

2014

## L'Envers de l'histoire de Jacques Collin: On a New Approach to Balzac's Most Infamous Criminal Mastermind

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*L'ENVERS DE L'HISTOIRE DE JACQUES COLLIN:*  
ON A NEW APPROACH TO BALZAC'S MOST INFAMOUS CRIMINAL  
MASTERMIND

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
Louisiana State University and  
Agricultural and Mechanical College  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts

in

The Department of French Studies

by  
Lauren Elise Pendas  
B.A., Louisiana State University, 2008  
December 2014

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Given the substantial time and energy I have invested in composing this thesis, everyone in my life has certainly come to view it as the black hole into which I have disappeared for over two years. I feel like a different person after having finally completed an incipient version of my project, whose materialization as a sort of manifesto evokes the integral role that the ideas therein have come to play in my approach to existence. There are no words to express the gratitude I feel for its unwitting benefactors, my family and my boyfriend, whose continuous support in spite of their completely valid exasperation is the only reason I survived it without debt or dementia. I must also thank my three advising professors, Dr. Greg Stone, Dr. Alexandre Leupin, and Dr. Frank Anselmo, whose ongoing encouragement and compassion in spite of many delays to my defense prevented me from giving up on understanding art, psychoanalysis, and the human condition on more than a superficial level. Last but not least, I must acknowledge my indebtedness to Honoré de Balzac and Jacques Lacan for their lifelong efforts to illuminate the unapparent yet essential elements of the human experience. Though the bulk of the works that they left behind still remains unknown to me, my journey of reading them to this point has already provided a stable foundation for my worldview, renewed my faith in humanity, and refined my vision of how to contribute to its progress. In this moment, my greatest hope is that I will remember to continue this journey, to keep exploring the never-ending paths that their works have opened before me and that everyday life ceaselessly threatens to obscure—the paths to the universal, fellow human beings, and singularity which forge the way to empathy, altruism, and self-awareness.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	ii
ABSTRACT .....	iv
CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION: ON A NEW APPROACH TO THE APEX PREDATOR OF BALZAC’S PARIS .....	1
1.1 Established Approaches to Understanding the Singularly Seductive, Particularly Remarkable “Vautrin” .....	8
1.2 Balzac and Lacan on the Human Condition’s Universal Frames.....	17
1.3 Letting Go of “Vautrin”: Jacques Collin’s Subjectivity and Balzac’s Moral Purpose.....	37
CHAPTER 2. <i>L’HISTOIRE OFFICIELLE</i> : COLLIN AS AN <i>EXCEPTIONAL</i> FIGURE OF MASTERY .....	45
2.1 The Impression Made by Collin’s Initial Description in <i>Le Père Goriot</i> .....	45
2.2 In Search of the Source of Collin’s Power .....	54
2.2.1 The Worldview Collin Imposes on his Protégés .....	55
2.2.2 The Unmatched Understanding of the Mind Informing Collin’s Modus Operandi .....	64
2.3 Balzac’s Employment of Readers’ Visceral Attraction to “Vautrin” .....	73
CHAPTER 3. <i>L’HISTOIRE SECRÈTE</i> : HOW BALZAC ASSERTS COLLIN’S <i>TYPICAL</i> SUBJECTIVITY .....	86
3.1 How Balzac Leads Readers to Challenge Collin’s Façade of Mastery .....	90
3.1.1 Ambiguity and Empty Space as Constructive Obstacles to Understanding Collin .....	90
3.1.2 Collin’s Soliloquy in <i>Vautrin</i> as the Link Uniting Readers’ Glimpses of his Humanity .....	97
3.2 Collin until 1816: Balzac on the Subject’s Division .....	116
3.2.1 The Circumstances Shared by Collin’s Initial Arrest and Primary Trauma .....	117
3.2.2 Collin’s Reactive Formation of his Worldview as the Prohibition Complex’s Resolution.....	124
3.3 Collin After 1816: Balzac on the Symptoms of Subjection to the Symbolic Order .....	143
3.3.1 Collin’s Protégé Plan as Repetition Automatism .....	144
3.3.2 Completeness as the Source and Limit of Collin’s Control .....	163
CHAPTER 4. CONCLUSION: ON A NEW APPROACH TO THE MODERN MORALITY CRISIS .....	191
4.1 Collin’s Corruption as the Counterpoint to Balzac’s Textual Ethics .....	192
4.2 Embracing the Potential of Art and Psychoanalysis .....	202
BIBLIOGRAPHY .....	207
APPENDIX: SUMMARIES OF THE WORKS IN WHICH COLLIN APPEARS .....	209
VITA.....	212

## ABSTRACT

Scholarship has failed to explore adequately how Honoré de Balzac evokes the human condition's universal elements through his most infamous criminal mastermind: Jacques Collin, alias Vautrin. Unlike analyses of Collin that I have encountered, this thesis takes all three novels and the obscure play in which Collin appears into account, challenges the transparency of his statements and the narration's descriptions of him, explores the conservative position framing Balzac's critique of early nineteenth-century Paris, and actively focuses on evidence of Collin's typical subjectivity (i.e. his insatiable desire and fallibility). Consequently, this reading does not evaluate Collin's significance solely through his apparent exceptionality and dominance and/or the particular environment that produced him; it shows how Balzac's nuanced way of attracting readers to Collin, associating Collin with paradoxical symbolism, and revealing patterns structuring Collin's experience allows the author to reveal the connection between his controversial political thought, his opaque and inconsistent style, and the underlying themes and moral purpose uniting his works—that is, a profound understanding of the human mind anticipating that of psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan.

Exploring contradictions between standing approaches to Collin and Balzac and Lacan's shared ideas about the inescapable limitations characterizing the human condition, the introduction proposes that Balzac establishes Collin as a figure of mastery and then subtly subverts that façade as a means of indirectly exposing Collin's and readers' inability to transcend blindness and suffering completely. Examining how the novels construct Collin's appearance of mastery, the second chapter explores how Balzac's presentation of Collin motivates readers to deny or ignore evidence of Collin's subjectivity. The third chapter emphasizes how Balzac undermines Collin's powerful appeal by presenting how the play clarifies the connection between Collin's repetitive behavior and his initial, traumatic arrest as well as how Collin's story therefore illustrates Lacan's theories on the mind's development and functioning. Finally, by comparing Collin and Balzac's use of their respective influence as mentor and author, the conclusion juxtaposes Balzac's textual strategy with Lacan's psychoanalytic ethics as similar means of promoting readers' or patients' self-awareness and briefly considers these methods' relevance to the modern morality crisis that their works illuminate.

## CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION: ON A NEW APPROACH TO THE APEX PREDATOR OF BALZAC'S PARIS

Over the past two years spent working on my thesis, my inseparably intertwined study of certain works of the author Honoré de Balzac (1799-1850) and the psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan (1901-1981) has progressively granted me a deeper understanding of the human condition, its context in modernity, and the ongoing problems that that environment's development initiated and whose resolution it perpetually prevents.<sup>1</sup> Driven by the conviction that all individuals are capable of making rational decisions and therefore deserve the right to choose their own beliefs and destinies in addition to their system of government, the 1776 American Revolution and the 1789 French Revolution aimed to create egalitarian societies ordered by merit rather than birthrights or absolute institutions. The period beginning with these revolutions and continuing until the present has been marked by a doctrine, often referred to as a "bourgeois work ethic" or the "American Dream," that asserts that each individual possesses equal amounts of potential and opportunity to attain success and therefore bears the sole responsibility for the shape that her or his life ultimately takes. However, the works of Balzac and Lacan emphasize that human beings do not have nearly as much control as this principle asserts. For them, human beings' lack of control encompasses more than just the facts that we do not choose our birth environments or the experiences that we will have therein and that we all will eventually die. They also stress the limits to our perception, self-mastery, and communication posed by the involuntary, ineffable aspects of the mind's functioning—that is, by the existence of the *unconscious* (i.e. the part of each individual's mind that s/he cannot consciously observe or control) and *primary processes* (i.e. those mental operations beyond one's awareness that precede and thus inform consciousness). Overall, Balzac and Lacan show that the human condition is universally limited by what I refer to as its *negative absolutes*—that is, the impossibility of any individual's attainment of complete control, satisfaction, knowledge, objectivity, understanding, or identity.<sup>2</sup> Showing that one's ability to resist the potentially destructive effects of primary processes—and thus one's capacity for social responsibility—depends on one's maintenance of *self-awareness* through the recognition and acceptance of one's subjection to negative absolutes in literal or symbolic form, Balzac and Lacan highlight a connection between ethics and the mind's functioning and critique modernity on these grounds. Through their similar explanations of why and how negative absolutes manifest in all human experiences, their parallel critiques of Cartesian philosophy, and their respective observations of the corruption and instability characterizing early nineteenth-century French society and the early twentieth-century psychoanalytic community, Balzac and Lacan highlight a conflict between the invariable dependence of individuals'

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<sup>1</sup> When speaking of "modernity," this thesis refers specifically to early nineteenth-century France (which I have studied considerably) and the current United States (which I have experienced firsthand). The extent to which my observations can be applied to other contexts—even to that of contemporary France—thus falls to the readers' discretion.

<sup>2</sup> Section 1.2 will provide a detailed explanation of why I refer to the limitations universally framing the human condition as its "negative absolutes" and will provide greater detail on Lacan's and Balzac's shared reflections on their origins and manifestations.

capacity for social responsibility on the recognition and acceptance of negative absolutes (i.e. the presence of empty space subverting assertions that human beings can attain complete control or satisfaction) and modern society's reliance on totalizing concepts as its principle means of legitimizing the standing authority and social structure, moralizing citizens, and maintaining order (e.g. human beings' capacity for autonomous reason, popular rule, freedom of beliefs and speech, complete happiness' possibility) and consequential motivation to marginalize proofs of negative absolutes' universality. This thesis will refer to the ongoing effects wrought by this particular frame's inadequate consideration of the human condition's universal elements as the modern morality crisis, and it will ultimately explore how Balzac and Lacan's ways of drawing attention to this crisis and to negative absolutes in general model a functional ethics whose effective promotion of self-awareness is strikingly relevant to the question of how to address this crisis.

I only became aware of this ongoing tension between the human condition's particular and universal frames through my attempts to understand one of the most notorious characters of Balzac's *Comédie Humaine*: Jacques Collin, alias Vautrin.<sup>3</sup> This protean, seemingly divinatory, and frustratingly opaque criminal mastermind appears in three novels of Balzac's enormous series—as a central character in *Le Père Goriot* (published 1833-1834; set 1819-1820) and in *Splendeurs et misères des courtisanes* (published 1838-1847; set 1824-1830) and in one long and significant scene of *Illusions perdues* (published 1843; set 1823).<sup>4</sup> He also appears as the antihero of the play *Vautrin* (published 1840; set 1816), Balzac's only theatrical work featuring a character from his novels, though analyses of Collin rarely comment on or even mention it.<sup>5</sup> These texts' styles and subject matter greatly vary; however, they all consistently emphasize Collin's exceptionality, dominance, and mystery, drawing attention to Collin both as a fascinating individual

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<sup>3</sup> Please refer to the appendix for a detailed summary of all of the works in which Collin appears as a principal character.

<sup>4</sup> The dates of the novels' publication here listed each represent the period of time over which they were initially published as *feuilletons* (i.e. in small installments appearing serially in popular magazines, journals, or newspapers). As for *Illusions perdues*, the date 1843 refers to the publication date of the one scene in which Collin appears; the entire work was published between 1837 and 1843. Collin only appears one other time in the *Comédie humaine*—in a short scene of *La Cousine Bette* (1847). I will briefly discuss this in the third chapter and the conclusion. Though Collin also appears in *Le Député d'Arcis*, a novel that Balzac began writing before his death and that is sometimes published with the *Comédie humaine*, the parts of the novel in which Collin appears were written by Charles Rabou at the request of Balzac's widow, whose concern that the project produce the greatest profit possible is certainly connected to the fact that Rabou revived many of Balzac's most popular characters when expanding these fragments. As Balzac apparently never intended to include Collin in *Le Deputé d'Arcis*, I will not include this novel in my analysis. C.f. Charles de Lovenjoul's *Histoire des oeuvres de H. de Balzac* for a detailed account of the aforementioned publication dates and the epilogue of Michael Lucey's *The Misfit of the Family* regarding Rabou's authorship of *Le Député d'Arcis*.

<sup>5</sup> The publication to which I will refer represents the fourth version of the play. Censors demanded its revision in January and then February of 1840. A third version gained approval to be performed that March with the famous actor Frédérick Lemaître portraying Collin. However, its highly anticipated opening night, attended by many notable Parisians, turned out to be its only performance—and an incomplete one at that. One often-repeated explanation of the ordeal states that when Lemaître entered the stage in the fourth act wearing the uniform of a Mexican general and a toupee greatly resembling the official portraits of King Louis-Philippe, the conspicuous exit of the king's brother and the audience's tumultuous reaction to it prevented the play's completion; however, several scholars have questioned this account of the night's events. In any case, censors prohibited its representation the next day. Nevertheless, Balzac edited the play a final time, publishing it in the summer of 1840. It did not appear on stage again until 1850, when it was put on without the author's permission.

and as a possible guide to the levels of and connections between Balzac's writings. The texts frequently stress that Collin's singular collection of talents, knowledge, connections, and financial resources grants him a level of social mobility, magnetism, and self-control conspicuously distinguishing him from the other characters, whereas they provide very limited information regarding exactly how he accomplishes his schemes or what he aims to accomplish through them and next to no information about his life before his first arrest in the First Empire's final years, at which point he was already about thirty years old. The texts never portray him before his initial arrest or during a period of his incarceration; before each text begins, Collin has always already evaded authority's grasp and returned to Paris under a false or stolen identity—in *Vautrin* and *Le Père Goriot*, he masquerades as a bourgeois named Vautrin, no first name, and in *Illusions perdues* and *Splendeurs*, he adopts the identity of Carlos Herrera, a Spanish priest. If this means that readers always initially encounter Collin once he has already found a way of regaining and safeguarding his freedom, it also means that his manifestations are always eerily shadowed with the tension between his appearance and whatever it covers. Though each text culminates in his unmasking and arrest (though not necessarily in this order), the respect and power commanded by Collin in the criminal community (i.e. the "underworld") makes each of his returns to prison seem more like a voyage home than a punishment.<sup>6</sup> On the one hand, because he escapes serving his whole sentence (if not being charged at all) every time he is arrested and succeeds in carrying off several daring intrigues victimizing *les honnêtes gens*, he is celebrated in that parallel society as *Trompe-la-Mort* (Death-Cheater), a moniker suggesting his transcendence of the limits usually placed on the human condition.<sup>7</sup> On the other hand, because Collin notoriously dispenses retribution to members of the underworld daring to betray their fellows, criminals fear him as the underworld's *dab* (meaning "king" in the cryptic, irreverent argot spoken by criminals of the period), a title that he apparently acquired after years of reliably providing his services as a banker to those whom incarceration prevented from managing their own finances, allowing him to slowly consolidate his influence over all of the underworld's most well-known, powerful, and wealthy

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<sup>6</sup> Collin is not unmasked in *Illusions*; its narration does not even inform readers that the priest who convinces Lucien not to kill himself is in fact the escaped convict who tries to manipulate Rastignac in *Le Père Goriot*. However, given that the installments of *Splendeurs* in which Rastignac recognizes Collin (though he does not name him) and in which the narration informs readers of Collin's concealed identity were first published respectively in 1838 and early in the summer of 1843 and that his scene in *Illusions* was first published in the late summer of 1843, one could argue that Collin's seemingly upstanding appearance in *Illusions* is no less shadowed by his infamous past than it is in the other texts.

<sup>7</sup> Collin escaped from custody at least four times, though the details and dates of these escapes are often unspecified. After his first arrest around 1808, he escaped from the Toulon *bagne* (forced labor camp) in 1815, managing to avoid the bulk of his twenty-year sentence. We know that he escaped after his arrest at the end of *Vautrin* in 1816 because *Le Père Goriot* informs readers that he had already returned to Paris and had begun living chez Vauquer in 1818. We learn in *Splendeurs* that after his arrest in 1820 (depicted in *Le Père Goriot*), he was sent to the Rochefort *bagne*, where he met Theodore Calvi, a handsome young murderer with whom he escaped in 1823 by disguising himself as a guard escorting Calvi off the premises. Finally, even though we see in *Splendeurs* that in 1830 he and Lucien are arrested and briefly held in the *Conciergerie*, his bargaining leads not only to his release without being charged for any crimes but to a pardon issued by the king himself for all of his past indiscretions.



members.<sup>8</sup> Collin often boasts of his supreme status in society's margins, suggesting that he enjoys or even takes pride in having acquired it and in performing the roles associated with it; however, when we consider the eagerness with which he seizes any opportunity to regain his membership in "honest" society and his willingness to expend his fellow criminals' lives and fortunes in the pursuit of this aim, it becomes clear that Collin primarily maintains and employs his absolute authority in order to safeguard the slim possibility that he could cleanse his stained reputation. Though he often acknowledges that he cannot change his status as a convict and thus can never reenter Parisian society as such, Collin repeatedly tries to circumvent his marginalization by disillusioning and gaining influence over beautiful, aristocratic, and *ambitious* young men lacking the connections, wealth, and knowledge needed to conquer Paris. He attempts this with Raoul de Frescas in *Vautrin*, Eugène de Rastignac in *Le Père Goriot*, and Lucien Chardon de Rubempré in *Illusions perdues* and *Splendeurs*. Like his meteoric rise in the underworld, Collin's continuous efforts to create a surrogate through whom he could vicariously exercise and enjoy the power and its fruits reserved for Paris' most exclusive and influential individuals shows the intensity of his desire for the success from which his criminal status definitively blocked him. He always describes his aim as revenge, presumably because the plan's accomplishment would constitute a symbolic triumph against the society that he so resents for refusing him a chance at redemption. If the vagueness with which he expresses this vengeful aim allows him to use it as justification for practically any action, prevents those around him and readers from anticipating his next move, and does not adequately explain certain patterns marking his behavior while actively engaged with a potential protégé, the possibility that other motivations underlie his formation of this plan are first hinted at by his arch enemy, the former-criminal-turned-police-chief Bibi-Lupin, who confides to fellow conspirators planning to expose Collin, "Apprenez un secret : il n'aime pas les femmes" (*Le Père Goriot* [PG] 233). In any case, though Collin prioritizes his protégé plan above his own freedom (given that his connections with his protégés are always involved in the circumstances leading to his arrests), his doctrine of selfishness (given that he promises each protégé that if necessary, he will sacrifice himself in order to protect their reputations), his status in the underworld (given that in *Splendeurs*, he uses the money entrusted to him to fund Lucien's campaign to raise his station), and whatever else was necessary, his plan never comes to fruition. After being initially drawn in by Collin's enticing worldview and partially or fully submitting themselves to his will, his protégés invariably abandon him—Raoul for the sake of love, Rastignac for the sake of independence, and Lucien for the embrace of death. If Lucien's suicide marks the end of Collin's attempts to realize his protégé plan, it hardly marks the end of

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<sup>8</sup> Striving as always for authenticity, Balzac performed extensive research regarding the inhabitants of the "underworld" before composing the in-depth description of their society and culture appearing in *Splendeurs*' fourth part, including a long passage on their language. One of his chief sources were the writings of Eugène-François Vidocq, a convict turned spy whose talent for making arrests led to Napoleon's creating the first plainclothes police brigade, the *brigade de la sûreté* (i.e. Paris' secret police), and placing Vidocq at its head. After first being discharged under the Restoration, he published his memoirs (1828), whose wild success granted him entrance to the literary sphere; Balzac befriended him after meeting him at a dinner party. After regaining his post and then once again being discharged during the July Monarchy, Vidocq continued to write and is credited with having founded the first private detective agency. Balzac drew heavily from the accounts of criminals' habits and common schemes as well as the police's modus operandi contained in Vidocq's memoirs and the dictionary of argot that he published in *Les Voleurs* (1836). C.f. *Balzac et le monde des coquins* (1985) for information on the resources informing Balzac's depiction of criminals.

Collin's remarkable success in manipulating others; the mastermind manages in the pages that follow to accomplish several aims that should not have been possible. He regains the loyalty of some of the criminals whom he betrayed and thereby thwarts Bibi-Lupin's plot to have them kill him in the prison yard. He saves Theodore Calvi, his former lover, from impending execution, after gaining access to the young man's cell through his appearance as a priest, conversing with him in Italian about the details of the crime while pretending to provide him with absolution, and sending his minions to find Theodore's accomplice in order to pass his death sentence to her. After having skillfully deflected constant attempts to expose his identity through interrogation or ambush, he suddenly does the unexpected; he voluntarily confesses his true identity to the Attorney General, monsieur de Granville, and utilizes three salacious letters written by three of Lucien's prominent aristocratic lovers, his singular ability to resolve certain problems facing the administration, a professed repentance and desire to serve justice, and even his grief for Lucien itself in order to bargain for what he wants from Granville, ultimately obtaining not only his and Theodore's freedom, but appointment as Bibi-Lupin's replacement (pending Collin's provision of promised evidence of his enemy's corruption), the royal pardon for his past crimes needed to render him eligible to occupy that post, and permission to walk free in time to attend Lucien's funeral. *Splendeurs* ends by explaining that after effectively unveiling his nemesis' corruption only eight days later (though allotted six months to accomplish this task), Collin becomes chief of the Parisian secret police—a position that he apparently executes efficiently enough to hold it against all challengers, as the novel's last words report, “Après avoir exercé ses fonctions pendant environ quinze ans, Jacques Collin s'est retiré vers 1845” (*Oeuvres complètes* Volume XI [XI] 533). Though doing so via a different route than that outlined by the protégé plan, Collin's story ends with his reincorporation into honest society; having thus rewarded Collin's modus operandi by granting him the supposedly impossible reversal of his criminal status, the texts ultimately seem to confirm his possession of unmatched control over others and himself as well as exemption from society's laws.

Though my efforts to understand the precise role that Balzac assigned to this supremely individualistic criminal mastermind may not seem that far removed from the consideration of the modern morality crisis presented above, my journey from the former to the latter proved convoluted and arduous. My decision to center my thesis on Collin stemmed primarily from the tension produced by the texts' constant encouragement of readers' belief in the character's significance while simultaneously constructing conspicuous obstacles to their understanding of the character.<sup>9</sup> In my case, I became fascinated by the apparent yet mysterious connections between Collin's exceptional mastery of others and himself and an understanding of the processes contributing to perception reminding me of the psychoanalytic theories that I had only recently encountered and that I already wanted to better understand; between Collin's supremacy and Balzac's social critique, which highlights several problems reflected in the current United States; and between the text's fusion of different traditions and opacity in presenting Collin and the notorious ambiguity similarly characterizing Balzac and

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<sup>9</sup> I will explore several factors contributing to this tension in section 1.1.

Lacan's styles. Motivated by my resulting conviction that understanding Collin would simultaneously allow me to expand my knowledge of the mind, society, and literature in a way that illuminated the human condition at large, I spent the following two years analyzing all of the texts in which Collin appears and researching interpretations of the character and Balzac's works at large; the works' historical and literary context; Balzac's nonfictional writings and his frame of reference; and Lacan's writings, seminars, and mathematical and topological representations of his theories. My readings gradually led me to frame my reading of Collin toward with the questions raised by the ambiguity and enigmas surrounding the character, the controversy surrounding Balzac's conservatism and his intentions for his work, and Lacan's complicated articulation of his theories using gendered terms. However, I was only able to unite these three approaches to the character after surmounting the greatest obstacle to my project's resolution: my ongoing, unrecognized desire to preserve the character's appearance of mastery and transcendence. By finally reading the play *Vautrin*—which, though now frequently published in collections alongside the novels given publishers' tendency to print Balzac's complete works, is nevertheless not a part of the *Comédie humaine* or initially published in conjunction with it and thus occupies a *marginal* position in relation to the other texts, remaining one of Balzac's least read works along with his other plays—I came to realize that rather than the character's constantly emphasized *exceptionality*, it is the manifestations of his *typical subjectivity* that make him a carrier of the author's vision and intentions for his work. The evocations of Collin's homosexuality and repetitive behavior in the short presentation of him above already foreshadow my conclusion that when designing the character, Balzac did not exempt him from the limitations imposed on the human experience. This thesis will show how focusing on the manifestations of Collin's subjectivity throughout all of the works in which he appears provides readers with the opportunity of recognizing that almost a century before psychoanalysis came into existence, Balzac's recognition or at least intuition of ideas closely resembling those of Lacan allowed him to unify his works at large with the vision of how the universal elements of human experience manifest in the frame of modernity and with the moral purpose of promoting readers' self-awareness by drawing their attention to their subjection to negative absolutes.

My point here is obviously not to assert that Collin, a fictional character, possesses a humanity of his own, but rather to highlight the complexity and perspicacity of Balzac's depiction of the human condition through Collin. When examining the convict's story more closely, I have found that it provides such a perfect illustration for example of the steps of each individual's mental development and of the mind's resulting structure and functioning that it does not seem possible that Balzac did not design this purposefully. I have not yet found a reading of Collin that fully explores why reading this *singular* character in the universal frame outlined by psychoanalysis reveals Balzac's understanding of the mind and proof that this knowledge informed the author's conservative position, the structure underlying the works as a whole, and the aims served by his strategic style. We can acknowledge several examples of this even before addressing his subjectivity on a deeper level. First of all, because Balzac makes explicitly apparent through this character (both through his seduction speeches, his behavior, and the narration's ambiguous treatment of him) the separation between appearances and the meanings which an individual consciously attaches to them (as well as how the unconscious steps of perception

taking place in this gap can be manipulated), this already frames readers' reading of Collin with some level of awareness of the existence of primary processes, encouraging them to actively look for the concealed knowledge, emotions, and interests informing interpretations of Collin—firstly, those of the other characters, then those of Collin himself, and finally their own. Secondly, along with his protean abilities, the empty space of Collin's past makes it possible for the narration to draw comparisons between him and characters of all demographics by preventing readers from focusing on any specific element of his background (his biological or environmental inheritance of certain traits, his relationships with his parents, etc.) as *the* detail transparently explaining his existence as such and therefore from *believing* to have understood him in relation to already-established prejudices or theories without ever actually making an effort to understand him. This allows us to consider for example how his subjection to the Symbolic order, the limitations to his vision and control, and his involuntary repetition of patterns represent characteristics of the human condition at large rather than just those of one particular social type. Thirdly, the fact that the texts support readers' ongoing impression that Collin possesses an unrivaled amount of control over others and himself suggests that if Collin represents humanity, he does so in its most reduced, bare-bones form; the texts' presentation of him seems to assert that Collin's subjectivity manifests only in those ways that are absolutely unavoidable. However, given that this thesis will show that Collin is no more free from desire or capable of attaining completeness than anyone else, we ultimately find that his story so usefully illustrates the mind's functioning because his efforts to conceal or eradicate his subjectivity allow the manifestations of his primary processes to starkly contrast with his masterful façade.

This contrast is central to this thesis' structure and evokes the citation for which it is named—Collin's famous statement to Lucien in *Illusions perdues*: "Il y a deux Histoires : l'Histoire officielle, menteuse, qu'on enseigne, l'Histoire *ad usum delphini* ; puis l'Histoire secrète, où sont les véritables causes des événements, une histoire honteuse" (VIII: 600). If Collin here stresses that the interest of those drafting official History in perpetuating the status quo motivates their whitewashing those details judged "shameful" in that particular frame and that could therefore cause disruptions in social order, Collin does not acknowledge how his own interests are present in his way of presenting the "secret" side of History to Lucien—that is, his interest in realizing the protégé plan, which we will see is primarily motivated by his unconscious desire. Considering how this citation as well as the examples given above draw attention to Collin's subjectivity, it seems strange that since the character first appeared almost two centuries ago, critical interpretations of Balzac's purpose in creating Collin have consistently ignored or denied how the character's story illustrates the universal elements of the human condition, focusing almost exclusively on his most marginal or exceptional qualities in their explanations of his significance. This is not to say that the readings of Collin that I have encountered are necessarily invalid or even simplistic; this thesis could never have come into being as such had scholarship not laid the groundwork for my understanding of the traditions and context informing Collin's creation as such and of how Collin serves Balzac's artistic vision and his social critique. I simply aim at exploring an approach to the character that I have not encountered as such in order to present the unexplored implications carried by Collin regarding Balzac's intentions and to show the usefulness of Collin's story as an illustration of psychoanalytic theories. Overall, this

thesis will compare the results of approaching Collin's story in a frame asserting completeness' possibility and then in a frame that accounts for negative absolutes' universality in order to explore how their differences shed light not only on the relationship of the particular frame of modernity and the universal frame of the human condition explored by Balzac and Lacan, but the relationship between the two structures of sexuation presented in Lacan's *Encore* as the two possible relationships one can have to one's desire. The second chapter will explore Collin's story through the first frame as his "official" History and the third chapter will explore it through the second frame as his "secret" History, thereby showing how the fact that most readings I have encountered with the character are aligned with the former evokes their having been produced in the frame of modernity. My exposition of the proofs of Collin's subjection to negative absolutes is therefore aligned with the side of History revealing the underlying causes of its events deemed "shameful" in the particular frame in which "official" History was drafted, evoking to what extent modernity not only fails to provide a frame through which one can acknowledge the impossibility of complete control, satisfaction, knowledge, objectivity, communication, or identity, but furthermore renders acknowledging proofs of these facts a potentially subversive act.

This introduction will present the key frames of reference invoked by my reading of the two sides of Collin's story. The first section will explore the key interpretations of Collin that I have encountered and will then consider the trends that unite these analyses in spite of their disparate approaches. Secondly, I will outline Balzac and Lacan's shared understanding of the human condition's universal elements in order to establish the frame through which I will approach Collin's subjectivity as well as the moral purpose that Balzac assigned to the works. Finally, I will stress how Balzac's nonfictional writings about the *Comédie humaine* in general and Collin in particular support both my argument that the character should be read as the representation of a typical human being and my revision, expansion, and unification of the readings of Collin that I have encountered in relation to the overall strategy that I believe guided Balzac's way of presenting the character—a strategy whose aim of promoting readers' self-awareness is ethical in the context of Lacanian psychoanalysis.

### **1.1 Established Approaches to Understanding the Singularly Seductive, Particularly Remarkable "Vautrin"**

When I first began seeking to understand Collin's significance, analyses of the character himself were the first resources that I explored. I encountered a wide range of arguments developed in diverse frames of reference regarding the different dimensions of his symbolic significance and textual roles. If in retrospect I have finally begun to understand how the seemingly unrelated aspects of the character highlighted by these analyses are all aspects of Balzac's strategic use of the character to bring attention to the ideas and moral purpose underlying his works, these analyses are also linked in another way: through their failure to consider Collin's story as a representation of the universal human condition. Perhaps the most evident evocation of the extent to which readers have not appreciated the implications of Collin's humanity manifests in the fact that apart from informing the studious reader of Collin's "official" name, people commenting on Balzac's works almost universally refer to this criminal mastermind using the pseudonym

under which he first appears: “Vautrin,” no first name.<sup>10</sup> Section 2.3 will more fully explore the possible reasons for and implications of this critical appellation; for now, I would simply like to note that the ongoing use of this name in spite of the fact that the character appears overall much more often under the name Collin seems connected to the overwhelming emphasis critics have placed on the character’s apparently masterful qualities that are asserted most strongly and whose veracity are least challenged by proofs of his subjectivity when he first appeared as “Vautrin” in *Le Père Goriot*. From the moment that readers first encounter Collin in this novel, the narration’s way of describing him immediately seizes their attention by highlighting his exceptional mobility, knowledge, vision, self-control, etc. and by surrounding him with a mysterious, presumably criminal air.<sup>11</sup> Thenceforth, the texts constantly provide details about Collin that support readers’ convictions of his mastery and significance while simultaneously drawing readers’ attention to the ambiguity or gaps in their knowledge concerning him, thereby preventing the resolution of their ever-heightening curiosity as to the nature and source of his power. For one thing, the narration refers to a vast number of historical, religious, philosophical, political, scientific, literary and other sources when describing Collin and his actions, thereby lending him a certain measure of their prominence and symbolic weight. However, the mismatched fabric woven of these allusions provides support for a vast range of often directly opposed interpretations.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, in the context of Balzac’s social taxonomy, Collin remains strikingly different from the author’s only other portrait of a criminal mastermind, *Ferragus*’ Bourignard. Though also created by Balzac and described in very similar terms as Collin (divinatory, protean, mysterious, iron-willed, etc.), the author assigns the two characters puzzlingly inconsistent fates. Bourignard never betrays his compatriots, takes greater pains than Collin to preserve his upstanding identity against threats of exposure, and even repents of his crimes in order to have a relationship with his estranged daughter. However, by the end of the comparably short novel in which he appears, he transforms from a man first described as “si profondément habile, si logique dans ses moindres actes, qui voit, qui pressent, qui calcule et devine même nos pensées” (IX: 117) into a haggard old man described as

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<sup>10</sup> Out of the twenty articles in my bibliography discussing Jacques Collin, only one of the critics (Moss) refers to him as “Collin” rather than his pseudonym—but she hyphenates them together as “Collin-Vautrin” half of the time.

<sup>11</sup> Section 2.1 discusses this scene in detail. I have presented *Le Père Goriot* as the first work in which readers encounter Collin because it was the first of the works in which he appears to be published and because it is by far the most widely read work in which he appears. Though *Vautrin*’s setting takes place before the novel, very few people comment on it when interpreting Collin. I have chosen to reserve discussion of it principally for the third chapter because it is most relevant to my discussion of Collin’s subjectivity and because in my experience, reading it last allowed it to retroactively illuminate the novels in an interesting way.

<sup>12</sup> Collin combines the suspicious criminal acumen of Vidocq with the mischievous appeal of the incorrigible villain Robert Macaire (as portrayed in *L’Auberge des Adrets* [1832] by Frederic Lemaître, who also played Collin). When addressing his protégés, his words blend God the Father’s benevolent promises to reward obedience (and to punish betrayal), the frightening but seductive tone of Satan (particularly that of Milton’s *Paradise Lost*), and the Messiah’s impulse to sacrifice himself for others (as Fanger and others note, his initials are J.C.). He professes his absolute loyalty to the fraternal, revolutionary ideology inspired by Jean-Jacques Rousseau, a fierce opponent of duplicity, while exercising like Napoleon an absolute authority over all who come in contact with him and ruthlessly doing whatever he deems necessary to accomplish his singular vision. He decries the injustices of the social system like Hugo’s Jean Valjean while simultaneously abusing its loopholes like Molière’s Tartuffe. He shares Descartes’ observations on the separation between appearances and the meanings which we attach to them while employing this knowledge with Machiavelli’s cynical pragmatism. These are just a few of Collin’s most frequent symbolic manifestations.

“béant, sans idées dans le regard, sans appui précis dans la démarche” (156) and is relegated to Paris’ *literal* margin. He lives out his days watching games of *boules* in a park where “là, Paris n’est plus; et là, Paris est encore” (154). Conversely, Collin prioritizes his personal interests over all else, betrays his fellow criminals, and is arrested several times after being careless; however, he is depicted as exercising absolute authority in the criminal realm *even after his treason*, and ascends after a thousand pages of scandals and even atrocities to a position of authority, regaining his official belonging to society while maintaining his influence over Paris’ criminals and its *honnêtes gens* alike. Beyond this unparalleled dominance, the stroke finalizing Collin’s singularity is his homosexuality, which defies not only prototypes through his hyper-masculinity but the heavy silence otherwise imposed on the subject at this time: “The principal reason why sexual ‘deviance’ in the early nineteenth century lends itself so poorly to analysis is that homosexuality itself had virtually no official existence. This is one of the great underground rivers of the nineteenth-century literary metropolis, and without Balzac a study of it during this period would mostly be the history of an absence” (Robb 154). Finally, Collin quite often seems to act as the author’s textual surrogate, e.g. by providing readers with their only view into the unknown through the criminal world and into same-sex relationships; by voicing his criticism of society’s hypocrisy and instructing his protégés and readers alike on the unwritten rules regulating Paris; by driving the plots forward and connecting the members of usually separate social spheres through their vices, exposing “a moral uniformity that is to be found beneath the separations imposed by social difference” (Prendergast 156). He furthermore serves a structuring role in the texts where he appears; critics sometimes refer to *Le Père Goriot*, *Illusions perdues*, and *Splendeurs* as the “Vautrin trilogy,” not only because of the obviously significant role he plays therein, but because Balzac himself writes in *Splendeurs* that Jacques Collin is an “espèce de colonne vertébrale qui, par son horrible influence, relie pour ainsi dire *Le Père Goriot* à *Illusions perdues*, et *Illusions perdues* à cette étude” (XI: 458). Referring to this quote, Donald Fanger summarizes Collin’s potential for fascinating critics, which seems to neutralize the frightful nature of his influence:

Vautrin is the “vertebral column” of this book no less than of the series that includes it: he is the principal carrier of mystery, the most flamboyant figure of melodrama, the most consistent embodiment of religious themes; he is the most complex symbol and perhaps the most complex character; certainly he is the Balzacian character *par excellence*, compact of energy, will, and passion to the point of transcendence; at once the rebel and revolt itself. [...] He is, in short, the most striking guide to the various levels of the Balzacian universe, for he exists on every one of them. (50)

All of this emphasizes not only to what extent the character’s constant association with powerful symbols, his personal strength, and his overall domination impresses readers, but why so many of them feel the need to formulate their approaches to Balzac in relation to him: just as Collin seemingly offers his young protégés the means to *master* the corrupt Parisian society, his character seems to offer readers the means of *mastering* Balzac’s text. The possibility that Collin constitutes a means of deciphering Balzac’s intentions renders him particularly appealing considering that the author’s conversion from a liberal stance to conservative royalism in 1830 (which he defended until the end of his life) has long remained the subject of debate:

Where did Balzac stand? While critics seem to agree that the *Comédie humaine* stands as a trenchant critique of contemporary society, discord arises upon the question of intent or even consciousness: did Balzac intend his work as the critique that it was and is? It would seem unnecessary to have recourse to the intentional fallacy, but the question has vexed critics of Balzac for many

years. Marxists annex the legitimist Balzac by dismissing their favorite's outspoken political opinions, and rightly so on the whole. The discrepancy is nevertheless disturbing. The gap between intent and reading of the *oeuvre* has proved too great for many to attempt. (Clark 166-167)

Whereas one customarily looks to an author's opinions outside of her or his fictional works in order to interpret the characters therein, it seems more useful to reverse this paradigm regarding Collin given the uncertainty surrounding Balzac's political position and the fact that the mastermind so often voices Balzac's social critique, carries many of the texts' most central themes, and even plays a role in structuring their plots. Taken *en masse*, Collin's characteristics can only overwhelm readers with conviction of the mastermind's importance in the work and relevance to Balzac's vision and social critique, heightening to a fever pitch their anticipation of discovering the meaning connecting all of these seemingly disparate qualities. However, once readers begin pursuing the reason that Balzac sets Collin apart so conspicuously, the ensuing search for an explanation proves frustrating. Balzac seems purposefully to veil the character in an opacity quite unlike the full-disclosure presentations of other characters, haunting readers with Collin's unexplained origins, the contradictions between his stated motivations or opinions and his actions, his tendency to be symbolically aligned with both sides of a paradox, the mysterious parallels drawn between him and Balzac, and the inconsistencies even in the narration's presentation of him. This aspect of the character led Pierre Citron to write, "En vérité ce personnage est inépuisable par la diversité, par la contradiction même des symboles qu'il incarne et par les multiples mystères qui subsistent en lui : nulle part dans *La Comédie Humaine* sa figure n'est complètement expliquée, et des zones d'ombre y subsistent, aussi bien sur ses origines que sur ses crimes et même sur ses motivations profondes" (qtd. in Deschamps 37).

Considering that the texts continuously affirm Collin's supremacy and that the empty spaces surrounding him manage to render the meaning that might be attached to him even more compelling, it is unsurprising that the overall impression of the character preserved in scholarships' interpretations of him is one of exceptionality and dominance. This is the case whether critics examine him in the context of Balzac's strategy of preserving through his series the "histoire [...] des mœurs" (I: 81) of his society by creating a social taxonomy composed of "les deux ou trois mille figures saillantes d'une époque, car telle est, en définitif, la somme des types que présente chaque génération" (I: 87); the trends in literature or theater informing and manifesting in the complex intellectual environment characterizing this period so often disrupted by the French Revolution's aftershocks and marked by disillusionment; the historical events and developments, political tensions, and popular culture framing and framed by his works; or Balzac's social critique and the moral purpose that he invested (or did not) in his works. Critics at the very least highlight Collin as a "personnage exceptionnel" (Deschamps 37), but often go so far as to call him "the Balzacian superman" (Robinson 82) or "the type of hundred-percent criminal whose powers are so vast that they appear superhuman" (Blunt 248), emphasizing how he achieves domination through "the double power of omniscience and omnipotence which stems from the right use of will" (Robinson 83), "the ease with which he moves everywhere" (Philip 79), "his superhuman power and character" (Blunt 248), his "genius for disguise" (Moss 447), his knowledge of the "unwritten but nonetheless powerful rules of the game" (Fanger 36), his "superior intellect unimpeded by such self-



deceptions” (Troy 339) as society’s avowed moral or ethical attitudes, or any other number of exceptional attributes. Any interpretation of Collin that does not note how his level of knowledge, influence, and success in navigating the cutthroat Parisian environment sets him apart from other characters fails to appreciate the impact that the author meant for this mastermind to have on readers. Those interpretations that focus solely on Collin’s mastery have a greater tendency to ignore his subjectivity—in some cases even to the point of asserting his transcendence of the human condition, as the quotes above show—and to reduce him to a representation of a marginal type or a single trait without recognizing how the text’s way of weaving together historical, literary, religious, philosophical, scientific, and other allusions when describing Collin encases the character in a tightly-woven, paradoxical fabric that on the one hand becomes a tangled mess when readers attempt to isolate or eliminate one set of threads and on the other hand renders him a useful tool for understanding Balzac’s underlying vision when considered in the context of the author’s heterogeneous style and approach to the human condition. Nevertheless, perhaps what is most striking about the analyses of Collin that I have encountered is the fact that though their approaches to the character are quite diverse, one key trend unites almost all critics’ treatment of the character—that is, the fact that none of the analyses that I have encountered consider the full implications of the fact that Collin represents a typical human being in a way that sheds light on the human condition’s universal elements.

Critics most commonly reduce Collin to one dimension by approaching the character as Balzac’s representation of the criminal type, of the spirit of “Revolt” subsisting throughout early nineteenth-century France, and/or as Balzac’s attempt to appeal to readers’ popular tastes. Given the rise in crime beginning at the end of the Empire, the period’s consequential fascination with criminals and popular taste for sensationalized representations of crime, and the burgeoning genre of crime fiction systematically representing the relationships of police and their quarry (of which the works where Collin appears are some of the earliest examples) emerging from this context, interpretations of Collin often appear in studies focused on these historical or literary trends (e.g. those of Louis Chevalier and Scott Carpenter). However, it is ironically those analyses focused specifically on Balzac’s sources and intentions in creating Collin that most often deny his subjectivity by asserting his super-humanity or reduce him to the product of Balzac’s narcissistic ambitions, as these readings almost invariably explore him only as a criminal type. Such approaches to Collin fail to acknowledge Balzac’s statements asserting the character’s humanity as well as his condemnation of not only of criminality, but of Revolution. Balzac’s 1842 *Avant-propos* to the first collection of his works published under the title *La Comédie humaine*, where he explains the series’ division into the *Études de Moeurs* (showing society’s effects), the more allegorical *Études Philosophiques* (showing society’s causes), and the *Études Analytiques* (showing society’s principles). Though works in the second category could involve superhuman beings or fantastic events, all of the novels in which Collin appears belong to the *Études de Moeurs*, described in the *Avant-propos* as “l’histoire générale de la Société, la collection de tous ses faits et gestes” (I: 88) divided into six books that each correspond to “une époque de la vie humaine” (I: 88). Balzac compares this division to the particular divisions separating a society’s individuals into social types, which he stated earlier in the *Avant-Propos* that his series aimed at representing as a social taxonomy: “Non-seulement

les hommes, mais encore les événements principaux de la vie, se forment par des types. Il y a des situations qui se représentent dans toutes les existences, des phases typiques, et c'est là l'une des exactitudes que j'ai le plus cherchées" (I: 88). This asserts that like all other characters in the *Études de Mœurs*, Collin constitutes Balzac's representation of a human being living a typical life. If any question of this remains, we need only refer to an explicit statement made by Balzac in response to Hippolyte Castille's interpretation of Collin as a product of the author's taste for exceptional if not fantastic beings: "Ce personnage, qui représente la corruption, le bague, le mal social dans toute son horreur, n'a rien de gigantesque" (*Oeuvres diverses* 364).<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, the author condemns of romantic portrayals of criminals and of criminals themselves in the 1847 preface to *Splendeurs*: "Quelques plumes animées d'une fausse philanthropie font, depuis une dizaine d'années, du forçat, un être intéressant, excusable, une victime de la société ; mais, selon nous, ces peintures sont dangereuses et anti-politiques" (XI: 584). Considering this, if Marie-Laure Deschamps stresses that the character's inspiration is more literary than historical by stating for example that "le type criminel incarné par Vautrin dépasse souvent la réalité et devient une figure mythologique" (37) and Anthony Blunt stresses Balzac's suspension of judgment and aloofness in presenting the character by saying that "Balzac does not either approve or condemn his hero. He only describes the phenomenon with astonishment and with an admiration which is emotional and not moral. He observes that Vautrin's divine or infernal powers make it impossible for him to obey the rules of society" (248-249), they do not realize not only how their distinction of Collin from the rest of humanity is the effect of their interpretation rather than of the author's intention, but how their interpretation of him in this way overlooks the warning contained in Balzac's portrayal of Collin of a kind of person that the environment of modern Paris can and did produce. Paul Vernière's reading of Collin has similar issues:

Vautrin est avant tout, pour Balzac, l'incarnation de cet instinct de puissance, qui donne la clef et qui forme l'unité réelle de la « Comédie humaine ». N'allons pas croire que Balzac a pour seule intention de peindre la société de son temps. Cette société, il veut avant tout la dominer, comme romancier, comme dandy, comme grand homme. Et jamais il n'a mieux su la fustiger que par sa création de Vautrin. (68)

Describing Collin as the manifestation of an unified instinct rather than one bearing it, as an object whose possession promises readers the answers to the enigma that the *Comédie humaine* can be, and as an outlet of the author's voracious ambition, the above passage presents the savory air of power accompanying Collin's appearances and the theatrical, sensuous tone quite often embraced by those writing about him. Vernière is absolutely correct in suggesting that Collin is an extension of Balzac's will to power; however, by saying that this sentiment is in itself the central foundation of Balzac's work, he does not acknowledge how Balzac shows even through Collin himself that this determination is always connected to other emotions stemming from past trauma or how Balzac channels both his own ambition and that of his characters toward accomplishing an aim beyond domination—the altruistic aim of addressing the modern morality crisis. Approaching Collin solely in relation to his mastery rather than breaking down his speeches and searching for his suffering allows one to feel the excitement associated with the idea of abandoning oneself to the reign of one's

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<sup>13</sup> I will discuss Hippolyte Castille's reading of Collin at length in section 2.3.

feelings, of finding meaning where it is supposed to be and taking it all for oneself, of vicariously enjoying the sadistic domination of those who probably deserve it, and of somehow believing that all of this serves the cause of justice. However, to limit an analysis to this approach is to refuse to engage with Balzac on the issues that his works are meant to address.

The failure or refusal to acknowledge Collin's subjectivity is understandable in the case of critics who focus exclusively on the details emphasizing the character's absolute mastery or exceptionality in order to explain his significance; acknowledging his typical qualities could undermine their overall argument. On another level, analyses reducing Collin's significance to a symbolic or textual function do not need to explore the character's subjectivity in order to make their point; their arguments could be weakened or could become unnecessarily complicated by taking his status as a divided subject into account. However, it is harder to explain the fact that even when critics do consider Collin's subjectivity for example by examining the character's motivations, behavior, or, in the rare case that his façade of mastery is challenged, his failure (e.g. to avoid arrest, to maintain control over his protégés, to manipulate a person in order to create a desired effect), they never more than briefly acknowledge his desire and fallibility and ultimately only comment on these proofs in the context of the *modern* environment. This is even stranger considering that their explorations of this particular frame in relation to Collin quite often acknowledge Balzac's recognition of negative absolutes in some way without then fully exploring Collin within that context. Lawrence Schehr discusses Collin while arguing that Balzac seeks to draw readers' attention to their process of perception and the limitations of their understanding when reading a text, and even comments that "Vautrin is endlessly about to become the purloined letter as well as all its possessors and readers" (Schehr 94).<sup>14</sup> However, he does not go on to explain this comment; he only explains the significance of Collin's arrest in *Le Père Goriot* by saying that Balzac "shows how, in one scene of recognition (the discovery of Vautrin's true identity as Trompe-la-Morte), the models of reproduction and ideological dominance on which his works thrive rely on a context of marginalization, disruption, and even perversions" (19).<sup>15</sup> Michael Lucey shows that Balzac did not see sexuality as something that must be clearly defined or that clearly defines one's identity before discussing Collin; however, he addresses the dimension of Collin's romantic and sexual desires as Balzac's approach to the effect of the bourgeoisie's rise on same-sex relationships. Furthermore, he writes of Collin's failure to convince Camusot not to interrogate Lucien, "I think that

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<sup>14</sup> This comment refers to Lacan's *Séminaire sur « la Lettre volée »* (the article which he placed first in his only book, *Écrits*), in which he shows how the letter in Poe's story *The Purloined Letter* represents how repetition automatism and intersubjective relationships are determined by each individual's relationship to an idealized object, which is a signifier first emptied of meaning and then filled with the meaning which convinces the individual of the object's ability to advance her or his quest for completeness.

<sup>15</sup> If Schehr had expanded his comment comparing Collin to the purloined letter, it may have accelerated my recognition of Collin's subjectivity; however, isolated as it is, it actually served to delay it. After stumbling upon this comment, I spent several months toying with the argument that because Collin's own motivations (i.e. his contents, like those of the letter) are never revealed and because his appearance is always formed in relation to others' desires (he functions in the texts as *an empty signifier* which other characters could idealize as that which could bring them complete satisfaction); this provided me with a way to explore the connection between Balzac and Lacan made evident through Collin without even broaching the subject of the character's subjectivity. Without dwelling on that nonsensical argument any further, the point is that I blatantly ignored the latter part of Schehr's sentence, which notes that Collin himself also falls into this pattern, and instead embraced an explanation of Collin's significance that indirectly preserved my hope that Collin offered a means of attaining complete control over society, others, the self, and Balzac and Lacan's works.

Vautrin's failure to assure Lucien's fame might be more helpfully linked to what we might call Vautrin's anachronistic vision of the world. Balzac knows that some people are better readers of the world than others, not *in general* but *at a given point in time*. [...] Vautrin, for all of his intense, cynical, visionary nature, is as subject to handicapping as anyone else in this arena—not only by the vagaries of love but by his very historically overdetermined makeup" (203-204). Christopher Prendergast asserts that the concept of totality in the context of Balzac's aim of preserving a complete representation of society is "not on a notion of total representation in any quantitative sense [...], but on an imaginatively realized system of connections which operates as a paradigm of the laws governing the development and functioning of society in general" (153-154), going on to show that the "primary task of the plot in *Splendeurs* is the bringing of different groups of characters into relationship one with the other, and the primary effect of these various conjunctions is the impression the novel creates of dealing with a whole social system" (154), arguing overall that those connections between characters are invariably established through "the universal vortex of instinct and desire which lies beneath and continually threatens the fragile structure of social differentiation" (158). Though he acknowledges that "there is more than one suggestion that the bond between criminal [Collin] and 'arriviste' [Lucien] is founded on the homosexual attraction of the latter to the former" (158) in order to stress how Collin's passion contributes to the linking of spheres, this does not figure into his final reading of the character:

It will also be recalled that in the same novel Vautrin's ideal is none other than to become a plantation owner in America, a classic projection of an essentially bourgeois fantasy and no different from the fantasies of wealth and power that haunt other members of Balzac's world. Despite all the rhetoric of revolt that accompanies the presentation of Vautrin, in his acquisitive dreams, his will to power, his contempt for moral law, he is in fact the quintessential expression of the dominant characteristics of the new society, an extension to the extreme point of its ruthless, anarchic individualism. (161)

Apart from the fact that Section 3.1.1 will present evidence that Collin's description of this plantation plan to Rastignac and to Granville is disingenuous, Prendergast's final estimation of Collin presents the character's selfishness solely in the frame of modernity. Fanger explores Balzac's fusion of romantic and realistic styles through Collin by recognizing that in *Splendeurs*, "Vautrin's strange passions, which serve on the one hand to make him the most complete outlaw in Balzac, serve as well in this book to humanize him" (60), noting the determining role played by Collin's desire when he writes that "the prime mover of all the separate secret histories is, ultimately, the fact of Vautrin's homosexuality" (60), and ultimately emphasizing that the novel's "unity of tone comes singularly from this angle of vision" (61)—that is, from the perspective of the passions as the underlying motor of human action. However, this is the full extent to which he explores Collin's desire, and he ultimately explains Collin's failure only as Balzac's means of highlighting the blindness to negative absolutes caused by modernity's progression:

In discussing Vautrin, emphasis was laid primarily on the method of presentation, on the ways he is aggrandized by legendary association—but no reader will overlook the enormous part he plays in Balzac's analysis of Parisian society. The romantic conception serves the realist's plan as Vidocq, Vautrin's real-life model, could not have done. This genius of disguise unmask society; this "ferocious logician" alone is sufficiently cynical to lay bare the cynicism of a whole social order. And when, in a final spasm of melodrama, his lurid world falls to pieces, he emerges from the wreckage looking more like Vidocq than Vautrin—reformed, a good citizen, placing his talents (but not his genius—that clearly is gone) at the service of law and order. And this, Balzac tells us, happened in about 1830, when the July Monarchy ushered in that era of bourgeois colorlessness which he himself lamented and his successors unceasingly attacked. (63)

Finally, D.A. Miller emphasizes the connection made evident in the novels in which Collin appears between desire's insatiability and the impossibility of its permanent repression, the fact that disillusionment is always followed by re-illusionment (with the only alternatives being madness or death), the fact that the works' "closure only signals the displacement of narrative and the necessity of its further production" (169), and the fact that "for the reader of Balzac, sense has no absolute basis, but changes with the narrative need and the social context" (180). This leads him to quite perceptively observe Collin's blindness caused by his desire:

For though Vautrin is able to see and manipulate "the arbitrariness of the sign" at most other levels, when confronted by a Rastignac or Lucien, he is entirely willing to grant the appearance all the erotic authority of the reality. A semiotician, as such, can never fall in love, for that experience is based on an assumption that the "outside" intrinsically corresponds to the "inside." [...] To the extent that Vautrin is enamoured, he abdicates his semiotic competence, not because he misreads the signs, but because in this domain he fails to understand them as signs at all. (176-177)

He even recognizes that Collin's final ascension is a sign of his subjection to social authority rather than his possession of power, commenting on the narration's projection of Collin's career at the end of *Splendeurs*, "The whole career of Vautrin as head of the Sûreté has been elided, as the sovereign power he fantasized and tried to possess has been attenuated in the exercise of 'functions'" (178). Nevertheless, like Prendergast, he refers to the plantation plan when giving an overall explanation of Collin's motivations (in order to explain Collin's "untimely possessiveness" [177] of the protégés), writing, "it is the arch-criminal in Balzac who entertains the most reactionary ancien-regime conception of power as a monolithic concentration in a single person. In a world, therefore, where he must encounter the elusively dispersed nature of modern power, diffused in techniques and norms, Vautrin is bound to disappointment" (177). This fails to consider, as the third chapter will show at length, that Collin is bound to disappointment not because of his environment, but because of his approach to his own desire and his belief in completeness' possibility.

Overall, these approaches to Collin are certainly limited by the fact that he is not the principal focus of these critics' arguments as well as the fact that none of them consider all of the works in which he appears. However, it is nevertheless remarkable that none of them stress how each of them passes over an opportunity to observe how manifestations of Collin's desire or infallibility highlight Balzac's attention to the human condition on a universal level, his emphasis that no person in any time period can possibly transcend it, and his implication that addressing the problems characterizing modernity will entail a reconsideration of what makes morality necessary and the way that it functions on a universal level. This thesis will explore several questions raised by the above readings of Collin. For example, how does Collin's conscious understanding of his motivations fail to account for several aspects about his behavior? How can his frequent deception and the narration's ambiguity subvert readers' initial impressions of his character and aims? Why do Collin's attempts to realize his protégé plan through the manipulation of appearances and others' desires invariably fail? How do the mental processes informing his words and actions shed light on both the particular and universal frames determining his development? Finally, what are the alternatives to Collin's worldview and *modus operandi* in Balzac's Paris and in general? Before exploring these questions, the following section will first outline the key concepts underlying Balzac and Lacan's assertions of the

universality of negative absolutes and their shared understanding of the mind's development and functioning—concepts of which I gradually became aware through my attempts to understand Collin.

### **1.2 Balzac and Lacan on the Human Condition's Universal Frames**

Through my initial readings of Collin and interpretations of him, the questions I needed to answer in order to advance my understanding of the character became clearer to me—questions primarily regarding the ideas informing Balzac's social critique and Lacan's explanations for the unconscious' existence. My efforts to understand each of these led me to contemplate free will, the intersection of the individual and society, and the trends in thought and changes contributing to modernity's development on a level that I never had before. Though I saw several similarities between Balzac and Lacan's approaches to these issues and many ways in which Balzac's presentation of Collin was relevant to them, it was not until I realized the centrality of their recognition of the impossibility of totality caused by *language as the frame of all human experience* that I finally found a means of connecting my reflections on Collin's manipulation of others through his understanding of the process of perception and the separation between appearances and the meanings assigned to them, Collin's compulsive pattern of behavior with his protégés, the fact that Collin straddles the opposition between masculinity and femininity and between obedience and revolt, the role that Collin plays in fusing the different styles and sources employed by the author, the fact that Collin voices the author's critique of the society while simultaneously mirroring its corruption through his ruthless domination of Balzac's Paris, the fact that Collin brought attention to the works through the appeal he posed for popular tastes and through his overall magnetism, Balzac and Lacan's similar opacity and verbosity in communicating the underlying meaning of their works, and Balzac and Lacan's similar critiques of the futility of Revolution and of the instability and hypocrisy characterizing the implementation of individualistic ideologies. In Balzac's *Avant-propos* and *Catéchisme social*, Lacan's *Séminaire sur « la lettre volée »*, and then in everything I read by them after that, I found that both men explain the human mind's development and functioning as such in relation to their identification of language as the invariable frame of human experience. Firstly, they show that because one's incorporation into a society already established and maintained through language necessarily entails one's subjection to its prohibitions, one must inevitably sacrifice either one's pursuit of prohibited objects of desire or one's social membership, meaning that desire can never be completely satiated. Secondly, they show that in spite of language's capacity to represent the realization of ideals of unity and perfection with no equivalent in the material world, certain limitations to language's ability to articulate meaning (e.g. its dependence on the differentiation of signifiers and consequential inability to articulate singularity or the part of meaning produced by associations established through experience between signifiers and emotions) mean that one can only partially express or understand meaning through language. Given that one's voluntary sacrifice and entrance into society can only be motivated by one's belief that doing so will provide one with the best available means of escaping the unpleasant dissatisfaction associated with continued desire, the unconscious comes into being to contain the repressed (i.e. that which is blocked from consciousness), which can be anything that undermines this belief by

challenging one's capacity to attain one's ideals of completeness or society's ability to fulfill its promises for an ideal future—whether that be one's continued desire for forbidden objects (which one will never be able to appease without endangering the social membership required to fulfill one's ideal vision for one's future), the part of meaning that cannot be articulated (which evokes the impossibility of attaining complete control of oneself, others, and/or the world at large through language and its products), feelings of disappointment experienced after having attained a goal one believed would resolve one's desires (which evoke the impossibility of finding perfect happiness), etc. Primary processes constitute the continued influence borne on one's perception and behavior by that which is repressed.

During my research of their shared ideas, I began using the term “negative absolutes” to refer to the effects of empty space preventing the formation of totality (i.e. the space beyond language and consciousness subverting the complete articulation of meaning, the space of what one does not symbolically possess preventing the complete satiation of one's desire, the space of possibility allowing for the formation of fantasy, and the space of death as the ultimate limitation to human existence and understanding)—that is, the impossibility of complete control, satisfaction, knowledge, objectivity, identity, and communication. Negative absolutes are not objective truths, but rather truths that every person can subjectively verify—that is, when the lack of a frame of reference outlining their existence and/or the lack of a motivation to recognize them prevents one from doing so. Neither Lacan nor Balzac refers to *negative absolutes* per se. The “negative” of negative absolutes comes from Lacan's reference to the limitations rendered irrevocable by the unconscious' existence as negative truths, given that they can never be fully expressed (due to language's limitations in producing meaning and the fact that their precise origins in each individual's singular experience cannot be articulated as such) and that they are the indication only of an absence. The “absolutes” of negative absolutes comes from Balzac's key argument that by abolishing the absolute institutions of religion and the monarchy, the 1789 Revolution undermined the standing bases for morality and social order, failed to provide any viable replacement for the rejected systems of values and government, and furthermore prevented the resolution of French society's ensuing instability, moral relativism, and corruption, as the institutionalization of freedom of beliefs and popular rule made it impossible to establish a definitive, unifying foundation for moral education capable of preparing individuals for social responsibility. Christopher Robinson comments on this situation:

What the Revolution did, in effect, was to discredit the approach to life which was associated with the thinkers of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment, an approach which had itself undermined the traditional concepts of moral and metaphysical authority that had remained relatively unchanged since the Middle Ages. Until the mid-eighteenth century two major concepts in particular had not seriously been challenged. Firstly, that eternal truths about the nature of the universe and of man exist, if only man can establish them. Secondly, that the structure of the universe can be represented by an hierarchical system of relationships, of which an eternal principle forms the apex. Permanent ethical values thus exist independently of man, and it is the task of the theologian or philosopher, acting in the interests of mankind in general, to establish them, so that the individual may conform as nearly as possible to the abstract standard.

The so-called *philosophes*, a group of thinkers in the latter part of the eighteenth century, working in the name of reason and drawing on a wide range of recent scientific enquiry, notably the work of the Englishmen Newton and Locke, raised doubts about the nature of man's place in the universe. Their doubts [...] put a new importance on man himself rather than on abstractions existing independently of man. Whether, like Voltaire, they approved of reason and science as the sole arbiters of truth, or, like

Rousseau, they promoted the value of intuition, whether like the deists they believed that God was a remote metaphysical principle, or like Diderot they doubted the need to postulate the existence of a God at all, they were all convinced of the significance of man, and of the possibility of his moral perfection. The Revolution seemed to offer the opportunity for man's rebirth, by its eradication of those social ills which were thought to be preventing the realization of his progress. But the Revolution came and went, and there was nothing in its aftermath to suggest that the state of man had moved one wit closer to perfection than before. Indeed, the behaviour of man to man during the Terror suggested that there was very little basis at all for supposing that man was naturally moral; or, if he were, then society had corrupted him irredeemably.

Post-Revolutionary society found itself, therefore, in a serious chaos of values. The *philosophes* had disposed of the old certainties; they had not succeeded in substituting any new ones. It is hardly surprising, then, that the primary characteristic of early nineteenth-century thought is revolt: the abandonment of all attempts to universalise, a fundamental disbelief in systems of any sort, the rejection of all solutions to human problems based on the primacy of reason. This is not to say that the existence of absolute values was universally denied, or reason totally excluded from a role in human life. It was man's capacity to attain a knowledge of absolute values, especially by purely rational processes, that was doubted. If man was to progress, it could only be intuitively, tentatively, towards some distant undefinable metaphysical goal, quite unobtainable in this material existence. Such a relapse into intuition and subjectivity was not total. But the new systematisers, the Positivists, had to take its existence into account, and it was, in any case, thirty years or more into the century before their doctrines gained much headway. A negative principle such as revolt necessarily leads to very disparate positive manifestations. Some thinkers remained in a state of despair. Others postulated solipsistic solutions applicable only to the individual or to an élite. Social thinking tended to be utopian, philosophy metaphysical. Above all there was a constant reiteration of dissatisfaction with the material world, with what man could achieve in the material world, with the information offered to man in the material world. (9-11)<sup>16</sup>

Robinson here highlights what I refer to as the modern morality crisis (which has no means been resolved) opened up by the tension between the Post-Revolutionary necessity of respecting and tolerating individuals' freedom of beliefs and the need for a consistent basis for morality and authority at large. Balzac and Lacan led me to contemplate whether a certain approach to negative absolutes could be capable of providing such a basis while still ensuring people their freedom of beliefs. However, before even broaching this idea, I must first present why these negative absolutes exist and the role that they play in the human condition. This section will thus consider how *language* and *prohibition* as the universal frames of human existence open up the space of negative absolutes and initiate an individual's primary processes, explaining when necessary why Balzac and Lacan's ways of articulating these ideas make Collin particularly useful in understanding how they work.<sup>17</sup>

Given that language preexists those whose lives it frames, I will begin by making several key observations on its functioning as well as how that functioning is reflected in that of the mind. One of Lacan's greatest innovations was to rework Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theories and Ferdinand de Saussure's structural linguistics in relation to one another; in other words, he approaches the

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<sup>16</sup> Robinson's statement regarding the two major concepts that "had not been seriously challenged" fails to acknowledge several important philosophical works regarding precisely these issues, including those for example of Aristotle.

<sup>17</sup> My hope has been to present the key ideas of Lacanian psychoanalysis at their most basic level and in the most accessible way possible. I have ultimately here inscribed the way his work makes sense to me, which is not necessarily the way he expressed it or even the way he thought of it. However, I think that it fairly represents the basic ideas at the heart of psychoanalysis, and my analyses of Collin in the following chapters seek to support my way of expressing them. I have purposefully sought to avoid using terms whose progressive evolution in Freud and Lacan's works and dissemination into the public vocabulary have rendered ambiguous or which are tied to complex ideas without immediate relevance to my observations; when I do have occasion to use psychoanalytic terms, I have defined them. I should start here by stating that in my usage, *consciousness* (a state which one actively experiences) refers to the sum of one's conscious perceptions at a given moment and *the unconscious* (what Freud famously refers to as an "other scene," a space which one can never consciously explore as such) refers to the sum of that which is repressed at a given moment and is structurally centered around the Real at its core.



limits placed on human experience by recognizing language as its frame. Like other animals, humans are instinctually motivated to fulfill their needs (i.e. to survive both as individuals and as a species), and death poses an unquestionable limit to all lives. However, all of this becomes something different when framed by *language*—the sole means by which humans mediate reality. Lacan first recognized the relevance of the study of language to the study of the mind beginning in the 1950s through Structuralism, a theoretical school founded on Saussure’s writings on linguistics in his *Cours de linguistique général* (published posthumously in 1916), which “has been described as nothing less than a ‘Copernican revolution’ in the human and social sciences, in the sense that, ‘instead of men’s words being seen as peripheral to men’s understanding of reality, men’s understanding of reality came to be seen as revolving about their social use of verbal signs’” (Homer 36). Because psychoanalysis aims at elaborating how the unconscious parts of the mind contribute to mental processes (thereby raising the question of our *knowledge* of our own mental processes), linguistics provides an insightful approach inasmuch as it dissects our only means of knowing—*language*. By deconstructing its structure, the process by which it produces meaning, and most importantly its *limits* in accomplishing this aim, linguistics allows us to see how these are reflected in our social environment, the process of perception, and the negative absolutes characterizing the human condition. Unlike his predecessors, Saussure argued that the historical approach then practiced by linguists (which focused on tracing words’ development and their “inherently attached” meanings) could not be constituted a science inasmuch as the “scientific method requires that one first identifies one’s object of study” (Homer 37), and therefore suggested that linguists should approach language “not historically but *synchronically* as a system that is complete at any given moment in time” (Homer 37). Saussure’s linguistics thus first of all interested Lacan because it had the potential to provide psychoanalysis with the clear scientific basis that it has often been accused of lacking. What is more, Saussure’s study of how language produces meaning inadvertently highlighted how the process of signification (the production of meaning) takes place beyond the realm of our awareness. For example, he highlighted how we can often learn and obey rules without realizing it: “When we use language we do so against a background of vocabulary, syntax, grammar and conventions; we are not conscious of all those elements when we speak or write but they are there and they determine what we can and cannot say” (Homer 37). This demonstrates how we can exercise knowledge without being aware that we have it, meaning that this learned aspect of our behavior is largely involuntary—the result of our unwitting assimilation into the social order. On another note, Alexandre Leupin notes that the fact that Saussure’s writings explicitly suggest that the process of signification cannot be named or explained through language means that for “an analytic ear, this can mean only one thing: it is unconscious” (40). Lacan thus also valued structural linguistics because it provides evidence of the unconscious’ existence in a field completely removed from psychoanalytic interests, and because its formalization of the production of meaning through language demonstrates how the structure and processes of signification and those of the mind cannot be discussed in isolation from one another.

Returning to the question of negative absolutes, we can see how Lacan interpreted Saussure to show how the limits to language’s production of meaning are reflected in human experience. If Saussure approached language as a complete system (by which he

indicates how all of its possible manifestations are contained as a finite set at any given moment as well as the simultaneous accessibility of all of its elements), this does not, however, mean that a language system also contains *complete meaning*. To the contrary, he distinguishes between language as a system and language as *Parole*, which we can interpret to say that one's use of language adds an additional element that the system does not possess on its own. Lacan would later write that speech always contains unintentionally-included traces of the articulator's unconscious, the lingering proof of primary processes. Lacan emphasizes that the things we say say things about us—particularly in cases of parapraxis (“Freudian slips”) or in jokes, but potentially in any statement that we make. The fact that our words often contain different levels of meaning is a result of the process by which it is produced, whose ephemeral nature was commented on by Saussure by saying that it could not be named. In connection to this, Saussure observed that the meaning produced in the listener by a word spoken to them is not a consistent meaning essentially or materially attached to that referent, but rather the mental concept that the listener already associates with that word.<sup>18</sup> He thus opposed his approach to the traditional belief that words are inseparable from and therefore communicate an unequivocal, essential meaning. Saussure represented the relationship between the *signified* (the concept that one seeks to represent) and the *signifier* (the sound utterance, word, or any other decipherable symbol used to represent it) with an equation that can be written as  $\frac{\text{signified}}{\text{signifier}} = \text{Sign}$ , in which the bar represented the connection between signified and signifier as two inseparable sides of the same sheet of paper, together forming the Sign as the basic unit of language. He argues that a language system is a complete set of Signs available at any given moment, and that these Signs produce meaning through their differential relationships to each other.

Though Lacan would revise Saussure's approach in several ways (arguing for example that signifiers and signifieds are not permanently attached, that a language system is a set of signifiers rather than signs, etc.), he stresses the importance of the linguist's recognition of the distance between that which we perceive and the meaning that we attach to it and the consequential nonexistence of objective, absolute meaning. Lacan's key revision of Saussure's idea was his emphasis that the signifier always precedes the signified; he rewrote Saussure's equation as  $\frac{\text{Signifier}}{\text{signified}} = \text{Sign}$  in order to demonstrate the *primacy of the signifier* in the process of signification. He uses this concept to emphasize not only that all production of meaning is first initiated by the perception of a signifier, but to stress that humans are born into preexisting societies established through language, meaning that their entire lives are formed in relation to that already-established structure.<sup>19</sup> For Lacan, the bar in the equation is neither a sign of the permanent juncture of a specific signifier

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<sup>18</sup> Saussure famously explains this distinction by saying that when a speaker tells a listener about a tree, the word tree is not connected to some literal tree in the world, but rather to the speaker's idea of a tree in her or his mind. For this reason, the concept of a tree which the listener retroactively attaches to the word “tree” does not necessarily have any connection to the speaker's concept of the tree, and could not have all of the same implications, as any two people's experiences with trees throughout their lives could never be precisely synonymous.

<sup>19</sup> The meaning that we are able to find in life is thus limited by the system of language which is available to us: one can only express or understand ideas which can be articulated through the given set of signifiers contained in one's language. What is more, Saussure

to a specific signified nor a division sign, but rather the marker of a topological barrier permanently separating two orders whose difference from one another is not precisely definable (Lacan refers to these as “ordres distincts et séparés initialement par une barrière résistante à la signification” [Écrits 497]) as well as that which represents the “operation that produces meaning” (Leupin 43)—that is, the ineffable process by which the signifier produces the signified. If Lacan argues that the signified produced in relation to a signifier cannot be completely communicated inasmuch as it is formed in relation to an individual’s unique combination of experiences, desires, conscious ideals, etc., he also emphasizes that even the individual her or himself cannot fully recognize the meaning that s/he attaches to a signifier, inasmuch as it is the product of primary processes beyond her or his awareness. For Lacan, this does not mean that there is no complete meaning; it simply shows that meaning in itself can never be completely contained in words, first and foremost because part of that meaning is unconscious and therefore inaccessible. However, it is partially beyond language for another reason, which Saussure himself expresses: inasmuch as we can only attempt to define a word by referring to other words and examining their differential relationships, language is incapable of articulating singularity.<sup>20</sup>

Through this understanding of language, we can define Lacan’s three orders: the Symbolic, the Real, and the Imaginary. Firstly, he refers to the language system and all of its manifestations as the Symbolic Order. When we are born, the world is already ordered by this structure, which encompasses all of our predecessors’ sedimented contributions to posterity through language. The Symbolic contains all forms of culture (inasmuch as they are composed of language, as in literature, religion, or science, or made possible through its employment, as in the Hoover Dam) and the values, ideals, and norms that are established in relation to it; is the means by which authority is established (as outlined by laws, foundational documents, etc.) and exercised (political rhetoric, treaties, a jury’s verdict, etc.), and by which social hierarchies are determined and maintained (through distinctions made between different groups, the distribution of property, etc.); and its existence as such at any given moment facilitates the maintenance of the current status quo, meaning that openly criticizing its limitations or attempting to change its dominant value system, underlying structure, etc. constitutes a challenge to those in power. Secondly, Lacan refers to everything ineffable that lies beyond language (the part of meaning that remains unconscious, singularity, etc.) as the Real, which humans principally experience as the *empty space* subverting all attempts to attain any form of completeness (and thus forever perpetuating the human condition’s frame of negative absolutes). Because we experience it as that which prevents us from ever feeling completely satisfied, he also sometimes refers to this as a feeling of lack

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shows that language can only produce meaning if its elements are combined in accordance with certain rules; this reflects not only how we learn and follow rules without realizing it, but on a larger scale how the necessity of obeying authority is integral to the human experience (and thus how constructing language in an unapproved way is in itself a subversive act).

<sup>20</sup> Homer explains this more clearly: “What a signifier refers to is not a signified, as there is always a barrier between them, but to another signifier. In short, a signifier refers us to another signifier, which in turn refers us to another signifier in an almost endless chain of signification. If we try to define the meaning of a specific word or concept, for example, we can only do so through other words; we are caught in a continual process of producing signs. [...] Signification is always a process – a chain. None of its elements actually ‘consist’ of the meaning or the signified but rather each signifier ‘insists’ on a meaning, as it presses forward to the next signifier” (42).

whose resolvability is veiled by one's idealization and desire for the "Thing" (as in, that one thing that if I only had it, I would be happy), surplus *jouissance* (a reference to Marx's term for the products of a worker's labor to which s/he does not have access).<sup>21</sup> If each of these orders exists as such apart from an individual, Lacan refers to the plane composed of both language and images on which one experiences reality as the Imaginary Order, whose existence solely in each individual's mind (when not projected into art) provides a platform that cannot be viewed or challenged from the outside and that thus allows one to perceive one's experiences through an accommodating filter of fantasy—that is to say, in a way that allows one to feel pleasure and to avoid displeasure whenever possible.

Even though psychoanalytic (and structural linguistic) vocabulary and theory did not yet exist as such during Balzac's lifetime, his *Avant-propos* and the posthumously published *Le Catéchisme social* foreshadow both Lacan's vision of negative absolutes as the result of language *and* as the result of the prohibition complex. Balzac asserts that language is a fundamental element of human experience: "Dans les pays récents comme formation ou comme habitation, on a trouvé partout un langage ou les rudiments d'un langage" (*Catéchisme social* [CS] 112). He shows how language (as the basis of the Symbolic order) both subjects an individual to the necessity of thought itself and to the rules regulating it as a form of language: "La pensée a ses lois, et ses lois sont dues à la société, car penser a été la conséquence du langage et le langage est une conquête de la société" (CS 124). He shows how language thus constitutes the sole means by which humans experience the world around them (Balzac argues that his work, as a taxonomy of social types, "devait avoir une triple forme: les hommes, les femmes et les choses, c'est-à-dire les personnes et la représentation matérielle qu'ils donnent de leur pensée; enfin l'homme et la vie" [I: 79]) and therefore limits the meaning that one can articulate to that which language can produce through the differential relationships of signifiers: "Le libre arbitre consisterait à pouvoir affirmer; mais *l'homme n'affirme que relativement*. Dans l'État naturel, il affirme ou se décide par rapport à son entourage. [...] Affirmer, c'est agir, et agir, c'est vivre. La vie est soumise à des milieux dans l'état naturel absolu (un homme seul dans une île) et, dans l'État sauvage, elle est déjà soumise à des lois. Ainsi toute action qui est l'affirmation parlée ou traduite en faits est *forcée d'obéir à des rapports*, elle est bornée" (CS 122-123, my emphases). This means that the articulation of singularity (and even the performance of completely original acts) is impossible: "En parcourant toutes les actions humaines, depuis les plus insignifiantes jusqu'aux plus importantes, la raison y découvrira une cause déterminante et jusqu'à ce qu'on ait découvert une action ou une pensée spontanée, c'est-à-dire produite

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<sup>21</sup> Rather than referring to the space beyond the Symbolic order, the space that prevents the satiation of desire, and the space that allows for fantasy as a *lack* or *gap* as Lacan usually does, I have chosen to refer to it as *empty* space. If the connotations of emptiness still evoke displeasure or the idea that something is supposed to be there associated with *lack* which I would prefer to avoid (as empty space is not in itself positive or negative, has never and will never be filled with what is "supposed" to be there, and serves roles in human experience resulting in both pleasure and displeasure), I nevertheless find it more fitting than the idea of lack, which implies the presence of an empty space within a given set, whereas the Real is the void lying beyond the Symbolic as a complete set of signifiers at any moment. I also rejected the alternative of *open* space inasmuch as this connotes conspicuousness (which is prevented by the veiling of empty space with a signifier) or the possibility of that space's closure or occupation. If in Lacan's approach *existence* is equivalent to *existence in language*, the idea of empty space connotes the nonexistence of the Real's contents.

sans un jugement a priori, sans une cause préexistante, sans Influence, il est juste de dire que le mot libre arbitre est sans signification” (CS 121). Balzac’s assertion that free will does not exist due to all action’s and word’s subjection to the environment that frames and therefore determines them constitutes his positioning himself in opposition to Descartes, that key founder of individualism’s canon, as Lacan would later do as well: “Lacan interprets the Freudian unconscious as both the direct heir of the Cartesian subject and, at the same time, that which undermines all philosophies deriving from it” (Homer 66), given that “Freud remains Cartesian to the extent that he sets out from a position of doubt, but, whereas Descartes moves from a position of doubt to the certainty of conscious mind, Freud moves in the opposite direction and places the emphasis on the *doubt* that supports certainty” (Homer 67). In other words, certainty’s prevention from ever being complete is a positive thing, as this constitutes one’s recognition of negative absolutes, whereas certainty about anything else constitutes an absolute and thus blinding belief in completeness.

Considering that free will is impossible regardless of whether or not one recognizes negative absolutes, one might well wonder why it matters one way or the other. In order to understand that, we have to examine the second source of negative absolutes: the prohibition to which any speaking being is necessarily subjected—not only in relation to the rules regulating language’s production of meaning, but to the rules that the Symbolic order necessarily imposes. At this point, we can already see how the human experience is limited by its frame: complete knowledge is impossible because some things cannot be articulated (and thus known) through language, complete objectivity is impossible because the signified that each individual consciously assigns a signifier bears the effects of indescribable primary processes, complete identity is impossible because singularity cannot be expressed through language, and unequivocal communication is impossible because the message that one sends is never equivalent to the message that is received—even if one sends that message to oneself.<sup>22</sup> However, if this section has shown how primary processes become evident in language’s functioning, it has not shed light on why part of mental functioning is unconscious in the first place. We can begin to contemplate this by remarking that our discussion of language has functioned quite efficiently without ever considering that for which it so often fails to account—*feelings*, including both the senses and most of all emotions. The question of feelings has thus far only come up with our discussion of the Imaginary as the fantastical plane in which everything is assembled in a way that allows us to avoid displeasure and to promote our experience of pleasure; however, any human can attest to the fact that this does not always work out as well as we would like. We can better understand this in relation to Lacan’s presentation of the subject’s development in three stages aligned with his orders: the Imaginary develops before the child begins speaking, then, once one begins speaking and understanding, one is

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<sup>22</sup> This is not to say that interpretation “est ouverte à tout sens sous prétexte qu’il ne s’agit que de la liaison d’un signifiant à un signifiant, et par conséquent d’une liaison folle” (*Livre XI* 225); Lacan stresses that each individual attaches fixed signifieds to certain signifiers which act as quilting points and stabilize meaning, and suggests that psychosis results from the removal of these points. In the psychoanalytic experience, the analyst is seeking to discover the fixed signifieds which patients have unconsciously attached to certain signifiers which are the cause of their symptoms. For that reason, an interpretation’s correctness will be verified by its ability to assuage a patient’s symptoms. Interestingly, this might be the only way in which a human can truly know that they have in some way seen the meaning of a word as another person sees it, though their own experience and their lack of knowledge of the patient’s full experience will still skew this.

subjected to the Symbolic through the enforcement of a prohibition. Finally, when the complex that arises from this trauma is resolved through the child's willing acceptance of prohibition and entrance into society, the repression that accompanies this resolution completes the child's development into a divided subject. If this division is between consciousness and unconsciousness, it is also the disjunction between language and feeling—the fact that former cannot fully control, anticipate, or even articulate the latter, as well as the fact that the Symbolic often does not provide a space in which the latter can safely manifest—that creates the necessity of primary processes. The Oedipus complex constitutes Lacan's way of illustrating the universal situation leading to each individual's division.<sup>23</sup>

It is regarding the difficulty and frustration I experienced in trying to understand Lacan's explanation of the subject's development and resulting structure that my study of Collin perhaps most greatly facilitated my study of negative absolutes. As analogies go, the Oedipus complex is so useful because it allows for the juncture of Freud's emphasis on sexuality as the fundamental force underlying all human activity and his Lacan's theories on the primacy of the signifier inasmuch as it demonstrates how the steps of human development establish "the phallus" *as a signifier* as that on which all ensuing mental processes hinge. Nevertheless, I will here divorce my presentation of Lacan's central ideas from gendered terms. Allow me to explain why the context of this study demands such an approach, why it will not corrupt these ideas' validity, and how the successful articulation of these theories without gendered terms could in fact prove beneficial to the psychoanalytic field. Firstly, this thesis focuses on showing how Balzac demonstrates the *universal* aspects of the human condition in relation to Collin, a character whom he purposefully avoids not only assigning a familial background, but avoids definitively aligning with one gender or the other. To analyze the character solely in terms of gender would be to fail to appreciate Balzac's recognition of the basic equivalence of all human experiences and to negate the positive effects of the author's effort. It is entirely because I became fascinated with Collin—this character who uses knowledge of perception to his advantage, who straddles the genders, and through whom Balzac portrays homosexual desires (practically unmentioned by writers in his period) as fundamentally the same as all others—that I returned to the psychoanalytic theories I had first encountered the year before and began making a concentrated effort to understand them on more than a superficial level. I had long struggled with the *why* behind its basic concepts—a *why* that Lacan addresses at such great length and in so many seemingly different ways that I did not even know where to begin in approaching it. What unquestionably posed the greatest challenge to my understanding of his theories' underlying structure was his use of *gendered terms* to explain his most central concepts. Even though Lacan's ultimate approach to the gender divide is markedly less sexist than that of Freud, is founded on a *structural* rather than literal interpretation of the Oedipus complex (which approaches the mother and father as symbolic functions rather than people), and demonstrates his remarkable awareness of the diverse elements contributing to and resulting from the stages of a subject's

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<sup>23</sup> Since composing this draft of my project, I have learned that Lacan ultimately rejected the Oedipus complex as a means of articulating his theories, opting instead to speak for example of castration. My future revisions of the project will reflect this; for now, I will simply note that Lacan continues referring to the binary relationship of m(O)ther and child and its interruption through the prohibition to illustrate his ideas about the subject's development even after rejecting the Oedipus complex.

development and ensuing behavior, I have always doubted the *necessity* of his use of gendered terms. Even if it is true that sexuality is the source of all human action (which my limited experience has not yet enabled me to verify or reject), it is not necessary to refer to it as such in order to reveal the universality of negative absolutes, which is the aim of psychoanalysis at large. Lacan's approach to the genders and the structures founded on their difference changes drastically by his twentieth seminar, in which he asserts that one's structure of sexuation as male or female (there defined as the two possible positions that one can occupy determined by the kind of enjoyment that one can experience) is not equivalent to one's biological gender. He seems to be stating as clearly as Lacan ever states anything that at least in *Encore*, when he talks about "man" and "woman," *what he is talking about is not what he is talking about*.<sup>24</sup> If his famous statement therein that "il n'y a pas de rapport sexuel" (18) states that there is no way that the two genders can completely understand or satisfy one another and that the precise difference between the two cannot be articulated, it always seemed to me that such statements were just as valid regarding any relationship between any two individuals. It was through reading *Vautrin* that I first began to contemplate how the gender divide is not the fundamental division from which negative absolutes spring and which determines the kind of enjoyment that one can have, but rather an analogy for that fundamental division. I had already noted throughout my reading of the novels that in his relationships with Rastignac and Lucien, Collin's commands were consistently depicted as paternal and his devotion to them as maternal. This is similarly the case in the play; however, unlike the novels, the play provides us with a point of comparison for each of these parental roles in the figures of Raoul's father and mother. The way in which these two characters' attitudes and patterns of behavior (the duke's as cold and controlling and the duchess' as worshipful and self-sacrificial) are each paralleled by those of Collin reminded me of *the graph* by which Lacan represents in his twentieth seminar the genders' asymmetrical desires. Considering that Lacan says that one's positioning as a man or a woman on the graph is not based on biological gender, but rather on the kind of enjoyment that one can have, my exploration of Collin's alternation between these two positions led me to see this graph as a representation not of two possible kinds of people, but rather as the two sides of each individual—the *subject of the signifier* as the bearer of conscious meaning and the *subject of jouissance* as the bearer of feeling—whose conflicts are the direct result of entering society. From that point forward, the concepts structuring Collin's story in particular and Balzac's works as a whole became clearer to me and allowed me to draw more and more meaning from that graph; I finally began to understand how all human beings become subjected to language (and therefore to negative absolutes) as well as how this is reflected in the subject's divided structure, process of perception, and ensuing behavior. I will thus here explain the basic points of the subject's development that finally came to make sense to me in relation to the graph, referring to the Oedipus complex as the prohibition complex.

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<sup>24</sup> "L'être du corps, certes, est sexué, mais c'est secondaire, comme on dit. Et comme l'expérience le démontre, ce ne sont pas de ces traces que dépend la jouissance du corps en tant qu'il symbolise l'Autre" (Lacan 10-11).

Two factors frame the child's perception and development in the earliest stages of life. First of all, the duration of human's development means that the infant is initially completely dependent on the caregiver for an extended period. Secondly, the fact that the child only relates to its exteriority through images and feelings means that the associations it establishes between the two in this initial period cannot be rationally challenged either internally or externally. This is why Lacan writes that mental activity in this first stage of life is framed solely by the Imaginary. The child's self-image and narcissism first develops in these circumstances. Lacan explains the elements of this development in different ways. The initial illusion created through the child's limited sensory perception of the child's unity with the caregiver ensures that from the beginning, the child's self-image is always established in relation to its exteriority, meaning that from the beginning of life the subject is *alienated from itself*, as its perception of itself is never of itself alone and is never completely stripped of illusion. As the child's senses develop, a feeling of pleasure becomes associated with the always-returning presence of the caregiver's face (for if it did not return, the child would not survive), which is accompanied by the fulfillment of needs. The fact that the caregiver always returns supports the illusion that the child possesses control over the caregiver as the sole object of the caregiver's desire—particularly when the child's image is reflected in the caregiver's face as an expression of affection. This continues in what Lacan writes of the Mirror Stage, in which the fragmented view of the child's own flailing body (in the absence of motor skills) is replaced with an image of wholeness in the mirror that the child can control, leading the child to identify once more with an external image that presents a false impression of completeness. If these and other circumstances mean that before ever speaking, the child begins to associate pleasure with the presence of the caregiver and complete control, what is most important is that these associations are the products of illusions made possible not by the actual presence of complete control or unity, but rather by the absence of definitive proofs of their illusory nature or the means of acknowledging them as such.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Freud and Lacan refer to the period between two and five years as the Oedipus complex, which begins when the child's belief in its unity with the mother first becomes challenged by the child's own recognition of its separation from the mother. Questioning its role in the mother's desire, the child attempts to regain the mother's unified love by assuming that the mother has lost something and attempting to become it—this is what Lacan first identifies as the phallus. However, the child's attempts are ultimately interrupted by a third term interrupting the dyadic relationship: the father (i.e. the person who performs the symbolic function of the Name-of-the-Father, "a symbolic position that the child perceives to be the location of the object of the mother's desire" and "a position of authority and the symbolic law" [Homer 53]). As a representative of authority enforcing the universal prohibition of incest, the father definitively breaks the child's fantasy of unity with the mother by requiring the child's sacrifice of the phallus (that through which it attempted to become reunited with mother) as the price of social membership. The complex resolves when the child agrees to this sacrifice, which comes about when the child reasons that the father must possess the mother's lost phallus which the child does not possess and ultimately concedes to the father's demands, and through "the substitution of one signifier, the desire of the mother, for another, the Name-of-the-Father" (Homer 56) comes to identify with the father, whose symbolic role is both that of the representative of the law and the tyrannical father from the primordial horde who takes all of the women for himself: he "is simultaneously the agency of authority and a figure outside the law who actively transgresses the law that he imposes upon others. The subject, therefore, is faced with its subordination to authority and the regulation of its desires through the internalization of a signifier that is itself beyond the law" (Homer 58). This identification requires that the child give up the phallus, which it represses and thereby establishes as the ordering signifier of the unconscious, there performing a symbolic function uniting all three orders. Homer explains this by saying that "the phallus stands for that moment of rupture when the child is forced to recognize the desire of the other; of the mother. 'The mother is refused to the child in so far as a prohibition falls on the child's desire to be what the mother desires'. The phallus, therefore, always belongs somewhere else; it breaks the mother/child dyad and initiates the order of symbolic exchange. In this sense the phallus is both imaginary and symbolic. It is imaginary in that it represents the object presumed to satisfy the mother's desire; at



This initial state in which such unchallenged illusions initiate the development of the child's narcissism is inevitably shattered by a *primary trauma*. Given that this trauma constitutes the child's first unavoidable encounter with proof of the limitations to its control and satisfaction, the child retroactively idealizes the state occupied before that trauma as a "lost" state of completeness in spite of the fact that the appearance of the child's possession of complete control or satisfaction was never more than an illusion—and in spite of the fact that the child probably never envisioned that state as one of perfection while experiencing it. Nevertheless, from this point forward, the child associates the *feeling* of complete control and satisfaction experienced or believed to have been experienced in the period before trauma with the circumstances of that period—that is, with unity with the caregiver, one's singular desirability, the caregiver's unconditional love, complete control, etc. This primary trauma manifests as the enforcement by a representative of authority of a prohibition already established by the preexisting Symbolic order.<sup>26</sup> The point of primary trauma is not that it happens the same way in every life, but rather that the trauma of prohibition happens in every life and that the circumstances of this trauma and the child's way of understanding them and dealing with them have a lasting symbolic significance for the child that comes to play a determining role in their thought, feelings, and behavior.<sup>27</sup> The *prohibition complex* is initiated through a representative of authority's enforcement of a prohibition proscribed by the preexisting Symbolic order—a prohibition *which does not also apply to the representative of authority*—leading the child to retroactively idealize the initial state as a complete absence of suffering and the complete satisfaction of needs and narcissism, blaming trauma for one's "loss" of this state even though it never existed. Benefits of the relationship with the caregiver (affection and care, the right to exercise individual control in social setting, etc.) that once appeared unconditional are henceforth limited by the necessity of obeying this representative of authority, meaning one must sacrifice some

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the same time, it is symbolic in that it stands in for the recognition that desire cannot be satisfied. By breaking the imaginary couple 'the phallus represents a moment of division [that "lack-in-being"] which re-enacts the fundamental splitting of the subject itself'. As a presence in absence, a 'seeming' value, the phallus is a fraud" (57). My approach differs only on one key point: I do not incorporate the child's perception of its separation from the mother before the trauma of prohibition; however, in my version there is still a pause between the child's identification with the Thing (as the phallus) and then with the representative of authority. If this separation is meant to stress the child's definition of itself in relation to its exteriority (i.e. in relation to another's desire for itself) or the imaginary origins of the phallus, I think I make each of these points. If it is to show how the child becomes motivated to identify with the representative of authority, I do explain this in a somewhat different way in relation to my reading of Collin in section 3.2.2.

<sup>26</sup> The question of whether all human energy is primarily sexual in nature is closely tied to the question of primary trauma. In order for this to be true, the prohibition whose enforcement initiated this trauma would always be the prohibition of incest. However, it seems likely to me that primary trauma can be initiated by the enforcement of any prohibition, as any interruption to the child's control and satisfaction would suffice to destroy the child's illusory state of completeness. I have not done enough research to speak confidently on this question, and I am not sure that enough research could be done to resolve it definitively; my point is that the way of describing the prohibition complex above allows for an understanding of the stages of development *whether or not* sexuality is the fundamental motor of all human thought and action.

<sup>27</sup> The caregiver and the representative of authority could be the same person, the role of the representative of authority could be played by some other signifier, or both roles could be played by two people. For example, the caregiver him- or herself could enforce a prohibition that creates a distance between child and caregiver, leading the child to have two conflicting images of that person. If the caregiver was the only parental figure, the representative of authority could be anything that the child blames as distracting and distancing him or her from the child—the caregiver's job, a television, a sibling, etc. If both parents had acted as caregiver and provided unconditional love to the child, the point at which both of them had to start enforcing prohibitions would destroy the child's image of all three being unified.

measure of both freedom and control, of which any amount of loss is traumatic given that even the smallest sacrifice suffices to dispel the illusion of completeness. Resisting this prohibition, the child first idealizes the signifier of what it identifies as the prohibited object of desire as capable of restoring “lost” completeness (i.e. the initial state of unity with the caregiver retroactively associated with complete control and satisfaction). Lacan refers to the signifier serving this function as the phallus, whereas I will refer to this function as the *Thing*. Though the representative of authority’s enforcement of prohibition interrupts the binary relationship of child and caregiver, what the child identifies as the Thing is not the caregiver but rather that which the child believes that the representative of authority possesses that the child does not; the Thing is something that the caregiver also does not have but desires, explaining why the representative of authority is able to interrupt the caregiver’s attention to the child as well as why the child then wants it—having this Thing would allow the child to provide it to the caregiver and therefore efface the caregiver’s need for this third party, restoring their perfect union. In other words, the Thing is that whose absence the child blames as the cause of trauma, thereby veiling its inescapable cause (prohibition) with a *particular, resolvable* cause. Primary trauma permanently disrupts the purely Imaginary dyadic relationship between caregiver and child, replacing this with a *triangular relationship* between the representative of authority (associated with the Symbolic order as the preexisting system of language and all of its manifestations to which one is subjected through prohibition), the now relatively distant caregiver (associated with the Real as the absence of the state of completeness initiated by primary trauma, an empty space which all desire from that point forward attempts to resolve through the attainment of a signifier, as it first attempted to do with the Thing), and the child (associated with the Imaginary order as the child’s narcissistic vision of itself [through an internal platform of fantasy composed of images and later supplemented by language] as having once and being capable of again possessing complete control and satisfaction—a vision necessarily supported by the idealization of a signifier as that whose attainment the child anticipates will restore the “lost” state of completeness). After a period of attempting to obtain the Thing without success, the child eventually abandons these attempts voluntarily, bringing about the prohibition complex’s resolution—a development that is accomplished when the child accepts the irreversibility of primary trauma, turns its attention to the representative of authority as one possessing the means to completeness through the Symbolic order, willingly sacrifices pursuit of the Thing in order to enter society and become like the representative through the pursuit of a new idealized signifier identified through the Symbolic, and repressing one’s continued desire for the Thing. This *primary repression* inaugurates the unconscious, ironically guaranteeing that one will never be complete at the same moment that the idealization of a new signifier as that which will restore completeness in the future veils one’s inability to resolve primary trauma, idealizing the sacrifice of the Thing as an exchange for future happiness supposedly available through social membership. By imagining that the sacrifice constitutes a *temporary* separation from completeness, one assumes dissatisfaction and fallibility will come to an end once one has realized the vision of one’s *ideal self*—a fantasy of the future restoration of one’s “lost” state of completeness in relation to one’s attainment of the new idealized signifier (any signifier whose pursuit requires social membership) identified as that which provides the representative of authority with the *control*

(whose existence the child experienced through its exercise in enforcing prohibition) that is required to access “completeness” (which the representative of authority is presumed to possess inasmuch as the representative enforces the prohibition of the Thing without being subjected to it). Through this cycle of idealization, disappointment, repression, and exchange, the process of signification begins; the child’s entrance to society constitutes not only its subjection to the Symbolic order through its sacrifice, assignment of a position therein, and ensuing mediation of reality through language, but also its subjection to negative absolutes as the insatiable desire initiated by sacrifice, the empty space opened between the signifier and the signified, the unconscious opened by repression, and the Real opened as language’s beyond.

Clearly, the Thing thus plays a fundamental role in primary trauma, the entrance to society, and primary repression because it is the first signifier to be idealized, to be sacrificed, and to be unconsciously desired. Consequently, the Thing is permanently associated with the *empty space* opened in each of the stages of development through the child’s way of veiling this empty space with associations formed between the Thing as a signifier and certain signifieds. Through primary trauma, the child first encounters the truth that the circumstances in relation to which one’s narcissism developed were merely an illusion. However, rather than recognizing or accepting this truth as such, the child veils the truth of dissatisfaction’s permanence by establishing an association between the Thing (the absent signifier that the child identifies as that whose prohibition the representative of authority enforced) and the *possibility* of regaining the “lost” state of completeness. This association between the feeling associated with the “lost” state of completeness and with a signifier that exists only as absence—that is, between a feeling produced by an Imaginary illusion and a purely Symbolic entity with no referent in the material world—constitutes the definitive alienation of one’s desire from the fulfillment of needs into a desire to obtain complete meaning and satisfaction through the Symbolic order. The dysfunction resulting from one’s idealization of the Thing is a result of one’s association of this signifier with signifieds produced through two different processes—the emotional process of producing meaning operates in relation to arbitrary associations established through one’s experience between signifiers and feelings even before one begins speaking, whereas language’s production of meaning operates only through the differential relationships of signifiers. On the one hand, one assigns the Thing the signified of that which could restore completeness through the rational identification of it as that whose absence resulted from the enforcement of prohibition interrupting “lost” completeness, meaning that obtaining it would restore one’s former state. On the other hand, one assigns the Thing with the signified of the *feeling* of “lost” completeness associated with the state that one believes one can regain through its attainment. If Lacan always emphasizes the divided structure of the subject, this is because beginning to relate to one’s surroundings through meaning produced by language does not efface or prevent the production of more meaning through the emotional processes preceding one’s use of language and furthermore does not provide one with the means of completely understanding or controlling these emotional meanings. The subject is therefore divided between the *subject of the signifier*, which functions in relation to meaning produced by language, and the *subject of the signifier*, which functions in relation to meaning produced by feeling. One’s idealization of the Thing and the alienation

of one's desire into an endless request for completeness through the Symbolic result from the coincidence of meaning produced by two different processes in a way that allows one to escape displeasure; however, for this reason, one's idealization of the Thing can only subsist as long as one can maintain this alignment. In other words, by setting a precedent allowing one to veil negative absolutes' irresolvability with the fantasy that the interruption of the "lost" state of completeness has only temporarily been interrupted, conscious desire becomes aligned with an expectation of attaining completeness through the Symbolic that the Symbolic is incapable of realizing. Nevertheless, by rendering the child capable of forming junctures between signifiers and an idealized vision of future completeness, the idealization of the Thing initiates the child's capacity to find pleasure in a world framed by the Symbolic by allowing the child to enjoy a signifier simply through the anticipation of its attainment—that is, the child's capacity to supplement its perception of and through the Symbolic with fantasy.

Eventually, one's failure to find satisfaction through the Thing evokes the truth that the pursuit of purely Symbolic entities (signifiers) idealized through the Imaginary will inevitably fail to realize one's projected expectations of completeness; however, one veils this truth by forming an association between the feelings experienced in trauma and the Thing by identifying one's failure to attain it as trauma's particular cause. However, because the child never actually attained the Thing, this means that even though it becomes associated with trauma, it never ceases being associated with "lost" completeness; one never stops desiring the Thing, but simply represses one's continued desire for it, thereby opening the empty space of the unconscious, which is to say the empty space of the repressed and the unspeakable constituting one's singular contribution to the Real. In other words, by permanently orienting insatiable, unconscious desire toward a specific signifier associated with transgression, primary repression initiates the child's capacity to relieve at least some of the tension created by desires whose fulfillment would disrupt one's social membership by orienting that desire toward approved or at least less taboo signifiers that, though not the Thing, symbolically evoke the specific traits and circumstances associated with the Thing and "lost" completeness without threatening one's social membership or one's narcissistic view of oneself.

Finally, if the need to repress continued desire for the Thing exposes the truth that prohibition makes complete satisfaction impossible by ensuring that one will always have to choose between desires for the prohibited and social membership, thereby opening up the empty space that is the origin and aim of insatiable desire, one veils this truth through one's belief that one no longer desires the Thing, which has become associated with the feelings experienced in primary trauma through its evocation of one's incapacity to regain the "lost" state of completeness as such. Considering these negative feelings, it makes sense that one turns to embrace the Symbolic order aligned with the representative of authority both because its value system demonizes this Thing, distancing one from it, and because its value system presents an alternative means of "regaining" completeness. Because the vision of one's future restoration of the "lost" state of completeness is associated with one's attainment of a *master signifier* (a signifier identified through the preexisting value system and appointed to the idealized position vacated by the Thing through its repression)

that requires one's maintenance of social membership, this allows one to feel pleasure in becoming socially assimilated inasmuch as the products of one's education can be narcissistically interpreted as indications of one's advancement toward one's vision of the future. Given that one's enjoyment of this master signifier thus depends on one's continued idealization of it, one's entrance into society initiates primary processes aimed at preserving that fantasy and therefore one's ability to find meaning and pleasure in life. These processes firstly aim at ensuring that our conscious perception of the world does not undermine or even actively preserves our belief in the master signifier's capacity to provide completeness (on which we depend as our sole source of *enjoyment*), the worldview and value system supporting one's idealized view of the master signifier (which one retroactively establishes through a selective internalization of knowledge from the Symbolic), and (whenever possible) one's confidence that one as an individual is capable of realizing the vision of the future formed in relation to the master signifier (i.e. one's narcissism) *through repression*.<sup>28</sup> For this reason, any attempts to make conscious that which has been repressed, whether initiated by oneself or another person, is met with *resistance* ranging from denial to violence to loss of consciousness. However, this does not mean that that which is repressed stays that way. Subverting consciousness through its blind spots, one's continued unconscious desire for the Thing unwittingly leads one to continue to pursue the Thing indirectly by determining one's attraction to certain objects which one can unconsciously *enjoy* through their similarity to that which one identified as the signifier of the prohibited object of desire. However, if conscious desire's enjoyment of the master signifier in the vacated position of the Thing and unconscious desire's symbolic enjoyment of signifiers resembling the Thing both depend on repression, the fact that what is repressed returns in other ways indicates that there is another desire motivating primary processes: the desire for the articulation of negative absolutes, which is the desire to resolve one's division between the subject of the signifier and the subject of *jouissance* as well as one's division between consciousness and the unconscious. This manifests as *the return of the repressed*, which attempts to restore blocked material to consciousness not only when the conscious mind is least active (manifesting in one's dreams, jokes, hallucinations, etc.) but through involuntary *symptoms*. These can appear as parapraxis (better known as Freudian slips) or as patterns of uncontrollable behaviors, emotions, thoughts, or even physical illnesses without biological causes which can become disruptive to everyday life. The more that one relies on repression to deal with the emotional and verbal meaning produced through trauma, the more intense these symptoms become. This brings me to the third function of the Thing: besides allowing the divided subject to find enjoyment in a Symbolic frame and to partially gratify unconscious desire, the fact that its specific association with the circumstances of the "lost" state of completeness and with the prohibited leads one's unconscious desire to influence one's perception and emotions in a consistent way means that it ultimately preserves a trace of one's singular relationship to negative absolutes that can be recognized, creating the possibility of self-awareness and therefore of

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<sup>28</sup> The unconscious is composed of the repressed junctures of signifiers with signifieds, given that "what is repressed is not images, words or emotions but [...] a core of the real" [Homer 84] and that "the unconscious consists of signifying material" [Homer 44], showing that one does not repress language or a feeling as a pure signifier or signified, but rather the permanent connection of a sensory, emotional, or symbolic signified with a specific signifier established through one's experience.

some measure of self-control. If the return of the repressed results in the fact that “speech is where the two subjects collide” (Fink 24) as well as the point at which consciousness and the unconscious intersect, this interestingly is what enables Freud’s *talking cure* to dispel involuntary symptoms by instructing patients to speak without censure and thereby leading them to recognize consciously their symptoms’ repressed causes, and in so doing bringing them to a new level of self-awareness—one which can allow them to avoid passively, compulsively repeating the self-destructive pattern whose precedent is set in the resolution of the prohibition complex with the mounting of a signifier to the place of the Thing and the veiling of recognition of negative absolutes.

Overall, Lacan shows how subjection to the Symbolic order through prohibition entails not only one’s subjection to a preexisting set of rules and system of values, but even more fundamentally involves one’s subjection to a signifier, the Thing, as the object of the insatiable unconscious desire that not only prevents one’s ever being completely satisfied, but informs one’s conscious desire, skews one’s perception, and constantly manifests as involuntary symptoms whether or not one allows oneself to satiate it in some way because its exposure through the return of the repressed can never be fully accomplished. Interestingly, we find both of these aspects of subjection to the Symbolic reflected in Balzac’s writings. He notes the existence of the Symbolic order as language when he writes that human life, even at its most primitive level, always entails social membership: “Aujourd’hui l’histoire et la science nous ont démontré que les plateaux de l’Asie ont été le berceau de l’homme, que l’homme y a été tout aussitôt en société” (CS 110). He goes on to stress that the necessity of obedience to an authority, whether familial or political, is therefore omnipresent when he states that “il est évident que l’état sauvage offre les éléments grossiers de toute société : la famille, la nécessité d’obéir, recours dans les dangers à une extension du pouvoir” (CS 111). Given that he presents the frame that makes the prohibition complex inevitable through his assertion of the requirement of sacrifice (which in itself evokes the impossibility of complete control or satisfaction), we may wonder if he had prohibition in mind when writing in the *Avant-propos* that there are “des situations qui se représentent dans toutes les existences, des phases typiques” (I: 88)—particularly considering that he focuses on the family and had already shown earlier in that preface (while defining “l’âme de cet ouvrage” through “les principes qui lui servent de base” [I: 82]) how each person’s subjection to this Symbolic order exposes one to contradictory influences and thus divides one between contradictory tendencies. He begins by saying, “L’homme n’est ni bon ni méchant, il naît avec des instincts et des aptitudes; la Société, loin de le dépraver, comme l’a prétendu Rousseau, le perfectionne, le rend meilleur; mais l’intérêt développe aussi ses penchants mauvais” (I: 82). This passage firstly asserts that humans are born with certain instincts and aptitudes, but its failure to mention them after this evokes to what extent our subjection to the Symbolic order means that they are absorbed by this frame and become something else. He continues by asserting that each individual is not born good or bad, but gains the potential to become *both* in relation on the one hand to the selfish and thus antisocial *interests* which socialization stimulates (e.g. through ideals of completeness), and on the other hand to the moral education (i.e. symbolic or literal awareness of negative absolutes) that it can provide its citizens: “Le christianisme, [...] étant [...] un système complet de répression des tendances dépravées de l’homme, est le plus grand élément d’ordre social” (I: 82). This evokes how

entrance into society causes one's division between the inevitably contradictory and irreconcilable aims of personal interest and social membership, thereby subjecting one to negative absolutes and creating one's need for a means of *repressing* the depraved tendencies, the effects of repressed desire, of which one can never rid oneself entirely—an idea consistent with the Christian doctrine of *original sin* as a source of inevitable suffering and temptation as well as that which makes one's own agency untrustworthy and thus forces one to trust in God's will. All of this serves to distinguish Balzac from Rousseau by asserting that regardless of the governmental or moral structures framing the Symbolic or of an individual's relative capacity for civility or cruelty, socialization will always instill every individual with the potential for antisocial behavior. However, when he goes on to make a distinction between thought and feeling as the two separate elements of passion, Balzac evokes the division between the *subject of the signifier* and the *subject of jouissance* in a way that stresses the potentially negative *and* positive effects of their division as well as their juncture: “En lisant attentivement le tableau de la Société, moulée, pour ainsi dire, sur le vif avec tout son bien et tout son mal, il en résulte cet enseignement que si la pensée, ou la passion, qui comprend la pensée et le sentiment, est l'élément social, elle en est aussi l'élément destructeur” (I: 82). Balzac here shows that if the juncture of thought and feeling into a driving passion—that is, an association between a signifier not necessarily perceivable in the absence of language and a feeling of pleasure enjoyed through one's anticipation of attaining that signifier—can motivate antisocial, destructive actions (i.e. *modi operandi* essentially equivalent to those motivated by instinct in the absence of language), it can also motivate individuals to perform altruistic actions supporting social order voluntarily and happily. On the one hand, association formed in relation to one's education and experience between a signifier and the signified of a feeling of attraction as well as a belief in its capacity to provide completeness can motivate one to do anything necessary to attain it, and the versatility of thought furthermore means that one can feel justified in doing so. On the other hand, associations formed in relation to one's experience and education between the signifier of performing selfless actions and the signified of a feeling of pleasure and of one's identity as a good person can motivate one not only to resist pursuing idealized signifiers when doing so would cause suffering or disrupt one's positive perception of oneself, but to seek actively to reduce the suffering and increase the pleasure of others. Balzac adds a few pages later that “[l]a passion est toute l'humanité. Sans elle, la religion, l'histoire, le roman, l'art seraient inutiles” (I: 86) and that “le Désir, principe de toute Passion” (I: 89). On the one hand, this evokes desire's role as that which ceaselessly springs from the irresolvable, imperfect relationship between language and emotion—that is, the social and individual parts of oneself—with the aim of resolving negative absolutes; it drives all human (inter)action because without the suffering experienced in relation to the insatiable desire created by subjection to the Symbolic as well as the beliefs in the possibility of greater satisfaction made possible through language and shared through fantasy, there would be no means or motivation to create something new, to express or address one's suffering, or to feel empathy for one's fellow human beings through a shared desire for something more, sublime capacity of projecting it and enjoying it through the Imaginary, and painful inability to realize it or to find satisfaction through it if pursued in the material world.

Having shown that in addition to recognizing that language subjects individuals to its rules and limits without our realizing it, Balzac clearly acknowledges both the division created by the necessity of sacrifice as well as the empathy made possible through it, we can now explore how his striking explanation of determinism in relation to language presages the idea of the Thing as the result both of one's subjection to the preexisting Symbolic and of one's own imagination:

Si nous ne sommes ni soumis à une nécessité, ni à un libre arbitre, à quoi sommes-nous soumis ? Quelle est la loi de nos actions ? Une loi de rapport entre nous et les choses, appelée raison.

L'homme voit, perçoit, pense, et il donne naissance à un être appelé idée.

Cette idée née de lui est déjà plus forte que lui, la partie est déjà plus forte que le tout, une idée a plus de vie que l'homme, peut soumettre les hommes, etc.

*Il obéit à sa propre création.* L'attribut régit la personne. L'organisation d'où sort la pensée est déjà complètement distincte de la pensée, le mécanisme qui le produit est tout aussi distinct de ce produit que la machine à vapeur est distincte du mouvement qu'elle donne. [...] Les philosophes qui ont fait ce dilemme : la cause de la détermination est-elle hors de nous ou en nous ? c'est ou le fatalisme ou la liberté, *ont oublié que c'est l'un et l'autre.* (CS 141-142, my emphases)

Balzac here distinguishes both instinct (as a necessity one performs without a choice) and free will (as pure choice, which he already said is impossible) from what drives human action, indicating that what does drive one is one's ability to reason about the connection between oneself and everything else—an exercise of reason apparently operating in relation to one's interests.<sup>29</sup> Indicating the distinct steps in perception culminating in the conscious creation of an idea as a *being* distinct both from that *chose* (signifier) whose perception inspired it and from the process and even the thinker through which it came into existence, it seems that this *idea* comes to rule the person who thought it from the inside just as the Symbolic order through which the person articulated it rules the person from the inside. The final sentence shows *reason is not objective*, but that which allows one to first *look outside* to the world around us (determined by the point that one occupies in the Symbolic order), *then* perceive (as a *separate action* with the space between the two indicating the process of selecting that which to perceive through unconscious desire), *then* think (once more a *separate action* that not only implies a process happening beyond one's knowledge between choosing what to perceive and then interpreting it, but is facilitated by a *mechanism* separate from all of the other steps—that is, a Symbolic mechanism that one learned to perform without realizing it), and finally produce an *idea* which Balzac shows immediately becomes *more than and distanced from its creator*, suggesting how it is both something that one has never had and that one continues to desire (i.e. something idealized through the Imaginary). If one obeys this idea willingly because one believes it to be one's creation (exhibiting its power as the *engine* driving us), the last sentence shows to what extent this belief fails to acknowledge how it is the product both of one's subjection to the Symbolic

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<sup>29</sup> The third result of a Google search for “loi de rapport” found this expression in the text of an 1838 issue of *Revue française* in a review of an essay by *M. le comte de Zeller*. This phrase appears in a quote from the original article (“L’organisme et l’intelligence de l’homme sont deux êtres de nature différente. [...] Relativement à ses actions, elles ne sont ni libres ni nécessitées; il agit toujours par une loi de rapport, exclusive de tout libre arbitre, comme de toute contrainte”), and the reviewer claims that Zeller elsewhere defines this *loi de rapport* as “une conviction de l’intelligence se rapportant à notre intérêt, à notre bien-être”. In beautiful support of my comments on modernity, the reviewer goes on to rebuke this idea on both religious and philosophical grounds. In any case, it seems a safe assumption that Balzac copied this from Zeller, given that he does not fully explain his use of the phrase *loi de rapport*.



order (one's determination from the outside) and one's subjection to insatiable unconscious desire (one's determination from the inside resulting from one's freedom to think). If this highlights the functioning of the appointment of a master signifier in the wake of the Thing's repression as a demonstration of the extent to which primary processes inform perception, Balzac does not here assert that this frees individuals from social responsibility. Instead, he addresses it by stressing the need both for the education of those primary processes whenever possible in a way that promotes social order ("On ne donne aux peuples de longévité qu'en modérant leur action vitale. L'enseignement, ou mieux, l'éducation par des Corps Religieux est donc [...] le seul moyen de *diminuer la somme du mal et d'augmenter la somme du bien* dans toute Société. *La pensée*, principe des maux et des biens, ne peut être *préparée*, domptée, dirigée que par la religion" [I: 82, my emphases]) and for individuals' awareness of this process ("Je ne partage point la croyance à un progrès indéfini, quant aux sociétés; je crois aux progrès de l'homme sur lui-même" [I: 86]). Balzac firstly makes a reference to *animal magnetism*—a system of theories on which Mesmer developed a treatment for illnesses with no biological causes, which Roudinesco and Plon write that Freud recognized as a direct predecessor of the psychoanalytic experience, as it "donnera naissance à l'hypnotisme (l'hypnose) inventé par James Braid (1795-1860) puis à la suggestion, et enfin à la théorie freudienne du transfert" (Roudinesco and Plon 682)—by referring to *action vitale* ("Au XVIII siècle, avec l'épanouissement de la première psychiatrie dynamique se développe l'idée, déjà avancée par Pascal et Spinoza, selon laquelle *l'autonomie de la conscience serait nécessairement limitée par des forces vitales inconnaissables et souvent destructrices*. Dans cette perspective, la voie est alors ouverte à une thérapeutique fondée sur la théorie du magnétisme" [Roudinesco and Plon 506]). He recognizes negative absolutes when he defines the aim of moral education (and social authority at large) not as the eradication, but as a *reduction* of suffering (evoking his frequent criticism of those asserting the possibility of utopian society). Most importantly, he demonstrates his recognition of *primary processes*, as Bourget noted as early as 1902 in relation to this passage: "[O]bservez que Balzac, devançant sur ce point avec une perspicacité singulière la psychologie de son temps, distingue nettement dans l'homme le conscient et l'inconscient, comme nous dirions dans le langage d'aujourd'hui. Cette expression, qui dut paraître si étrange aux esprits d'alors : *une pensée préparée*, signifie que la vie inconsciente précède chez nous la vie consciente; celle-ci n'est que la reconnaissance chez nous de toute une activité qui lui a été antérieure. La réalité de l'âme ne réside donc pas pour Balzac dans la seule pensée" (56). By stating that for Balzac, the *reality of the soul* does not rest solely in thought, Bourget draws attention to the difference between the author's position and that of Descartes; furthermore, it is striking that Bourget commented on Balzac's recognition of "the unconscious" within the first decade of the term's usage.

If the previous section prepared this thesis' reading of Collin by exposing the principal questions raised and left unanswered by interpretations of the character that I have encountered as well as certain pitfalls made apparent by their limitations that my approach to the character will seek to avoid, this section has established the frame in which I will address those questions by outlining how Balzac and Lacan similarly explain the universal elements of the human condition in relation to its subjection to the Symbolic order and consequently to negative absolutes. If this section has also highlighted how Collin's simultaneous association with both genders

allowed me to articulate Lacan's central ideas about the subject's development and structure in the absence of gendered terms, thereby making it easier to see how all human experiences' are similar by eliminating distracting assertions of difference between particular groups of people, the following section will explore several other ways in which my approach to Collin proves useful not only to considerations of typical subjectivity, but to considerations of how the frame of modernity fails to acknowledge or address the necessity of recognizing negative absolutes as the basis of self-awareness and social responsibility.

### **1.3 Letting Go of "Vautrin": Jacques Collin's Subjectivity and Balzac's Moral Purpose**

Overall, my approach to Collin is far from the first to consider Collin as a person rather than a symbol. The approach whose untapped potential this thesis will explore is a combination of three factors: firstly, a consideration of all of the works in which he appears, the author's statements about the character, and the author's explanations of his principles and intentions; secondly, an active questioning of the transparency of and the motivations behind Collin's or the narration's statements in representing the character; and finally, an effort to focus actively on the explicit and implicit manifestations of the character's *typical* subjectivity. By allowing readers to see in the frame of Lacanian psychoanalysis how the compulsive patterns, blindness, and fallibility inconspicuously characterizing Collin's story evoke Balzac's understanding of the human condition's essential elements, this will first and foremost provide much-needed support for my reading of Balzac's nonfictional writings. If the previous section seems to have clearly set out some similarities between Balzac and Lacan's approaches to the human condition and modernity, the validity of those parallels can easily be challenged for two reasons. First of all, the understanding of the mind I outlined through the interpretation of Balzac's nonfictional writings could easily be challenged given that psychoanalytic vocabulary did not exist when he composed those writings, meaning that the terms that he does use could be interpreted in other ways in other contexts. What is more, my admittedly selective presentation of excerpts from his nonfictional writings excluded others less fitting to my reading—though I must say that from what I have read of Balzac's nonfictional essays, he seems to very consistently recognize negative absolutes and to condemn the promotion of beliefs in totality. The question of the author's political stance poses an entirely different issue. Since Balzac first adopted a conservative, royalist position soon after the 1830 Revolution, his objective in doing so has been the subject of debate. He famously describes his position in his *Avant-propos* by writing, "J'écris à la lueur de deux Vérités éternelles: la religion, la monarchie, deux nécessités que les événements contemporains proclament, et vers lesquelles tout écrivain de bon sens doit essayer de ramener notre pays" (I: 83). In spite of the fact that Balzac declared that "La loi de l'écrivain [...] est une décision quelconque sur les choses humaines, un dévouement absolu à des principes" (I: 82) and the fact that he wrote extensively and consistently about his political opinions from 1832 until his death, the question of Balzac's political and social writings "est une de celles qui ont été le plus fréquemment traitées dans les études consacrées à Balzac, mais, pour des raisons qu'il est facile d'imaginer, elle l'a presque toujours

été de la façon la plus injuste, la plus partielle et, finalement, la plus insuffisante qui se puisse concevoir” (Guyon 5).<sup>30</sup> If Bernard Guyon comments in 1922 that Balzac had only rarely succeeded in convincing French critics “qu’il était autre chose qu’un « amuseur public »” (6), by the late twentieth century, Balzac’s social critique had been given more consideration—but only because readers had found a way of sidestepping the question of his conservatism altogether. First of all, “[Friedrich] Engels remarked that Balzac’s acute perception of historical trends led him, in spite of himself, to highlight the contradictions and injustices of society and thus to promote the proletarian revolution he actively tried to prevent” (Robb 196), and he also famously observed that the lives of Balzac’s characters sometimes led them to conclusions contradicting with the author’s *Weltanschauung*—an observation that Georg Lukács would later comment on when praising the author for consciously setting aside his personal ideology in order to more accurately represent reality. First of all, Engels’ approach to Balzac’s works suggests his ignorance of or lack of respect for Balzac’s deliberate attention to negative absolutes in his works; Balzac viewed the eradication of all contradictions and injustices in society as impossible, writing for example in the posthumously-published *Catéchisme social*, “Toutes les fois que les destructeurs de société ont voulu miner un état de choses quelconque, [...] ils ont toujours été précédés de sophistes habiles qui ont essayé d’établir table rase, ou des principes à un état pur qui n’existe point et ne saurait exister. Ils ont pour renverser le pouvoir établi (l’Église et la Royauté) créé des préjugés philosophiques : le libre arbitre, la liberté de conscience, la liberté politique, qui se sont traduits par des révolutions. [...] On ne peut pas supposer le rien, quand on est soumis visiblement à tout” (122). The fact that approaches to Balzac like that of Engels “suppose le rien” by failing to recognize the interpreter’s subjection to primary processes reflects the ease with which so many of his commenters have repeated the tenets of his social critique without paying any attention to its frame in negative absolutes. Nevertheless, there are some challenges to his sincerity in embracing royalism that carry more weight than others. If Guyon and Raymond Trousson both offer substantial proof undermining abounding accusations of this political conversion’s initiation by his romantic affair with a noblewoman at the time or by his political and literary ambitions, there are other, more substantial challenges that threaten to weaken our estimation of the sincerity, validity, or relevance of his opinions. For example, certain comments to his mistresses in his correspondence bring his genuine faith into question, as Trousson highlights in relation to two citations: “Il le dit à la marquise de Castries le 5 octobre 1831 : « Je respecte les croyances auxquelles je n’ai pas foi », et le répète à Mme Hanska le 12 juillet 1842 : « Politiquement, je suis de la religion catholique, je suis du côté de Bossuet et de Bonald »” (168). In addition, Joseph Jackson’s exhibition of an undeniable, somewhat extreme similarity between the 1842 *Avant-propos* and the writings of the counterrevolutionary thinker Louis de Bonald (whom Balzac does there cite as an influence) leads Jackson to propose that the former practically plagiarized the latter in order to present himself as a viable replacement for the recently deceased aristocrat in the *Académie Française*. Though

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<sup>30</sup> To give one notorious example, in his eulogy of Balzac, Hugo, his close friend, proclaimed him a revolutionary in spite of himself—perhaps he felt this final jab was merited given that Balzac had redressed him for demagoguery during one of their last conversations. C.f. Robb 406 on Hugo’s last conversation with Balzac, and Robb 412 on Hugo’s eulogy.

there is indisputable evidence of Balzac's conversion from liberalism to conservatism as early as 1832 (and of his loyalty to these positions for the rest of his life), it is still strange that these ideas are so precisely extracted from Bonald—particularly those about the structure of his proposed work and its aims.<sup>31</sup> In addition, though the *Catéchisme social* is a posthumously-published collection of materials presumably written by Balzac in the 1840s (several unedited essays, truncated notes, or even just lists of isolated thoughts arranged in general categories), Balzac clearly copied many of these ideas verbatim from other sources, perhaps intending only to contemplate these ideas without truly embracing them. Overall, the very aspects of Balzac's artistic vision that grant his works their potency and longevity—that is, the author's efforts to preserve a portrait of his society representing not only his own view of it, but those of all individuals experiencing it, those made possible in relation to an accumulation of details transcribed from it, those contained in other historical or literary evaluations of it, etc.—make it possible for practically anyone to read his fictional works without necessarily having to challenge their current worldview. Because of this, one can assemble support for whatever argument one intends to make in relation to his texts without ever needing to conduct secondary research, meaning that one can compose an analysis without ever seeking out his political opinions or after having briefly perused and rejected them.

The approach to Collin explored in this thesis is so interesting because it shows through Collin's story that Balzac's portrayal of this mastermind illustrates the ideas outlined in the previous section about the mind's development and ensuing functioning in relation to one's subjection to the Symbolic order. Furthermore, this approach to Collin allows readers to make a connection between the author's understanding of the mind and his social critique given that the character's story weaves together the manifestations of Collin's typical subjectivity with evocations of the key factors contributing to modernity's development and dysfunction that Balzac highlights for example in his essays *Sur la Situation du parti royaliste* (1832) and *Du Gouvernement moderne* (1832), in his prefaces to the works at hand, and through the novels' narration. Firstly, if Balzac stresses that the Protestant Reformation's emphasis on freedom of belief initiated the trend in individualism leading to the prioritization of personal interests over those of the whole, this is echoed not only through Collin's worldview, which shows how easily this freedom could be abused, but through the "general collapse of standards" exposed in relation to the "complete obliteration of moral distinctions between the outlaw [Collin] and 'respectable' organized society" (Prendergast 160) at the end of *Spendeurs*. Secondly, if Balzac critiques Cartesian philosophy for asserting the transparency of consciousness and human being's capacity for objective reasoning, we find for example through my reading of Collin's soliloquy in *Vautrin* that even this mastermind who "speaks the language of eighteenth-century rationalism and materialism" and "is Cartesian Will incarnate" (Wenger 230) cannot fully eradicate the effects of primary processes from his thought. Because Balzac goes to the trouble of temporarily extracting Collin from the novelistic *Comédie humaine* and transporting him into the theater

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<sup>31</sup> Balzac began writing about his conservatism around the same period that he begins writing about the structure of his work, in his correspondence with Zulma Carraud and several political articles written as early as 1832, and then almost at the end of his life in his 1848, in an open letter published in the *Constitutionnel* responding to diverse requests for him to follow other notable figures' leads by publishing a *profession de foi* in order to advocate his candidacy.

(an elaborate treatment which none of his other characters from the series enjoy), he ensures that the most crucial presentation of the character's subjectivity would be encountered in the form of *speech*, which the previous section highlighted as the juncture of consciousness and the unconscious. *Vautrin*'s format *as a play* allows it to provide a trustworthy account of how Collin consciously thinks of his own motivations through his *soliloquy* (given the absence of an interlocutor and narration), which removes the imperative of deception ruling his interactions with others and thus allows us to observe his blindness to certain contradictions in his thought and to the limits of his power, the disparity between his conscious understanding of his motivations and certain aspects of his behavior, the emotions that he usually conceals quite efficiently, and other proof of his *typical* humanity that are easier to ignore or deny when only reading the novels. Thirdly, if Balzac highlights how the Enlightenment's glorification of egalitarianism inflated individuals' expectations of the level of satisfaction and control that a government must accord to its citizens in order to prove its legitimacy and how the Revolution's abolishment of absolute institutions removed all visible limitations placed on individuals' desires and ambitions, we see through Collin's manipulation of his protégés how even the smallest dissatisfaction with society or the slightest belief in the possibility of one's attaining completeness suffices in the context of modernity to disillusion an individual with the standing order and to convert that individual to a doctrine of pure selfishness. Even in relation to Collin himself, readers find that in spite of his seemingly irrevocable criminal status and his tendency to honestly serve his duties as *Dab* when not engaged in the protégé plan, he immediately reverts to a single-minded, cold-blooded, and at times even reckless way of operating as soon as the possibility of this plan's realization presents itself. Fourthly, Collin echoes Balzac's assertion that capitalism's rise in a society with no fixed values or means of fixing values allowed money to become "the key that opens virtually all doors" (Clark 149), "the symbol of power in the venal modern world" (Robinson 83), "the *sine qua non*" (Fanger 49) for pursuing both one's desires and one's ambitions, creating an environment of "institutionalized, unhampered competition" (Clark 165)—an environment where "the strong, those who mastered the social system, would prevail regardless of their morality or lack of same" (Clark 166). As is reflected in Collin's instructions to each of his protégés that their futures hinge on acquiring a fortune by whatever means necessary while maintaining a veil of honesty, Collin believes that money is equivalent to success, that success is equivalent to power, and that power is equivalent to absolute immunity to all sacrifice required of and vulnerability experienced by others—a belief that is supported by his rise to the underworld's highest rank through his control of its finances, but which appears more and more pathetic each time that he himself exploits increasingly wealthy and powerful individuals through their desires and blindness. Finally, if Balzac argued that the commercialization of art led often impoverished writers to compose works that would first and foremost sell as many copies as possible (e.g. works of flattery, works appealing to popular tastes, works that would not be censored or lead to the author's marginalization) and therefore to society's loss of self-reflection, we see that as long as Lucien remains in Collin's grasp, he flatters his benefactor and withholds judgment of him. However, in his suicide letter, Lucien shows his capacity for discerning and condemning Collin's lack of self-awareness, indeterminate devouring of all in his path, and inability to bring anything but suffering to others and himself—a composition that is

followed by its author's death, the ultimate form of marginalization, and its reader's complete repression of its message and continued existence as such.

Each of these aspects of the modern environment obstructs or even actively opposes individuals' development of self-awareness through their recognition of the limitations invariably placed on human control and satisfaction, the development of empathy through the commiseration of shared suffering, and the development of altruism through acceptance that all attempts to attain completeness invariably end in disappointment if not greater suffering. Beyond revealing how Collin's story demonstrates the connection between Balzac's understanding of the mind and his critique of modernity, my approach to Collin most importantly shows how Balzac's presentation of the character—unlike modernity's promotion of expectations of completeness and Collin's own manipulation of his protégés—is in itself a performance of the moral purpose that the author assigned to his works at large: the promotion of self-awareness, empathy, and altruism whose rarity Balzac lamented. Though my desire to understand Collin began to dissipate after my efforts to identify and deconstruct the obstacles apparently blocking my understanding of the character's significance finally led me to recognize Collin's subjectivity and the understanding of the mind underlying Balzac's social critique, I continued to struggle to structure this project until I realized the central role played therein by both my *ongoing desire to understand Collin*, which prevented my premature resolution of the project in spite of growing pressure to do so, and *my resistance to perceiving the character's subjectivity*, which motivated me to continue exhausting all materials remotely relevant to the subject until I found an approach to the character's exceptionality that could reconcile all other approaches. This thesis will argue that because Balzac recognized that particularly in the frame of modernity, straightforward explanations of negative absolutes (like that in his nonfictional writings) prove overwhelmingly ineffective when attempting to guide individuals harboring inherited beliefs in completeness' possibility to acknowledge the limitations of their control and satisfaction, the author purposefully presented Collin in a way that would provide readers with an illustration of the human condition's universal frames and of the mind's functioning while simultaneously setting them up to encounter proof of their own subjectivity. By conspicuously establishing Collin as a captivating figure of mastery apparently possessing and promising completeness only to then subvert that façade with subtle indications of Collin's subjectivity whose manifestations most immediately serve to prevent readers' belief in having understood the character, Balzac engages readers' conscious and unconscious desires for the resolution of negative absolutes in a way that strongly motivates them to try to understand the character by any means possible, ultimately leading them in the best case scenario to read all of the works in which he appears and to expand their knowledge of the frame in which he was created. In this way, Balzac ensnares readers who acknowledge the obstacles to their understanding of the character, as the desire to appropriate Collin's means to completeness can never be resolved as such because of the existence of negative absolutes, the desire to understand Collin in relation to his exceptionality cannot be resolved as such because his significance stems from his typical subjectivity, and the desire to perceive through Collin the underlying message of Balzac's works cannot be resolved without recognizing the impossibility of completeness. Readers' efforts to understand Collin can

therefore only end in four ways: with the formation of an approach to the character excluding his subjectivity and therefore failing to unite all aspects of his significance, with the abandonment of their attempts out of frustration, with their never-ending search for an approach to the character that accommodates both their beliefs in completeness' possibility and a unified vision of the character, or with the ultimate recognition of his subjectivity as the carrier of his significance and Balzac's message. In the last alternative, readers gain the opportunity to recognize the fact that this "supremely" cynical and disillusioned character is no less blinded and controlled by his desire than anyone else, the disparity of their first and final impressions of the character as an indication of their own subjectivity, their vulnerability to manipulation by figures of mastery due to their desires to resolve negative absolutes, and their lack of a frame of reference allowing them to recognize and resist that temptation. If this clarifies the moral purpose that Balzac assigned to his work, it does so in a way that links him to Lacan both through his aim and through his way of attempting to accomplish it.

Like the parallels often drawn between Collin and his creator, the statement regarding the two sides of History gains a new relevance and irony in relation to Balzac's way of presenting Collin's story. On the one hand, given that Collin shows his protégés—as Balzac does his readers—the disparity between whitewashed history (which promotes obedience of the principals which officially order society by asserting that the path to success framed by laws and values upholding traditional virtue is capable of providing completeness) and that which it conceals (the fact society much more often rewards the wealthy, the duplicitous, the selfish, and the ruthless), the above statement aligns Collin with Balzac and therefore could strengthen readers' impression of the character's exceptional vision and power by asserting their equivalence to that of the omnipotent creator of his world. On the other hand, when read in relation to how Balzac's presentation of Collin's story has traditionally been interpreted, the above statement evokes how this official version (the story of "Vautrin") focuses on the details of the text supporting Collin's associations with completeness and thus ignores, rationalizes, or at the very least fails to fully explore not only how Balzac shows that Collin does not have complete conscious control over his actions, thoughts, and worldview at large (that is to say, the presence of his *desire*), but how the fact that Balzac does so suggests that his controversial conservatism is founded on a profound understanding of the human mind and is invested with a particularly and universally relevant moral purpose. What is more, if the above statement evokes how both Collin and Balzac seek to inform others of the secret side of a story, it also evokes the difference between their ways of revealing it and what they hope to accomplish by doing so. In general, the point of recounting that which the official elides is firstly to create a distance between one's interlocutor and that which they already know, secondly to emphasize one's superior position due to one's possession of valuable knowledge which the listener lacks, and finally to accomplish some goal by sharing (or not sharing) that knowledge. By belittling his protégés (calling them *mon petit*, *mon enfant*, *mon étudiant*), having answers backed by an endless store of secret (and possibly fictional) stories ready for all of their questions, and only identifying with their position in order to show how he has transcended it, we see that Collin's aim in recounting the underside of history is simply to refute their objections, silence their interjections, and ultimately to completely replace their voices and wills with his own. However, Balzac does not tell Collin's story, but rather enables

us to tell it, showing how his way of unveiling clandestine tales (both in relation to Collin and in general) aims at promoting not readers' dependence on him, but rather their abilities to independently assess their own subjection to negative absolutes and therefore to make ethical decisions. Finally, by skillfully leading each of his protégés to scrape away the veneer of "honesty" concealing the true principles regulating society, Collin seeks to disillusion the young men in order to present his own unique mindset (that is, that embracing selfishness is superiority) as an attractive alternative worldview to which they can only gain access through him, thus motivating them to reject all other influence and depend on him alone for guidance, ultimately solidifying his influence over them. In other words, Collin always expresses his knowledge in a way that preserves his position of superiority and only empowers his protégés (the only people to whom he makes any amount of his knowledge available) as extensions of his own will. Contrarily, by surrounding Collin with narrative contradictions or signs of his humanity which, even if they initially seem inconsequential, can lead readers to question their first impression of Collin, Balzac seeks to distance readers from their belief in Collin's mastery (and the possibility of completeness in general) while simultaneously evoking the differences between Collin's views and the conclusions which he (the author) expresses elsewhere on human nature, Balzac freely offers readers the opportunity to attain a greater level of self-awareness by providing them with the means of dispelling their fascination with Collin, thus creating the opportunity not only for readers to recognize the author's greatness and express their gratitude and respect for him, but to increase the overall level of social responsibility and thus to improve society at large.

This thesis will mirror the experience of reading Collin described above by first showing in Chapter 2 how Balzac leads readers to view Collin as an exceptional figure of mastery and only then considering in Chapter 3 how the author covertly subverts this façade with proof of Collin's typical subjectivity. Given that the former is aligned with the frame of beliefs in completeness' possibility and the latter is framed with the recognition of negative absolutes, the chapters correspond respectively to the "official" side of History and the "secret" side of History in the particular frame of modernity. Chapter Two will explore the elements contributing to Collin's lasting reputation as a mastermind by first evaluating how his initial description immediately promotes readers' association of the character with completeness, secondly considering how any ensuing attempts to appropriate the sources of his exceptionality necessarily draw readers' attention to his worldview and understanding of the mind, and finally come to a close by examining why the overall impression made by the character so effectively serves to capture readers' attention as well as Balzac's professed intentions for employing that attention. Chapter Three will then show how the novels initially disrupt readers' conviction of having understood Collin, how reading *Vautrin* in conjunction with the other texts allows us to definitively undermine Collin's associations with completeness through their exposure of the primary processes informing his perception. Examining the elements of Collin's pattern in chronological order, it will then show how the progression of the character's story illustrates the steps of each individual's development into a divided subject by considering how the consistent components of his worldview are directly connected to the traumatic circumstances surrounding his initial arrest. Finally, the chapter will end by showing how his pattern of behavior



demonstrates the functioning of the symptom of repetition automatism, ultimately showing how Collin's final ascension to a position of authority is not a depiction of his supremacy, but rather one of his humanity showing that no amount of exceptionality, knowledge, or depravity can provide the ability to transcend the human condition's negative absolutes. Finally, after exploring how Balzac and Collin's contrasting ways of employing their relative knowledge of the mind establishes them as ethical counterpoints in the context of Lacanian psychoanalysis, the conclusion will briefly explore how I would like to expand this study to explore several questions highlighted by this project, including that of how Balzac and Lacan's way of promoting self-awareness could be relevant to addressing the modern morality crisis.

## CHAPTER 2. *L'HISTOIRE OFFICIELLE*: COLLIN AS AN *EXCEPTIONAL* FIGURE OF MASTERY

For Collin, “l’Histoire officielle, menteuse, qu’on enseigne” (VIII: 600) is the fabricated product of society’s having whitewashed the lives of its most powerful figures, composed as such to encourage citizens to think that society rewards the values which best support stability (i.e. perpetuate the current status quo) while concealing how duplicity and dishonesty are in fact rewarded much more often. Regarding the official, hollow side of Collin’s story, this chapter will explore it in the form of Collin’s long-accepted appearance as a figure of unrivaled mastery—given that its circulation stems largely from the appearances he constructs in order to escape the constrictions of his criminal identity and, as I will argue, from Balzac’s presentation of the character in a way that delays readers’ recognition of Collin’s subjectivity—which, as the introduction showed, leads readers to initially focus on his *exceptionality* (in some cases even leading critics to assert the character’s inhumanity or supernatural powers) and consequently to ignore or discount the many proofs of the mastermind’s *typical* subjection to the negative absolutes framing the human condition. This chapter will examine this eye-catching, seductive appearance as such, focusing first of all on how the narration’s immediate presentation of the different elements of his “transcendence” and “total dominance” motivate readers to pay the highest attention to the details supporting this reputation, and then on how the ensuing information presented to readers in *Le Père Goriot*, *Illusions perdues*, *Splendeurs*, and even *Vautrin* allows them to make a connection between his apparent omniscience and omnipotence and his possession of a profound understanding of the human mind which in many ways mirrors that of the author.<sup>32</sup> The fact that this side of the story manifests less as a chronological recounting of the key events in Collin’s life than as a systematic evaluation of the many proofs supporting readers’ belief in his exceptionality represents how focusing principally on Collin’s façade as such can lead readers to interpret his appearances in the text as a sort of handbook for success rather than the biography of a person with whom one could identify. However, the end of the chapter will present a few of the key scenes or patterns which, even before reading *Vautrin*, led me to question my initial understanding of the character and to wonder what clandestine message the author may have invested in him.

### **2.1 The Impression Made by Collin’s Initial Description in *Le Père Goriot***

From their very first encounter with the mastermind in *Le Père Goriot*, readers cannot but view Collin as *an exceptional figure of mastery*—an appearance capturing their attention, sparking in them a fascination which the texts only heighten and perpetuate by continuously providing more proof of its seeming veracity while failing to explain *how* he manages to maintain it or *why* the author

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<sup>32</sup> I will here largely abstain from discussing *Vautrin* firstly because the large majority of analyses of Collin do not take this work into account, and secondly because doing so, as I explained in the introduction, makes it very hard for readers to ignore the evidence of Collin’s typical personhood.

endows him with it.<sup>33</sup> His name (or rather, his pseudonym) first appears when the narration places him on the second floor of the Vauquer pension house, and is followed shortly after by his initial description, which appears alongside those of the other boarders, is exceeded in length only by that of the titular character, and foreshadows his overall appearance throughout all of the texts which will follow:

Vautrin, l'homme de quarante ans, à favoris peints [...] était de ces gens dont le peuple dit : Voilà un fameux gaillard ! Il avait les épaules larges, le buste bien développé, les muscles apparents, des mains épaisses, carrées et fortement marquées aux phalanges par des bouquets de poils touffus et d'un roux ardent. Sa figure, rayée par des rides prématurées, offrait des signes de dureté que démentaient ses manières souples et liantes. Sa voix de basse taille, en harmonie avec sa grosse gaité, ne déplaisait point. Il était obligeant et rieur. Si quelque serrures allaient mal, il l'avait bientôt démontée, rafistolée, huilée, limée, remontée, en disant : Ça me connaît. Il connaissait tout d'ailleurs, les vaisseaux, la mer, la France, l'étranger, les affaires, les hommes, les événements, les lois, les hôtels et les prisons. Si quelqu'un se plaignait par trop, il lui offrait aussitôt ses services. Il avait prêté plusieurs fois de l'argent à madame Vauquer et à quelques pensionnaires ; mais ses obligés seraient morts plutôt que de ne pas le lui rendre, tant, malgré son air bonhomme, il imprimait de crainte par un certain regard profond et plein de résolutions. A la manière dont il lançait un jet de salive, il annonçait un sang-froid imperturbable qui ne devait pas le faire reculer devant un crime pour sortir d'une position équivoque. Comme un juge sévère, son œil semblait aller au fond de toutes les questions, de toutes les consciences, de tous les sentiments. Ses moeurs consistaient à sortir après le déjeuner, à revenir pour dîner, à décamper pour toute la soirée, et à rentrer vers minuit, à l'aide d'un passe-partout que lui avait confié madame Vauquer. *Lui seul jouissait de cette faveur.* Mais aussi était-il au mieux avec la veuve, qu'il appelait *maman* en la saisissant par la taille, flatterie peu comprise ! *La bonne femme croyait la chose encore facile, tandis que Vautrin seul avait les bras assez longs pour presser cette pesante circonférence.* Un trait de son caractère était de payer généreusement quinze francs par mois pour le *gloria* qu'il prenait au dessert. Des gens moins superficiels que ne l'étaient ces jeunes gens emportés par les tourbillons de la vie parisienne, ou ces vieillards indifférents à ce qui ne les touchait pas directement, ne se seraient pas arrêtés à l'impression douteuse que leur causait Vautrin. *Il savait ou devinait les affaires de ceux qui l'entouraient, tandis que nul ne pouvait pénétrer ni ses pensées ni ses occupations.* Quoiqu'il eût jeté son apparente bonhomie, sa constante complaisance et sa gaité comme une barrière entre les autres et lui, souvent il laissait percer l'épouvantable profondeur de son caractère. Souvent une boutade digne de Juvénal, et par laquelle il semblait se complaire à bafouer les lois, à fouetter la haute société, à la convaincre d'inconséquence avec elle-même, devait faire supposer qu'il gardait rancune à l'état social, et qu'il y avait au fond de sa vie un mystère soigneusement enfoui. (63-65, my emphases)

As Fanger notes, this passage already “hints that we are dealing with an extraordinary nature, tending toward omniscience, if not omnipotence” (51). Conveniently grouped together, we find an exposition of the qualities most frequently highlighted in this character, showing the first impression Balzac clearly intended him to make on readers: a benevolent connection to the unknown, an exciting window to danger, a potential stepping stone to success—a person who not only knows everyone else’s secrets, but is *in control* of his own. The three statements which I’ve italicized explicitly mark Collin as unique among the boarders. They evoke suspicions which the following texts never cease to overtly confirm: how he is not constrained by the same limits as everyone else, how he possesses knowledge about how both society and the mind work to which almost everyone else is blind, and, perhaps most importantly, how he has control of himself and his past.

By naming Collin the only possessor of a *passe-partout* (a *master* key), the first sentence which I emphasized above foreshadows his ability to move between Paris’ usually mutually exclusive spheres without consequence. We never encounter an image of Collin being turned away from entering a new space: he seems to possess the magic wand which Rastignac famously wishes for when first

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<sup>33</sup> Though *Vautrin* describes a period of Collin’s life preceding the action of *Père Goriot*, the 1834 novel was the earliest work to be published in which Collin appears. Though the first text in which Balzac’s readers encountered the character, it sufficed to immediately render infamous both Collin and his creator. Overall, *Le Père Goriot* tellingly remains the best known and most often read of the works in which Collin appears.

exploring the unfamiliar, cold, or even hostile corners of fashionable Parisian society.<sup>34</sup> Beyond simply being separated into different social circles of varying exclusivity, each of the texts depicts the metropolis as divided into two parallel worlds, one honest and the other infamous. This latter is often referred to as “the underworld” (*la pègre*), a realm whose existence remains historically questionable but which was nevertheless increasingly accepted as common knowledge during the period in which Balzac composed these works. Though the idea of a parallel, infamous society with its own laws, values, hierarchy, language, etc. had existed in the *Ancien régime*, the constant rise in crime which began with the (re)establishment of the Bourbon Restoration (during which all of our works are set) and continued throughout the July Monarchy (during which all of our works were written) made it ubiquitous. Three principle changes explained this rise in crime, all of which dealt with government policy.<sup>35</sup> However, Chevalier, Foucault, and many other historians emphasize how little these explanations factored into the public’s view of criminals; popular opinion fixed a reductive, distasteful identity on anyone belonging to the lower classes which included assumptions about her or his inherently inferior, base, untrustworthy, and malevolent character. Daily life in Paris supported the impression of a criminal omnipresence: “No part of the contemporary Paris was unshadowed by crime” (Chevalier 2), though this impression was skewed by the middle and upper classes’ inability to distinguish between the working classes and criminals, referred to *en masse* as the “dangerous” classes and labeled as the scapegoat for all of Paris’ social crises. Furthermore, hyperawareness of crime became widespread largely due to the availability and

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<sup>34</sup> Rastignac finds such a magic wand in his cousin’s name, but also finds out that there are limitations to its effects: “En prononçant le nom du père Goriot, Eugène avait donné un coup de baguette magique, mais dont l’effet était inverse de celui qu’avaient frappé ces mots : parent de madame de Beauséant. Il se trouvait dans la situation d’un homme introduit par faveur chez un amateur de curiosités, et qui, touchant par mégarde une armoire pleine de figures sculptées, fait tomber trois ou quatre têtes mal collées. Il aurait voulu se jeter dans un gouffre. Le visage de madame de Restaud était sec, froid, et ses yeux devenus indifférents fuyaient ceux du malencontreux étudiant” (PG 117-118).

<sup>35</sup> Firstly, the gradual replacement of public, corporeal punishment with the penitentiary system first initiated in the late eighteenth century had begun to take full effect during Napoleon’s reign. The Empire witnessed the establishment of a new criminal code, the construction of several state prisons, and the initiation of a policy requiring criminals’ registration with local authority, surveillance by police agents, and disclosure to potential employers of their record upon release from custody. Though built to be a more humane alternative to older forms of punishment, from their first use these institutions were criticized for failing in their aim of preparing criminals to reenter society, instead providing first offenders access to a network of accomplices and a criminal education, thus actually leading to an increase in criminal activity and recidivism made worse by the fact that even if a criminal did want to return to an honest life, the many restrictions placed on him or her by the government (not to mention the distrust of potential employers) made this very difficult. However, as Napoleon’s wars had employed all able-bodied men as soldiers, the penitentiary system’s consequences were not fully felt until the end of the Empire, which brought other changes—particularly due to the new regime’s deregulation of the capital’s industrialization. The influx of hopeful provincials into a city still medieval in construction and incapable of supporting this enormous increase in population, the scarcity of jobs and food, the recurrence of devastating cholera epidemics and prevalence of other diseases, as well as other biological and economic factors meant that as the population in Paris increased, the standard of living plummeted—though the poor almost exclusively bore these consequences, creating an increasing disparity between the experiences of the lower and higher classes running parallel to the growing financial disparity between them. Finally, a third factor contributing to the rise particularly in violent crime prevents us from attributing it solely to need: the political frustrations of the voiceless and the marginalized—that is, the unquelled revolutionary fervor amongst the poor. Though 1789’s liberal leaders had promised a utopian society could be realized through these ideals, in the Revolution’s wake this dream subsisted only in the lower classes’ disappointed expectations, growing constantly dimmer each time that a new regime came to occupy the seat of power and abandoned revolutionary principles to a new degree, tending instead to establish increasingly authoritarian policies and to exclude the lower classes from government participation.

popularity of several new kinds of publications.<sup>36</sup> However, the pervasive fascination with and popularity of any publication dealing with crime did not produce a favorable view of criminals themselves; Foucault highlights during this period a trend in thought about criminals which, unlike the *Ancien régime*'s picaresque depictions of the underworld and belief that all humans bore the capacity to become criminals, supported honest society's *assumption of difference* between themselves and criminals by labeling them as inherently evil beings different from the rest of society who deserved the punishment that they received—and the lower classes' association with revolutionary passions did not help their reputation.<sup>37</sup> Wright describes this black-and-white view of criminals in early nineteenth-century Paris by saying that at times, "one gets the impression of a civil war between two totally distinct and hostile races," evoking how the large majority of the population, whether on one side or the other, engaged in this conflict by accepting the veracity of the dichotomy on which it was founded: "Only occasionally did Frenchmen suggest that there might be a gray zone rather than an impassable barrier between the world of criminals and that of *les honnêtes gens*" (viii). Ultimately, whether or to what extent the underworld actually existed matters less than the fact that beginning in the Restoration and throughout the entire July Monarchy it became a key element of popular culture in early nineteenth-century France and unsurprisingly had far-reaching consequences in the perception and treatment of criminals.<sup>38</sup> Given this society's understanding of criminality as an inherent character flaw and resulting resistance to allowing ex-criminals to find an honest position once released, this division usually takes on fundamental and permanent dimensions in Balzac's works. However, Collin manages not merely to exist in both of these spheres, but to dominate them. On the one hand, he is always presented as the criminal "dab" (which we are informed means king in argot), given that readers never see him portrayed before his initial arrest and *literal* branding as a criminal.<sup>39</sup> After making connections with the criminal higher-ups during his first incarceration in a labor camp beginning in 1810, he escaped in 1815, and as we see in *Vautrin* contributed to the establishment of the *Société de Dix Mille* before being arrested again in 1816. By the time he escaped again and returned to Paris, where we see him in *Le Père Goriot* in 1819, he had apparently solidified his power amongst the criminals at large and become not only their banker, but

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<sup>36</sup> These included daily journals reporting arrests and developments in conspicuous trials, publications of statistical reports on crime (some of which were even government-sponsored), the memoirs of notable criminals and policemen (the murderer Lacenaire, the criminal-turned-police-chief Eugène François Vidocq, etc.), and representations of crime in popular literature (usually Romantic or sensationalist in nature) flooded the imaginations of respectable Parisians.

<sup>37</sup> The Terror had associated 1789's cause with violence and chaos, and when 1816 finally brought an end to the period of more or less constant warfare (whether domestic or internal) and thus political, social, and economic instability begun in 1789, the country at large craved the peace and stability brought by the Bourbons' recuperation of the throne, leading to the demonization of those still acting on sentiments of revolt (with the exception of the years leading up to and following 1830).

<sup>38</sup> It kept the lower classes from improving their quality of life not only due to their lack of voice in the government, but to the prejudices preventing their individual change of station; it kept police attention focused outside of the realm of influence, not only allowing the powerful to do what they pleased but subjecting the lower classes to greater attention by the police, increasing the likelihood of their arrest and permanent marginalization; it caused the lawmakers and juries to assign harsher punishments to the crimes committed by the lower classes; etc.

<sup>39</sup> He bore the brands "T.F." for *travaux forcés* (forced labor) on his shoulders from his incarceration in a forced labor camp.

their overall ruler. Bibi-Lupin's speech to Poirot and Michonneau asserts that by that time, Collin had extended an absolute power over the criminal world as a whole, depicting him as the unique link holding the underworld together and important enough to be the focus of lofty government officials.<sup>40</sup> In *Splendeurs*, we learn the full extent of his power as criminal sovereign when we follow him into a definitively criminal space—the prison cells and yard of the *Conciergerie*.

However, we cannot reduce Collin to his criminal side—not only because he betrays his companions, but given that we see Collin confidently traipsing through “honest” society not only under long-term false identities which allow him to evade the police, but in a seemingly endless number of other forms which he assumes as needed. In the play and the first novel, Collin escapes suspicion by adopting the bourgeois identity of “Vautrin,” no first name.<sup>41</sup> However, as opposed to this fabricated identity weakened by its lack of verifying paperwork as well as his brands, in the last two novels he adopts a real (i.e. stolen) and thus stronger upstanding identity—that of Carlos Herrera, a priest and secret envoy of the Spanish king whom Collin killed on the highway in order to enjoy his considerable wealth and his identifying documents. Knowing the power which this identity could offer him, Collin even goes so far as to burn his face and back with acid in order to more resemble the man and efface the proof of his own identity.<sup>42</sup> Overall, we see Collin appear in fifteen plus forms, whose personas originate from all levels of society. And in the end, though he defies every branch of government—flagrantly ignoring laws and invariably escaping his punishment, dominating police officers, spies, lawyers, judges, ministers, and even dominating executive power by receiving pardon from the king himself—in the end he becomes a part of that government when his scheming allows him to become the chief of Paris' secret police. This brings us to the next level of Collin's exceptionality: his exceptional freedom from the law. Because he is able to maintain a presence *in both the upper and underworlds*, he

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<sup>40</sup> In Bibi-Lupin's description, Collin appears truly larger-than-life: he not only established himself as an absolute authority in a world created out of disgust for authority and created an entire society (complete with financial, judicial, and military institutions mirroring those of the upper world) *ex nihilo*, but apparently possessed in his person more power than all of society's agents combined inasmuch as he managed to keep the whole operation shrouded in mystery.

<sup>41</sup> Even though we often find that he changes his attitude according to whom he addresses in *Le Père Goriot*, we never see Collin outside of the boarding house—all of his activities are left in the dark, symbolically asserting his control over others' perception of him. In *Vautrin*, he has seven changes of outfit; he moves through the public and private aristocratic spheres and even makes his home in an honest neighborhood, wearing in the first act “*la tenue d'un ministre diplomatique étranger en soirée*” (24), in the second “*habillé tout en noir*” (52) as an apparent police spy, then in the third act wearing “*la tenue d'un homme d'affaires, le matin*” (58), then changing into an elaborate costume and styling himself as a German baron de Vieux-Chêne, then appearing in “*la tenue d'un agent de change*” (76), then in the fourth act (most ostentatiously) “*habillé en général mexicain*” (86), and appearing in the fifth act “*vêtu d'une redingote brune, pantalon, bleu, gilet noir, les cheveux courts, un faux air de Napoléon en bourgeois*” (106) in the play's final scenes in which he reveals his criminal past and submits to arrest to preserve the duke's reputation.

<sup>42</sup> As he manages to maintain this identity for almost a decade (until he willingly admits to his true identity, though only after this mask withstood intense interrogation), during which he enters society regularly, it seems his efforts were worth it. In *Splendeurs*, he at least doubles his repertoire to date, appearing as a masked man at a ball whom the onlookers assume is a vengeful cuckold or creditor, as a guard escorting an inmate during his escape with Theodore from prison, as a soldier when bringing Esther to dinner at the Opera, doubly disguised as a man whom onlookers assume to be a gendarme in disguise in *rue Taibout* while spying to see if Esther and Lucien make any attempt at discretion in their new love nest, as a red-headed Englishman named William Barker in order to get false bills of exchange approved by force of blackmail, as an accusatory magistrate supposedly sent on behalf of the police chief to an expoliceman whose snooping has threatened Collin's plans for Lucien, and as a traveling salesman in order to return to Paris after pretending to depart to Spain, before finally actually becoming the chief of the Parisian police.

gains a unique power in both of them and cannot be punished by either of them.<sup>43</sup> What is more, because he does not respect the systems of morality promoted by either sphere, often mocks Providence without fear, and never experiences guilt for his depraved acts, overall he appears to transcend not only social hierarchy and the law's efforts to punish him, but the constraints placed on mankind by sacred texts and personal conscience. We can thus see how this leads his protégés and readers alike to venerate him as one exempted from social, governmental, and divine laws as well as those ordering Balzac's universe; as a natural man unrestricted by society; as the beneficiary of some ideal freedom; and as one apparently possessing the means we need to achieve our own completeness.

Even though Collin's ability to project a benevolent exterior as a barrier between himself and the other characters certainly protects him from unwanted attention, we cannot ignore that his use of his protean ability is predicated on knowing what role he needs to play. The second sentence which I emphasized above—which indirectly links Vauquer's special treatment of him to the flattery which he alone is able to offer her—shows to what extent Collin's mobility and manipulation of appearances depends on his knowledge of the mind's involuntary processes. Given that the narration shows to what extent the boarders recognize the tension between the *appearance* of an honest bourgeois which Collin here adopts and *that which it undoubtedly conceals*, the entire passage implies that Collin's exercise of his power is predicated by his exceptional understanding of the human mind. As Fanger notes about this description, "All this suggests either the criminal or the policeman [...] There is nothing to contradict either possibility" (51). The truth of his past is fairly obvious; what remains less obvious is *why the other boarders do not care*—particularly in the case of Vauquer, whose establishment and thus whose livelihood (which she treasures above all else) are endangered by his presence. Each of the special attributes listed by the description would be useless if he could not first render their overtly ominous implications unthreatening or even endearing by presenting them in a way which appealed to his roommates' interests.<sup>44</sup> Overall, he projects a

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<sup>43</sup> He could not have risen in the underworld if he had not first proven that he could escape from incarceration and still find a way to live in "honest" society, because he needed to be free in order to take care of the other criminals' affairs; conversely, he could never have gained sway over so many of the upper world's high ranking officials if he did not have a network of spies gathering information with which to blackmail them, the criminals' money to bribe them and maintain his upstanding appearance, minions to carry out his dirty work when he did not want to endanger his freedom, etc. As a result of this omnipresence, we find that on the one hand, the judicial system cannot punish him by incarcerating him because he is worshiped in the underworld and he escapes every time he is arrested, and it cannot punish him by killing him because he knows the law so well that he avoids committing by his own hand crimes punishable by death and because he always makes sure to protect himself from mistreatment by controlling his passions (as in the scene of his arrest, in which he recognized that Bibi-Lupin hoped to have him killed if he tried to resist them) and by involving the eyes of the public. On the other hand, the criminal world cannot punish him because it depends on him at first as the sole person capable of managing their finances, and eventually as the only person who knows where they are and possessing the means of recovering them.

<sup>44</sup> His robust strength contrasts with the other men's scant physiques; however, he uses this advantage not to menace the others (at least not actively), but rather to express exceptional affection by embracing Vauquer. He is familiar with *everything*—everything *d'ailleurs*, which seems to signify more than a conjunction, suggesting an otherness, an affinity with "elsewhere." However, because he puts this knowledge to work for the others, they do not focus on its marginal nature. He allows himself certain luxuries, but because he gives the other boarders financial help, they do not question the source of his fortune. The opacity of his past, his piercing gaze, and his cold-blooded air set the other boarders on edge, offering a silent threat to any who would seek to betray him; however, his pleasant

persona both intimidating and benevolent, motivating the boarders through their interests (whether in avoiding his wrath or in profiting from his generosity) to corroborate (or even believe in) his honest appearance and to avoid meddling in his affairs whenever possible. This passage thus sets a precedent for the *modus operandi* by which Collin exercises his power: *he uses his knowledge of human nature in general and his interlocutor's desires and interests in particular to construct for himself the appearance which would best serve his purposes in a given situation*. Beyond the statement listing the wide range of topics he is familiar with, by comparing his diatribes against society to the compositions of Juvenal (a Roman author who wrote poems which satirically documented extensive aspects of life in that period), the narration obliquely draws a comparison between Collin and Balzac himself. This implies that Collin to some extent shares the same knowledge as his universe's creator (a suspicion which his compelling critiques of society's hypocrisy later support), showing not only that Collin has enough material to construct more masks than he could possibly need, but that he offers a rare direct connection to the author himself.

If the first sentence highlights his mastery of *society at large* (through his transcendence of all boundaries and laws) and the second exhibits his influence over *other characters* (through his understanding of the process of perception and the role played therein by desire and personal interest), the last sentence—stating that Collin “savait ou devinait les affaires de ceux qui l’entouraient, tandis que nul ne pouvait pénétrer ni ses pensées ni ses occupations” (65)—asserts the level of control which he possesses over *himself*. In any given moment, he does not only exercise a seemingly absolute control over his physical appearance (whether that be the tone or accent of his voice, the authenticity of his disguises, the suitability of his mannerisms, his facial expressions, his fabrication or suppression of emotions, etc.), concealing his underlying motivations and desires in order to eliminate in himself the vulnerability which he exploits in others; he does not only remember all of the information about the character he is supposed to be playing and about all of the interests that he is juggling in order to avoid saying something that could unveil his treachery; but his unmatched clarity of vision seems to indicate *his exemption from desire and the distortions which it usually imposes on perception*. The narration evokes this by showing that where the other boarders' vision is directed inward, Collin's focus is always directed outward. The narration labels both young and old boarders as superficial observers, the former “emportés par les tourbillons de la vie parisienne,” and the latter “indifférents à ce qui ne les touchait pas directement”; however, it also states that less superficial or indifferent Parisians “ne se seraient pas arrêtés à l'impression douteuse que leur causait Vautrin.” This echoes the depiction of Parisians in the novel's first paragraph: as they traverse the city, this “vallée remplie de souffrances réelles, de joies souvent fausses, et si terriblement agitée, qu'il faut je ne sais quoi d'exorbitant pour y produire une sensation de quelque durée” (48), they only stop to observe “des douleurs que l'agglomération des vices et des vertus rend grandes et solennelles : à leur aspect, les égoïsmes, les intérêts s'arrêtent et s'apitoient ; mais l'impression qu'ils en reçoivent est comme un fruit savoureux promptement dévoré” (48). We here see a city overflowing with

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demeanor, his generosity, and his general enjoyment of life do so much to lift spirits in the face of such lachrymose surroundings that certain boarders from time to time even declare his exceptional goodness and charm.



people crawling across its surface with the same nervous energy as ants on their hill after it's been stepped on; surrounded by the dead left in the giant foot's wake, they cannot stop to stare before tending to their own survival, rebuilding with a vigor undeterred by the looming threat of fate's cruelty still signified by their immediate surroundings. Their minds race at such a pace, occupied with pursuing their fates, that they never really stop to feel anything or to hold the present in rapt embrace. The only thing that will make them stop and stare (unlike Collin's suspicious air) is something that starkly brings together grotesquery and purity and thus has the capacity to produce strong yet conflicting emotions, and yet which ultimately is received by the Parisian audience with a feeling of *pleasure*. They stop to look *as* interest, *as* egoism itself; such a view makes them feel superior because the failure of those pursuing vices or devoted to virtue justifies true Parisians' cynical pragmatism and ruthlessness. All in all, they seem to feel a sort of *survivor's pride* rather than guilt, thereby demonstrating their complete lack of empathy. They know that their city is cutthroat and dangerous. However, they wouldn't change it because it is the only place that promises to fulfill all of their dreams, which were formed in relation to this city of lights! Parisians thus enjoy such tragic spectacles as an *internal feast*. They never really exit themselves, interacting with the outside world only on their own behalf. This reflects how Parisians only really connect with their exteriority when their environment evokes their fantasies—a rare event indeed, considering the level of every person's ambition and expectations of success formed around fleeting glimpses of fortune and influence encountered at the rare events where high and low rub shoulders or through secondhand knowledge of ephemeral opportunities which chance presents to few and which fewer manage to seize. However, we see what happens to such Parisians when the possibility of their happiness begins to fade and that vital energy slackens in the way that the narration speaks of the boarders as a whole in the paragraph just after that describing Collin:

D'ailleurs, aucune de ces personnes ne se donnait la peine de vérifier si les malheurs allégués par l'une d'elles étaient faux ou véritables. Toutes avaient les unes pour les autres une indifférence mêlée de défiance qui résultait de leurs situations respectives. Elles se savaient impuissantes à soulager leurs peines, et toutes avaient, en se les contant, épuisé la coupe des doléances. Semblables à de vieux époux, elles n'avaient plus rien à se dire. Il ne restait donc entre elles que les rapports d'une vie mécanique, le jeu de rouage sans huile. Toutes devaient passer droit dans la rue devant un aveugle, écouter sans émotion le récit d'une infortune, et voir dans une mort la solution d'un problème de misère qui les rendait froides à la plus terrible agonie. (65)

The activity of the streets is thus here contrasted to the arrested scene of the Vauquer dinner table, and that absence of mobility in itself causes discomfort and frustration. Without any developments to share about their victories or failures, they quickly run out of things to say, coming to resent and distrust those reminding them of their social paralysis. Their shared suffering thus serves not to bring them together as much as to isolate them. Only Rastignac brings home excited accounts of his adventures; however, we see several times that when he sits down at this table, seeing in it a sobering account of his true social state, the effects of the glamor he just witnessed drain from his body, replacing his charmed intoxication with fear and determination—that is to say, more internal contemplation.

Collin thus here poses a striking contrast. His confidence in his abilities and his conviction in his ideas make him seem like a stone column in the river of fluid, ill-defined interests driving the movement on Paris' streets; however, he appears quite active in

comparison to the other boarders, often walking from room to room with such joyful energy that he sings. The pages surrounding his description define all of the other characters in relation to their *misfortunes*; however, it describes Collin by highlighting his *strengths*—even the suspicious aspects of his character prove powerful inasmuch as they serve to keep the other boarders from meddling in his affairs. Whereas the other boarders are caught up in inner meditations related to their pasts or futures (hardly speaking of anything else), we find Collin founded firmly in the present.<sup>45</sup> Aside from noting how his wrinkles allude to his hard life (showing evidence of pain but no remaining connection to it), Collin's description only touches upon his past to evoke its opacity; positing no query in relation to Collin, the narration here gives him special treatment like that provided him by Vauquer, and reflects the other boarder's acceptance of his appearance as such. Though it is easy to see that the narration is using this ploy to create a certain level of suspense which could potentially hook readers, Collin's lack of connections to the past and the future—which for all other characters reduced their present to the state of their interests and desires—thus sets him apart in this moment as void of observable interiority. This impression is strengthened by the fact that he appears happy and untroubled, retaining his cajoling manner even when making his sole complaints (*an outward focus* on social injustice), whereas the others spend their time in anxious or remorseful reflection. Collin's arrival on the scene equipped with ample coffers, extensive knowledge, a cheerful demeanor, and a well-established world view; his effusion of self-confidence and conviction in the least of his acts and statements; his clarity of vision in considering the others; and the fact that he lives in the moment and appears to garner enjoyment from his surroundings all suggest *the possibility* that he is not defined by his past or future because *he is satisfied*, because *he knows his true identity*, because *he is capable of objectivity*, because *he has reached an ideal level of understanding*. In this Paris devoid of *control*, he thus seems to offer a glimmer of hope. Though this description is only a compilation of the information Collin makes available to the other boarders and no further evidence has as of yet backed any of these statements, readers can nevertheless read into the passage and, in the surprise and excitement of discovering that a way of mastering Paris *might* exist, fall into the seductive trap here laid for them by giving this character their full attention and, like his fellow boarders, the benefit of the doubt.

We thus see that in setting up Collin's apparent *exceptionality*, the description sets up a tension between readers' eager anticipation to have their hopes confirmed about what Collin offers and their as of yet still distant fear of discovering that their own morals might preclude them from following such a model. This description sets a precedent for his appearances in every work: Collin first arrives on the scene in a space to which he should not have access through his use of a *mask* which covers his true identity, thus initiating a perpetual tension between the apparently upstanding nature of his adopted identity and the criminal nature which it conceals, which for example manifests in his magnetic gaze and the aura of mystery with which he surrounds himself as the indicators

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<sup>45</sup> The descriptions of Vauquer, Michonneau, and Poiret all progress in the same way: by evoking their present, unfortunate states only to then hypothesize on the troubles which could have led to their degeneration. Victorine, Rastignac, and Goriot are described in the midst of the as of yet unresolved situations causing their misfortunes, foreshadowing how their social standings could still change for better or for worse.

of his conscious stranglehold on his projected appearance. The reader experiences this tension in the same way as Collin's protégés: as an oscillation between or mixture of fascination and suspicion, admiration and revulsion, anticipation and anxiety. He is always unmasked by the end of each text—whether at the hands of authority figures or through a voluntary surrender—and subsequently arrested. We expect this tension's alleviation once Collin's underlying criminality is revealed; however, this unmasking does not necessarily reduce him to a feeble, laughable version of his former self, leaving the reader feeling comfortable, safe, and validated through an assertion of the social order's dominance. To the contrary, these moments only serve to reiterate his power, which resonates perhaps even more strongly once unveiled. In these moments, he makes his dominance clear, foretelling with absolute certainty his inevitable escape and return to Paris—prophecies which the narration verifies by reproducing him in a new form in the following text. Considering this, neither his protégés nor the readers can simply brush off his critiques of society or his lessons in manipulating it as groundless or ineffective; his end appears to justify the means.

## **2.2 In Search of the Source of Collin's Power**

The above examination of Collin's initial description shows how the texts motivate readers to pay the highest attention to ensuing details illuminating his mastery, knowledge, purpose, or singularity. Though the fact that the texts remain strangely mute on Collin's background sets him apart from other characters and thus serves as additional proof of his exceptionality, it proves frustrating to readers engaged in the search for the character's significance. The narration usually either accompanies a character's first appearance with an account of her or his past or provides those details in the following pages when that information becomes relevant to the current situation. In any case, the little we do know about his past is ambiguous and sheds only a little light on the possible sources of his mastery. It is not until a scene in the third part of *Splendeurs*—the scene of Collin's interrogation by Camusot—that we encounter the only information available to us about Collin's early life. Camusot attempts to intimidate Collin with his knowledge of the convict's past while interrogating him:

— Votre tante, qui compte environ cinq ans de plus que vous, a été la maîtresse de Marat d'odieuse mémoire. C'est de cette source ensanglantée que lui est venu le noyau de la fortune qu'elle possède. C'est, selon les renseignements que je reçois, une très habile recéleuse, car on n'a pas encore de preuves contre elle. Après la mort de Marat, elle aurait appartenu, selon les rapports que je tiens entre les mains, à un chimiste condamné à mort en l'an VIII, pour crime de fausse monnaie. Elle a paru comme témoin dans le procès. C'est dans cette intimité qu'elle aurait acquis des connaissances en toxicologie. Elle a été marchande à la toilette de l'an XII à 1810. Elle a subi deux ans de prison en 1812 et 1816, pour avoir livré des mineures à la débauche... Vous étiez déjà condamné pour crime de faux, vous aviez quitté la maison de banque où votre tante vous avait placé comme commis, grâce à l'éducation que vous aviez reçue et aux protections dont jouissait votre tante auprès des personnages à la dépravation desquels elle fournissait des victimes... Tout ceci, prévenu, ressemblerait peu à la grandesse des ducs d'Ossuna... Persistez-vous dans vos dénégations ?...

Jacques Collin écoutait monsieur Camusot en pensant à son enfance heureuse, au Collège des Oratoriens d'où il était sorti, méditation qui lui donnait un air *véritablement étonné*. Malgré l'habileté de sa diction interrogative, Camusot n'arracha pas un mouvement à cette physionomie placide. (362, my emphasis)

Considering that Collin's *thoughts* about his past are so opposed to Camusot's presentation of it that it *truly astonishes* the mastermind, we find that the information contained within the former is the only part of this passage which we can accept as true. I do

not here have the space to explore all of the historical reasons why Collin's aunt could not have been Marat's mistress or to question the evidence suggesting she is not Collin's aunt at all; in any case, even if she did raise him, given that she was only five years old when he was born, she could not have done so alone.<sup>46</sup> All that we definitely learn here is that Collin attended an Oratorian school—as did, in fact, Balzac himself. Other than this, the first three decades of his life's events remain in the dark; the next thing we know about him was that he spent 1810-1815 in the Toulon *bagne* (penal colony) after having confessed to a crime committed by another man whom he apparently loved, the beautiful Italian colonel Franchessini.<sup>47</sup> However, even if Collin certainly transgressed the law by obstructing the young man's punishment, readers could easily take this detail as an opportunity to downplay Collin's criminality (and thus the immorality of following his example) by claiming that Collin was only ever guilty of love.

His instructive conversations with Rastignac and Lucien provide the best opportunity to understand his dominance: nowhere else does Collin so openly share (and model) the worldview and *modus operandi* which allow him to enjoy such astounding freedom, vision, influence, and self-control. Taking the approach of a reader fixated on identifying the source of Collin's power with the conscious or unconscious aim of appropriating what s/he finds therein, this section will begin by examining the similarities and contrasts between the advice which Collin gives to Rastignac and Lucien in order to identify the core ideas of his personal worldview, only to then examine how *that which these speeches consistently leave out* as well as certain patterns regulating his actions while pursuing his goals show to what extent it is not only this worldview, but his refusal to fully share his understanding of the mind which allows him to dominate those around him.

### 2.2.1 The Worldview Collin Imposes on his Protégés

Collin's seduction speeches to Rastignac in *Le Père Goriot* and to Lucien in *Illusions perdues* outline not only clear instructions on how to dominate Parisian society, but an entire worldview providing a rational foundation and moral justification for Collin's actions against which neither of the young men manage to argue successfully. If these speeches seem self-evident, we should temper our eagerness to accept them as such through the observation that they are framed not only by Collin's goal of gaining his potential protégés' complicity, but by the roles which Collin plays in each scene: firstly, that of an experienced and powerful man with unspecified criminal connections; secondly, that of a diplomatic priest on a mission from the Spanish king—roles which he most likely there adopts because they are the most powerful appearances available to him in those moments. An evaluation of these

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<sup>46</sup> Simone Évrard, Marat's mistress, died in 1824 and this scene takes place in 1830; if anything, the fact that the high government official's information makes this connection between Jacqueline Collin and Évrard just shows how much the Restoration government enjoyed criminalizing figures of Revolutionary acclaim. On the matter of Jacques and Jacqueline's relation, the fact that she is described as appearing to be from Java ("Asie, qui paraissait être née à l'île de Java, offrait au regard, pour l'épouvanter, ce visage cuivré particulier aux Malais, plat comme une planche, et où le nez semble avoir été rentré par une compression violente" [XI: 97]) whereas Collin has naturally bright red hair ("cheveux rouge brique et courts qui leur donnaient un épouvantable caractère de force mêlée de ruse" [PG 266]) seems to indicate their very different familial origins. We could even question whether Jacques and Jacqueline Collin (this conspicuous similarity) are the two individuals' real names.

<sup>47</sup> I will evaluate the circumstances of his initial arrest in section 2.2.1.

speeches ultimately proves fortuitous in our quest to understand the source of Collin's power because comparing them makes evident the consistent elements of his worldview.

Collin begins each of these speeches by expressing more clearly and strongly than perhaps either Rastignac or Lucien had ever done on their own the young men's ambitions and their possible glorious outcomes or failures, thus intensifying their desires to *parvenir* from the start. He then sets out the position in which the young men's ambitions place them, emphasizing to what extent their way of pursuing them so far could never bring success because they are not founded on a clear vision of how Parisian society functions. In order to show how much they do not understand (and how much he does), he then begins outlining the levels of society's hypocrisy, which his knowledge and personal experience of "honest" society's history and culture, his firsthand observation of the miseries and powers in Paris' lowest depths, and his education in rhetoric allow him to present in an authentic and insightful way which resonates with the young men and readers alike. In his speech to Rastignac, he emphasizes that society does not in fact reward success in relation to honesty and hard work, the doctrine of the status quo: "Savez-vous comment on fait son chemin ici? par l'éclat du génie ou par l'adresse de la corruption. Il faut entrer dans cette masse d'hommes comme un boulet de canon, ou s'y glisser comme une peste. L'honnêteté ne sert à rien" (PG 166). Collin here paints corruption as the only possible means to success, with genius as the only alternative; however, he discounts its viability as an option for Rastignac by emphasizing that genius will make one the target of the hatred and attacks of everyone else (and by noting before this passage the abundant competition in the realm of law). He establishes duplicity as the city's norm by emphasizing the distance between honesty's traditional definition as the practice of virtue—which in Paris is treated as foolishness and rewarded with poverty—and that which Parisian society covertly assigns it: "Aussi l'honnête homme est-il l'ennemi commun. [...] A 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 des savates du bon Dieu. Certes, là est la vertu dans toute la fleur de sa bêtise, mais là est la misère" (PG 167). One can be seen as honest not by flaunting the truth, but to the contrary by minding one's own business and refusing to share—whether secrets, which Collin certainly uses as currency, or property, whose distribution Collin goes on to emphasize is the true foundation of Paris' social hierarchy. Having already stated that "[s]i les fières aristocraties de toutes les capitales de l'Europe refusent d'admettre dans leurs rangs un millionnaire infâme, Paris lui tend les bras, court à ses fêtes, mange ses dîners et trinque avec son infamie" (PG 171), he goes on to remark that the Parisian justice system is hardly just: "Pourquoi deux mois de prison au dandy qui, dans une nuit, ôte à un enfant la moitié de sa fortune, et pourquoi le bagne au pauvre diable qui vole un billet de mille francs avec les circonstances aggravantes? Voilà vos lois. Il n'y a pas un article qui n'arrive à l'absurde" (PG 174). Here making the Hugo-esque objection that those who steal out of need are condemned whereas those who steal out of greed just ascend, Collin seems justified in his anger toward the social order. He similarly describes society's hypocrisy to Lucien in *Illusions perdues*, where his effort to maintain his disguise as a priest

makes his arguments all the more eloquently potent. After recounting several tales revealing the secret, shameful side of history, he offers a historical critique of society's hypocrisy since the Revolution (whose resemblance to Balzac's own is striking):

Eh ! bien, voulez-vous savoir ce qui, pour un homme politique est écrit sur le front de votre dix-neuvième siècle ? Les Français ont inventé, en 1793, une souveraineté populaire qui s'est terminée par un empereur absolu. Voilà pour votre Histoire nationale. [...] Sans-culotte en 1793, Napoléon chausse la couronne de fer en 1804. Les féroces amants de *l'Egalité ou la mort* de 1792, deviennent, dès 1806, complices d'une aristocratie légitimée par Louis XVIII. [...] En France donc, la loi politique aussi bien que la loi morale, tous et chacun ont démenti le début au point d'arrivée, leurs opinions par la conduite, ou la conduite par les opinions. Il n'y a pas eu de logique, ni dans le gouvernement, ni chez les particuliers. Aussi n'avez-vous plus de morale. Aujourd'hui, chez vous, le succès est la raison suprême de toutes les actions, quelles qu'elles soient. Le fait n'est donc plus rien en lui-même, il est tout entier dans l'idée que les autres s'en forment. (VIII: 604-605)

Collin here evokes a key element of Balzac's social critique (that the Revolution abolished the values and institutions on which morality was based without replacing them with new ones) by reminding him to what extent the frequent redistribution of power in the Revolution's wake and the consequential paranoia and authoritarian policies of those regimes meant that all Parisians had likely needed at one time or another to conceal or change their opinions not just in order to succeed, but in order to survive. He here repeats his point that morality has been reduced to a formality with no fixed basis and that everyone seems unsure of what they will believe or do the next day. He also emphasizes to what extent money has become the sole means to power as well as the only consistent focus of Parisians' interests: "Votre Société n'adore plus le vrai Dieu, mais le Veau-d'or ! Telle est la religion de votre Charte, qui ne tient plus compte, en politique, que de la propriété" (VIII: 606). What is more, in a way that interestingly anticipates Michel Foucault's comments on the development of the modern justice system published over a century later in *Surveiller et Punir* (1975), Collin comments on the justice system to Lucien as follows:

Il y a des gens sans instruction qui, pressés par le besoin, prennent une somme quelconque, par violence, à autrui ; on les nomme criminels et ils sont forcés de compter avec la justice. Un pauvre homme de génie trouve un secret dont l'exploitation équivaut à un trésor, vous lui prêtez trois mille francs [...], vous le tourmentez de manière à vous faire céder tout ou partie du secret, vous ne comptez qu'avec votre conscience, et votre conscience ne vous mène pas en cour d'assises. Les ennemis de l'ordre social profitent de ce contraste pour japper après la justice et se courroucer au nom du peuple de ce qu'on envoie aux galères un voleur de nuit et de poules dans une enceinte habitée, tandis qu'on met en prison, à peine pour quelques mois, un homme qui ruine des familles en faisant une faillite frauduleuse ; mais ces hypocrites savent bien qu'*en condamnant le voleur les juges maintiennent la barrière entre les pauvres et les riches, qui, renversée, amènerait la fin de l'ordre social ; tandis que le banqueroutier, l'adroit capteur de successions, le banquier qui tue une affaire à son profit, ne produisent que des déplacements de fortune.* (VIII: 605-606, my emphasis)

I find truly amazing the connection between Collin's statements here and Foucault's theory that the penitentiary system was never meant to rehabilitate criminals, but rather to provide the public with proof of the justice system's enforcement of rules while distracting them from crimes performed elsewhere, thus maintaining the current hegemony.<sup>48</sup> However, the fact that Collin here

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<sup>48</sup> Writing that if the penitentiary system has been criticized for its failure since its adoption and yet has remained the principal means of dealing with criminals (at this point for two centuries), Foucault asks, "Le prétendu échec ne fait-il pas partie alors du fonctionnement de la prison?" (276). He goes on to question what role this failure might have, suggesting that if we suppose "que la prison et d'une façon générale, sans doute, les châtements ne sont pas destinés à supprimer les infractions; mais plutôt à les distinguer, à les distribuer, à les utiliser; qu'ils visent, non pas tellement à rendre dociles ceux qui sont prêts à transgresser les lois, mais qu'ils tendent à aménager la transgression des lois dans une tactique générale des assujettissements" (277), this allows us to see that "la prison, en « échouant » apparemment, ne manque pas son but; elle l'atteint au contraire dans la mesure où elle suscite au milieu des

condemns those who decry this injustice alerts us to an important contradiction. If Collin argues when playing the role of a criminal that society's hypocrisy justifies revolt against it and the exploitation of its inhabitants (a mindset traditionally associated with revolution as well as the underworld) and when playing the role of a diplomatic priest that society is justified in pursuing the poor more than the rich because this maintains the social order (an opinion which befits his current mask, whose power stemmed from the Church and from monarchy), this shows that neither of these opinions is an integral element of his worldview. His true mindset is best presented when he advises Rastignac to "ne pas plus tenir à vos opinions qu'à vos paroles" (PG 172). Why, then, does he mention hypocrisy at all? To emphasize his exceptional vision in a way that the young men could verify with their own experience and find compelling, and to provide the young men with a means of justifying his suggested rejection of moral values as illusions in terms which they could understand—whereas his worldview evaluates value only in terms of superiority and inferiority rather than right and wrong. What is more, though his judgment of hypocrisy is inconsistent, he nevertheless evokes it to make the same point in each speech: he supports his position of *moral nihilism* by showing that there is no observable connection between appearances and what they reveal *or* what they conceal, and by extension that there is no inherent connection between the motivations people claim and those which truly drive them. These key observations remain consistent; they follow each of the statements of hypocrisy cited above. We find that if Collin decries society's corruption to Rastignac, he does so not to encourage the young man to try to combat it, but to provide him with a model for the correct way to pursue success: "Si donc vous voulez promptement la fortune, il faut être déjà riche ou le paraître. [...] Voilà la vie telle qu'elle est. 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" (PG 167). Though projecting his criminality and declaring himself to obey nothing, he nevertheless advises the young man to follow the model already set by the rest of society, or more specifically by the powerful—that is, to know how to wash his hands of all signs of a crime after the recipe of success inevitably requires him to add this ingredient to the mix. Painting corruption as the young man's only option for achieving success in the city, which we might expect to be the advice of a criminal, he goes on to say something we do not anticipate: that he does not offer this suggestion out of bile, but rather due to a reflection on human nature: "Si je vous parle ainsi du monde, il m'en a donné le droit, je le connais. Croyez-vous que je le 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, et les niais disent alors qu'il a ou n'a pas de mœurs. 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" (PG 167). Rather than condemning the rich's behavior on behalf of the poor, as a criminal or a liberal revolutionary would typically do, he paints all humans' selfishness and hypocrisy as inevitable.

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autres une forme particulière d'illégalisme, qu'elle permet de mettre à part, de placer en pleine lumière et d'organiser comme un milieu relativement clos mais pénétrable. Elle contribue à mettre en place un illégalisme voyant, marqué, irréductible à un certain niveau et secrètement utile, — rétif et docile à la fois ; elle dessine, isole et souligne une forme d'illégalisme qui semble résumer symboliquement toutes les autres, mais qui permet de laisser dans l'ombre celles qu'on veut ou qu'on doit tolérer" (281).

However, he immediately supersedes the idea that all individuals are the same in order to show how some differ in a way that marks them as superior—a difference which, unsurprisingly, marks him as one in 100,000, and which suggests to Rastignac that he can choose to be like Collin by recognizing morality's ephemeral nature and putting a stop to its control over him, or he can be honest and thus be unwittingly dominated (both by the “superior” and his own desires). After decrying justice's imbalance for the rich and poor, we find that Collin follows this critique not by calling for the young man's revolt against the status quo, but in order to make its “true form” clear to him by removing the illusions concealing it, famously stating: “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” (PG 172-173). He backs up this observation with a black-and-white argument which further denies the existence of some objective Good: “La vertu, mon cher étudiant, ne se scinde pas : elle est ou n'est pas” (PG 174). He pulls all of these together at the end: “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 cause apparente est un crime oublié, parce qu'il a été proprement fait” (PG 175). Though his expression of his final advice uses vocabulary which serves to associate this view with criminality, he repeats this general message in his role of a priest—all that changes is his choice of more delicate language and refined observations. At the beginning of their conversation, Collin responds to Lucien's despair by telling him a story about a handsome young man of obscure origins whose beauty so impressed a passing nobleman that he made him his secretary. In this position, the young man develops the compulsive habit of eating paper. This first brings him trouble when he accidentally eats an important treaty and is condemned to death; however, his beauty saves him, as the king allows him to escape. At this point in the story, Collin makes an important remark:

— C'est souvent, reprit l'Espagnol, au moment où les jeunes gens désespèrent le plus de leur avenir, que leur fortune commence. [...] Si vous croyiez que ce joli homme, condamné à mort pour avoir mangé le traité relatif à la Finlande, se corrige de son goût dépravé, vous ne connaîtriez pas l'empire du vice sur l'homme ; la peine de mort ne l'arrête pas quand il s'agit d'une jouissance qu'il s'est créée ! D'où vient cette puissance du vice ? est-ce une force qui lui soit propre, ou vient-elle de la faiblesse humaine ? Y a-t-il des goûts qui soient placés sur les limites de la folie ? Je ne puis m'empêcher de rire des moralistes qui veulent combattre de pareilles maladies avec de belles phrases !... (VIII: 598-599)

Though he seems uncertain as to the reason for the intense power exercised by “vices,” we find once again that Collin scoffs at moralists' belief that any reform, any set of values could prove powerful enough to deter an individual from compulsively pursuing the pleasures *which s/he created for herself or himself*, a means by which *only s/he* might attain satisfaction—that is, the underlying, purely individual (and perhaps even self-destructive, though he does not explicitly recognize this) passions which will subsist and guide one's actions whether or not one recognizes them. Once the young man finds new secretarial employment with a duke, he inadvertently eats another document and, finding he has done so, throws himself on the mercy of the duchess, who finds him so striking that she marries him once her husband dies, thus making him a sovereign at a time when raising one's station was supposedly impossible. Collin's lesson thus appears to be that one's passions are only weaknesses if one treats them as such—like everything else,



they can be played to one's advantage, particularly if one is beautiful. This emphasis on the importance of appearances introduces how in this speech Collin once again evokes society's hypocrisy only to emphasize that Lucien should mimic this behavior. Collin uses his acknowledgement of history's two sides to introduce how the lives of Cardinal de Richelieu, the Medicis, and Napoleon all model the ruthless behavior needed to dominate society: "Vous voulez dominer le monde, n'est-ce pas ? il faut commencer par obéir au monde et le bien étudier. Les savants étudient les livres, les politiques étudient les hommes, leurs intérêts, les causes génératrices de leurs actions. Or le monde, la société, les hommes pris dans leur ensemble, sont fatalistes ; ils adorent l'événement" (602). He thus still feels when speaking to Lucien that an observation of the behaviors which society actually rewards, as opposed to those which it says it does, will inevitably show that humanity is guided only by selfish interests and that no one cares about how something comes to pass as much as the fact that it does. Similarly, we find that Collin emphasizes the fleeting nature of post-Revolutionary loyalties as a rubric to which he compares Lucien's former behavior in order to explain the young man's failure to succeed during his disastrous first trip to Paris:

[A]yez de beaux dehors ! cachez l'envers de votre vie, et présentez un endroit très brillant. La discrétion, cette devise des ambitieux, est celle de notre Ordre [dominicain], faites-en la vôtre. Les grands commettent presque autant de lâchetés que les misérables ; mais ils les commettent dans l'ombre et font parade de leurs vertus : ils restent grands. Les petits déploient leurs vertus dans l'ombre, ils exposent leurs misères au grand jour : ils sont méprisés. Vous avez caché vos grandeurs et vous avez laissé voir vos plaies. Vous avez eu publiquement pour maîtresse une actrice, vous avez vécu chez elle, avec elle : vous n'étiez nullement répréhensible, chacun vous trouvait l'un et l'autre parfaitement libres ; mais vous rompiez en visière aux idées du monde et vous n'avez pas eu la considération que le monde accorde à ceux qui obéissent à ses lois. [...] Changez de conduite ! mettez en dehors votre beauté, vos grâces, votre esprit, votre poésie. Si vous vous permettez de petites infamies, que ce soit entre quatre murs. Dès lors vous ne serez plus coupable de faire tache sur les décorations de ce grand théâtre appelé le monde. Napoléon appelle cela : *laver son linge sale en famille*. (VIII: 605)

Collin here shows how in the public eye (and thus in the quest for success), all that matters is whether one's outer appearance is in harmony with the system of values embraced by the majority (or at least by the most powerful), emphasizing that one's obedience of popular culture's tastes is just as important as one's public obedience of the law in the maintenance of one's reputation, given that this reputation's ability to bring others pleasure (by validating rather than challenging their worldviews) will increase the number of social doors open to one. His message remains the same: only by presenting one's appearance in a way that supports the veracity of society's surface values will the powers-that-be find pleasure in rewarding one—all while paying no attention at all to what one does in secret. Finally, we find that when Collin explains that justice punishes the poor more than the rich, he does so only in order to emphasize that Lucien should act to place himself on the advantageous side of this imbalance: "Que devez-vous donc mettre dans cette belle tête ? [...] Se donner un but éclatant et cacher ses moyens d'arriver, tout en cachant sa marche [...] car nous obéissons tous à quelque chose, à un vice, à une nécessité, mais observez la loi suprême : le secret !" (VIII: 606). By saying that one not only can but should simultaneously equal society and obey one's personal, selfish passions, Collin here restates the point which he made with the paper-eater's story. Upon his habit's revival, that young man, knowing from experience that his compulsion's exposition to the public would be met with condemnation, finds a way to avoid knowledge of it from ever becoming public by privately ensuring that his positive

qualities would be the only ones which the public would ever know. In other words, the lesson here is that since we will *always be driven by our selfish passions*, which we cannot always choose or control, our only option is to create a safe space in which we can pursue them by constructing honest reputations with our natural or affected positive qualities as barriers to others' eyes on our personal lives given its ability to inspire trust and respect, therefore allowing us to do whatever we want in private without attracting suspicion.

The central precepts consistently communicated by his speeches are thus as follows: that virtue and morality are illusions; that mankind's inherent duplicity, selfishness, and savagery means that it has always been so and that no reform of society's values could change this underlying truth; and that the surest way to mark oneself as superior is to accept this fact, reject all morality as an illusion, and take one's place among the greats by proving one's willingness to cross any and all lines without balking while nevertheless maintaining a reputation of honesty (that is, by emulating the model provided by the powerful). If we are curious to what extent Collin himself practices the lessons outlined here, we have only to look to his domination of the underworld, which we find he accomplished in precisely this manner. If his betrayal shows that Collin does not respect the laws of the *pègre* any more than those of *les honnêtes gens*, it is also true that the account of his rise given in *Splendeurs* shows that this could be because he observed a similar hypocrisy at the heart of *both* of these purportedly separate and opposed worlds. The narration's description of the underworld in the final part of *Splendeurs* shows how its hierarchy is ordered by wealth and how Collin ultimately mastered it through its pocketbook:

La haute pègre, qui est pour ce monde son faubourg Saint-Germain, son aristocratie, s'était résumée, en 1816, à la suite d'une paix qui mettait tant d'existences en question, dans une association dite des *Grands Fanandels*, où se réunirent les plus célèbres chefs de bande et quelques gens hardis, alors sans aucun moyen d'existence. Ce mot de *fanandels* veut dire à la fois frères, amis, camarades. Tous les voleurs, les forçats, les prisonniers sont fanandels. Or, les Grands Fanandels, fine fleur de la haute pègre, furent pendant vingt et quelques années la cour de cassation, l'institut, la chambre des pairs de ce peuple. Les Grands Fanandels eurent tous leur fortune particulière, des capitaux en commun et des mœurs à part. [...] Ces ducs et pairs du bagne avaient formé, de 1815 à 1819 la fameuse société des Dix-Mille [...]. Ainsi nommée de la convention en vertu de laquelle on ne pouvait jamais entreprendre une affaire où il se trouvait moins de dix mille francs à prendre. [...] Jacques Collin était le caissier, non seulement de la Société des Dix-Mille, mais encore des Grands Fanandels, les héros du bagne. De l'aveu des autorités compétentes, les bagnes ont toujours eu des capitaux. Cette bizarrerie se conçoit. Aucun vol ne se retrouve, excepté dans des cas bizarres. Les condamnés, ne pouvant rien emporter avec eux au bagne, sont forcés d'avoir recours à la confiance, à la capacité, de confier leurs fonds, comme dans la société l'on se confie à une maison de banque. (XI: 438-440)

This passage shows that even if the group of people constituting the underworld's authority had gained access to that position through their infamy, at the beginning of the Restoration (during the very year that the *Charte* appeared which Collin denounces to Lucien as making money the sole means to power), this aristocracy became equivalent to a group of people only engaging in the most profitable of endeavors. What is more, we find that though the *Grands Fanandels* govern the underworld at large, the *capitaux en commun* here mentioned are attributed specifically to this one group rather than criminals as a whole. This passage also shows to what extent Collin was instrumental in allowing this nobility's fortune to amass, inasmuch as we know from *Vautrin* that Collin was involved in the formation of the *Société de Dix-Mille* (which the above shows also has its own, separate account with Collin), and because this passage shows that his *trustworthiness* created a means by which criminals could conserve the spoils of their ventures even in the

event of their arrests. If Collin had not built up and maintained his legendary reputation as *Trompe-la-Morte*, whose notoriety as exceptionally skillful in the criminal craft, exceptionally cunning and daring in his schemes against society, exceptionally dedicated to the cause of Revolt, exceptionally loyal to his men, and exceptionally honest in the handling of the *bagne*'s coffers led criminals far and wide to associate his name with a larger-than-life embodiment of all of the underworld's values, he would never have gained control of the other criminals, showing once more the power of an *honest* appearance—as well as how context changes the meaning of honesty.<sup>49</sup> Furthermore, we find that once Collin attained the crucial position of the underworld's banker, he acquired absolute control over the criminal world, which had no higher authority that could hold him accountable:

Le caissier savait seul combien d'associés survivaient, quelle était la fortune de chacun. La mortalité particulière à ses mandataires était entrée dans les calculs de Trompe la-Mort, au moment où il résolut de *manger la grenouille* au profit de Lucien. En se déroband à l'attention de ses camarades et de la police pendant neuf ans, Jacques Collin avait une presque certitude d'hériter, aux termes de la charte des Grands Fanandels, des deux tiers de ses commettants. Ne pouvait-il pas d'ailleurs alléguer des paiements faits aux fanandels *fauchés* ? Aucun contrôle n'atteignait enfin ce chef des Grands Fanandels. On se fiait absolument à lui par nécessité, car la vie de bête fauve que mènent les forçats impliquait entre les gens comme il faut de ce monde sauvage la plus haute délicatesse. (XI: 442)

We see here that even if the high-ranking criminal groups shared certain possessions, this did not mean that all property was allocated equally to all—some was clearly divided on an individual basis. Considering this in addition to the statements above placing the rich, exclusive groups of criminals at the top of the ladder, as well as the fact that his control of the underworld's money provided him an unrivaled power in that sphere, it is clear that the upper and underworlds' hierarchies were each organized largely along monetary lines. Given this equivalence, we can assume that Collin dominated the underworld by exercising the principles he outlines for his protégés, granting him privileged access not only to the money, but the loyal service of other criminals which he could then employ in his pursuit of his own interests.<sup>50</sup> In *Splendeurs*, we see that even after having disappeared for almost a decade, the strength of his reputation and the desperate position of his criminal compatriots are what save him from the trap set for him at the *Conciergerie*.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Philip notes this moral relativism is a key aspect of Balzac's Paris: "To enter another neighborhood, to move, is not simply to change social position, but also habits and morality; more than an alteration, it is a metamorphosis," meaning that "the adroit, those who succeed in the *Comédie humaine*, are those who have sufficient resilience to adopt to different environments" (78-79). If he thus notes that "Vautrin's power stems from the ease with which he moves everywhere [...] His protean gifts allow him to move comfortably in the most diverse places and social circles" (79), he also notes how this movement manifests in the changing *language* which he uses, thus highlighting how Balzac recognizes the influence of the Symbolic order in framing both social environments and personal morality, which is furthermore suggested when he continues: "Vautrin, however, stands for the exception; more generally, the Parisians of the *Comédie humaine* evolve within the limits of their particular sphere" (79).

<sup>50</sup> In *Vautrin*, he staffs Raoul's household with his minions, whom he compels to continue serving him even after six months of their having not made any money from the venture and having been commanded by Collin not to commit any crimes which could endanger their reputations. In *Splendeurs*, even though their collaboration with the embezzler could put their lives in danger, Paccard, Prudence, and Jacqueline Collin all serve Collin's dreams for Lucien for half a decade or more. Paccard and Prudence do run off with Esther's money when she kills herself, which is one of the charges brought against Collin and Lucien; however, they later return with the money and reenter his service.

<sup>51</sup> Desperate to expose Collin's true identity, Bibi-Lupin arranged to have Collin, still posing as a priest, enter the prison yard, where he arranged to have three of the underworld's key players waiting, knowing that the *haute pègre* had condemned Collin for betraying

When his three former chain-mates do in fact recognize and confront him in the prison yard, bringing up the charges against him, the exchange which follows demonstrates that Collin's ability to dominate other criminals does not fade over time. His response in the argot in an immediately commanding tone as if nothing has happened to challenge his authority: "Ne me *conobrez pas*, *épargnons le poitou* et *engantez-moi en sanglier* (ne me connaissez plus, prenons nos précautions et traitez-moi en prêtre), ou je vous *effondre*, vous, vos *largues* et votre *aubert* (je vous ruine, vous, vos femmes et votre fortune)" (449, original parenthetical notes). The scene thus ends with those whom he betrayed jumping to follow his orders, even participating in his ruse by catching him as he collapses in evident distress and calling to a guard to bring a chair for the poor old priest. We see in the surrounding text that their knowledge of his reputation, their respect of his dedication to other criminals and his audacious blasphemy, their disdain of the police, and their amazement at his nerve and skill in playing this role all play a part in their aiding him rather than attacking him. However, as the narration observes in the following lines, their complicity hinged on one key element of his words to them: "Trompe-la-Mort, de même que Napoléon reconnu par ses soldats, obtenait soumission et respect des trois forçats. Deux mots avaient suffi. Ces deux mots étaient : vos *largues* et votre *aubert*, vos femmes et votre argent, le résumé de toutes les affections vraies de l'homme. Cette menace fut pour les trois forçats l'indice du suprême pouvoir, le *dab* tenait toujours leur fortune entre ses mains. Toujours tout-puissant au dehors, leur *dab* n'avait pas trahi, comme de faux frères le disaient" (XI: 450). If the narration here connects criminals to the population at large by calling *money* and *women* (i.e. sexual or romantic relationships) the true passions *de l'homme*, it furthermore does so by going on to highlight that Collin appeals to them on the same level as he does to readers at large—through his mystery and seeming transcendence: "La colossale renommée d'adresse et d'habileté de leur chef stimula, d'ailleurs, la curiosité des trois forçats ; car, en prison, la curiosité devient le seul aiguillon de ces âmes flétries. La hardiesse du déguisement de Jacques Collin, conservé jusque sous les verrous de la Conciergerie, étourdissait d'ailleurs les trois criminels" (XI: 450). Knowing they want to believe that he has not betrayed them and that his omnipotent reputation precedes him, Collin knows exactly how to make them obey: by constructing an appearance which appeals to their values and curiosity while taking its real power from its evocation of their fortunes, thus allowing them to justify their loyalty to him without thinking about how Collin's exploitation of their desires evokes their inability to resist these passions' pursuit at any cost, even if that be submission to a man proven untrustworthy.

By here showing how he manipulates the criminals through their desires for money, this scene recalls the fact that in his speeches to Rastignac and Lucien, he similarly offers and in fact provides them with money, leading us to realize that though he recounts to his protégés every other strategy which he used in his rise to the underworld, he notably omits an explanation of his principle means of manipulating others. Though the two roles which he plays while giving each of the speeches means that they are housed in completely different contexts, arguments, and even delivery styles, Rastignac and Lucien each react to what they have heard in very similar

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them and hoping that upon seeing their former friend (as they had all been together in the Toulon *bagne* from 1810 to 1815), these three men would carry out the death sentence.

ways—ways which avoid recognizing the extent of his depravity, preserve his appearance of mastery and proximity to completeness, and externalize their blame for being drawn in by his dulcet tones.<sup>52</sup> Clearly, Collin’s protégés, like the criminals (and perhaps even the readers), are helplessly compelled to pay the highest attention to anything which they believe can provide or even just create the possibility for *completeness*. However, if it is through the desires of others that Collin achieves his greatest successes, he never fully explains to anyone else his understanding of the mind, always reserving this empowering knowledge for himself.

### 2.2.2 The Unmatched Understanding of the Mind Informing Collin’s Modus Operandi

If Rastignac thinks of Collin as “ce singulier personnage pénétrait ses passions et lisait dans son cœur, tandis que chez lui tout était si bien clos qu’il semblait avoir la profondeur immobile d’un sphinx qui sait, voit tout, et ne dit rien” (PG 157), if the narration notes that “Personne ne pouvait [...] mesurer l’ambition de cet Espagnol comme on ne pouvait prévoir quelle serait sa fin” (XI: 89), and if by his “génie de la corruption, il détruisit l’honnêteté de Lucien en le plongeant dans des nécessités cruelles et en l’en tirant par des consentements tacites à des actions mauvaises ou infâmes qui le laissaient toujours pur, loyal, noble aux yeux du monde” (XI: 117), all of this highlights that though some characters may spout out bursts of perspicacity in moments of distress and disillusionment, no other character even comes close to rivaling Collin’s vision of the process of perception, much less his systematic way of manipulating it which brings it to the readers’ attention. Even if he owes much of his success to his natural intuition and charisma and even if he does not articulate or perhaps even recognize some of the concepts upon which he acts, does not necessarily see the structure connecting his diverse observations on desire and perception, and has no frame of reference highlighting what his approach leaves out, his understanding of the mind nevertheless grants him the exceptional power which he habitually employs. In highlighting some key statements made by Collin demonstrating his knowledge of primary processes, this section will thus focus principally on the central ideas on which his modus operandi depends. Though I will here define some psychoanalytic terms which his statements outline, I will wait until the next section to explore the contradictions and blindness made evident by the character’s statements on the mind.

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<sup>52</sup> After Collin leaves him to his thoughts, Rastignac’s initial repulsion at the mastermind’s offer wavers as he walks away deep in thought. After tortuously meandering between his family’s traditional values and the truth which he sees in Collin’s arguments, he never decides to take one route or the other, but simply forces himself to stop thinking: “Diable! ma tête se perd. Je ne veux penser à rien, le cœur est un bon guide” (PG 176). Rastignac repeats the format of this reaction several times: this is his typical way of avoiding the displeasure he feels in bearing any similarity to Collin—even though he nevertheless often puts into practice everything which he learned from him. What is more, we see that the greater his need, the more insistent his attraction to Collin becomes: “il se trouvait alors dans un moment où sa misère parlait si haut, qu’il céda presque involontairement aux artifices du terrible sphinx par les regards duquel il était souvent fasciné” (221). In *Illusions perdues*, Lucien is captivated by Collin’s thoughtful explanations of society’s true principles, observations on where Lucien went wrong in his first trip to Paris, and his strong words capturing the young man’s need to avenge himself on those who had humiliated him. Though Lucien remains hesitant due to his uncertainty of the priest’s motivations, Lucien’s skepticism ends along with the scene as soon as Collin uncovers at the young man’s request the pile of gold in his possession, the sight of which immediately procures Lucien’s pledge of allegiance: “Mon père, je suis à vous, dit Lucien ébloui de ce flot d’or” (612).

First and foremost, Collin's practice of extreme dissimulation and his masking of his true identity, feelings, and motivations shows his awareness of the gap not between appearances and some objective "reality," but rather between appearances and the meaning which individuals consciously assign to those appearances (i.e. the signifier and the signified). By explaining to Rastignac that money is the only thing that matters in Paris and furthermore emphasizing the equivalence between having and appearing to have a fortune, Collin shows his recognition that for the perceiver, there is no difference between a wealthy appearance actually backed by wealth and one which is only a façade; there is only the meaning which s/he attaches in relation to that appearance. We see this again when he tells Lucien in *Illusions perdues* that because success is now the underlying motivation of all actions, "Le fait n'est donc plus rien en lui-même, il est tout entier dans l'idée que les autres s'en forment" (VIII: 605). Disregarding the idea that this is a recent development (which is perhaps an effect of his priestly role), what is important here is that he recognizes *appearances* and *the way an individual understands them* as the only two observable terms present in the process producing meaning. Collin's way of taking advantage of this distance between signified and signifier involves his recognition of three primary processes informing consciousness. We have already seen several examples of how Collin recognizes two of these: firstly that one can only interpret appearances through one's environment's provided means of explaining and understanding the world as well as its supporting belief system (the Symbolic Order), and secondly that an individual will be more inclined to accept an argument or appearance which flatters them (narcissism). His way of fashioning his false identities or interim disguises reflects his awareness of individuals' tendency to accept at face value appearances which their knowledge and beliefs have already rendered understandable, allowing him to use his knowledge of the particular values, prejudices, and expectations of his appearance's potential perceivers (both as Parisians belonging to certain spheres as well as the city at large) in a way that allows him to escape the suspicion or even attention of those whom he does not want meddling in his affairs. His success in doing so is reflected in Bibi-Lupin's explanation of why he needs Michonneau's help:

Trompe-la Mort, en venant ici, a chaussé la peau d'un honnête homme, il s'est fait bon bourgeois de Paris, il s'est logé dans une pension sans apparence ; il est fin, allez ! on ne le prendra jamais sans vert. Donc monsieur Vautrin est un homme considéré, qui fait des affaires considérables. [...] Le ministre, si l'on se trompait en arrêtant un vrai Vautrin, ne veut pas se mettre à dos le commerce de Paris, ni l'opinion publique. M. le préfet de police branle dans le manche, il a des ennemis. S'il y avait erreur, ceux qui veulent sa place profiteraient des clabaudages et des criaileries libérales pour le faire sauter. (PG 232-233)

Collin mastered the police through public opinion; as long as society believed him to be an honest man, the police had to treat him as an honest man. They could only arrest him if they were completely sure of his identity, or else their own social positions would be in jeopardy. It seems that he profits from "honest" individuals' *assumption of difference* between themselves and criminals every time that he enters the upper world: according to the prejudice that criminals were necessarily evil and different from honest people, it would be impossible for a criminal to conduct himself in a civilized manner. The idea of an "impassable barrier" between the upper and underworld in his case served to protect him from discovery in honest society as long as he managed to avoid performing those typical attributes associated with criminals—a feat which, as we see over and over again, Collin accomplishes with ease. In addition, we have already observed Collin's recognition of the usefulness of flattery as early as his initial description given that he obtains a

*passe-partout* by sweet talking Vauquer. Even though Collin has no interest in women, he easily convinces Vauquer of the opposite; at one point she even asks the other ladies of the house, “Croyez-vous [...] que monsieur Vautrin ait des intentions relatives à ma personne ?” (PG 253). Similarly, at the end of *Splendeurs*, when he heals Sérizy from the madness stemming from her belief that Lucien died hating her by bringing her a letter Collin says Lucien wrote shortly before he died, but which he had in fact written her long ago, the narration observes that Collin succeeded because he recognized that “[a]ucune femme ne résiste à l’idée d’être aimée uniquement” (XI: 532). However, Collin’s flattery is not restricted to women; for example, he says to Rastignac during one of their meetings after Collin’s initial offer, “Je ne parlerais pas ainsi à tout le monde. Mais vous, vous êtes un homme supérieur, on peut tout vous dire, vous savez tout comprendre. Vous ne patouillerez pas longtemps dans les marécages où vivent les crapoussins qui nous entourent ici” (PG 226), and at the end of *Splendeurs*, after having made a deal to join the police, he facilitates the attorney general’s trust of him by honoring his position and refusing to ride in the same carriage: “Non, monsieur, [...] je ne me trouverai pas dans la même voiture à vos côtés... Je suis encore un forçat. Si j’ai le désir de servir la justice, je ne commencerai pas par la déshonorer” (529). These are just a few examples of how Collin flatters those who stand to advance his goals. Collin seems to have recognized that all people are happy to be seen as superior individuals and thus are more inclined to believe any proof making this point, suggesting that he recognized in general that people rarely remain skeptical of the veracity of an idea, appearance, etc. for long (if at all) if it produces the impression that others perceive them as they would like to be perceived (i.e. as their ideal selves—that is, as superior, important, desirable, in control, unique, *perfect*, etc.) He associates himself with the proofs of these fantasies because he knows that individuals will not want to reject his appearance if doing so also means symbolically rejecting the conjoined proofs of their superiority which bring them pleasure—not to mention their convictions of their inherited knowledge or their own rational abilities.

What we have not yet explored satisfactorily is Collin’s comprehension of the important role played by individuals’ interests and desires (which he collectively refers to as *passions*) in the process of perception, the idea on which his *modus operandi* perhaps most depends. Collin articulates this as early as his first speech to Rastignac, before he even became interested in taking the young man under his wing. In response to Rastignac and the other boarders discussing what they believe to be Goriot’s spending all his money on prostitutes (who are actually his daughters), Collin says to Rastignac, “Vous êtes encore trop jeune pour bien connaître Paris, vous saurez plus tard qu’il s’y rencontre ce que nous nommons des *hommes à passions*” (PG 99). The fact that Collin says Rastignac will only understand later even though he plans to explain immediately shows his recognition that telling someone something does not guarantee their understanding it. He continues:

— Eh bien ! reprit-il, ces gens-là chaussent une idée et n’en démordent pas. Ils n’ont soif que d’une certaine eau prise à une certaine fontaine, et souvent croupie ; pour en boire, ils vendraient leurs femmes, leurs enfants ; ils vendraient leur âme au diable. Pour les uns, cette fontaine est le jeu, la Bourse, une collection de tableaux ou d’insectes, la musique ; pour d’autres, c’est une femme qui sait leur cuisiner des friandises. A ceux-là, vous leur offririez toutes les femmes de la terre, ils s’en moquent, ils ne veulent que celle qui satisfait leur passion. Souvent cette femme ne les aime pas du tout, vous les rudoie, leur vend fort cher des bribes de satisfactions ; eh ! bien ! mes farceurs ne se lassent pas, et mettraient leur dernière couverture au Mont-de-Piété pour lui apporter leur dernier écu. (PG 99-100)

Collin here makes several observations on the passions which, though he here frames them in relation to a specific type of men, he will later extend to humanity at large. This passage emphasizes how *unconscious desire* leads one to identify one object as opposed to another as that which will provide completeness. Throughout the passage, he uses a fountain as a symbol representing that which contains the particular kind of water each of these individuals desires. This evokes mythological fountains celebrated in different forms by cultures the world over for thousands of years as containing water which can provide immortality, restore one's youth, revitalize or heal one's body or spirit, etc. Considering this, we can argue that such fountains are traditionally viewed as capable of providing some form of completeness which is otherwise unattainable. By here making the distinction between the fountain and the water, Collin recognizes the distinction between the object (the signifier) and that which one hopes to attain by possessing it (completeness). Though the object may change, this goal does not (though his passage does highlight the repetition involved in choosing these objects). It is thus striking that Collin emphasizes that the water craved by the individuals here concerned is often stagnant; this shows not only the disparity between the object's value in the eyes of the general public and the individuals' idealized perception of it, but also emphasizes how their determination to drink from it is not only potentially self-destructive (inasmuch as it could be hazardous to their health; cholera epidemics were a serious problem in Paris during this period), but can even cause them to hurt those closest to them without even hesitating. What is more, Collin shows not only that these people do not choose their passions—which seem strangely specific—but how their compulsive, unchanging attraction to one kind of disgusting water held in one kind of fountain (i.e. the vision of the future framing one's fantasy of attaining the object) which they inexplicably desire in exclusion of all others never diminishes in spite of the fact that even when they manage to drink it, it provides only the tiniest shred of pleasure. However, though it never even comes close to satisfying their desire, as long as they know that there is water in the fountain, they cannot stop going back, no matter what the cost. After this, Collin continues by saying that Goriot's passion for Anastasie makes him one of these men, which he proves by recounting what he witnessed that morning: he saw Goriot sell one of his last possessions in order to send the proceeds to the young woman, concluding by saying to Rastignac: “Cela vous prouve, mon jeune étudiant, que, pendant que votre comtesse riait, dansait, faisait ses singeries, balançait ses fleurs de pêcher, et pinçait sa robe, elle était dans ses petits souliers, comme on dit, en pensant à ses lettres de change protestées, ou à celles de son amant” (PG 100). This is followed by an exchange with Rastignac on the nature of Paris:

— Mais, dit Eugène avec un air de dégoût, votre Paris est donc un borbier.

— Et un drôle de borbier, reprit Vautrin. Ceux qui s'y crottent en voiture sont d'honnêtes gens, ceux qui s'y crottent à pied sont des fripons. Ayez le malheur d'y décrocher n'importe quoi, vous êtes montré sur la place du Palais-de-Justice comme une curiosité. Volez un million, vous êtes marqué dans les salons comme une vertu. Vous payez trente million à la Gendarmerie et à la Justice pour maintenir cette morale-là. Joli ! (101)

Collin confirms to Rastignac the city's status as a *bourbier*—which could mean a hole filled with mire or an infamous, abject situation with no means of escape—and furthermore *un drôle de borbier*. This is not necessarily a reversal or opposition to a borbier on its



own (given this qualifier possesses the possible meanings of strange, surprising, intriguing, or *singulier*), but rather paints it as one which differs from the one that it was expected to be. In his view, the city immerses its inhabitants in either physical or moral mud and leaves no escape, but does so in a unique and disingenuous way. Considering this, we could say that Collin paints Paris at large as a stagnant fountain where men *relentlessly seek to fulfill their seemingly indispensable but in fact self-destructive desires* and where even those women who appear happy are secretly thinking about *what they are lacking*—all while paying the justice system to find someone to blame for the problems created by their selfishness. For him, the whole city is thus animated by individuals' selfish attempts to attain completeness (an interpretation which supports his worldview). When Collin has nothing to gain from Rastignac, his idea of the city does not seem to offer the route to any real pleasure, as every person within it becomes so controlled by their passions that they cannot escape.

The situation which Collin describes in this passage constitutes a strikingly detailed representation of the process which Freud and Lacan referred to as repetition automatism—that is, the repetitive idealization, pursuit, and failure to obtain satisfaction through a certain type of object which one (usually inexplicably) associates with the possibility of attaining the ideal completeness for which all humanity yearns. According to Collin, when confronted with such an object, individuals cannot resist pursuing it at all costs. If Collin seems to be familiar with this type of passions through his frequent exploitation of them, this suspicion is confirmed many times over throughout the texts, where we see that he manipulates people from both genders and from all levels of society through their desires. However, before this proof comes into view, in his second seduction speech to Rastignac he connects himself to this kind of people by drawing a comparison between himself and Goriot (whose love he by then knows is that of a father for his daughters) while expressing his motivations:

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 ? Voyez le père Goriot : ses deux filles sont pour lui tout l'univers, elles sont le fil avec lequel il se dirige dans la création. Eh ! bien, pour moi qui ai bien creusé la vie, il n'existe qu'un seul sentiment réel, une amitié d'homme à homme. Pierre et Jaffier, voilà ma passion.” (225-226)

By saying that passions play the same role in his life as they do in Goriot's, demonstrating to what extent *one's entire approach to the world is founded first and foremost on one's idealization of the object which seems most capable of providing completeness*, Collin indicates that he finds this to be a universal tendency. The fact that he says a man is *everything* or nothing to him shows to what extent Collin recognizes that once he idealizes a young man, everything in his universe gains meaning only in relation to his relationship with that object. Furthermore, his emphasis on *feelings* rather than reason in determining this object-choice (a feeling which thus contains *the world* inasmuch as it determines one's approach to it) suggests his recognition that one's conscious perception of the world is informed by primary processes—that is to say, is preceded by one's initial, emotional reaction to that which one perceives, which one's mind seeks to reconcile with one's worldview and self-image. He here identifies the way in which he hopes to engage with such

objects as a relationship shared between men similar to that found in Otway's *Venice Preserv'd* (1682)—a play to which he also refers when speaking to Lucien about his motivations for maintaining their relationship, though he does not express it in precisely the same way. The two men's friendship is strictly platonic in the play, and is not overtly or really even covertly homosexual. Because Collin immediately follows his allusion to this relationship by describing it as two men's willingness to help each other to bury a body without asking any questions, this reminds us of the fact that in the preface to the *Histoire des Treize*, the narrator says this play also inspired that group's formation, thus allowing us to ignore other interpretations of Collin's desire if we would like—however, in this scene he actively makes it apparent in other ways. If Collin explains to his protégés that all men are driven by selfish desires which they cannot choose or change, he here appears to recognize that this applies even to himself.

As Collin leaves at the end of this scene telling Rastignac that he does not yet want him to decide if he wants to join him, the narration notes that Collin “semblait connaître le secret de ces petites résistances, de ces combats dont les hommes se parent devant eux-mêmes, et qui leur servent à se justifier leurs actions blâmables” (PG 226). In psychoanalytic terminology, *resistance* refers to the force opposed to conscious efforts to actively recognize something already repressed. Knowing that the young man's mind would find a better way of convincing Rastignac to embrace Collin's offer (i.e. a way of consciously justifying something which he already wants to do and blocking out everything undermining this decision), Collin gives the young man space to leave his mind to its work, simply reiterating before departing how that which he wanted Rastignac to do would be in the young man's interest. We thus find in *Le Père Goriot* that Collin recognizes unconscious desire as an underlying force affecting perception which one can never entirely resolve, whose objects one cannot choose or change, and which he believes is invariably selfish, as well as that one's mind will always work in order to portray an opportunity to fulfill one's passions in a favorable light. In *Illusions perdues*, we see this knowledge's central role in his *modus operandi* through its positioning at the heart of his key advice to Lucien: “Vous avez agi en enfant, soyez homme, soyez chasseur, mettez-vous à l'affût, embusquez-vous dans le monde parisien, attendez une proie et un hasard, ne ménagez ni votre personne ni ce qu'on appelle la dignité ; *car nous obéissons tous à quelque chose, à un vice, à une nécessité*, mais observez la loi suprême : le secret !” (VIII: 606, my emphasis). As I stated when evaluating this passage in relation to Collin's story about the paper-eater, this passage could be said to paint selfish desire in a less than horrible light. Though by saying that *everyone* obeys something, Collin here shows that *everyone* is one of his *hommes à passions*, the “something” which everyone obeys here remains ambiguous; it is hard to tell whether this something *is* a vice *and* a necessity, *is* a vice *or* a necessity, or is one of three possible objects listed in a series. This allows Lucien and readers alike to plug whatever they have personally idealized as that most likely to bring completeness into one of these alternatives and thus use this advice without necessarily thinking of their object as a vice or a necessity, if this would undermine their visions of themselves. Similarly, if he says to Rastignac that it is “fatigant de désirer toujours sans jamais se satisfaire” (PG 163) in order to encourage him to take up his offer, he does not here remind him of the *bourbier* speech which he gave before he had an interest in concealing the insatiable nature of desire. Collin could very well be downplaying the gravity of desire's

influence and the impossibility of its fulfillment because he wants his potential protégés to capitulate to their passions (particularly their material ones), because this would provide him with the means of controlling them. However, if we return to the passage above, we could just as easily read in it a more serious tone. For example, even if that which one pursues is not in itself condemnable, the fact that secrecy is imperative in all such pursuits shows to what extent that pursuit in itself is always a vice. Furthermore, the very fact that we all obey something shows that such pursuit is also a necessity, and the advice surrounding it shows to what extent it requires that we sacrifice everything to it: in his protégés' cases, Collin commands them to sacrifice their morals and other illusions in order to ruthlessly do whatever it takes to achieve his goal; in lying in wait for the chance to pursue success, there is an opportunity cost of everything else they could have done with the time spent hunting in Paris, of all of the other experiences which they could have had in other places or among people who could not aid his quest; they have to be willing to dedicate their bodies, their dignity, and every other aspect of themselves to the cause; and they have to avoid making genuine human connections which could compromise the secrecy of their schemes. Considering how the compulsive, all-consuming nature of this pursuit so resembles that of the *hommes à passions*, readers may rightly wonder how Collin could expect that the water to be drunk at the end of his own quest would bring him and his protégés any more satisfaction than that which, for example, Goriot drank—water whose poisonous nature the old man only realized on his deathbed, where his daughters' absence leads him to exclaim his regrets for having pursued that water as he did: “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 ! je demeurerais dans un hôtel, j'aurais de belles chambres, des domestiques, du feu à moi ; et elles seraient tout en larmes, avec leurs maris, leurs enfants” (PG 334). We may here recall that Collin only said that this water is *often*, not always, stagnant; this leaves open the possibility that they could get their hands on some of the good stuff. What is more, Collin's ascribed pursuit of this water differs from that of the *hommes à passions*: whereas they search out in the open, allowing anyone to ridicule them and to take advantage of them by manipulating them or selling them a product whose contents were cut prodigiously with the tap, Collin's knowledge apparently provided him with a short cut straight to the source—even if he himself could not drink, but only lead others to do so.

We can now examine how Collin's *modus operandi* reflects this knowledge of the mind. First of all, he unifies his will toward attaining one goal, which is purportedly equivalent to his selfish passions (and which the following chapter aims at identifying)—an action whose importance he expresses when telling Rastignac, “Voyez si vous pourrez vous lever tous les matins avec plus de volonté que vous n'en aviez la veille” (PG 168) and in his question to Lucien, “Mais avez-vous rapporté tous vos vœux, toutes vos actions à une idée ?” (VIII: 603). Secondly, he removes obstacles to this goal firstly by prioritizing its accomplishment above all else (that is to say, above moral values which he deems illusory) and then by fashioning his appearance in a way that protects him from the police and meddlers through his knowledge of the mind's tendency to accept that which supports what it already knows and that which appeals to its narcissism. Thirdly, he creates a scheme in relation to his greatest resources—that is, the service of others which he can

prompt wherever needed by manipulating those individuals through their desires. Whether by making his targets' complete satisfaction seem possible by posing himself as the sole possible arbiter of their passions or by threatening to disrupt the possibility of their fulfillment, he does not even have to use force to accomplish his goals: the compulsive desires for completeness of those whom he manipulates motivates them from the inside to come around. This is why Collin is always trying to find out more information on the desires of those surrounding him.<sup>53</sup> We see how much power this gives him over others at the end of *Splendeurs*, given that when Collin heals Sérizy, the narration notes that Collin is "un grand médecin des âmes" (XI: 531). However, we see that he only heals when he has something to gain; just as he healed Esther at the beginning of that novel for Lucien's sake only to later drive her to despair for the same reason, the only reason that Collin healed Sérizy was in order to secure his appointment to chief of the secret police.<sup>54</sup> This brings us to another point: in spite of the seeming sincerity of his words in all of these cases and others, we have to remember that he is a master of disguise driven only by his selfish purpose; his words depend entirely on *who he addresses*, so we cannot judge his motivations by his words themselves, but must rather focus on whether he is pleased with their *effects*—the emotions which they inspire in his addressee, and whether those emotions drive the addressee to accomplish Collin's goal of her or his own volition. As a result, all of Collin's words are eerily emptied of meaning, allowing (as we have already seen) for the often contradictory or one-dimensional interpretations of his character's significance.

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<sup>53</sup> In *Vautrin*, thanks to the many asides in which Collin speaks to himself, we see his attention to the desires of the other characters in forming his plans. At the beginning, he recognizes that Joseph, a former fellow criminal now employed as a domestic *chez les Montsorel*, desires to continue his honest life—asking him coyly, "Tu jouis donc de la paix du cœur ici ?" (XXIII: 25)—and gains his complicity by obliquely threatening his position. He fishes for information about the Montsorels, hoping to crush the parents of Raoul's rival for Inès' hand, challenging Joseph's reluctance in supplying it when saying *à part* "Il devient un peu trop honnête home. Peut-être croit-il ne rien savoir? Quand on cause pendant cinq minutes avec un homme, on en tire toujours quelque chose" (XXIII: 27), then thinking to himself of the duke, "Tout grand seigneur a de petits passions par lesquelles on le mène" (XXIII: 27), and asking Joseph where the duchess confesses so as to send some of his men there disguised as priests. He thinks of his control over the gang manning his household, "Il suffit, pour les mener, de leur faire croire qu'ils ont de l'honneur et un avenir" (XXIII: 67). Upon viewing Inès' great love for Raoul, he thinks, "Comme elle l'aime ! Pauvre fille, ça ne demande qu'à d'être abusé" (XXIII: 93). In *Le Père Goriot*, it is not until the moment when he and Rastignac are about to duel and Victorine cries out, "Oh ! monsieur, [...] pourquoi voulez-vous tuer monsieur Eugène ?" that he "fit deux pas en arrière et contempla Victorine" and, inspired by his plan to make her an heiress and give Rastignac a leg up—for a fee—he responds, "Autre histoire, s'écria-t-il d'une voix railleuse qui fit rougir la pauvre fille. Il est bien gentil, n'est-ce pas, ce jeune homme-là ? reprit-il. Vous me donnez une idée. Je ferai votre bonheur à tous deux, ma belle enfant" (PG 159). At the beginning of *Splendeurs*, when Collin receives news that Esther is heartsick and tries to cheer her up by bringing her out of the convent, he is quickly able to determine the source of her unshakeable melancholy, taking the occasion to survey her capacity for love for future knowledge: "« Elle meurt d'amour pour Lucien », se dit Herrera qui voulut sonder la profondeur de cette âme et savoir tout ce qu'on en pouvait exiger" (XI: 86). In relation to Lucien's proximity to his goals, Collin is later able to convince Lucien in less than a page of the necessity of selling Esther to Nucingen and abandoning her bed, at least for a while. Indeed, Collin abuses the old banker's all-consuming passion for Esther, the first love which he had ever experienced, to the tune of 750,000 francs (not to mention the household which the baron sets up for his beloved): "Nucingen ne jouait pas, Nucingen ne protégeait pas les arts, Nucingen n'avait aucune fantaisie ; il devait donc se jeter dans sa passion pour Esther avec un aveuglement sur lequel comptait Carlos Herrera" (XI: 163).

<sup>54</sup> After Esther is mocked at the ball at the beginning of the novel, he finds her at her apartment trying to commit suicide and brings her to a convent to be educated not only in order to renew her will to live, but to give her the appearance of a lady and thereby prevent a chance sighting of her and Lucien together from afar from being recognized as Lucien's relationship with a (former) prostitute.

This is connected to the next tenet of Collin's *modus operandi*: his need to conceal his goal and his intended means of achieving it from view. He avoids genuine human connections, leaves behind no loose ends (whether material evidence or the bearers of untrustworthy tongues), and goes to great lengths to conceal his underlying motivations, even to the extent of providing false ones.<sup>55</sup> If the text presents readers with the evidence of a dozen or two of Collin's crimes, there are still countless others which it hides from view.<sup>56</sup> On another note, Collin once more proves exceptional given that in addition to this concealment of his aims (which provides him protection from the kind of manipulation which he himself practices) as well as their initial establishment and the unification of his will in relation to them (which allows him to actively rather than passively pursue his goals and to avoid much of the blindness associated with desire), Collin always has a backup plan. For one thing, he always maintains his authority in the underworld, therefore ensuring that simple arrest cannot definitively end his quest for completeness. We see two other proofs of his preparation for the worst in *Le Père Goriot*: firstly, he drugs Rastignac and Goriot the night before he plans to have Victorine's brother killed in a duel in order to prevent them from trying to stop it from happening (which, given Rastignac's determination to do precisely that, seems to have been a wise choice); secondly, we see another proof during the scene of his arrest. As Bibi-Lupin explained to Michonneau, the police hoped that by seizing Collin unexpectedly they would be able to confiscate the underworld's coffers and find proof in the form of a ledger which could bring down his cohorts or allow the authorities to estimate the true value of the underworld. However, they find nothing compromising in his chambers, and Collin mocks the police returning to the common room empty-handed by announcing that he had already relocated the criminals' *caisse* the day before and that he never keeps any written proof of his transactions: "Mes livres de commerce sont là, dit-il en se frappant le front" (PG 269). In *Splendeurs*, he probably would never have emerged from the *Conciergerie* without handcuffs had he not had the foresight not only to stash in an unnamed location the most salacious letters written to Lucien by his three noble lovers (each either the wife or daughter of a prominent figure in the government), but to get them to write them in the first place (as is evident in his command to Lucien to "glisse à Clotilde la lettre incendiaire que tu as écrite ce matin, et rapporte m'en une un peu chaude !" [XI: 114]); this provides him with leverage even after he confesses to being Jacques Collin. The fact that he takes preventative measures to prepare for unforeseen circumstances shows to what extent Collin recognizes the limits to

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<sup>55</sup> I will provide several examples of this in the following section.

<sup>56</sup> For example, we never find out exactly how he earns enough money to set up his household with Raoul the first time, what his occupation was while living in Vauquer's boarding house, how he attains countless forged documents or even official ones, how he managed to escape from prison three out of the four total times he does so—the list goes on. Interestingly, one of the only crimes which we do see him commit—the murder of the spy Contenson by pushing him from a roof in *Splendeurs*—is never brought as a charge against him.

his control; however, just as he hides his motivations, so does he hide these limitations through his constant assertions of his omniscience and omnipotence throughout the text.<sup>57</sup>

Ultimately, the overall impression that Collin's unique knowledge and mysterious maneuverings render him the most exceptional and dominant inhabitant of Balzac's Paris is seemingly validated by the mastermind's final ascent to a position of power through his manipulation of the city's highest authority, the king himself, in the same way that he manipulates so many other characters—by predicting and exploiting the victim's personal interest. Long before his and Lucien's arrest, Collin successfully prepared for the chance of their plot's discovery by anticipating that the king would like to avoid his most trusted officials being publicly defamed. If this and all of the examples discussed above clarifies why so many readers have asserted that Balzac designed Collin as a portrait of super-humanity or Revolt, it does not explain why even those analyses that focus on his failure to successfully complete the protégé plan through Lucien only examine the reasons for this failure in a particular frame. Before moving on, I would therefore like to present my understanding of why readers are so attracted to Collin, as well as how this attraction is relevant to the question of why analyses of the character fail to take his typical subjectivity into account.

### **2.3 Balzac's Employment of Readers' Visceral Attraction to "Vautrin"**

Considering that Collin has remained one of the most commented characters of Balzac's series, the fact that Collin's criminality appealed to popular tastes when these works were first published clearly does not suffice to explain the appeal that he holds for readers. Given that Collin's knowledge and methods allow him to dominate the authorities of the underworld and "honest" society alike, to attract and influence his protégés, to manipulate others and control their perceptions of him, and to avoid many of the pitfalls usually associated with desire and personhood in general, his speeches and machinations cannot but glow bright in readers' minds—whether because his unique worldview and *modus operandi* seem to answer the question of how to pursue one's ambitions successfully, of the connection between the mind's and society's functioning, or of morality in the absence of absolute institutions. For those who read these works when they first appeared, Collin's association with these questions captured their attention on a more directly personal level. On one level, the recentness of the changes initiating modernity (e.g. individualism, the abolishment of absolute institutions, industrialism, and capitalism, which first flourished under Louis-Philippe) meant that individuals at large could still see a connection between this new frame and the problems facing their society and affecting their everyday lives (e.g. the government's instability, the growing disparity between classes, the rise in poverty and crime). If the role played by ideas in inspiring the Revolution had made clear how great an influence the intellectual sphere can bear on society's overall shape, the fact that all established approaches to the mind and society had become associated with the failings of the periods preceding and following 1789

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<sup>57</sup> For example, in *Le Père Goriot* he responds to Vauquer's question, "Bah ! vous êtes donc prophète, monsieur Vautrin ?" by saying, "Je suis tout" (PG 258), and in *Illusion perdues*, when Lucien is surprised that Collin knows Rastignac when he offhandedly mentions that they are passing his family's home, Collin responds, "Je connais tout Paris" (VII: 600).

furthermore meant that unfamiliar theories regarding the process of perception, society's operation, and the validity of certain value systems could potentially engage readers from any origin during this period on the level of personal and altruistic interests.<sup>58</sup> His confidence in his vision is in itself a key element of its attractiveness, as is, strangely enough, his constant declaration of his intention to get vengeance against his hypocritical society—for, in a world where one can choose one's own beliefs, it is sometimes hard to find something to believe in apart from one's conviction that the dominant authority or culture is misinformed, biased, or in any other way dysfunctional, given that it inevitably fails to provide the *complete* satisfaction it promises. Whether due to their disillusionment with standing authorities or their personal ambitions, Balzac's contemporary readers could see value in the rationalizations backing Collin's rejection of the status quo and morality. Removed only a few decades from 1789, they certainly may have admired Collin for his ability to rise above what by this time appeared to be just petty, pointless politics, above morality emptied of meaning through the destabilization of the institutions that had established and enforced it, even above the reason that many of the *philosophes* had suggested as the new basis of morality (given that he says that all human action is informed by selfishness and that he lives only for *sentiment*). Perhaps one of the greatest factors contributing to the weight of Collin's argument is that in spite of his moral nihilism, Collin manages to still experience great joy and purpose (particularly in *Le Père Goriot*, the most-read work in which he appears) in relation to his quest for success and power, exhibiting a vivacity contrasting starkly with the reigning *mal de siècle*. Given that Collin's worldview prevents his marginalization and disillusionment from immobilizing him or motivating him to overturn the reigning order, it confronts readers with the question of whether or not society could use its central tenets to harness personal interests and promote progress and stability at large.

On another level, the July Monarchy was framed by political and economic reforms rendering more plausible the ambitions even of those possessing nothing, meaning that Collin's seduction speeches would have almost invariably engaged readers through their hopes for their own advancement or that of someone close to them.<sup>59</sup> Considering that opportunities for advancement have only increased since these works' composition through the definitive abolishment of monarchy and the broadening application of egalitarianism to include members of groups traditionally marginalized from power (women, racial or religious minorities, homosexuals, etc.), the percentage of readers identifying with Balzac's *parvenus* has grown to encompass practically all of them. For any readers questioning the validity of their inherited morality after encountering proof of society's hypocrisy and the necessity of bending the rules in order to attain success, Collin can appear like a potential source of salvation inasmuch as he not only provides a step-by-step guide of how to survive in a world where nothing is as it seems and corruption is the name of the game, but the means of

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<sup>58</sup> See section 1.2 for a more detailed explanation of the intellectual environment framing Balzac's works.

<sup>59</sup> Given that Louis-Philippe expanded suffrage (though it was still reserved to the wealthy), exhibited a tendency to appoint members of the haute bourgeoisie to high positions in the government, abolished heredity and limitations on the number of members of the Chamber of Peers, ennobled several families, and promoted a laissez-faire economy, the path to power widened under the July Monarchy for anyone capable of accumulating wealth and influence.

justifying such behavior and thereby escaping one's guilt in performing it. Because Collin's worldview highlights morality not as a predicate to examine its terms and thereby attempt to restore it but rather only in order to dismiss it (e.g. using his vision of the Symbolic's flaws not in order to urge individuals to correct this corruption, but rather to assert that it cannot be corrected; employing reason only to deny reason's supremacy by emphasizing that selfishness is unescapable), it highlights the hypocrisy pervading readers' own experience without requiring them to act against it or make any sacrifice. To the contrary, it allows one to justify doing whatever one wants to do and even to feel superior for doing so, promising *completeness* as its benefit. If what Collin says is true, then one can stop looking for meaning and direct all of one's energy to doing whatever one pleases without ever having to feel guilty for the selfishness that becomes apparent when one does so or worrying about the consequences of one's actions—as long as one keeps this mindset and everything that it leads one to do a deeply buried secret.

Nevertheless, if this sheds light on some reasons that readers might seek to uphold the appearance of Collin's transcendent freedom and control and therefore to avoid recognizing proof of Collin's dissatisfaction or fallibility, it does not explain why the failure to account for Collin's subjectivity often marks even those readings of him that actively condemn his worldview and *modus operandi*. We see this for example in the analysis of Collin contained in Hippolyte Castille's 1846 editorial of Balzac's *Comédie humaine* published in *La Semaine*. This article shows that if the frequent silence or brevity regarding Collin's subjectivity is partially an effect of the scarcity of information clearly illuminating it, it nevertheless stems first and foremost from the fact that Collin *primarily* appeals to readers on a level of which they remain unaware, or in any case that I have not seen addressed as such. Castille's editorial of the *Comédie humaine* provides an exemplary illustration of readers' reaction to the character. His critique therein of the series' moral purpose (or rather, its lack thereof) hinges largely on his discussion of a certain group of Balzacian characters, of which he highlights Collin as the archetype. His sizeable profile of the character begins as follows:

Quiconque a lu M. de Balzac, connaît une des plus étranges physionomies de sa vaste comédie : Vautrin. On n'a pas oublié cette figure vigoureuse comme les grandes silhouettes de l'Odyssée, et pourtant toute moderne. Le galérien Trompe-la-Mort vit dans toutes les mémoires. Nul n'a oublié le crâne roux et les épaules de cyclope de cet homme poilu. Les moindres actes de sa vie, plus chargée d'ombre, plus rougie de sang qu'une toile espagnole, ne sont pas sortis de notre souvenir. *On a fini par prendre à ce monstre un intérêt mystérieux qui va croissant de jour en jour.* Les cœurs battent aux moindres péripéties qui mettent en danger la vie de ce Trompe-la-Mort qui renaît sans cesse. On suit avec anxiété la trame de ses crimes révoltants, on s'intéresse à leur perpétration. L'œil s'attache à cet homme qui marche dans la société à travers les lois, les embûches de la police, les trahisons de ses complices, comme un sauvage du nouveau monde parmi les reptiles, les bêtes féroces et les peuplades ennemies. M. de Balzac a jeté sur Vautrin l'intérêt immense que M. Cooper répandit sur Bas-de-Cuir. *Le jour où M. de Balzac laissera succomber son géant du monde civilisé, il aura perdu un de ses plus actifs agents de succès.* Honneur soit donc rendu à l'artiste puissant qui coula ce beau bronze aux reflets rouges et aux muscles tordus ! (qtd. in Lovenjou 364-365, my emphases)

Writing from the first person plural and thus from the position of all readers encountering the character, in the above passage (the first half of his paragraph on Collin), Castille captures readers' visceral, *emotional* response to the character. Their knee-jerk attachment to him evokes the universal aspect of the human mind to which he directly appeals. Without even considering what that aspect could be, we see here that readers' feelings toward Collin are established practically as soon as they encounter him as well as how their attraction affects their judgment of the character. In these sentences, the mere three times Castille mentions Collin's criminality are



always in passing, always juxtaposed with some mention of readers' fascination with the character, showing that Collin inspires in readers an enchantment bordering on idolatry (his smallest acts sticking in our memory, his arousal of our ever-growing interest, the concern we feel when his life is threatened, our attention to his *modus operandi*) that remains unfazed by or even completely detached from the signs of his depravity (the bloody acts of his life, his monstrosity, his revolting crimes). After this elaboration of Collin's mastery and readers' response to it, we find the small portion of the passage dedicated to decrying his monstrosity, which it does only indirectly: "Mais, mon maître, je vous arrête là. Ce bronze, fait pour les dieux et les héros, vous l'avez changé en monstre. Tout plein de votre génie, vous vous êtes attaché à votre œuvre avec d'âpres voluptés. Enivré de votre propre talent, vous vous êtes contemplé vous-même, et, tant était puissante votre création, vous avez oublié l'immonde nature du monstre et l'avez adoré. Enchanteur, vous avez éparpillé sur elle tant d'allèchements, que notre cœur et notre esprit se sont arrêtés, surpris et suspendus" (365). The fact that this critique is presented only after the initial effusion of emotional response suggests to what extent *moral judgment is secondary* to readers' initial reaction to the character. These sentences place full responsibility for the character's malevolent qualities and readers' potentially compromising captivation with him on *the author's own reaction to Collin*. Castille's argument depicts readers as the passive hostages of Balzac's sphinxlike spawn, here painted as the product of illusion or even madness. Directly after the statement attributing readers' reactions to the author's unscrupulous sorcery, Castille seems to extend this theme, thenceforth depicting readers' amenable reactions to the character as the effects of a spell preventing them from seeing any bad in him:

Mais, un beau jour, nous nous sommes aperçus que nous adorions ce brave, cet honnête Vautrin [...] Après avoir fait ainsi connaissant avec cette séduisante canaille, on ferme le livre de M. de Balzac, on se tâte et l'on finit par se dire : « Ma foi, je crois que je tuerai bien le mandarin ! » Ceci mène, en projection perpendiculaire, à une morale très-large, la morale de la force. Toute supériorité devient bonne. Tel est un fripon, mais c'est un homme bien fort! Monsieur triche au jeu, mais il fait si joliment filer la carte ! Ce loup-cervier est un homme sans mœurs, sans probité, sans esprit, mais il sait rouler l'actionnaire dans la perfection ; on peut l'avouer pour ami. Voyez-vous ce gentleman si galamment ganté, il tue un homme avec autant de sang-froid qu'il avale une huître au *Rocher de Cancale*; ôtons-lui notre chapeau! (364-365)<sup>60</sup>

Castille's way of whitewashing Collin's most dangerous attributes by countering them with praises (e.g. he may cheat, but he makes the cards fly so nicely) is meant to demonstrate the destructive way in which Balzac's works can be received. When Castille writes that upon finishing Balzac's book, "on se tâte et l'on finit par se dire : « Ma foi, je crois que je tuerai bien le mandarin ! »" (365), Castille seems to assert that the only message that could stick with readers upon finishing Balzac's books are those advertised by the criminal characters; his use not of the conditional *je tuerais* but of the future *je tuerai* shows to what extent the application of Collin's model is not limited to fiction but is ready for use in the real world. If Castille's denunciation of Balzac's creation seems justified, it serves as impetus for his ensuing critique. His article goes on to attribute Balzac's success to his glorification of such characters, saying that Balzac's work does not fulfill Castille's own "sérieuse opinion sur *l'art*" (366) that "toute œuvre d'art doit [...] tendre vers

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<sup>60</sup> "Killing the mandarin" is a reference to a scene in *Le Père Goriot* in which Rastignac, contemplating Collin's recent offer to kill Victorine's brother, asks Bianchon a hypothetical question which he (mistakenly) says is from Rousseau: "Te souviens-tu de ce passage 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" (197). This image returns to Rastignac when forced to make a difficult decision.

un but : le Beau [...] ainsi que l'entendaient les Grecs, c'est-à-dire le Beau contenant l'âme du Bien. [...] On pourrait victorieusement prouver que, dans toute œuvre parfaite, le beau, le sens moral et la logique sont toujours d'accord avec les règles de l'art, et concourent à sa perfection" (366). Castille furthermore argues that if Balzac's realism aims "sinon vers le Beau, du moins vers le Vrai" (367) (the latter of which he describes by writing, "La Vérité est une comme le Beau est un ; cependant le plus grand nombre des réalistes se font une vérité à eux" [367]), Balzac's pursuit of this aim is nevertheless also flawed due to the contradiction between the fact that the author bases his characters on *exceptional* or even *fantastic* models rather than *typical* ones as well as the fact that the author frequently attempts to represent reality by compiling infinite, minute details, creating the effect of "une recherche excessive de la réalité sans cesse démentie par le démon de la fantaisie" (368).

If the point here is that upon encountering Collin, readers react to him primarily on a purely emotional level, Castille's statement that *On a fini par prendre à ce monstre un intérêt mystérieux qui va croissant de jour en jour* evokes this by stressing the *mysterious* quality of readers' ever-growing interest in Collin, showing that readers experience this attraction without understanding why. However, Castille's statement that *Le jour où M. de Balzac laissera succomber son géant du monde civilisé, il aura perdu un de ses plus actifs agents de succès* shows not only to what extent Collin's allure was a key factor in *Le Père Goriot*'s success, but more importantly Castille's failure to recognize in his own words both the cause of his own attraction to the character and its effect on his interpretation. By saying that fewer people would follow the story if Balzac let Collin be conquered by civilization, he shows that it is Collin's *transcendence*—that is, his freedom of movement and participation in society without obeying its rules or bearing the consequences of breaking them—that attracts readers. Castille unwittingly shows that Collin's universal appeal stems from the fact that the human condition unavoidably requires submission to authority as the price of social membership, meaning that all members of the species share the desire to find a way to get the latter while avoiding the sacrifice entailed in the former (i.e. a desire to obtain the means of possessing completeness). Castille never explicitly acknowledges that readers' overwhelming fascination with Collin stems directly from the fact that the character not only appears to have the means of achieving an existence of complete freedom and control, but seems to offer it to readers themselves.<sup>61</sup> Why would readers, among whom Castille included himself, be so interested in the details of Collin's modus operandi unless, on some level, they hoped to imitate it, to profit from it? The desire to not sacrifice and to assert one's individual existence and control is just one manifestation of human beings' desire to disprove the universality of negative absolutes; we also see it through Castille's fascination with the unknown (to which Collin presumably constitutes a portal), his taste for "complementary" pairs (e.g. modernity and antiquity, god/hero and monster, a *morale de force* and a *morale de Beau*), the

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<sup>61</sup> The novels note Collin's point of view and modus operandi as potentially empowering for *parvenus*, for example through Raoul's successful reincorporation into his aristocratic family and marriage to his noble and rich beloved, through Rastignac's employment of them and consequently rapid rise to Paris' peak (even becoming a member of the Chamber of Peers), and through Lucien's coming oh-so-close to achieving his aims of purchasing the lands of his ancestors, marrying a rich and titled heiress, and thenceforth making his ascent into the realms of nobility and power, failing only at the last moment—after he directly disobeys Collin's advice (specifically, to not be ever publicly seen with Esther).

contradiction between his extreme criticism and extreme praise of the author (suggesting that he enjoys this character in spite of himself), the absence of Castille's consideration of Collin's subjectivity or responsibility or of readers' responsibility for their attraction to him, and the absence of Castille's recognition of Balzac's moral purpose. Regarding these last two, Castille's analysis is interesting because it shows how his worldview blinds him to how his perception is skewed by primary processes. The analysis shows that even after having recognized the character's potential for corrupting readers, Castille continued reading the works because he felt confident in his worldview's capacity to withstand that corruption and felt justified in doing so because he would be able to respond to the text with a moral critique. The fact that Castille remains unaware of the primacy of his unconscious desire for completeness is suggested by his failure to consider that his motivation to continue reading about Collin may have been more complex than his conscious desire to compose a critique supporting his value system; however, it becomes definitively clear through his failure to recognize the connection between readers' impulsive attraction to the character and his own attraction to a value system asserting that "perfect" works of art exist in relation to inherited ideals of completeness—ideals whose objective establishment and universal application to certain works of art has never been accomplished. By placing all blame for the character's enchantment of readers with the author, Castille avoids ever directly critiquing or even evaluating the character himself (which may have shed light on how the texts undermine Collin's façade of completeness with subtle proof of his subjectivity) or considering the role of the readers' own desire in their attraction to Collin (and thus their responsibility for its effects). This explains why he ultimately fails to recognize his having been inspired to write about morality in relation to this character as evidence of the character's way of serving Balzac's moral purpose; instead of seeing Collin's corruption and capacity to corrupt as an effect of his environment's failure to account for the negative absolutes universally framing the human condition, Castille deems Collin's attraction to be the product of Balzac's having endowed the character with superhuman qualities, thereby avoiding an encounter with proof of the dysfunction wrought by framing human existence with assertions of totality's possibility. His approach to Collin and to Balzac's project as a whole allows him to support the validity of his inherited *ideals of completeness* in relation to which he shaped his reality (ideals of perfection, wholeness, and unity whose realization is impossible due to negative absolutes), to provide a valid excuse to continue reading the works in which Collin appears (and thereby continue vicariously enjoying the character's unfamiliar depravity or apparently complete control without feeling guilty, given that he externalized the blame for any pleasure that he feels), and to find narcissistic pleasure by asserting his vision of himself as a good person (if not of his moral superiority to one of the greatest artistic visionaries of his time).

I have highlighted these elements of Castille's approach to suggest that readers' tendency to avoid considering the proofs of Collin's subjectivity in a universal frame indicates their insufficient awareness of their subjection to and desires to resolve negative absolutes. If we ultimately find that Balzac and Lacan critique society for promoting beliefs in and expectations of completeness, the reason they do so is evidenced here. In order to believe that *totality* is possible, one must ignore or deny any evidence of permanently uncontrollable and insatiable desire or of language's limitations in producing meaning; however, the result of this blindness is that

when one encounters a signifier whose attainment is apparently capable of providing completeness, one's inability to challenge this appearance in relation to one's recognition of negative absolutes leaves one vulnerable to the impulse to engage in the seemingly justifiable and yet undeniably compulsive and likely self-destructive pursuit of this signifier, whose attainment will in any case prove disappointing. As we will see, Collin successfully leads each of his protégés to question if not to abandon their existing value systems by using the sort of black-and-white rationalizations on which they are founded to undermine their validity. By the same token, Collin serves Castille's critique so well because the scholar takes him as a manifestation of *complete* Evil, allowing him to outline his vision of complete Good in opposition to Collin. This exposes the side effect of the idealization and expectation of completeness: the categorical condemnation of anything that one deems to stand in opposition to those ideals—that is, anything that one's education or one's interest of the moment motivates one to disparage as the bearer of some particular quality identified as the cause of the disparity between one's ideals and the actual state of one's life or the world at large. Interestingly, Balzac's response to Castille's critique of his work both addresses Castille's mentality of totality and delineates several aspects of the strategy of presenting Collin that I outlined in the introduction. For one thing, Balzac shows to what extent Castille's critique is an effect of his failure to understand how the mind constructs reality: “Dans votre article, vous me reprochez, en deux colonnes jumelles, ici de prendre des exceptions pour composer mes caractères, et là de les faire gigantesques en accumulant des riens. Cette contradiction renferme un tel éloge, que j'aime mieux vous croire inconséquent. Mais, monsieur, qu'est-ce que la vie? un amas de petites circonstances, et les plus grandes passions en sont les humbles sujettes. Tout est petit et mesquin dans le réel, tout s'agrandit dans les hautes sphères de l'idéal” (364). Like his quote foretelling the Thing, this quote shows his awareness of how one's reality centers on *an ideal* (the signifier functioning as master signifier) which comes to order one's approach to everything else. If it is thus only in relation to one's *ideals* and supporting value system that any one signifier appears more or less important, valuable, good, etc. than another, the consistent trend of readers interpreting Collin as supremely significant and/or exceptional shows to what extent his *appearance of mastery* asserts itself in relation to a basic opposition common to all humanity—not of good and evil, but of *obedience* and *transgression*, two poles which both play a role in one's attraction to a signifier in the place of the Thing. The part of Balzac's response to Castille defending his inclusion of evil in his works and revealing their moral purpose shows that he anticipated readers attraction to Collin (to be attracted to a transgressive, seemingly transcendent character; to focus primarily on his mastery and exceptionality; to believe to understand him in relation to his *particular* qualities) and created the character as such in anticipation of them. After first asking how an author can promote society's morality with overtly moral works given that immoral people do not read them, he then writes, “Je pense que l'écrivain, quand il peut avoir l'oreille du public, produit un grand bien en faisant réfléchir son lecteur ; mais il faut conserver le droit de lui parler et de s'en faire écouter ; on ne le garde, ce droit, que de la manière dont on l'a conquis, en amusant” (*Oeuvres diverses* 366, my emphasis). Balzac thus establishes the goal of his works as making the reader reflect (whether in the sense of reconsidering something s/he believes to have already understood or literally of producing an observable and thus analyzable representation of him

or herself), showing that he presents Collin in a way that firstly and continuously amuses, meaning that the instructive aspects of the character are dominated by that priority. He stresses to what extent his works are filled with both obedient and antisocial characters, saying, as he also does in the *Avant-propos*, that the *Comédie humaine* rewards the former almost exclusively: “Vous verrez peu de gens, ayant perdu le sentiment de l'honneur, bien finir dans LA COMÉDIE HUMAINE; mais, comme la Providence se permet, dans notre société, cette affreuse plaisanterie assez souvent, ce fait y sera représenté” (366). Balzac goes on to respond to Castille’s attribution of Collin’s enthralling magnetism to the author’s egotism by highlighting the universal pull of that which is prohibited: “Vous dites : « Mais les gens vicieux de LA COMÉDIE HUMAINE s’amusent beaucoup, nous amusent, et l’on s’intéresse trop à eux. » Monsieur, si le vice n’offrait pas d’immenses séductions ; si, comme dit la Bible, Satan n’était pas le plus beau des anges, qui donc se laisserait dévorer sa fortune par une courtisane, sa santé par l’amour, sa vie par la débauche, son talent par la paresse?” (367). Highlighting the universal allure of the prohibited whose role in interpreting Collin Castille had ignored (like the fact that his own moral discussion centered on the character) and the exceptionality which necessarily characterizes individuals like Collin (i.e. their appearance of escaping the rules which allows them to convincingly promise that rebelling can provide one with a life unmarked by the sacrifice required by authority—that is, in which one experiences a state of completeness), the first quote ends by giving examples of how capitulating to temptation can quickly lead to the annihilation of one’s future potential almost without one’s realizing it by depicting people *letting themselves* lose everything and thus evoking the passivity often associated with addiction, passionate love, criminality, etc. Balzac thus shows how in the absence of some way of recognizing and making peace with negative absolutes, if people lose faith in the ability of the Symbolic order to realize their long-term goals, they lose motivation to resist (i.e. the ability to feel pleasure in resisting) pursuing short-term, antisocial pleasures, whose prohibition (at least in excess) for the sake of longevity never stopped them (or anyone) from unconsciously wanting to fling themselves headfirst into Bacchus’ arms. Overall, Balzac shows that his attention to Collin and characters like him is closely tied to his moral purpose:

Moraliser son époque est le but que tout écrivain doit se proposer, sous peine de n’être qu’un *amuseur de gens*; mais la critique a-t-elle des procédés nouveaux à indiquer aux écrivains qu’elle accuse d’immoralité ? Or, le procédé ancien a toujours consisté à montrer la plaie. [...] Voyez Dante! *le Paradis* est, comme poésie, comme art, comme suavité, comme exécution, bien supérieur à *l’Enfer*. *Le Paradis* ne se lit guère, c’est *l’Enfer* qui a saisi les imaginations à toutes les époques. Quelle leçon ! [...] Les grandes œuvres, monsieur, subsistent par leurs côtés passionnés. Or, la passion, c’est l’excès, c’est le mal. L’écrivain a noblement rempli sa tâche, lorsqu’en prenant cet élément essentiel à toute œuvre littéraire, il l’accompagne d’une grande leçon. A mon sens, une œuvre profondément immorale est celle où l’on attaquerait les bases de la société par parti pris, où l’on justifierait le mal, où l’on saperait la propriété, la religion, la justice. [...] Si je vous montre un avoué fripon, je vous l’accompagne d’un honorable avoué. [...] C’est l’improbabilité, la probité, juxtaposées comme dans le monde. [...] Cette opposition salutaire du bien et du mal est mon incessant labeur dans LA COMÉDIE HUMAINE. (366-368)

By saying that humanity’s most moral works have always consisted of *showing the wound*, he uses the exact same imagery as Lacan when he describes the Real as the wound opened by the cut of subjection to the Symbolic. He emphasizes that contrast is the key way in which writers have traditionally been able to bring attention to their society’s problems as manifestations of their inadequate approach to negative absolutes—a task that will always be necessary given that no Symbolic frame could ever exist without being

disrupted by the Real, explaining why he stresses that addressing these disruptions where they appear is more productive than revolting against a Symbolic frame at the first indication of its incapacity to satisfy everyone. However, his way of using this strategy of contrast is more complex than simply juxtaposing “good” and “evil” as absolute categories. For one thing, these contrasts appear not in the comparison of two groups of people, but in his seemingly contradictory way of describing one group. We see this for example in Balzac’s statements about Collin and his criminal posse in his 1847 preface to *Splendeurs*:

Vautrin est à lui seul toute la corruption et toute la criminalité [...] Bien des gens ont eu la velléité de reprocher à l’auteur la figure de Vautrin. Ce n’est cependant pas trop d’un homme du bagne dans une œuvre qui a la prétention de daguerréotyper une société où il y en a cinquante mille [...], dont les existences incessamment menaçantes attireront tôt ou tard l’attention du législateur. Quelques plumes animées d’une fausse philanthropie font, depuis une dizaine d’années, du forçat, un être intéressant, excusable, une victime de la société ; mais, selon nous, ces peintures sont dangereuses et anti-politiques. Il faut présenter ces êtres-là ce qu’ils sont, des êtres mis à toujours *hors la loi*. Tel était le sens infiniment peu compris de la pièce intitulée *Vautrin*, où le personnage concluait à son impossibilité sociale en offrant le combat dramatique de la police et d’un voleur incessamment aux prises.

Peut-être rendra-t-on plus tard justice à l’auteur en voyant avec quels soins il a mis en scène ces figures, si curieuses, de la courtisane, du criminel et de leurs entourages, avec quelle patience il est allé chercher le comique, avec quel amour du vrai il a trouvé les côtés beaux de ces caractères, par quels liens il les a rattachés à l’étude générale du cœur humain. [...] À moins de ne pas se rendre compte du but et des moyens de l’auteur, qui, en définitive, a entrepris l’analyse et la critique de la société dans toutes ses parties, aucun lecteur ne peut lui refuser le courage d’aller au fond des questions, et de les examiner sous tous leurs aspects. (584-585)

If Balzac here emphasizes the contrast posed by criminals to the rest of society in order to assert his own difference from authors exempting lawbreakers from responsibility for their actions, certain contradictions appearing in this passage also shows how the exploration of less obvious contrasts can create the opportunity of recognizing parallels or constants where one least expects to find them. We can first of all note that Balzac’s criticism of those depicting criminals as interesting or as excusable victims of society contrasts with the fact that his texts apparently do just this when describing Collin (e.g. when the character’s submission to his arrest for the sake of Raoul’s future seemingly associates his actions with noble self-sacrifice at the end of *Vautrin*, when *Splendeurs*’ final installment explores society’s treatment of criminals). This condemnation of victimizing criminals furthermore contrasts with Balzac’s phrasing when he says that criminals are beings *put* forever outside of the law, implying that it is an external force rather than their own defiance of authority or disregard for their membership in “honest” society that leads to criminals’ occupation of a marginal space in which society’s laws do not apply. In addition, there is a contrast between Balzac’s placement of criminals within society (by saying they are a part of that which he must record) and *hors la loi* inasmuch as the former asserts criminals’ inclusion in his presentation of the typical manifestations of human life in the particular frame of early nineteenth-century French society whereas the latter asserts that the laws forming the basis of this particular frame affect a group of people to which these individuals do not belong. We find another contrast between Balzac’s approach to Collin when he states that “Vautrin” is *all* criminality and *all* corruption and Balzac’s evocation of the character’s subjectivity at the end of the passage. If the former approach seemingly reduces the character to a representation of the criminal type (i.e. of the period’s vision of criminals as inherently base creatures with attributes and capacities fundamentally differing from those never convicted of a crime) or of the impulse to Revolt itself rather than an individual subjected to

this impulse, we find that in spite of the fact that the latter approach refers to Collin as a type by speaking “du criminel” (which certainly refers to Collin given that this criminal is described as the center of an entourage), it nevertheless accompanies this association of Collin with a particular label with the association of Collin to the rest of humanity through *the ties by which Balzac carefully attached him to his general study of the human heart*. The key to understanding these contrasts arrives with the statement that Collin *decides* on his social impossibility. By distinguishing between the act by which criminals are *put forever* outside of the law and Collin’s decision to accept this placement, Balzac on the one hand stresses that though criminals are not victims, as their behavior led to their marginalization, they should be allowed to reenter society as long as their hope that they could still contribute to society survives, as this hope could potentially motivate them to assimilate to society. On the other hand, he condemns Collin for his decision to cease trying to regain his social membership, as his continued efforts to do so could have led him to contribute to the general welfare in some way; as this thesis will argue, Collin’s story at large emphasizes that this perseverance’s outcomes would have ultimately better served both society and Collin himself than the criminal’s abandonment of his principles—a choice that removed all limits to his selfishness and therefore increased his determination to accomplish his aims at any cost (leading him to increase the suffering of those around him) while blinding him to these aims’ incapacity to fulfill him and to the limitations that their single-minded pursuit placed on his vision and control (leading to his own suffering). The contrast drawn between criminals’ simultaneous positioning as part of society and as outside of the law allows Balzac to stress that becoming an outlaw does not remove one from the Symbolic’s influence, but simply revokes one’s social membership as the Symbolic’s claim to contain one’s singular identity as an individual—something that it is incapable of doing anyway—and prevents one from enjoying the benefits of obeying laws and performing traditional virtue (e.g. one’s ability to invoke applications of the law that act in one’s favor, one’s freedom to enter social spheres and to form connections with others without constantly concealing one’s identity). By emphasizing how those on the margins have a particularly good view from which to perceive the problems facing society, Balzac echoes a statement appearing earlier in this preface: “On ne peut guère pénétrer dans le corps social dogmatiquement, [...] il faut bien aller dans les prisons et dans les profondeurs de la justice, mené par un criminel” (584). By refusing to employ his unique view of society’s problems in order to promote change and instead embracing his social impossibility in order to pursue power and wealth, Collin displays his continued subjection to the Symbolic through his continued idealization of the same signifiers whose association with completeness serves a fundamental role in the status quo’s perpetuation. The following chapters will consider how his story shows that becoming an outlaw just means ordering one’s life in relation to a different set of rules, meaning that no accumulation of knowledge, talent, skill, or control can definitively satisfy one’s desire by resolving one’s subjection to negative absolutes.

We also quite often find that Balzac poses contrasts in order to bring attention to an unexpected similarity between the two supposedly mutually exclusive or opposing alternatives, only to then bring readers’ attention to a more complex difference between them that does not depend on a reductionist assertion of two terms complementarity. We see this for example in relation to his

response to Castille's reading of Collin. In response to Castille's accusation that Balzac invoked the fantastic in creating Collin, Balzac emphasizes that the estimation of the criminal as anything but a real person is unfounded:

Venons à Vautrin. Encore quelques mois, et je publierai la dernière partie de *Splendeurs et Misères des Courtisanes*, où ce personnage s'abîme. Vous me permettrez de garder le secret sur ce dénouement. Ce personnage, qui représente la corruption, le bague, le mal social dans toute son horreur, n'a rien de gigantesque. Je puis vous assurer que le modèle existe, qu'il est d'une épouvantable grandeur et qu'il a trouvé sa place dans le monde de notre temps. Cet homme était tout ce qu'est Vautrin, moins la passion que je lui ai prêtée. Il était le génie du mal, utilisé d'ailleurs. (*Œuvres diverses* 364-365)

First of all, by saying that Collin will deteriorate (or collapse into himself, be *voided of content*, which we will see is a fitting description) in the last part of *Splendeurs* calls to our attention that the character's ascension to a position of authority is not the sign of his domination which it first appears. By then stating that there is nothing larger-than-life about Collin, Balzac implies that if readers interpret him as such, this is purely an effect of their primary processes, showing how presenting Collin as a figure of mastery granted Balzac the opportunity to bring readers' attention to the role of their own underlying desire in their perception of Collin (and therefore to their subjection to negative absolutes). The contrast comes into play when he continues by asserting that Collin is modeled off of a real person (presumably Vidocq, as the last sentence suggests). Beyond emphasizing that the character's proportions, though exceptional, are nevertheless those of the material world, Balzac brings our attention to Collin's *passion* as the sole factor differentiating him from another person—specifically, one who resembles him in every other way. Though it is clear that with “passion,” Balzac is referring to Collin's homosexuality, we could take this to mean that Collin is defined by his sexual orientation. However, he also equates “Vautrin” with *un homme* and thus shows to what extent he distinguishes neither criminals nor homosexuals from other humans, an aspect of the author that Lucey comments on: “Sexuality, for Balzac, is not in any primary way a place of selfhood or identity, rather it is more an impression that no individual could master or even successfully read. Indeed, *the interests being enacted by that impression often seem, subjectively speaking, nearly illegible*. Yet it seems to me that it is in his effort to objectify those forms so that they and the interests they carry achieve some legibility that Balzac has so much to offer, both as a historian and as a sociologist of sexual forms” (Lucey 223, my emphasis). Joining this impossibility of fixed identity with a reference to the ambiguity of a subjectivity which is in itself ambiguous (as it is unclear whether Lucey speaks of his own subjectivity or that of Collin), he then turns to focus on the text's reflections on a particular type of people at a certain moment in history. In other words, he shows Balzac's willingness to take individuals as such, only to then focus on the group Collin belongs to, just as Fanger performs in the following sentence: “His homosexuality does not obviously affect his actions; it serves to complete his outlawry—since all the other criminals in Balzac have more socially acceptable sexual ties—rather than to define it” (52). If Fanger shows that in addition to highlighting desire as that which makes one an individual (as shown by Lucey), Balzac also highlights it as that which makes one the same as everyone else, Fanger does not go on to explore this universality. Instead, his comment stresses that this desire makes Collin the same as just a certain group, which in these works is defined by a pure difference from the rest of humanity obscuring the



sameness of all human beings. I am not saying it is not worthwhile to study nineteenth-century outlawry or collective queer interests; I am simply highlighting a trend in treatment of this character: by allowing some *particular* quality to inhabit the space of the universal and the singular (which is the space of *the unconscious*, the wellspring of subjectivity) which Balzac painstakingly preserves in this character, this obscures readers' chance to see Balzac's reflection on the universal aspects of human life. If Balzac's statement above highlights Collin's difference from Vidocq (his passion) in a way that does not efface the similarity between Collin and Vidocq (as men), he then goes on to pose the more important significance between the two figures—the way in which they employ their genius. This brings me to the contrast at hand: that between the two sides of Collin's story. Collin's appearance of mastery initially serves to oppose him to the other characters through the exceptional *modus operandi* garnered through his worldview. This difference is effaced through the "moral uniformity" (Prendergast 156) exposed in *Splendeurs* as characterizing all classes. However, upon seeing him linked to other selfish characters, we find that the consistency with which he embraces this worldview sets him apart from them once again (as Section 3.3.1 shows in detail). Nevertheless, this difference is once again effaced by his similar failure to achieve his aims. Upon recognizing this evidence of his subjectivity, this prepares two final contrasts—that which his compulsive selfishness poses for example to Bianchon, who achieves Success while remaining honest, and that posed between his employment of his knowledge of the mind solely in the pursuit of selfish aims and Balzac's employment of this same knowledge in designing his works' moral purpose. Considering this, we see how initially engaging contrasts on a particular level can lead to a reflection of similarity and contrasts on a universal level, which then allows for reflection on the particular in a new way. Given that I will present just such a reflection in the conclusion, my exploration of the contrast between the two sides of Collin's story stands as proof that Balzac's strategy for engaging readers' desires and then confronting them with complex contrasts serves well to bring attention to negative absolutes' universality as well as the way that these manifest in the particular frame of modernity.

By exploring the dimensions of his extraordinary protean abilities, his wealth of knowledge acquired from sources ranging from his high-quality education to his time spent in the underworld, his adaptable rhetorical skills, and his profound awareness of the mind's functioning, the version of Collin's story presented above has seemingly already managed to explain his possession of these exceptional qualities through his understanding of the mind; to present the key observations about the character on which the diverse and in some cases even contradictory interpretations of Collin listed in the introduction are founded; and to conjure the forcefully promoted, intensely alluring impression of his affiliation with completeness. Considering at the close of the "official" side of his story the substantial range and profundity of approaches to Collin already available solely in relation to the information presented above, it is understandable why few have ventured any further than this point in search of Collin's significance. Though not particularly threatening, this *resistance* to challenging Collin's appearance of mastery in order to observe his subjectivity proves to be invested with surprising strength—a force stemming less from an attachment to the "official" as such than from the fear that the Real lurks beyond this point. By no coincidence, it is this same fear of encountering proof of negative absolutes' universality that so strongly

motivates readers to preserve Collin's appearance of mastery; as long as one can find a way to continue seeing his story as an assertion of transcendence's possibility, one can avoid acknowledging the impossibility of escaping one's own disappointing subjectivity. Nevertheless, we saw in the introduction that opting to repress and veil rather than recognize and accept proofs of negative absolutes' universality prevents one from becoming self-aware, renders one increasingly susceptible to involuntary symptoms as repression becomes necessary more often, and precludes one's finding any enjoyment beyond that attainable through the Symbolic order. This illuminates the two positions that one can occupy in relation to negative absolutes' universality, the first of which corresponds to the way of responding to trauma first performed at the moment of the prohibition complex's resolution, and the second of which becomes possible only after one's experience of several traumas and/or one's acquirement of a new frame of reference allows one to recognize and accept the universality of negative absolutes and one's subjection to them.

### CHAPTER 3. *L'HISTOIRE SECRÈTE*: HOW BALZAC ASSERTS COLLIN'S TYPICAL SUBJECTIVITY

The previous chapter presented the texts' frequent description of Collin in epic terms, the potency of Collin's seduction speeches, and the remarkable understanding of the mind evident in Collin's critique of society and *modus operandi* in order to explore how reading Collin in a frame asserting completeness' possibility exclusively involves the exploration of apparent proofs of his exceptionality and dominance while denying, downplaying, or just failing to consider proofs of his subjectivity. If such readings have disseminated a version of Collin's story that celebrates his most remarkable qualities and in which his victories over representatives of authority serve as the most notable milestones, this contrasts sharply with the version of his story exposed by this chapter, which reveals everything necessarily left out by readings upholding the illusion of Collin's omnipotence and omniscience. Taking all of the works in which Collin appears into consideration and reconsidering the reading of Collin presented in the previous chapter within a frame asserting negative absolutes' universality, this chapter will show that though the texts do accentuate the powerful impression that Collin makes on those around him, they also systematically refute the assumptions on which readers' conviction of Collin's mastery are founded (e.g. assumptions that the narration's statements about the character are equivalent to the author's vision of him, that Collin's worldview is informed by sound logic, that Collin's *modus operandi* could aid readers themselves in more effectively pursuing completeness) by presenting subtle proofs of Collin's subjection to the Symbolic order, the primary processes informing his perception and worldview, and the pattern of self-destructive behavior uniting his appearances in the novels and the play—that is to say, proof of Collin's typical subjectivity.

When unveiling History's two sides for Lucien, after presenting "l'Histoire officielle" as a deceptive representation of events drafted with the aim of protecting those in power and edifying citizens rather than the preservation of fact, Collin then alludes to "l'Histoire secrète, où sont les véritables causes des événements, une histoire honteuse" (VIII: 600). By showing how the secret version remains unknown to the public because it challenges the official version with proof of the duplicity and ruthlessness of society's greats, Collin seeks to support his contention that humans' selfish motivations are inevitably the true causes of events, that ruthlessness has always been the most effective means of attaining success, that authority has always striven to conceal proof of these shameful facts in order to maintain the people's beliefs in noble virtues' centrality to Success and thereby pacify them, and that superiority of vision and control marks those who reject these illusions in favor of moral relativism. However, this line of reasoning is corrupted by the fact that it is not the product of clandestine knowledge, but rather of the mindset embraced by society at large, meaning that what he describes as rebelling against corrupt society is in fact an urge to assimilate to its hypocritical status quo. Though the worldview that Collin presents as the product of his exclusively possessing knowledge about Paris' unwritten rules appears quite compelling when readers first encounter it, it is ultimately an elaborate representation of Paris' dominant mindset and

therefore aligned with History's official side, whereas the elements of Collin's story highlighting Balzac's awareness of negative absolutes' universality as well as social responsibility's dependence on recognizing them has remained almost entirely unmentioned and is therefore aligned with History's secret side. Collin is far from the only character to note and to conform to the corruption dominating society; in *Le Père Goriot*, he is not even the first character to explain its rules. Several scenes before Collin outlines Paris' unwritten rules for his potential protégé, Rastignac's cousin, Madame de Beauséant, had already articulated them in her advice to the young man just after having been betrayed and humiliated by her long-time lover:

Le monde est infâme et méchant [...] Plus froidement vous calculerez, plus avant vous irez. Frappez sans pitié, vous serez craint. N'acceptez les hommes et les femmes que comme les chevaux de poste que vous laisserez crever à chaque relais, vous arriverez ainsi au faite de vos désirs. Voyez-vous, vous ne serez rien ici si vous n'avez pas une femme qui s'intéresse à vous. Il vous la faut jeune, riche, élégante. 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. Pour préserver par avance cet amour qui n'existe pas encore, apprenez à vous méfier de ce monde-ci. [...] A Paris, le succès est tout, c'est la clef du pouvoir. Si les femmes vous trouvent de l'esprit, du talent, les hommes le croiront, si vous ne les détrompez pas. Vous pourrez alors tout vouloir, vous aurez le pied partout. Vous saurez alors ce qu'est le monde, une réunion de dupes et de fripons. Ne soyez ni parmi les uns ni parmi les autres. Je vous donne mon nom comme un fil d'Ariane pour entrer dans ce labyrinthe. Ne le compromettez pas, [...] rendez-le-moi blanc. (134-136)

Issued as they are from the peak of high society, Beauséant's words as well as readers' knowledge of the experience and authority backing them establish a precedent for Collin's more in depth expose of this explanation of Paris's unspoken protocols, allowing the criminal mastermind's speech to ring all the more true. However, the texts present substantial evidence of other characters' operation in accordance with Collin's worldview, suggesting Collin's exaggeration of this mindset's exceptionality and thus of the power that it offered those possessing it, given that any person disillusioned in Paris could perceive his basic arguments as such even in the absence of outside guidance. In *Splendeurs*, the narration itself establishes Success as the value replacing religion and stresses that its pursuit has come to dominate all aims: "La Charte a proclamé le règne de l'argent, le succès devient alors la raison suprême d'une époque athée. Aussi la corruption des sphères élevées, malgré des résultats éblouissants d'or et leurs raisons spécieuses, est-elle infiniment plus hideuse que les corruptions ignobles et quasi personnelles des sphères inférieures" (203). At least in the works here concerned, consistently moral characters are much rarer than their ambitious or disillusioned counterparts, leading critics to describe Balzac's Paris as "as pitiless a world as Darwin was ever to imagine" (Berman 11), "a world of double-dealing and masks beneath masks" (Fanger 26), a place where "[a]mbition, the psychological spur to mobility, undermines traditions, splits the family unit and leaves *parvenus* to run rampant" (Clark 148). As Prendergast shows when he argues that "[d]espite all the rhetoric of revolt that accompanies the presentation of Vautrin, [...] he is in fact the quintessential expression of the dominant characteristics of the new society, an extension to the extreme point of its ruthless, anarchic individualism" (161), Collin represents not the exception, but the rule. Prendergast furthermore emphasizes this when he writes in relation to Collin's conversion, "The opposition between society and outlaw, order and anarchy dissolves into a conflict of morally indistinguishable forces, in which the roles of criminal and policeman are, in moral terms, wholly reversible" (162), evoking how what Collin presents as history's inverse has in our time become its

standard evaluation. If all of this shows that in this locus of power, pleasure, and concentrated personal interest that the individual with the fewest moral qualms and with the best ability to conceal his or her illicit actions under a public reputation of honesty apparently reigns supreme, morality's consequential marginality is driven home when we consider that Collin's evocation of the two sides of History echoes the title of another of Balzac's works, *L'Envers de l'histoire contemporaine* (1843-1848), a novel in which Balzac tells the story of how the members of an *underground charity* aided others while concealing their identities, which it seems they do less out of a sense of humility than out of concern for the consequences of openly performing altruism.

If readings of Collin frequently remark that his exemplary selfishness and unwavering determination to achieve his aims at any cost establish him as the symbol of ubiquitous moral relativism in the particular context of modernity while remaining relatively mute on how the manifestations of his subjectivity allow Balzac to frame this widespread corruption with his observations of the human condition's universal elements, the previous chapter's observation that Collin informs his protégés of Paris' unwritten rules while remaining pointedly mute regarding the understanding of the mind informing his *modus operandi* once again shows that the dominance of ideas asserting completeness' possibility leads to the active or passive concealment of knowledge asserting the universality of negative absolutes. Collin is obviously set apart less by his worldview than by his singular understanding of the mind—an understanding enabling him to control other characters as long as their beliefs in completeness (e.g. in their own objectivity, in language's adequacy in mediating reality, in the Symbolic's capacity to fulfill their expectations of completeness) block them from recognizing the primary processes preceding consciousness. Nevertheless, when we consider how the misrecognition wrought by Collin's own unconscious desire often surfaces in those same moments that his understanding of the mind becomes most evident, it becomes clear that Collin's continued belief in completeness' possibility ultimately prevents him from recognizing his disparate observations' shared origin in negative absolutes. On the one hand, he asserts that all human action is driven by selfishness, shows through his *modus operandi* that he understands how to exploit such vices in order to manipulate others' perception, and acknowledges that even he is subject to a vice for devoting himself to others (for example when he says to Lucien, "J'aime à me dévouer, j'ai ce vice-là" [VIII: 612], showing that he sees it as a passion, a vice, and thus something which he *must* compulsively pursue because one cannot change one's desire), ultimately profiting from these observations by learning the importance of defending himself by concealing his desires and of preparing for the chance that they blind him. On the other hand, the fact that Collin employs his awareness of primary processes in order to pursue an ideal of completeness glorified by the Symbolic order explains why he never recognizes his observations' common origin in negative absolutes, as we see for example in *Illusions* when he mocks moralists' "futile" attempts to combat the strength of vice (here presented in the position of unconscious desire) while admitting that he himself does not understand its origins (and thus the possibility of tempering it through self-awareness) when he asks, "D'où vient cette puissance du vice ? est-ce une force qui lui soit propre, ou vient-elle de la faiblesse humaine ?" (599). Collin's failure to consider the possibility of obtaining even partial control over one's desires reflects his interest in asserting selfishness' invariable determination of

human behavior in order to free himself from guilt and to gain his protégés' complicity by validating his worldview in this way. Furthermore, Collin's belief in having united his will to a single aim—that is, the Success idealized by society at large as holding the key to attaining completeness—belies the limitations of his conscious understanding of his motivations and ultimately prevents him from recognizing or resisting in any measure the unconscious desire underlying his repetition of the protégé plan in spite of its invariable culmination in failure. If in *Le Père Goriot* he describes repetition automatism quite lucidly in his fountain allegory, this same passage contains one of the few proofs of his blindness appearing in that novel. Though his judgment of Goriot's passion for his daughters as compulsively all-consuming seems apt, he wrongly interprets this paternal devotion as that of a lover, ironically declaring, "Il n'est pas difficile de deviner ce secret-là" (100) and then proclaiming once more, "Il ne faut pas coudre deux idées pour voir clair là-dedans" (100). It does not even occur to him, the master mind-reader, that there could be a similarity in the manifestations of *romantic passion and parental devotion*; however, just as Goriot ruins himself for his daughters, Collin sacrifices everything for Lucien in *Splendeurs*; he spends all of the money entrusted to him by his criminal cohorts on this young man whom he ultimately claims as his illegitimate son when interviewed by Camusot. This blind spot, which surfaces in his very first speech about Paris, alerts readers to the superficiality of Collin's understanding of the mind. His denial of the complexity of his own motivations through his insistence that exploiting a protégé is the only means available to him of accessing Success allows him to indulge his "vice" of devoting himself without realizing that he is blatantly transgressing Paris' unwritten prohibition of selflessness (and therefore setting himself up for trauma). Overall, the fact that Collin's level of self-awareness never progresses, but rather diminishes by the end of his story is reflected in the fact that even though his *modus operandi* suggests that he is aware of the roles played by unconscious desire, narcissism, and social education in the process of perception, there is notably no evidence of his recognition of one final primary process—the return of the repressed, the one process that makes possible one's attainment of a higher level of self-awareness and one's capacity to resist one's compulsive pursuit of *completeness* in some measure.

This chapter will demonstrate how Collin's story can be read not only as an intricate exposition of Balzac's observation of the mind's functioning and the basic elements of the human condition, but as the author's observation of the inevitable futility of pursuing ideals of completeness. It will begin by showing how Balzac's understanding of the mind becomes apparent through his strategy of bringing readers' attention to Collin's subjectivity, firstly by lightly guiding the readers to challenge their initial impression of the character through the presence of textual ambiguity and empty spaces preventing their believing to have definitively understood Collin, and secondly through his soliloquy, which provides evidence of the limitations of Collin's conscious understanding of his motivations and allows us to interpret Lacan's graph of the structures of sexuation as well as his four discourses in a way that demonstrates how one's division and primary processes become apparent in speech. It will then examine how the circumstances of Collin's arrest and the formation of his worldview show how this version of his story flows from an initial traumatic clash with the Symbolic order whose echo in his ensuing behavior allows us to better understand how primary trauma and the resolution of the

prohibition complex set a precedent for one's reactions to trauma and lead to repetition automatism. Finally, it will explore how certain patterns characterizing his story overall show the functioning of repetition as well as how Balzac demonstrates through Collin that no measure of mastery can neutralize one's subjection to negative absolutes.

### **3.1 How Balzac Leads Readers to Challenge Collin's Façade of Mastery**

As I stated in the introduction, I was only able to see the connection between Collin's apparent mastery, Balzac and Lacan's similar observations on the modern morality crisis, and Balzac and Lacan's similar styles after having recognized Collin's unquestionable subjection to negative absolutes, which led to my epiphany that Balzac only ever seeks to initiate readers' fascination with the character as a means of bringing our attention not to the character's inherent or accomplished exceptionality and significance, but rather to *our all-consuming belief in it*. Clearly, the empty space preserved by Collin's masks and the narration's unusual silence regarding the overwhelming majority of his past and interiority plays a key role in sustaining the character's tantalizing mystery and heightening readers' beliefs in the character's exceptionality and significance, the tension wrought by their anticipation of understanding him, and their attention to his manifestations in the text. However, by maintaining readers' convictions of not yet fully understanding the character, that same empty space sustains the possibility that readers will question their initial impression of him; ambiguity stretches out from the lack of information on his origins, motivations, and purpose in Balzac's text; extends to encompass many contradictions in the narration's treatment of him; and ultimately allows readers to suspect that his endless sequence of adopted personae covers nothing more than an ordinary, vulnerable, divided subject. In this way, the novels prepare readers for encountering Collin's soliloquy in *Vautrin*, which provides a window into his otherwise opaque consciousness. Focusing on the scene of Collin's arrest in *Le Père Goriot* and the plantation plan that Collin voices both to Rastignac and to Granville as an explanation of his motivations, the first part of this section will present my reading of the statements that Collin makes about himself and the way that the narration describes him in these parts of the novels in order to show that challenging their sincerity proves much more productive than taking them at face value. The second section will then present my reading of Collin's soliloquy in *Vautrin*, showing how the primary processes observable therein provide a guideline for deciphering their role in Collin's perception and behavior throughout the texts at large.

#### **3.1.1 Ambiguity and Empty Space as Constructive Obstacles to Understanding Collin**

Given that so much attention is paid to the self-control that Collin exhibits for example when disguising himself, manipulating others, and coldly carrying out his schemes, it seems strange that critics so often accept the sincerity of Collin's descriptions of his own motivations. If we saw in the previous chapter that apart from the core principles of his worldview (which he only exposes to his protégés), Collin's opinions shift to suit his environmental, mask of the moment, and interests, this chapter will show that those interests—and his concealment of them, both from others and himself—are surprisingly consistent. Though my analyses of the scene of Collin's arrest in *Le Père Goriot* and of his articulation of his plantation plan represent my retroactive exploration of them after

having read *Vautrin*, even when I first read each of these, I sensed that their underlying significance escaped me in a way that was relevant to my aim.

It was while reading Collin's final scene in *Le Père Goriot*—that of his arrest, the moment where he seemingly most embodies the ultimate criminal mastermind—that I first recognized the presence of an ambiguity which ultimately caused me to question not only the sincerity (and the validity of my initial interpretation) of all of Collin's own words as well as the descriptions of him up to that point, but my initial impressions from that point forward while reading Collin's words, any details revealed concerning Collin, and the text as a whole. The observably questionable nature of the only details available in *Le Père Goriot* through which readers could attach meaning to Collin—details which critics almost invariably take at face value in spite of the fact that the only information on Collin's past is presented either by the character himself in his conversations with Rastignac (in which his interest in corrupting the young man takes precedence over his honesty) or through the detective Bibi-Lupin (whose personal enmity with Collin and interest in convincing his fellow boarders to betray him bring this information into doubt)—climaxes in this final scene. It simultaneously affirms and undermines readers' suspicions about Collin's true identity, character, and motivations implanted over the course of the novel via the text's continuous hinting at them as such through oblique suggestion, Bibi-Lupin's unverified allegations, Collin's shadowy meetings with Rastignac, etc. On the one hand, once his true identity is revealed and the officers storm the boarding house at the beginning of the scene, when Collin realizes that he cannot escape, he proceeds to give a grandiose speech to the onlooking boarders and officers, declaring therein his loyalty to the underworld, his discipleship of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, his state of constant revolt against the corrupt social order, the power of the fraternal brotherhood backing him, the hypocrisy of those who think themselves better or different than criminals, etc. However, if readers thus here seem to finally receive substantial information about Collin's motivations and symbolic significance, several aspects of the scene led me to question not only Collin's sincerity in his speech, but that of the narration itself in describing him. For one thing, it is characterized by an extremely heightened theatricality at odds with the rest of the novel, and the narration repetitively describes Collin's actions and words therein as a performance (even exclaiming, "Horrible et majestueux spectacle ! sa physionomie présenta un phénomène qui ne peut être comparé qu'à celui de la chaudière pleine de cette vapeur fumeuse qui soulèverait des montagnes, et que dissout en un clin d'œil une goutte d'eau froide" [PG 266]) and paints the assembled boarders as an audience by limiting their participation in the scene to that of passive onlookers and by communally describing their gazes, gasps, silence, cries, etc. in reaction to Collin's actions and words. However, what initially led me to reexamine the scene was not the theatrical nature of Collin's profession of loyalties (whose superficiality becomes quite clear in *Splendeurs*), but the uneasiness which I felt in relation to the narration's reduction of the character to his criminality and heavy-handed, somewhat flamboyant way of stripping him of his humanity—an injustice at odds with my impression of Balzac to that point. The narration informs us that upon discovering his betrayal, "la figure *du forçat* devint féroce en déposant le masque bénin sous lequel se cachait *sa vraie nature*" (265, my emphases). The narration here calls Collin not by his name, but simply by his



(a) social status, foreshadowing how the rest of the scene will repeatedly foreclose his humanity by continuously incorporating tropes often applied to criminals in the period's popular (i.e. picturesque, romantic, sensationalist) literature. Once the police enter, Bibi-Lupin violently smacks Collin's wig off of his head, and the *horreur* of the head exposed beneath prompts an even more dramatic evocation of his wickedness via his appearance: "Accompagnées de cheveux rouge brique et courts qui leur donnaient un épouvantable caractère de force mêlée de ruse, cette tête et cette face, en harmonie avec le buste, furent intelligemment illuminées comme si les feux de l'enfer les eussent éclairées" (266). This appearance alone suffices to convince the boarders to reinterpret everything they know about this man in relation to a standard label: "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" (266). Collin's ensuing lapse into rage seems to confirm this judgment; however, upon noticing the officers drawing their weapons (indicating their readiness to act on any sign of his resistance as an excuse to kill him—a readiness which Bibi-Lupin explicitly expressed to Michonneau and Poiret), he immediately reins in his explosive reaction, smiles, and begins addressing the onlookers, taking on a typically criminal persona in the ensuing monologue which the boarders had not yet seen him adopt as such, and which leads the narration to echo their judgment of him in relation to common prejudices about criminals: "Le bague avec ses moeurs et son langage, avec ses brusques transitions du plaisant à l'horrible, son épouvantable grandeur, sa familiarité, sa bassesse, fut tout à coup représenté [...] par cet homme, qui ne fut plus un homme, mais le type de toute une nation dégénérée, d'un peuple sauvage et logique, brutal et souple. En un moment Collin devint un poème infernal où se peignirent tous les sentiments humains, moins un seul, celui du repentir. Son regard était celui de l'archange déchu qui veut toujours la guerre" (268). Mirroring the boarders' reduction of Collin to his criminality, the narration abandons its usually practical, measured tone to eschew Collin's humanity with memorable (and often-quoted) flair.

This parallel between the boarders' and the narration's elision of Collin's subjectivity led me to observe two other parallels in this scene that demonstrate the inadequacy of any interpretation assuming the sincerity of Collin's words or even the narration's description of him here or elsewhere. Firstly, the scene provides proof of both Collin's and the narration's disingenuousness, leading us to consider how they each benefit from it. If the theatrics here surrounding Collin's actions and speech do not definitively prove his insincerity while addressing the boarders, the fact that Collin here profits from playing the role of a typical criminal supports my suspicion of his duplicity by providing a motive for it. His abrupt change in his behavior upon realizing that he cannot escape demonstrates his incredible ability to quickly recognize how to bend any situation to his advantage, which in this case required his portraying the version of the criminal which the onlookers expect to see.<sup>62</sup> Firstly, by providing his audience with a performance

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<sup>62</sup> Collin profits from the boarders' presence in several other ways than those which I present. Engaging the onlookers while limiting their agency to that of an audience observing at a distance, he uses their presence as an opportunity to prevent the police's mistreatment of him (thwarting Bibi-Lupin's hope to kill him on the spot), to avoid undressing (giving him time to dispose of any

which indirectly flatters them and thus brings them pleasure by asserting the accuracy of their preexisting prejudices about criminals and allowing them to feel superior to this ingrate, Collin so effectively manages to distract them and/or to void their interpretations of his words of content (by ensuring that they will only hear their own prejudices within them) that he is able to *speaking a message* to Rastignac while they watch without their even noticing. Furthermore, by playing his role, he leads the other boarders and police alike to *believe to have understood* his deepest motivations, thus preventing the development of any lingering curiosity about him which might have led them to dig deeper into his affairs. Given that Collin frequently manipulates people through their desires, it makes sense that in order to protect himself from others' employment of similar ruses he not only conceals his desires and motivations, but provides false ones where they should be. Inversely, on the level of the narration, we find clear contradictions to the statements declaring Collin's inhumanity. If the narration's symbolic description of Collin—his physical appearance painting him as “a walking bundle of proverbial symptoms, the red hair as indicative of passion as the Galenic choleric humor, the blazing eye as hypnotic as that of the ancient Mariner” (Berman 7); the hellfire in his eyes and infernal tone of his words as a demonic, fallen archangel (a reference to Milton's Satan); his lapse into *argot*, crude jokes, passionate declarations, and vague threats as a typical representative of the degenerate race of base, unrepentant savages populating the “underworld,” Paris' second society, where talents only serve to make a person more dangerous—apparently denies his personhood, this is contradicted within the same scene by less obvious but nonetheless clear references to his humanity. When Collin reins in his reaction to Bibi-Lupin's blow just before he begins addressing the crowd, the narration describes him as follows: “Collin comprit son danger en voyant briller le chien de chaque arme, et donna tout à coup la preuve de *la plus haute puissance humaine*. [...] La goutte d'eau qui froïdit sa rage fut une réflexion rapide comme un éclair. Il se mit à sourire et regarda sa perruque” (266-267, my emphasis). As opposed to the surrounding text, the narration here asserts the complexity of the person referred to by the name “Collin” through the contrast posed by his impulsive reaction and the performance following his moment of reflection, which shows both the presence of primary processes and his ability—though limited and secondary—to restrain himself made possible through *language* (i.e. his knowledge and thought), the universal frame of *human* experience and the basis of all *civilization*. It seems that the narration applies the label of inhumanity not to “Collin” as a whole, but to the role which he begins playing after that smile. If Collin puts on his performance as a distraction from his coded message to Rastignac and his still-concealed motivations, the narration's purpose is here overtly connecting Collin's criminality to his apparent inhumanity—potentially distracting certain readers (through the narration's description of Collin's inhumanity in accord with social convention, through its general theatricality, through their excitement to learn about Collin) from a coded message addressed to informed readers (e.g. that the label of criminality fails to fully represent Collin or explain his actions, that Balzac's works carry a

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incriminating evidence on his person), to discourage the boarders from intervening in his affairs (or even those of the underworld at large) in the present or at any point in the future with an intimidating display of “brutality,” and to protect his reputation in the underworld in the case that the details of his arrest reach criminal ears by pronouncing his devotion to his criminal brothers and their cause, decrying society's hypocrisy, and audaciously mocking the authorities.

message subverting popular opinion as well as the authorities which it supported as such)—was not immediately clear to me. It thus shocked me when I first realized that in this scene which I had for so long viewed as supporting his self-control, I had never noticed the presence of his desire in his message to Rastignac itself and had never considered that *that* might be the author's covert message: the presence of Collin's *typical* subjectivity. The narration twice contrasts the grandiose stature projected by the criminal while playing his role to the tone and expression he takes when addressing himself to Rastignac—first explaining, “Ses yeux s’arrêtèrent sur Rastignac, auquel il adressa un sourire gracieux qui contrastait singulièrement avec la rude expression de sa figure” (268), and later describing his final words to the young man: “Il fit quelques pas, et se retourna pour regarder Rastignac. Adieu, Eugène, dit-il d’une voix douce et triste qui contrastait singulièrement avec le ton brusque de ses discours. Si tu étais gêné, je t’ai laissé un ami dévoué. Malgré ses menottes, il put se mettre en garde, fit un appel de maître d’armes, cria : Une, deux ! et se fendit. En cas de malheur, adresse-toi là. Homme et argent, tu peux disposer de tout” (270-271). Isolated in this way, his emotion seems obvious; however, caught up in the vigor of the scene, I just read them as his dramatic, “*Adieu!*” It is hard to slow down to hear the words which he speaks in this soft, sad tone—the only genuine ones we see here—and it is certainly strange to think of Collin as *quietly* sad. The asides he directs solely to Rastignac are like gazes or messages drifting to a fellow actor concealed at the side of the stage; they allow us to glimpse Collin's craving for a connection to another person in the midst of a scene where his playing a role leads to his distancing from the other boarders and the police. His use of the word *ami*, a common code word used to describe a homosexual lover during this period (as verified by Lucey's discussion of this equivocal vocabulary), and his pledge that Rastignac could use his money *and his person* completely both show the presence of something else in this scene which even his possession of the highest possible human power cannot allow him to completely repress: the request to recognize him as more than just the criminal as which society has labeled him, to see in him someone deserving to have his selfless love returned, to identify in him the signs of the superiority which he so often proclaims, to look at him with even a little desire. Luckily, no one observes the contrast in his scene of arrest; however, as we will see, this is far from the only way that Collin endangers himself in order to maintain his connection to a beautiful young man.

This is just one manifestation of Collin's desire to escape the constant isolation which he must maintain in order to effectively control others through his appearance—an appearance which he nevertheless maintains while expressing that desire. Interestingly, we find another such manifestation through two other false statements of intentions made by Collin in order to conceal his true ones—statements which critics also often latch on to while presenting the character's motivations. He first expresses these false intentions during his seduction speech to Rastignac:

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. Je veux m'y faire planteur, avoir des esclaves, gagner quelques bons petits millions à vendre mes bœufs, mon tabac, mes bois, en vivant comme un souverain, en faisant mes volontés, en menant une vie qu'on ne conçoit pas ici, où l'on se tapit dans un terrier de plâtre. Je suis un grand poète. Mes poésies, je ne les écris pas : elles consistent en actions et en sentiments. Je possède en ce moment cinquante mille francs qui me donnerait à peine quarante nègres. 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, sans qu'un curieux de procureur du roi arrive vous en demander compte. Avec ce capital noir, en dix ans j'aurai trois ou quatre millions. Si je réussis, personne ne me demandera: Qui es-tu? Je serai monsieur Quatre-Millions, citoyen des États-Unis. J'aurai cinquante ans, je ne serai pas encore pourri, je m'amuserai à ma façon. (PG 168-169)

He expresses this vision once more in *Splendeurs* to Granville as an alternative to his replacing Bibi-Lupin, though in a different form: “Si vous n’obtempérez pas à ma demande, j’ai plus de courage, j’ai plus de dégoût de la vie qu’il n’en faut pour me brûler la cervelle moi-même et vous débarrasser de moi... Je puis, avec un passeport, aller en Amérique et vivre dans la solitude ; j’ai toutes les conditions qui font le sauvage... Telles sont les pensées dans lesquelles j’étais cette nuit. [...] Vous me voyez entre trois chemins : le suicide, l’Amérique et la rue de Jérusalem” (522-523). Besides the evident contrast between these visions (the former assuring Rastignac that the young man will not have to worry about Collin’s continued parental affection after the accomplishment of their plot by displacing it elsewhere and the latter confronting Granville, who does not want Collin to kill himself, with the potential tediousness of getting this man a passport as well as the convict’s potential elusiveness or even return to his position in the underworld once granted this freedom as unpleasant alternatives to simply obtaining his pardon), which in itself leads us to doubt that he proposes them as anything but a distraction, readers are also led to see Collin’s disingenuousness in proposing this plan upon reading *Vautrin*, whose final scene definitively undermines its sincerity. Having just revealed to the assembled characters that Raoul is the Montsorels’ lost son and explaining to them all he has done for the young man, the rest of the characters’ appreciation for his devotion to Raoul (in spite of his scheming) leads them to ask about his plans for the future:

LE DUC. Mais quels sont donc les malheurs qui vous ont plongé dans l’abîme ?

VAUTRIN. Est-ce qu’on explique le malheur ?

LA DUCHESSE DE MONTMOREL. Mon ami, n’est-il pas en votre pouvoir d’obtenir sa grâce ?

LE DUC. Des arrêts comme ceux qui l’ont frappé sont irrévocables.

VAUTRIN. Ce mot me raccommode avec vous, il est d’un homme d’État. Eh ! monsieur le duc, tachez donc de faire comprendre que la déportation est votre dernière ressource contre nous.

RAOUL. Monsieur...

VAUTRIN. Vous vous trompez, je ne suis pas même monsieur.

INÈS. Je crois comprendre que vous êtes un banni, que mon ami vous doit beaucoup et ne peut s’acquitter. Au delà des mers, j’ai de grands biens, qui, pour être régis, veulent un homme plein d’énergie : allez-y exercer vos talents, et devenez...

VAUTRIN. Riche, sous un nom nouveau ? Enfant, ne venez-vous donc pas d’apprendre qu’il est en ce monde des choses impitoyables. Oui, je puis acquérir une fortune, mais qui me donnera le pouvoir ?... (*Au duc de Montsorel.*) Le roi, monsieur le duc, peut me faire grâce ; mais qui me serrera la main ?

RAOUL. Moi !

VAUTRIN. Ah ! voilà ce que j’attendais pour partir. Vous avez une mère, adieu ! (XXIII: 124-125)

At this moment the police, alerted by Joseph, rush in to arrest him. The characters lunge to place themselves between him and the officers and the duke starts to tell them that he will protect him, but Collin tells the duke, “Chez vous, monsieur le duc, laissez passer la justice du roi” (126); tells Raoul, “Tu te maries bientôt. Dans dix mois, le jour du baptême, à la porte de l’église, regarde bien parmi les pauvres, il y aura quelqu’un qui veut être certain de ton bonheur. Adieu” (126); and leaves with the officers.

The link between these three scenes alerts us to several empty spaces which induce readers’ questioning of Collin’s motivations. What were the initial circumstances of his crime, which he here refuses to repeat beyond calling them *malheur*? Why is his kind of

arrest irrevocable?<sup>63</sup> To whom is he referring when he says to Raoul, “You have a mother”? The fact that he refuses Inès’ offer on the grounds that getting money will not change his reputation shows that money—his claimed motivation when engaging Rastignac—actually holds little appeal for him. Furthermore, if we will see that in his soliloquy, he paints his motivations in engaging a protégé as his goal of using that young man as a tool through which he can dominate society and enjoy Success vicariously, this is undermined by the fact that he here leaves without attempting to blackmail Raoul or his family (whose dirty secrets he has in droves) in order to attain the power which he desires (as he would do to any other character) or even to stay nearby in order to still have a connection with Raoul, but instead allows the young man to get married and embrace his family without having to worry about the consequences of his long-term ties to an escaped criminal. If Collin’s words to Inès show his desire for recognition as an individual beyond the label of criminal (or otherwise), his response to Raoul’s assertion that he would shake Collin’s hand (by saying that this is what he was waiting for to depart) as well as the fact that his relationship with Raoul sets a precedent for his repetitive relationships with his protégés suggests that what he wants is not recognition in general, but recognition from a beautiful, aristocratic, ambitious, virtuous young man. When this scene is recalled through the plantation story in the two others, it appears to readers as his tell—an indication not only that he is lying, but why he is lying; he still wants what he wanted in this scene, and the plantation dream is still not the way that he wants to get it.

Even if adding Collin’s relationship with Raoul in the play to those which he shares in the novels with Rastignac and Lucien establishes a clear pattern suggesting the consistency of his desire, we nevertheless find that whatever it *is* that Collin pursues in *Vautrin* by engaging with Raoul and with his later protégés, Collin’s approach to his protégé plan clearly changes in the novels. If the young men each bear a continued belief in noble illusions when they first meet Collin, Collin’s approach to his protégés’ values changes after *Vautrin*. When Raoul, wanting to know his mentor’s plans, confronts Collin passionately, asking him, “Tu m’instruis sans déflorer les nobles instincts que je sens en moi ; tu m’éclaires sans m’éblouir ; tu me donnes l’expérience des vieillards, et tu ne m’ôtes aucune des grâces de la jeunesse ; mais tu n’as pas impunément aiguisé mon esprit, étendu ma vue, éveillé ma perspicacité ?” (XXIII: 79), and Vautrin cries out in a response that is probably frustrating for Raoul, “Eh ! qui restera froid devant la générosité de cette belle jeunesse ? Comme son courage s’allume ! Allez, tous les sentiments, au grand galop ! Oh ! tu es l’enfant d’une noble race. Eh ! bien, Raoul, voilà ce que j’appelle des raisons. [...] Tu me demandes des comptes de tutelle ? les voici” (79). It seems strange that Collin would have made such an effort to preserve Raoul’s purity if he was just making him into a tool. In any case, he does not seek to do this again after Raoul; as the last chapter showed, he purposefully disillusioned Rastignac and Lucien. Perhaps this explains why Balzac wrote that Collin *decided* on his outlawry in *Vautrin* in his 1847 preface to *Splendeurs*, which stresses his opinion that criminals’ circumstances cannot excuse their crimes: “Il faut présenter ces êtres-là ce qu’ils sont, des êtres mis à toujours *hors la loi*.

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<sup>63</sup> His becoming chief of police at the end of *Splendeurs* seems to disprove this, until our last chronological glimpse of him in *La Cousine Bette* shows that he has readopted the name “Vautrin” while playing this role.

Tel était le sens infiniment peu compris de la pièce intitulée *Vautrin*, où le personnage concluait à son impossibilité sociale en offrant le combat dramatique de la police et d'un voleur incessamment aux prises" (XI: 584). Earlier in this same preface, Balzac emphasizes that those on the margins have a clear view of corruption: "On ne peut guère pénétrer dans le corps social dogmatiquement, [...] il faut bien aller dans les prisons et dans les profondeurs de la justice, mené par un criminel" (584). By refusing to put his view to good use and actively deciding to embrace his social impossibility, Collin manages only to display his *social impotence*—that is, his continued subjection to negative absolutes. If we see this through the fact of his continued dissatisfaction evoked by the scenes above, this chapter will consider how his story shows that becoming an outlaw just means ordering one's life in relation to a different set of rules, and that that which one idealizes in relation to them is just as incapable of providing completeness as that which one left behind. We thus can here begin to see the purpose served both by the two sides of Collin's story, by the paradoxes with which the character is surrounded, and by the parallels drawn between Balzac and Collin; by challenging them, readers gain the opportunity to see the approach to empty space (i.e. to desire, to negative absolutes, to language's beyond) around which Balzac's works are structured and which they aim at bringing to light.

### **3.1.2 Collin's Soliloquy in *Vautrin* as the Link Uniting Readers' Glimpses of his Humanity**

Presenting readers with an unparalleled view of the character's interiority, Collin's soliloquy in *Vautrin* provides what the novels do not: a sound and sufficient structure for the consideration of Collin's subjectivity. His statements about himself are compromised by their contextual placement in situations where he is interested in making a certain impression on his interlocutor; the texts' descriptions of him cannot be trusted as readers cannot always determine if the narration seeks to represent the circumstances as they appear to those experiencing them, as the author believes the reader will perceive them, or as the author himself understands them; and the few relatively trustworthy snippets presenting Collin's consciousness in the novels—for example his statements to those whom he trusts or whom he has no reason to manipulate (of which his aunt is probably the only example, whether or not she is his aunt) and his thoughts—in any case appear very rarely and shed little light on the primary processes informing his consciousness. Contrarily, Collin's monologue, in which he expresses emotions which he usually conceals and thus allows us to see his past and his behavior in general in a new light, succinctly articulates his conscious vision of society and his place within it, his motivations for his relationship with Raoul (and thus to some extent for those with Rastignac and Lucien), and his overall goals for life. It furthermore provides evidence of Collin's blindness to several key contradictions and fallacies whose characterization of his consciousness throughout all of the works we can retroactively recognize. It is thus invaluable to this study because it escapes the ambiguity produced when he addresses someone else or when the narration describes him. Moreover, its contents present a means of reexamining the validity or relevance of information presented in the novels. This scene thus evokes the psychoanalytic experience, with Collin in the position of the patient caught up in the vocalization of his thoughts and the audience in the position of the analyst observing the unconscious

meaning surfacing therein. However, because we cannot speak back to him and bring the evidence of primary processes in his *speech* to his attention, he never becomes more aware of these manifestations of his subjectivity.

The scene at hand immediately follows one in which Collin authoritatively dispels the concerns of his criminal minions (about his apparent obsession with Raoul and consequential lack of concern for fulfilling his promises to them over the past six months) and sends them off on various tasks, and it precedes the presentation of any interaction between him and his protégé. Given this positioning just after a scene depicting his dominance and before any depiction of Raoul's frustration with his adopted parent, the audience is still open to the mastermind's assertions of his dominance when, alone on the stage, he ponders the dilemma characterizing his life in this moment and in general. He begins by smugly commenting on his effective manipulation of the other criminals:

Il suffit, pour les mener, de leur faire croire qu'ils ont de l'honneur et un avenir. Ils n'ont pas d'avenir ! que deviendront-ils ? Bah ! si les généraux prenaient leurs soldats au sérieux, on ne tirerait pas un coup de canon !

Après douze ans de travaux souterrains, dans quelques jours j'aurai conquis à Raoul une position souveraine : il faudra la lui assurer. Lafouraille et Philosophe me seront nécessaires dans le pays où je vais lui donner une famille. Ah ! cet amour a détruit la vie que je lui arrangeais. Je le voulais glorieux par lui-même, domptant, pour mon compte et par mes conseils, ce monde où il m'est interdit de rentrer. Raoul n'est pas seulement le fils de mon esprit et de mon fiel, il est ma vengeance. Mes drôles ne peuvent pas comprendre ces sentiments ; ils sont heureux ; ils ne sont pas tombés, eux ! ils sont nés de plain-pied avec le crime ; mais moi, j'avais tenté de m'élever, et si l'homme peut se relever aux yeux de Dieu, jamais il ne se relève aux yeux du monde. On nous demande de nous repentir, et l'on nous refuse le pardon. Les hommes ont entre eux l'instinct des bêtes sauvages : une fois blessés, ils ne reviennent plus, et ils ont raison. D'ailleurs, réclamer la protection du monde quand on en a foulé toutes les lois aux pieds, c'est vouloir revenir sous un toit qu'on a ébranlé et qui vous écraserait.

Avais-je assez poli, caressé le magnifique instrument de ma domination ! Raoul était courageux, il se serait fait tuer comme un sot ; il a fallu le rendre froid, positif, lui enlever une à une ses belles illusions et lui passer le suaire de l'expérience ! le rendre défiant et rusé comme...un vieil escompteur, tout en l'empêchant de savoir qui j'étais. Et l'amour brise aujourd'hui cet immense échafaudage. Il devait être grand, il ne sera plus qu'heureux. J'irai donc vivre dans un coin, au soleil de sa prospérité : son bonheur sera mon ouvrage. Voilà deux jours que je me demande s'il ne vaudrait pas mieux que la princesse d'Arjos mourut d'une petite fièvre...cérébrale. C'est inconcevable, tout ce que les femmes détruisent. (XXIII: 67-68)<sup>64</sup>

Though this monologue is unsurprisingly dominated by the frequent assertions of his *control* which we have come to expect of him, the absence of an interlocutor means that Collin is not actively concealing all signs of his subjectivity, allowing us to view what his appearance of mastery conceals—both conscious and unconscious proofs of his subjectivity.

On the conscious level, Collin's subjectivity manifests through his expression of the displeasure which he experiences in relation to certain obstacles to his success of varying permanence as well as his recognition of certain inescapable limits placed on his existence.<sup>65</sup> Overall, he recognizes his subjectivity through his feelings of dissatisfaction, his inability to reverse his social exclusion,

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<sup>64</sup> Presenting the complete soliloquy rather than fragmenting it is important primarily because the latter would reintroduce the very ambiguity whose avoidance is a key reason for our focus on this particular passage. Furthermore, the progression of his thoughts in the passage is in itself significant.

<sup>65</sup> He here expresses his frustration and disappointment that the love shared by Raoul and Inès has begun to threaten his plan for his protégé and a general exasperation with the influence that women bear over other men. The regret which he expresses in relation to his lost potential and his intense desire for revenge against society shows the magnitude of his dissatisfaction and mirrors the strength of

and his lack of complete control over Raoul as proofs that he does not (or rather, does not *yet*) have the means of realizing his ideal self, even vicariously. This allows readers to reconsider their alignment of Collin's mindset and modus operandi with completeness, as his possession of it here clearly does not manage to allow him to transcend negative absolutes.

On the unconscious level, Collin's subjectivity actually manifests much more thickly, both in ways that challenge the assertions of control that he does make and in ways that directly reveal his subjection to the Symbolic order and negative absolutes. Almost all of the above statements are marked by false assumptions or contradictions that Collin does not seem to notice and that therefore represent the effects of primary processes. First of all, by mocking the other criminals for the ease with which he manipulates them through their hopes for the future, Collin highlights that he does not see how his own aims (whose end goals differ from those of the other criminals very little) similarly serve to skew his vision by leading him to pursue completeness and preserve his belief in its possibility at all costs. This blindness is all the more striking considering that the other criminals just confronted him about his obsession with Raoul in the previous scene. In the next paragraph, he says with full confidence that he will have conquered a sovereign position for Raoul in a few days. Though he may recognize that this is an impossible aim (as there is only one sovereign position in the country, i.e. that of the king), he certainly does not see how this word choice reflects his subordination to a compulsive pursuit of *complete* control that only gets stronger as the texts progress and that we will see often leads him to refrain from embracing opportunities which might have brought him a greater measure of happiness than that to be found in domination. This statement and those following it also show his overestimation of the amount of control he has over Raoul (that is to say, the extent to which Raoul values him). He does not recognize that Raoul is not interested in the life he is arranging for him, that Raoul does not want the fake family which Collin is fashioning for him (as he is not satisfied with Collin as his family), and that it is not the love shared by Raoul and Inès that will destroy his plans, but rather the fact that Raoul would have challenged this plan regardless. Collin then fails to see the contradiction in his statement that he wants Raoul to be glorious *on his own* so that Collin can dominate "honest" society through him; Collin wants Raoul to be independent less than he wants the young man to only depend on himself. Just as Collin here fails to realize that his vision of Raoul does not in fact have anything to do with Raoul, this oversight prevents his anticipation of Raoul's initial rebellion against him.<sup>66</sup> If this ultimately leads to the play's resolution in the best possible way for Raoul, there is no space for Collin in this happy

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the will with which he seeks to resolve it. In relation to his acknowledgement of specific ways in which negative absolutes manifest in his life, his uncharacteristically vulnerable or even defeatist tone is completely unlike that which he adopts elsewhere: his lamentation of his irreversible marginalization from society as well as his foreshadowing of the failure of his plans for Raoul and the reason for it (the young man's prioritization of romantic love over his relationship to Collin, his adopted parent) shows that Collin does not himself believe in his possession of omniscience or omnipotence which he elsewhere professes.

<sup>66</sup> This manifests when Raoul ignores Collin's instruction to stay at home and shows up at Inès' house, thereby interrupting Collin's efforts to secure a marriage arrangement between Raoul and Inès by pretending to be a Mexican officer sent by Inès' father to instruct her to marry Raoul, whom he tells Inès and her mother is actually the man vying for the position of Mexican president upon its independence, explaining his need to conceal his identity. Raoul arrives just as Collin has become convinced that his plan will succeed, startling the mastermind, and the young man's emotional reaction nearly ends the escapade right there. Though the play



ending; it fills all of the roles that Collin hoped to occupy in the young man's life (i.e. the roles of provider, confidant, father, mother, brother, and possibly lover), and when Collin offers to leave them to their happiness, Raoul does not beg him to stay. This suggests that Raoul's devotion to Collin had long been the product of necessity paired with a readiness to replace him, showing how greatly Collin overestimated his control of the young man.<sup>67</sup>

Moving forward in our reading of the soliloquy, we see how Collin's vague articulation of his aims allows him to consciously justify whatever he wants to do at a given moment and to define himself as different from and superior to others. Though he says that Raoul is his *vengeance*, we see here what is true in all of the texts: he does not clearly define the target of this vengeance, which means that only he can arbitrarily proclaim whether or not it has been accomplished or how it should be pursued. This allows his conscious justification of his actions to apply to whatever he is doing at any given moment. We see that it is loosely tied to his feeling that society's marginalization of him was unjust when he contrasts his situation to those of the other criminals, who he says cannot understand his feelings as they were born already surrounded by crime. Just as his vision of Raoul as the hollow vessel that he needs him to be leads Collin to see only empty space in place of the young man's individual will, allowing him to preserve his belief that he will be able to advance his quest for completeness through Raoul, his conviction of his own singularity and superiority in comparison to the other criminals similarly veils his similarity to them with the empty space of distance, allowing him to justify his abuse of their trust, to enjoy the affirmation of his fantasy of mastery, and to preserve his belief in the possibility of his attainment of completeness in opposition to these other characters, on whose incapacity to do so he commented in the soliloquy's first paragraph. Clearly, Collin sees his suffering as setting him apart from others, not connecting him to them. In the middle of the second paragraph, we see that Collin fails to recognize how his assumptions about his minions' inherent criminality constitute the blanket application of prejudices which he resents when applied to himself. He also fails to see how his assumption of their happiness—which is disproven by their requests for his fulfillment of his promises—obscures how his refusal to fulfill his promises could bring them suffering (that is, a potential source of guilt).

This leads to a third point: in spite of the clear view that Collin's disillusionment and ruthlessness supposedly provide him, his reasoning often suffers from the same unwitting inconsistencies which he decries in the social order as indications of its hypocrisy.

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ultimately ends with an ideal resolution of the situation through Raoul's reconciliation with his family and engagement to Inès, this probably would not have happened if Raoul's desire to remain honest with his future wife did not ultimately lead Collin to forego his initial plan.

<sup>67</sup> What is more, the fact that Collin ultimately claims responsibility for Raoul's happiness shows his inability to distinguish the agency of his object (i.e. the fact that this ending resulted from Raoul's honesty *in spite of* Collin's tutelage and deceptive intentions) from his own. If on the level of consciousness Collin's idealization of Raoul as a signifier only serves to heighten his valuation of Raoul in order to heighten the narcissistic enjoyment he derives from believing to possess Raoul, this shows how the master signifier not only serves to provide an aim for the subject's desire and thereby stabilize its worldview, but becomes incorporated into the subject's vision of him or herself. This renders more understandable the fact that the master signifier is one of the four elements of the subject's structure.

His blindness to how this prejudice shows the effects of his education through society is echoed in the following sentence, when he shows that he does not recognize to what extent all such prejudices are the effect not just of humans' natural instincts of selfishness, but of assimilation to the Symbolic order. He takes society's hypocritical treatment of criminals as an indication of its citizens' unchangeable, uncivilizable natures without recognizing how his own statement that they *have reason* shows that this duplicity's possibility is the effect of language encountered in society.<sup>68</sup> Collin's overestimation of his power and his underestimation of the extent of society's influence over him are juxtaposed in the final sentence of the second paragraph, which shows that he thinks he has broken all of society's rules to the point that he has metaphorically compromised either its structural integrity (by which he could mean the stability of the social structure or the current governing power, which had only that year been reestablished as the Bourbon monarchy) or the stability of his respect for that structure, which would inevitably collapse if he tried to reenter the social structure and therefore trap him in a position which would crush his spirit. In the former case, he grossly overestimates the level of his influence; even if his escapes and exploits bring attention to authority's limitations, even if he single-handedly organized the underworld and provided it with institutions, even if his life story provides supplements criminals' mythology of Revolt, nothing that Collin does ever serves to definitively interrupt social order. In the latter case, he fails to recognize to what extent the social order is still crushing him for example through his continued desire to succeed therein and his consequential obedience of its unwritten rules, evoking his blindness to his continued subjection to society in spite of his having created a unique position for himself therein.

The final paragraph continues in this vein by showing the different ways in which Collin fails to recognize the total motivations and effects of his idealization of Raoul. He refers to Raoul as the magnificent instrument of his domination; however, more often than not in the play it seems that he is in fact the tool of Raoul's desires—not only because he needs Raoul to remain satisfied in order to ensure his continued complicity, but because he cannot bear to refuse him anything that he wants. He reminds Raoul of this by asking, “*qui veille à tes plaisirs ?*” (XXIII: 81). What is more, though he stresses the importance of disillusioning Raoul without exposing his past, when he first converses with the young man a few scenes later, he not only says that he has always tried to preserve the young man's noble nature, but actually reveals the criminal connections that he has employed in the service of Raoul's future. In the soliloquy, when he goes on to say that love has ruined everything that he has prepared, he refers only to the love between Raoul and Inès, failing to recognize to what extent his own love for the young man has prevented him from disillusioning the young man and gaining control over him as effectively as he might have done using the more ruthless tactics that he employs with other people (manipulation, blackmail, threats of violence, etc.) which make this gentle guidance look extremely tame. The following sentence reinforces this by showing that even though he has dedicated twelve years to his venture with Raoul, he is still willing to back off if

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<sup>68</sup> If “*ils ont raison*” translates literally to “they have reason,” it is also an idiomatic expression that is translated into English as “they are right.” In any case, having the capacity for reason, establishing a social policy toward criminals, and existing within a sphere in which one's decisions can be judged as right or wrong all evoke how language is a predicate of the situation here discussed.

the young man finds happiness in a plot that is not of his design—but, as the final part of the sentence shows, for which he will take full credit.<sup>69</sup> If the next sentence shows that Collin has contemplated killing Inès, which would constitute his prioritization of his own desires over those of Raoul, the play shows that he does not do this. However, his hostility toward Inès does show that what he hopes to achieve through Raoul is more than just the young man's advancement. If all he wanted for Raoul was his ascension, he would be happy that the young man found a way to do so that also allowed him to find love. The final sentence drives home the presence of Collin's unspoken desires. When he says that *everything* that *women* destroy is unbelievable, the plural *women* implies that he has found himself in this situation before, and with the *everything*, he leaves open space for us to suspect that he resents them not only for threatening his binary relationships between himself and protégés, but because they are his rivals in another dimension—the dimension of romance and sexuality.

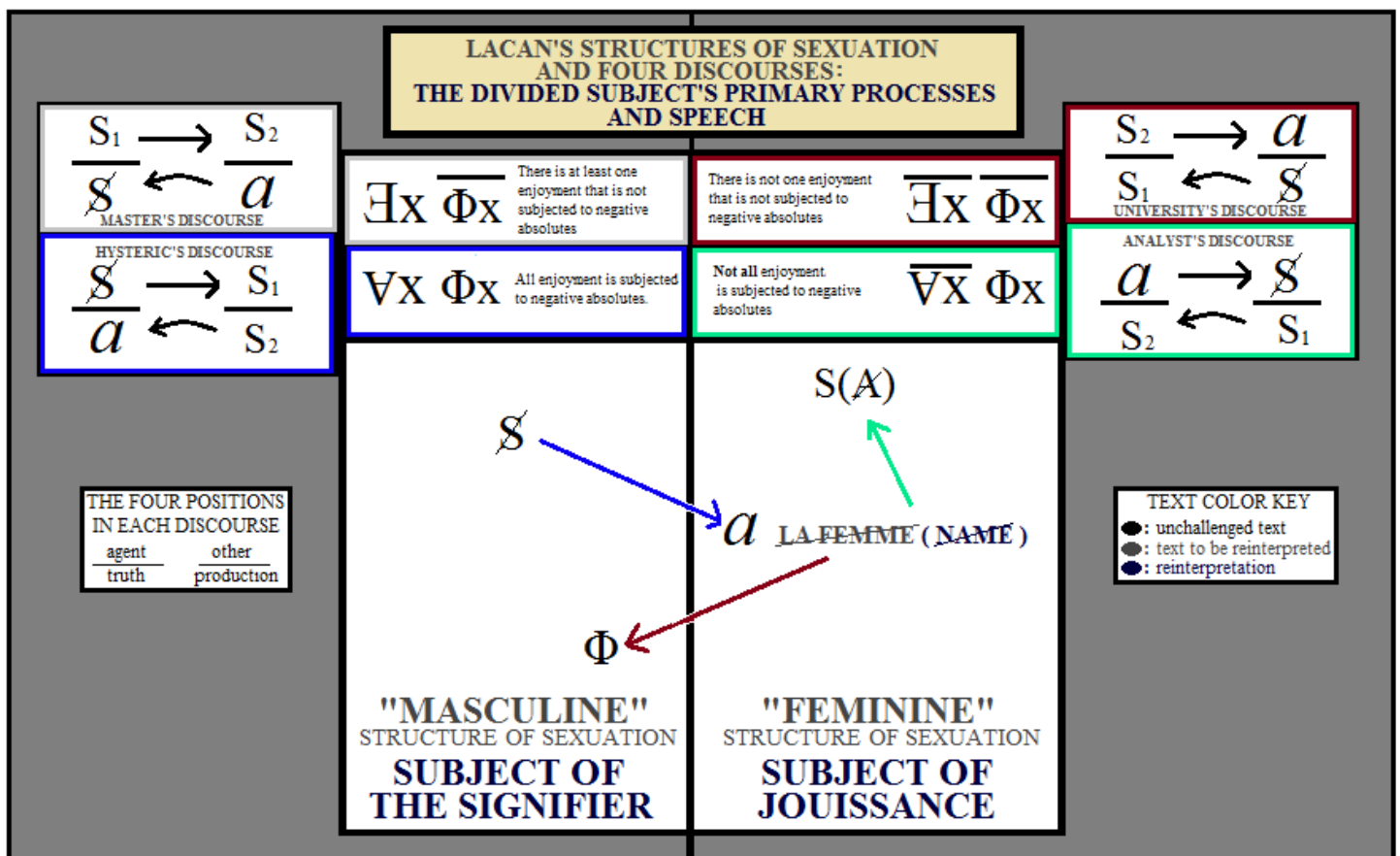


Figure 1: Lacan's Structures of Sexuation and Four Discourses: The Divided Subject's Primary Processes and Speech

Having thus considered this evidence in Collin's soliloquy of the primary processes informing and shaping his consciousness, I will now introduce my reading of Lacan's mathemes representing the structures of sexuation and the four discourses (see Figure 1). Though Lacan presented this graph as a representation of the relationship between masculine and feminine structures of sexuation by

<sup>69</sup> Indeed, even though Raoul ends up changing his station due to his preexisting ties to the nobility by birth, the play ends with Collin romantically declaring all he has done for the young man to the assembled characters.

demonstrating through the asymmetry of the vectors of each structure's desire(s) that a relationship between two individuals representing each structure could not provide completeness, my reading of the graph will show how it represents the relationship between the two sides of the divided subject—the *subject of the signifier* and the *subject of jouissance*—by demonstrating how the disjunction between meaning produced by language and feeling leads the subject to simultaneously value and pursue conflicting objects. My reading of the graph examines how the distinction drawn between the structures of sexuation reflects the subject's divided structure as well as how the elements of this structure interact in the production of consciousness and speech. This reading will allow me to define the three different primary processes made evident in Collin's soliloquy by showing how each process aims at resolving a certain manifestation of empty space. Furthermore, I will explore how the four discourses can be aligned with the "quatre formules propositionnelles" (*Encore* 74) inscribed above the structures of sexuation in order to show how the four forms of speech delineated by Lacan each represent a kind of speech that a divided subject can perceive or speak in relation to its primary processes. Lacan says of the graph representing the two structures of sexuation, "Qui que ce soit *de l'être parlant* s'inscrit d'un côté ou de l'autre" (*Encore* 74, my emphasis). This statement sheds light on why Lacan refers to each individual as a divided "subject." If this term evokes that every individual is subjected to the Symbolic's rules and limitations and therefore to the suffering produced by them, Lacan's use of this term stresses the duality involved when a speaking being is the *subject* (i.e. agent) of any action (e.g. the production of meaning, the performance of a task, speech)—a duality resulting from that action's simultaneous determination by meaning produced in disconnected ways and by processes within and beyond and individual's awareness. His reference to the division not of all beings but of one being suggests first of all how there are different *quis*, agents, who can speak within one individual. I have aligned the four discourses with the four formulas at the top in order to examine how the alignment of Collin's speech with one of these formulas at a certain moment allows us to see which *qui* is actively speaking at that moment. However, before returning to Collin's soliloquy, I would like to explain my reading of Lacan's graph and discourses in greater detail.

First of all, if I highlighted three primary processes through Collin's soliloquy, my reading of Lacan's graph makes clear that these processes are each related to one of the three distinct vectors involved in the subject's divided structure. If Lacan intended these vectors to represent the asymmetrical desires of the two structures of sexuation, in my reading they represent the conflicting drives between which the subject's energy is distributed as well as the desires aligned with each of these drives. Given that "drive shares with desire the property of never achieving its aim" (Homer 76), the distinction between them concerns the difference between their aims and their ways of pursuing them. A drive "always circles around its object but never achieves the satisfaction of reaching it," meaning that the "purpose of the drive [...] is simply to maintain its own repetitive compulsive movement" (Homer 76). If Lacan's concept of the drive concerns unpleasant feelings of tension that humans employ their energy in order to alleviate, he repeatedly distinguishes instinctual drives and drives framed by language. On the one hand, in existences determined solely by instinctual drives for survival, tension is relieved through the pleasure produced by the periodic satiation of one's needs; one's ability to feel pleasure and therefore

one's capacity to alleviate the tension of the drives is continuously made available through the invariable renewal of one's need to eat, to drink, to procreate, etc. On the other hand, in existences framed by language and therefore removed from instinctual imperatives, because language enables speaking beings to articulate desires for a pleasure beyond the fulfilment of needs in relation to purely Symbolic entities (i.e. idealized signifiers) while simultaneously subjecting speaking beings to prohibition and language's limitations in producing meaning (i.e. negative absolutes), the drives' attainable aim of need fulfilment becomes alienated into the unachievable aim of resolving negative absolutes, meaning that for the duration of speaking beings' lives, the drives continuously make one feel like one wants something more than fulfilling one's needs, causing one to feel unsatisfied, anxious, frustrated, disappointed, or depressed when confronted with proof of the Symbolic order's incapacity to provide an object (as a signifier) whose attainment could permanently resolve this tension, of the limited satisfaction and control available to one, of one's insurmountable separation from others and themselves, etc. Because the empty space around which a drive orbits can never be resolved, each drive "is characterized by the constancy of the pressure it exerts on consciousness" (Homer 75). I will argue that the vectors in the above graph show how the subject's energy is divided between coexisting drives ("Lacan argues that all drives are partial in the sense that there is never a single integrated harmonious resolution of the drives in the subject" [Homer 76]) whose orientation toward opposing, irresolvable aims results from one's having encountered different forms of empty space during the stages of one's subjection to the Symbolic order—the empty space preventing desire's complete satisfaction opened through the inescapable prohibition encountered in primary trauma, the empty space of possibility opened by idealization of the Thing, and the empty space preventing complete meaning's articulation opened through the creation of the unconscious through repression and one's subjection to the frame of language's limitations. In the frame of language, if a drive therefore aims at resolving negative absolutes and motivates a speaking being to pursue this aim by creating an uncomfortable tension in relation to the empty spaces through which one encounters the Real, a desire comes into existence in relation to the signifiers one uses to veil these empty spaces with the aim of permanently and completely resolving tension. Given that speaking beings can only find pleasure capable of relieving the tension produced by the drives through the periodic satiation of desires determined by the Symbolic order, it makes sense that a desire's function "is to desire" (Homer 76); when a drive is not accompanied by a desire, one has no means of relieving the tension produced by the drives—a problem that, if not corrected, can lead one to lose one's mind or even one's will to live.<sup>70</sup> However, unlike a drive, a desire can fail to perform its function because its continued circulation depends on one's ongoing association of a pleasant vision of the future with the attainment of the specific signifier that is its object—an association that can be undermined by one's encounter with proof challenging one's idealized perception of that signifier, by that signifier's inevitable failure to fulfill one's expectations upon its attainment, one's encounter with definitive proof of that signifier's unattainability, or that signifier's association with trauma. This means that one not only has to *want*

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<sup>70</sup> In section 3.3.1, I will explore examples in Balzac's texts of the negative effects of failing to veil empty space with a signifier.

to live in order to keep living, but that wanting to live is equivalent to having *something to live for*, meaning that one's failure to veil empty space with a signifier and to sustain the continued circulation of desire in relation to it can have mortal consequences.

Having shown how the vectors can represent both the drives and the desires through which the tension produced by drives are relieved, we can now explore the nature of each of these vectors in relation to their origins and aims. Though there are three vectors, there are only two agents, which in my reading constitute not “masculine” and “feminine” individuals attempting to find satisfaction through one another, but rather the two sides of the divided subject—the *subject of the signifier* and the *subject of jouissance*—whose determination by different processes producing meaning and simultaneous attempts to satisfy insatiable desire in conflicting ways results in the contradictions evident for example in Collin's soliloquy and in the unexplainable elements of his behavior. The introduction highlighted the disparity between the emotional production of meaning through the arbitrary association of signifiers with signifieds in relation to one's experience (which began before primary trauma) and the rational production of meaning through the differentiation of signifiers (which began after primary trauma as the first unescapable encounter with the Symbolic). This disparity is connected to my reading of the graph above not as a representation of the division between consciousness and the unconscious but rather of that between the parts of an individual independently responding to meaning produced in these two ways—parts which are each barred between consciousness and the unconscious. The barred “S” represents the subject of the signifier as the bearer of meaning produced through language. Given that language can articulate concepts or images with no material equivalent, that one can produce meaning through language without acknowledging one's emotional motivations to draw certain conclusions, and the fact that meaning produced through the differentiation of signifiers cannot articulate singularity and is therefore always approximate, the subject of the signifier is separated between its conscious understanding of and approach to the surrounding world, its intersubjective relationships, and its own mental processes and identity through the Symbolic order and all meaning excluded from that consciousness—whether through a lack in one's frame of reference, through one's repression of any knowledge threatening the pleasure made possible through one's standing approach, or through language's limitations in producing meaning. The barred “La Femme”—which in this reading should be replaced with the barred name of the individual being considered, a barred “Jacques” or “Lauren” if you will—represents the subject of jouissance as the bearer of all feeling, including physical sensations and emotions. Beyond the fact that feelings are not rational, the facts that they shift from moment to moment, are often complexly layered or ambiguous, and respond to stimuli beyond one's awareness and/or control makes it more difficult to describe this subject's division. Clearly, this subject's division is related to the facts that the Symbolic order cannot provide a context in which one can freely experience the full range of one's emotions and indulge all of one's desires, that the anticipation of regaining the “lost” state of completeness initiated by the prohibition complex' resolution can never be resolved, and that the drives never cease producing tension and therefore the need for additional pleasure. If the “jouissance” of the subject of jouissance refers to the inescapable presence of *surplus jouissance* as the amount of satisfaction whose absence prevents one's complete satisfaction, on a day-to-day basis this

division involves that between one's conscious responses to stimuli and unpleasant feelings associated with trauma (i.e. one's encounters with proof of negative absolutes' universality), which can compromise one's ability to function acceptably in a social environment. This division can also encompass that between the feelings one consciously experiences and those feelings of doubt or disappointment that threaten one's ability to continue the circulation of one's desire in relation to an idealized signifier and therefore to find enjoyment in life. Furthermore, considering that one's enjoyment of a signifier depends on the coincidence of verbal and emotional meaning, this division can manifest between one's desire to desire a particular signifier and the absence of that desire or between one's desires for signifiers whose pursuits are irreconcilable. However, at its most fundamental level, this division stems from the fact that one's repressed desire for the Thing never ceases to circulate and can never become conscious as such.

Given that one's assimilation to the Symbolic order orients the subject of the signifier's desire toward a master signifier whose future attainment requires social membership whereas the subject of *jouissance* is attracted to signifiers resembling the prohibited Thing, the vectors' emanation from these two separate subjects already brings to light the potential conflict between them. Nevertheless, considering for example that one's disillusionment with the Symbolic order can lead the subject of the signifier to idealize a prohibited signifier, the subject's division is evidently more complex than an opposition between tendencies to obey and to transgress. If this complexity is reflected in the presence of a third vector in the graph, it becomes clearer through an examination of each of these vectors' aims—aims that echo the different ways in which Lacan describes not only primary processes, but desire itself. For example, Lacan often remarks that primary trauma, repression, and assimilation to the preexisting Symbolic order serve to alienate the instinctual drive to satisfy one's needs into the endless articulation of insatiable *requests*. First of all, such requests are issued to resolve the emotional dissatisfaction initiated by one's first encounter with empty space as the absence of the feeling associated with the "lost" state of completeness. As Homer notes, Lacan often stresses that in the request "for love [that] goes beyond the objects that satisfy its needs" (Homer 73), insatiable desire is what remains when one subtracts need from one's request. If primary trauma initiates one's *requests for love* by interrupting the apparently unconditional presence of another person's affection and revealing that one is not its only recipient, primary repression ensures that the child's desire to resolve this request through possession of the Thing underlies all of the child's ensuing attempts to regain "lost" completeness through the Symbolic order. Second of all, such requests are issued to resolve the intellectual dissatisfaction initiated by one's encounters with empty space as that which cannot be articulated or understood through language—empty space evoking that "behind all meaning lies non-meaning, and behind all sense lies nonsense" (Homer 12). Lacan stresses for example in his explanation of why analysts should refuse to answer patients' requests for answers concerning their problems (which I will discuss in the conclusion) that one's requests for meaning can never end because one can never ask a question that can adequately contain the desire inspiring its articulation or receive an answer that can meet one's expectation of transcending one's fallibility and desire through the Symbolic. The transcendence of instinct through language may seem pointless considering the effects of these endless requests; if language allows us to escape instinct and natural selection by

providing us with reason, it nevertheless subjects us to elaborate authorities invasively controlling how we experience life and to insatiable desire as an irresolvable wellspring of dissatisfaction. However, the fact that it is when we human beings “find the pleasures available to us in life inadequate [...] that we expound systems of knowledge” (Fink 34) evokes that if suffering would inevitably pervade human existence with or without the species’ use of language, it is only in the frame of language that suffering can serve a purpose as the engine of progress. This capacity of language is related to the third kind of request endlessly issued by divided subjects: the request for an indefinable *something-more* initiated by one’s encounter with empty space at the very moment that one anticipated finding complete satisfaction or control.<sup>71</sup> If subjection to the Symbolic order initially instills one with “the idea of a jouissance that never fails and that never fails to diminish still further the little jouissance we already have” (Fink 36), the request for something-more is related to the fact that language enables us to recognize retroactively the compulsive and potentially destructive effects produced by one’s pursuit of or even just beliefs in such ideals. The request for something-more differs from the request for love and the request for meaning. Whereas the first two requests specifically ask for an idealized signifier (i.e. love capable of restoring “lost” completeness or meaning capable of granting one complete control over one’s exteriority and interiority) with the expectation that receiving what one asks for will inaugurate some vision of totality, the vagueness of this last request allows it to encompass the two requests preceding it without being limited by them. More importantly, it differs from the first two requests because it surfaces only after one finally receives what one asked for only to find it wanting—a dilemma that can result in one’s wanting to know what to want or in one’s wanting to know why one ever wanted what one requested. Given that this request can harbor the reconsideration of the Symbolic order’s limitations as well as those of one’s own subjectivity, it is closely connected to the possibility of self-awareness. If these three types of requests are each initiated in relation to one’s first encounter with an unfamiliar type of absence, this reflects how three key moments in the subject’s development—each involving an encounter with and the subsequent veiling of empty space in a different way—serve to initiate the drives’ endless circling of empty spaces as well as desires’ attempts to find enjoyment and alleviate tension through the pursuit of the signifiers covering these empty spaces. It therefore cannot be a coincidence that in Lacan’s graph above and in his mathemes elsewhere, the symbols of  $\Phi$ ,  $a$ , and  $S(\mathbf{A})$  each represent a manifestation of a key form of empty space contributing to negative absolutes’ universality. In the initial presentation of the graph above,  $\Phi$  represents “the phallic function organizing signifieds and representations around a missing element, the phallic signifier” (Leupin 91);  $a$  represents the *objet petit a* as “lack itself” (Homer 87) given that though it is “at once the void, the gap, the lack around which the symbolic order is structured and that which comes to mask or cover over that lack” (Homer 88), it “is not the object itself but the function of masking the lack” (Homer 88); and  $S(\mathbf{A})$  represents the “the signifier of the lack in the Other” (Barnard 172)—proof that “there is no signifier that can account for or answer for

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<sup>71</sup> I am not sure if Lacan ever refers to such a request as such or juxtaposes it with his descriptions of requests for love or meaning; however, his works certainly assert its existence given for example that the psychoanalytic experience hinges on the patient’s relinquishment to the desire inspiring requests for something-more, as the conclusion will show in detail.



[one's] jouissance" (Fink 26). Even without here attempting to decode the Lacanian terms in relation to which these citations define them, each of these symbols is clearly associated with empty space.<sup>72</sup> Rather than investigating these terms further, I will explore the kind of empty space that each of these symbols represents by chronologically examining the traumas through which they each initially become apparent as well as the respective ways in which they are subsequently concealed with signifiers providing objects for the three kinds of desire underlying primary processes. Beyond showing how the approach to the divided subject presented in the introduction is informed by my reading of the graph, the following outline of the pivotal moments in human experience establishes the frame through which this chapter will explore how Collin's soliloquy as well as his story at large suggest a parallel in Balzac and Lacan's understanding of the human mind's development and functioning.

If the enforcement of prohibition constitutes the first trauma through which empty space becomes apparent, the fact that the citation above defined  $\Phi$  in relation to the phallus (which this thesis refers to as the Thing) as well as the fact that the idealization of the Thing is triggered by primary trauma show that the form of insatiable desire initiated by primary trauma is aligned with the vector on the graph originating with the subject of jouissance and aiming at  $\Phi$ . If the citation referring to the phallic function above evoked that  $\Phi$  represents not the Thing itself but the fact that the function performed by the Thing causes all signification to be *bound to failure* to reach its aim of articulating unequivocal and comprehensive meaning, the fact that the Thing performs functions in all three of Lacan's three orders and in all three of the moments of trauma opening empty space here concerned evokes the fact that all empty space is essentially equivalent (not because it is necessarily related to the Thing but because it is only perceivable as an absence through language) and shows to what extent primary desire for the Thing determines and is therefore reflected in all ensuing manifestations of desire in some manner. If insatiable desire first manifests in relation to the Thing, this is because primary trauma leads one to encounter  $\Phi$ , which as the signifier of language's failure (i.e. negative absolutes) refers specifically to empty space as the absence of meaning. If this absence of meaning appears when prohibition interrupts the presence of the purely emotional meaning fostering the development of one's narcissism that one associated to one's circumstances before primary trauma, it also appears

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<sup>72</sup> If the "phallic function" refers to the function played by the phallus in signification, I will refer to this function as that of the Thing. Though Lacan's conception of the *objet petit a* came to play a central role in his theories, his explanation of it shifted greatly over the course of his works; in any case, the empty space that *a* represents as well as the way that it is veiled (in my reading, with the master signifier) can be articulated without referring to this term or the development of Lacan's understanding of it. Finally, though the barred A in S(A) refers to "l'Autre" (which is translated into English as "the Other") as the Symbolic order, because "l'Autre" refers in other contexts to concepts of absolute alterity (i.e. the Real), is even often associated with the mother, and most often appears in Lacan's densest passages in a way that blurs the lines between all of its forms, I prefer to discuss directly the form in which this term here manifests in order to establish as clearly as possible the frame through which my reading of Collin will proceed. If these and other terms used by Lacan to explore language's beyond are cryptic and his employment of them can seem frustratingly inconsistent, this is undoubtedly connected to the purposeful difficulty of his style and this strategy's connection to his vision of ethics, which I will discuss in the conclusion. However, given that I only began to understand his use of such terms after having contemplated the graph presented above at length, that my reading of Collin's story in itself supports my interpretation of that graph, and that my thesis overall has aimed at discussing Lacanian theory without employing gendered terms and at refraining when possible from invoking overly ambiguous or involved terms and concepts, my reading of the graph will interpret the symbols above without using the terms in relation to which these citations define them.

through the idealization of the “lost” state of completeness and of the Thing as the *absence of meaning undermining the illusion of completeness’ possibility*. If this absence initially allows one to interpret the circumstances of the period of initial dependence on the caregiver as indications of one’s supremacy and leads to the establishment of emotional associations between the elements of these circumstances apparently connoting one’s desirability and control and feelings of pleasure, the truth encountered in primary trauma is that the “lost” completeness that one attempts to regain after primary trauma never actually existed, but was simply an illusion produced by the absence of proof of one’s limitations, which is why primary trauma permanently interrupts it. Idealization of the Thing veils this truth with the inaugural fantasy “lost” completeness has only been temporarily interrupted and can be regained through the Symbolic by veiling the unresolvable empty space of  $\Phi$  with the Thing as that whose absence is the particular cause of one’s separation from “lost” completeness and therefore as that whose attainment could restore one’s former state. Through the idealization of the Thing, one unhesitatingly seizes the opportunity presented by language to fashion one’s perception of the traumatic situation in a way that paradoxically strengthens one’s narcissism (both by leading one to articulate one’s supposed capacity to exercise complete control and to experience complete satisfaction in relation to one’s retroactive idealization of the “lost” state of completeness and by asserting the possibility of one’s domination of the rival representative of authority in spite of one’s physical and experiential disadvantages), inflates one’s estimation of the control and satisfaction available through the Symbolic (e.g. by allowing one to directly witness the power available through language), and preserves one’s ability to continue enjoying the illusion of completeness interrupted by trauma through the anticipation of regaining it. In addition to the fact that the illusion of one’s capacity to experience completeness originating before one’s experience of primary trauma undergoes no significant change in response to it, all of this shows that by the time one encounters prohibition, one is already extremely emotionally invested in fantastical beliefs in completeness’ possibility and therefore already subjected to an impulse to respond to trauma in a way that prioritizes one’s attainment of completeness through the Thing and to sustain one’s belief in its possibility. It therefore makes sense that the agent of the vector aligned with primary desire in the graph is the subject of jouissance; one’s desire only ever becomes oriented toward purely symbolic entities (signifiers) due to one’s unwillingness after primary trauma to forego a chance to continue accessing the pleasure enjoyed in relation to an illusion of completeness. Given that  $\Phi$  always exists as such and that desire for the Thing veiling it, as a signifier only of the absence created by the enforcement of prohibition (given that one’s perception of it as the object of prohibition and as that whose possession allows the representative of authority to engage the caregiver’s desire is based on Imaginary assumptions made possible through the continuous absence of the Thing itself), is oriented toward an unattainable object that exists only in the Symbolic order, the vector represents the drive creating tension through its incapacity to resolve empty space as the distance between the signifier and the signified created both by language’s incapacity to represent reality as such due to its inability to represent singularity as well as its capacity to represent concepts with no material basis—a tension that one initially seeks to dissipate through the Thing and then repeatedly seeks to dissipate thereafter through the identification of a particular, resolvable cause for language’s failure (which is

evoked through one's own) and the initiation of anticipation of resolving it in the future in relation to the Thing. This brings me to the second encounter of empty space that leads to the repression of the Thing and the prohibition complex's resolution. If on the Imaginary level the Thing is attached the signified of that which could restore "lost" completeness before entrance into society initiates repression of one's desire for it and leaves behind one's ability to idealize other signifiers in this way by showing one how to support fantasy with the empty space of possibility, this is the empty space represented by the *a* referring to Lacan's *objet petit a*, the object-cause of desire, i.e. surplus jouissance itself. From the side of language, the subject of the signifier is driven to resolve this empty space by veiling it with an idealized signifier consciously identified through the Symbolic order and yet whose meaning lies on the side of feeling. Because the subject of the signifier depends on language in order to establish meaning and find enjoyment, it can only *enjoy* an object *as a signifier* through its idealization and anticipated possession on the stage of fantasy because it is not the signifier itself that the subject of the signifier wants, but rather the feeling that it believes it will obtain from it (i.e. the dissolution of surplus jouissance). Given that one's idealization of a signifier and thus one's enjoyment of it cannot survive this object's attainment, the subject of the signifier's desire manifests as the pursuit, attainment, disillusionment with, and replacement of a succession of objects. Overall, the second vector represents the drive creating tension through its incapacity to resolve empty space as the absence of an object that can fully satiate one's desire—a tension that one repeatedly seeks to dissipate through the veiling of the impossibility of one's finding such an object through the appointment of a master signifier to the idealized position vacated by the Thing. This brings me to the third encounter of empty space which occurs when one becomes disillusioned with the master signifiers meant to replace the Thing. This empty space, represented by the symbol  $S(A)$ , manifests as the symptoms and feelings that—as the return of the repressed that disrupts the simple functioning of one's consciousness and that occurs most strongly in the wake of disillusioning trauma—bring one's attention to one's division as well as proof of the Symbolic's incapacity to fulfill the expectations that one formed through it. This vector represents the drive creating tension through its incapacity to resolve empty space as that which one cannot express, know, or enjoy through the Symbolic order—a tension that one repeatedly seeks to relieve through attempts to articulate negative absolutes' manifestations and origins and through attempts to define one's singular identity, which is to say to resolve one's division (a goal in whose pursuit the Thing plays a useful role, as the rest of this thesis will show).

Exploring how these empty spaces are veiled with signifiers brings to light how the desires sustained in relation to those signifiers are the sources of the *primary processes* that I briefly introduced above. Repressed desire for the Thing influences one's perception with the aim of preserving its ability to find partial satisfaction without one's consciously realizing it. Secondary desire for a signifier idealized in relation to the Symbolic skews one's view through means ranging from fantasy to repression firstly in order to preserve one's belief that it can provide completeness and secondly in order to placate one's narcissism by allowing one to experience the pleasure associated in the Imaginary stage of development with the caregiver's validation of one's importance, exceptionality,

desirability, superiority, etc. through the pair's apparent unity as well as the pleasure associated through one's entrance into society with exercising control and with proof of one's impending realization of one's vision of oneself upon having attained completeness through an idealized signifier.<sup>73</sup> Finally, desire for language's beyond means that the return of the repressed seeks whenever the conscious mind is least active to illuminate everything that is repressed and thereby clarify the unacknowledged sources of one's symptoms and provide one with a connection to the enjoyment available beyond the Symbolic order. If the soliloquy provides readers with plain proof of Collin's subjection to negative absolutes, the elements of it which I highlighted above also show how this soliloquy provides readers with examples of all three kinds of primary processes and thus allows us to consider how they interact in the formation of consciousness. An examination of what Collin consciously highlights and ignores firstly evokes the effects of the process aimed at affirming the continued possibility of his future attainment of completeness (and thereby ensuring the continuation of his will to live through his continued ability to get pleasure in life) and secondly at producing narcissistic pleasure in the present whenever possible (that is, in any situation that would not obstruct the accomplishment of the first goal).<sup>74</sup> If the proofs of Collin's desire for *a* veiled by a signifier (whose secondary function is to appease one's narcissism) thus shows to what extent the first process involves an eradication of anything which would undermine his conscious illusions, the fact that such proofs are present at all attests to the influence of a second primary process: that which covertly attempts to accomplish the return of the repressed (i.e. the rendering conscious of everything unconscious, the articulation of the Symbolic's limitations and the resulting universality of negative absolutes) by making them apparent whenever possible, we see that this is not limited to the times when the conscious mind is inactive (in sleep, exhaustion, intoxication, when telling jokes, etc.), but can be accomplished through the *empty spaces* left by Collin's worldview. In his consciousness' blind spots—those which the previous primary process steer him away from recognizing—his words unwittingly evoke not only the proof of his subjection to the Symbolic order and the limits of his vision and control, but a spectrum of emotional life encompassing far more than the coldness which he prescribes for Raoul and showing to what extent his purported unification of his will to a single aim has not succeeded in subordinating his feelings to his conscious goals.<sup>75</sup> Finally, among all of the

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<sup>73</sup> If the preservation of beliefs in completeness and narcissism seem like they should be considered in isolation, their alignment makes sense considering that one's value system is first established in relation to the idealized signifier veiling *a* and sustaining one's belief in completeness' possibility. As a result, one can only experience narcissistic pleasure in relation to this frame through which one's vision of one's object and of oneself as superior are founded.

<sup>74</sup> This process manifests above for example through his overestimation of his own control; through his failure to recognize Raoul's will as separate from his own, not to mention conflicting with it; through his vague evocation of revenge, which asserts his ability to exert his own control over that which has controlled him; through his assumption of difference from the other criminals, who are actually quite similar to him; through his justification of his actions by externalizing blame for any suffering caused by them to the corrupt Symbolic order; and through his unawareness of his blindness to the contradictions, inconsistencies, etc. in his speech which, were he to recognize them, would subvert the plausibility of his future completeness' possibility, would force him to acknowledge the unpleasant truth of negative absolutes' universality, and would undermine his arrogant vision of himself.

<sup>75</sup> His words evoke the dissatisfaction, frustration, self-pity, anger, pride, longing to concede, regret, disappointment, hatred, pessimism, loneliness, etc. which he feels in relation to negative absolutes, whether or not he consciously recognizes them.

evidence snuck into his speech by the return of the repressed, we see through the presence of empty space at certain moments in his speech the presence of the final, most elusive process—the process whose articulation as such could explain the elements of Collin’s behavior for which his conscious understanding of his motivations fails to account, were it not for the unfortunate fact that the desire which it serves cannot be explained, whether due to its repression or its aim at language’s ineffable beyond.<sup>76</sup> Overall, the fact that the last two processes’ presence is limited to *ambiguity and empty spaces* (i.e. that which led me to examine this side of Collin’s story) evokes how their role in his behavior, words, and perception is established before the first process arrives on the scene with its clean-up crew to make everything sparkle before moving on to consciousness.

Returning to Lacan’s graph, we see that if the two vectors which cross from language to feeling or vice versa demonstrate how these two desires underlie the juncture of language and feeling in conscious and unconscious meaning, we have also seen through the soliloquy that if unconscious desire cannot be articulated as such, empty spaces and the return of the repressed nevertheless allows glimpses of it to be presented to the conscious mind. As far as how we can observe these junctures and weighted empty spaces, psychoanalysis approaches these in the frame on which its treatment depends: the frame of *speech* as the place where language and feeling *as well as* consciousness and the unconscious collide. Turning to the four discourses as Lacan’s formalization of the four kinds of speech, we can see how their four terms are involved in the graph:  $S_1$  represents the *master signifier*, which is the signifier mounted to the place vacated by the Thing through repression;  $S_2$  represents the conscious worldview articulated in relation to one’s idealized view of  $S_1$ , the Symbolic order, and unconscious desire;  $a$  represents the empty space covered by  $S_1$ ; and the barred  $S$  represents the divided subject as the *symptom*—that is to say, how the consequences of repression (on the levels of both language and feeling) become apparent in speech. In each quaternary structure, the functions of the term occupying it—beginning at the top left spot and continuing counterclockwise—are the *agent* (that which is speaking), the *other* (the interlocutor), the *production* (what is created), and the *truth* (that which the discourse *veils*; what the agent is unconsciously trying [but fails] to say). If I have highlighted (by color) the correspondence between certain vectors and certain discourses in order to show their structural equivalence (inasmuch as the juncture of language and feeling in speech makes it possible to distinguish the conscious and unconscious desires participating therein) as well as the equivalence between the kind of enjoyment which one can obtain through each of these kinds of speech, the Master’s discourse is excluded from this because, occupying as it does the dominant position amongst the four, it represents all signification. As an enunciation is voided of the unconscious meaning which informed its articulation as such once spoken, thus preserving within its signifier an empty space to which one interpreting it can assign a meaning which presumes the speaker’s possession of or equivalence to a master signifier; however, the fact that no one actually does possess such a master signifier (whose existence *outside of the subject*

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<sup>76</sup> This empty space occupies the place for example of his explanation of his concept of revenge, of the reason for his willingness to sacrifice his plans for Raoul’s domination for respect of Raoul’s happiness, of his expression of his romantic feelings or even just devotion to Raoul, and of the unmentioned, other things which women destroy.

who does not possess it allows the signifier [a purely Symbolic construct whose unconscious evocation of meaning causes one to retroactively idealize it through fantasy] to serve as a *point de capiton* and thus provides a fixed point in relation to which the subject can assign meaning) means that no one can actually speak from this position, but can only believe to *be spoken* or *be spoken to* from it through the fantasy sustained by that empty space. This is why this discourse is aligned with the formula asserting that there is at least one enjoyment which is not subjected to negative absolutes (in which  $\Phi$  is the function of Symbolic failure causing one's disappointment). Given that the interlocutor is thus the active party in this discourse, it is interesting that  $S_1$  (as any signifier or signifying chain whose interpretation one supplements with fantasy—i.e. all of them to which one consciously assigns meaning, meaning that  $S_1$  could be said to represent the Symbolic order as such when viewed as an adequate means of approaching reality) addresses itself to  $S_2$  in the interlocutor (which forms itself in relation to the listener's master signifier) and produces  $a$  (empty space, i.e. the Real) through the repression needed to sustain the fantasy on which  $S_2$  depends. If the truth which this agent veils is the symptom, the divided subject, this truth is that of both anyone interpreting  $S_1$  as such (i.e. as a *master*, as objective truth, as promising completeness) as well as anyone believing to speak from this position or purposefully trying to appear to be speaking from this position (given that one's believing in one's ability to speak as a master [as one possessing means to completeness not available to others] or one's attempts to make others interpret one as a master [due to the conviction that doing so can provide a greater measure of *jouissance* than not doing so] are both symptoms of repression of negative absolutes). Because of this, the function of  $S_1$  includes that of the subject's name, the signifier as which others perceive one and the signifier with which one associates both one's ideal self and the disappointing gap between the  $S_1$  and one's ideal self in one's own and others' interpretation of that signifier.

Moving on to the University discourse in which this  $S_2$  is the agent, we can see how this reflects primary desire for the Thing inasmuch as the truth which it is trying to express is that of the determining role in the formation of one's worldview played by  $S_1$ , the master signifier to which one becomes attracted through its similarity to the Thing and through which one partially satiates unconscious desire. This desire's discourse leads one to address the other as  $a$ , the absence of an adequate object evoking language's limits, from a position of knowledge which (as was evoked by Fink) one was motivated to accumulate through its ability to respond to specific sources of displeasure encountered through one's experience, explaining why this discourse aligned with the formation of one's worldview issues from the subject of *jouissance*. This discourse presents a combination of knowledge appropriated from the Symbolic and arranged in a way that responds to one's singular encounters with the Real, but which nevertheless fails to contain one's singularity as it can only be composed of the Symbolic (which is why it occupies the position of truth). Though this discourse allows one to veil negative absolutes with signifiers in a way that allows one to avoid losing one's will to live, it also produces *the symptom*. The vector begins on the side of feeling because its necessity is always initiated by a *feeling of displeasure* in relation to  $a$ , which it assuages through the reinforcement of  $S_1$ 's meaning through language. This discourse is always a response to a challenge to one's

belief in a master signifier's capacity to provide completeness and always results in the production of a symptom that this discourse is aligned with the formula that there is not one enjoyment which is not subjected to negative absolutes (inasmuch as the enjoyment which one receives from  $S_2$  is constantly interrupted by the manifestations of  $a$ ).

On the other hand, we see in the Hysteric's discourse that when the *symptom, the divided subject* searching for the signifier which will complete it, occupies the place of the agent, one's speech serves the desire for the empty space of  $a$  inasmuch as the truth which one is trying to express to  $S_1$  is the presence of  $a$  as the *lack of meaning* which it needs  $S_1$  (which thus always represents the Symbolic as a whole) to fill, thus producing  $S_2$ , which allows one to believe that  $S_1$  could do so in response to its rationalizations. However, as its position on the side of language means that it can only find enjoyment through  $S_1$  as a signifier and thus depends on not having yet experienced the feeling of having possessed it completely, this means that *all* enjoyment obtained in relation to  $S_1$ —both the mixed excitement and frustration of anticipation and the disappointment pleasure of possession—is subjected to negative absolutes, as the formula states. Furthermore, as this speech embodies a desire crossing from language into feeling, the fact that this crossing is a *symptom* produced by  $S_2$  evokes the inadequacy of the Symbolic alone as a frame of existence (due to the universality of negative absolutes) as well as the involuntary nature of both that which initiates it (either inherited, purely Symbolic ideals or unconscious desire's determination of one's attraction to a certain signifier in relation to the Thing, which as a signifier is also determined by the Symbolic inasmuch as it is associated with prohibition) and that which it feels and thinks in relation to  $S_1$  (which is the product of arbitrary associations between signifiers and feelings or the internalization of the Symbolic order in relation to the master signifier). In other words, the Hysteric's discourse represents humans' lack of free will and constitutes the purely passive state resulting from the prohibition complex's resolution, from which one can progress to a state of self-awareness in the University discourse through the conscious recognition of negative absolutes.

Finally, regarding the Analyst's discourse in which  $a$  occupies the position of agent, when we consider that empty space as such exists as the Real, which is not a part of the subject but rather constitutes both the object-cause of insatiable desire and the limits to the meaning it can articulate, etc., it makes sense that no person can speak from this position, but can only allow empty space (the unconscious) to be spoken through one. If the listener thus occupies the active position in this discourse, highlighting its similarity to the Master's discourse, the fact that this discourse is aligned with a vector of desire as opposed to that of the Master's discourse evokes a key difference between them. As I said above, anyone who purposefully fashions one's speech in order to make oneself appear to be  $S_1$  for another person does so *as a symptom* of one's worldview—that is to say, in relation to one's belief that doing so will provide one with a measure of completeness unavailable elsewhere. However, the analyst's discourse aims to lead patients to recognize and accept their subjection to negative absolutes in order make them aware of their primary processes and thereby assuage their involuntary symptoms (that is, those which have become so disruptive that they have come to the analyst for help, not the general symptoms of division, which can never be completely resolved). This discourse is thus aligned with the return of the repressed and the

desire for language's beyond. Because the analyst knows that primary processes will not allow the patient to understand this information as such, by refusing to provide her or his own worldview to the patient and fashioning her or his interactions with the patient in a way that allows the analyst to become associated with empty space through the patient's interpretation (which, following the precedent set by the prohibition complex's resolution, the patient will proceed to veil), the analyst aims at causing the patient to project the signified of  $S_1$  onto the analyst in order to then bring the patient's attention to this phenomenon as proof of the patient's primary processes.<sup>77</sup> If this discourse is thus associated with the desire for the Real, this is because one has to *want* to see negative absolutes—to want to understand why the Symbolic is incapable of fulfilling its ideals and to see the effects of that fact, to want to get rid of one's symptom—before one can become aware of them, much less help others to see them as well. This discourse allows one person to help another open a pathway to their unconscious without simply subjecting that other person to their own worldview and making the patient dependent on them (as is the case in the Master's discourse). Because the analyst's ability to perform this task depends on his or her determination to make his or her own subjectivity evident, this allows the patient to see that humanity is connected through the inevitable suffering caused by negative absolutes, thus promoting empathy and discouraging the abuse of others for the sake of pursuing idealized signifiers which in any case will inevitably only bring produce more symptoms (i.e. suffering).<sup>78</sup>

Though I could certainly break down Collin's soliloquy or other speeches in relation to the *mathemes* above, my purpose in presenting them has been to establish the final product of my reading of Collin, my reading of Lacan, and my contemplation of this graph and the discourses (i.e. my worldview), which developed only through my *alternation* between texts.<sup>79</sup> Interestingly, my

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<sup>77</sup> This is the first step in the psychoanalytic experience, which I will discuss at length in the conclusion.

<sup>78</sup> It makes sense that the vectors between the agent and the other in the Master's and Analyst's discourse are marked by impossibility as "the encounter with something real that is not reducible" (Leupin 69) whereas the vectors between the production and the truth in the University and Hysteric's discourse are marked by impotence as "the fact that production has no relation to truth, hence it masks a real impossibility" (Leupin 69). The former pair involve the listener's direct contact with the object-cause of desire (empty space or its veil) and thus provide the opportunity to question that which orders one's world as an affirmation of negative absolutes' universality in relation to the analyst's discourse (which leads one to observe the salutary contrast between one's perception of past  $S_1$ s before and after one's possession of them—a contrast not unlike that which Balzac described as his goal), the latter pair involves only the maintenance of one's current state as such. Given the absence of an interlocutor in Collin's soliloquy, we are only able to see how two of the discourses manifest therein. Firstly, the University discourse manifests as his articulation of his worldview justifying his selfish employment of his minions—perhaps in relation to his minions' challenging his motivations for helping Raoul in the previous scene, his need to discourage the belief in himself which he expressed to them that accomplishing Raoul's success would provide them all with the means to find reentry into society and satisfaction, his need to justify to himself his use of their employment with no plan of actually helping them, etc. This leads to the manifestation of the Hysteric's discourse, in which he addresses his plans for Raoul, unwittingly expressing both the enjoyment he feels in anticipating their realization and the frustration he experiences in relation to its obstacles. After his statement opposing his past failure to his minions' criminality from birth, the fact that his way of recognizing negative absolutes (by saying society requests that one repent only then to refuse one forgiveness) serves to support his worldview shows how the University discourse only acknowledges its manifestations in ways that support his vision, and his judgment that they are right to reject those who hurt him shows his reentering the Hysteric's discourse, which structures the rest of his speech as he thinks about his plans. If this discourse is thus aligned with the formula stating that not all enjoyment is subjected to negative absolutes, I will wait until the conclusion to explain why this is so in more detail.

<sup>79</sup> Considering Lacan's argument that "the essence of communication is misunderstanding" and his consequential injunction "to get rid of imagery in order to grasp the psyche's structure" (Leupin xxxiii), which he sought to accomplish through mathematical



discussion of Collin unwittingly reflects the four discourses: if the previous chapter discussed the Master's discourse inasmuch as it showed the role of the character's *mystery* in allowing readers to interpret Collin (or perhaps we should say "Vautrin") *as a signifier* (practically of empty space, except for its *definite alignment with prohibition*, explaining his tendency to engage unconscious desire) bearing the signified of *mastery*, it also showed how he was only able to construct his appearance in relation to his interlocutor's desires by veiling his own—a task which this chapter has already begun to show that he failed to accomplish. Secondly, the following section will explore the University discourse, given that it will explore how our little knowledge about Collin's life before 1816 allows us to see that Collin formulated his worldview directly in relation to the trauma which caused his initial arrest and marginalization, thus allowing this part of his story to demonstrate the terms and processes involved in primary trauma and the prohibition complex's resolution. Thirdly, the last part of this chapter will explore the Hysteric's discourse inasmuch as it will explore the *symptoms* of Collin's belief in completeness (e.g. repetition automatism, blindness, compulsive exercise of control, and *losing consciousness*) which prove that no matter how singular and masterful he appears, Collin is ultimately no more able to transcend the negative absolutes framing the human existence than anyone else. And finally, if the last part of the former chapter explored the *empty spaces* with which the text surrounds Collin in order to bring readers to question their initial interpretation of the character, the conclusion will explore how this strategy opposes Balzac to Collin himself and aligns him with Lacan on the level of ethics.

### **3.2 Collin until 1816: Balzac on the Subject's Division**

If my analysis of the soliloquy evokes how one's conscious reality is characterized by an idealization of everything that supports one's illusions established in relation to a master signifier and an avoidance, repression, or rejection of everything that challenges them, what we know about the least-explained aspect of Collin's story—the part before our earliest view of it in *Vautrin*—demonstrates how such illusions first come to be established, the long-term effects of the repression on which they depend, and the reason why primary processes exist and can never be brought under our full control. The situation outlined by the scarce details surrounding Collin's initial arrest and consequential marginalization from society can be taken as Balzac's representation of the way

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formalizations of his theories like those represented above (which aim "at *being the subject's structure itself*" [Leupin xxxiii]), I found it striking when I discovered Troy's description of Balzac's attempts to accomplish a similar goal: "[I]t is clear that he is making a sharp distinction between 'poesy' and 'Science'; that the *Comédie* is to be taken as a vast symbolical edifice [...] It is evident that Balzac hoped to reconcile both the method and the discoveries of the science of his time with poetry. The building of effects by the massing of factual detail is the application to narrative of the quantitative method of science. [...] For Balzac's generation the immense world of fact opened up by science had something like the awe-inspiring fascination of Nature for the primitive mind; it made possible once again a poetry of size. But there is the more important sense in which all this elaborate and painstaking documentation is after all no more than the vehicle of what is an essentially imaginative reading of life. [...] Quasi-scientific documentation is simply an expansion of what is the "literal" level of communication in a poet like Dante. The great difference between Dante and Balzac, of course, is that where the first had his meanings already embodied and ordered in a set of traditional symbols the second has laboriously to reassemble into wholes meanings that have been fractured through the analytical exploits of the previous two centuries" (Troy 334-335). Perhaps it is the conscious effort to join language and signifiers which Troy here alludes to which makes Balzac's work such a cogent illustration of Lacan's ideas.

in which every human story begins: with a *traumatic* encounter with authority to which our way of responding sets a precedent for our reactions to trauma—that is, until we accept the impossibility of completeness.

### 3.2.1 The Circumstances Shared by Collin's Initial Arrest and Primary Trauma

Though Collin's trauma is, of course, not a representation of actual primary trauma but rather only of a repetition of it, certain aspects of its circumstances make it particularly useful for considering the function played by this stage of mental development, in which the precedent is set for one's ability to find enjoyment through the Symbolic. Beyond the fact that we know very little about what happened before his arrest, the fact that the arrest itself constitutes his encounter with an authority of which he was previously unaware, that its consequences confront him with proof of negative absolutes, and that he proceeds to idealize his state before it, all evoke the situation that initiates the prohibition complex. Similarly, the fact that he reacts to this trauma by submitting to this new authority and reforming his vision of the future in relation to it reflects the way in which this complex is resolved, as the following section will show. Since *Le Père Goriot*, set in 1819, describes Collin as "un homme âgé d'environ quarante ans" (5), we can assume that Collin was born around 1779. Apart from this, readers know very little about Collin before 1816, so the little we do know appears all the more significant. It is thus interesting that the earliest event in Collin's life whose specific details are recounted to readers is his initial arrest and subsequent relegation to the underworld. We learn about it through Bibi-Lupin during his first attempt to recruit Michonneau and Poiret:

— [...] Eh ! bien, Son Excellence a maintenant la certitude la plus complète que le prétendu Vautrin, logé dans la Maison-Vauquer, est un forçat évadé du bagne de Toulon, où il est connu sous le nom de *Trompe-la-Mort*. [...] Ce sobriquet est dû au bonheur qu'il a eu de ne jamais perdre la vie dans les entreprises extrêmement audacieuses qu'il a exécutées. Cet homme est dangereux, voyez-vous ! Il a des qualités qui le rendent extraordinaire. Sa condamnation est même une chose qui lui a fait dans sa partie un honneur infini...

— C'est donc un homme d'honneur, demanda Poiret.

— À sa manière. Il a consenti à prendre sur son compte le crime d'un autre, un faux commis par un très beau jeune homme qu'il aimait beaucoup, un jeune Italien assez joueur, entré depuis au service militaire, où il s'est d'ailleurs parfaitement comporté. (PG 229-230)

Collin's comments to Rastignac elsewhere in the novel reveal this Italian's identity as the handsome colonel Franchessini, with whom Collin claims to still be close. If primary trauma results from one's encounter with an authority figure enforcing a prohibition of which one was previously unaware as the required sacrifice for continued social membership and thereby leading to one's separation from a state subsequently idealized as one of "completeness," it is not immediately apparent how the above passage, overrun as it is by assertions of Collin's exceptionally successful accumulation of the control available to him after his arrest, bears any connection to the blackness and vulnerability brought to mind by the word trauma. However, we must note that as usual, the text's focus on Collin's exceptionality here threatens to distract us from the surfacing of his subjectivity in the last sentence. Though Collin sacrificed his freedom and his entire future for a *very* beautiful young man whom he loved *very much*, the young man repaid him by...leaving town with the military and apparently staying far away from the criminal sphere to which Collin had been relegated, given the unlikelihood that Bibi-Lupin, chief of the secret police, would have reported the young man's good behavior had he seen him in those quarters. If

we thus find that in this unique passage describing Collin's arrest, the clash between his *appearance of mastery* and the *proof of his suffering* shows once again how Balzac provides readers with the opportunity to misread him, we also find that this clash between this façade which other characters and posterity attribute to him and the evocation of his singular suffering—which, like everything else about him, is made to support his masterful reputation as a sign of his honor—evokes the two terms of primary trauma. On the one hand, we find the preexisting Symbolic order, whose forceful application of inevitably reductive meaning to those whom it absorbs forever isolates them and all others from their singularity while nevertheless declaring its ability to contain this in one's identity, and on the other hand the suffering experienced in relation to the Real, whose recognition could actually provide individuals with a greater level of self-awareness and the basis of an empathetic connection with others. However, as we see in the worldview that Collin adopted after this experience, the precedent set by our initial response to trauma leads us to repress knowledge of the Real in relation to the corners of the Symbolic that we have not yet explored and where we still hope to find the promised means of defining and communicating our originality.

By the time Bibi-Lupin spoke the words above in 1819, over a decade had passed since Collin first entered the underworld and began his rise therein, and that several aspects of the text suggest a dramatic difference between his life and even his character before and after his arrest.<sup>80</sup> Like his protégés, Collin may have also lived the life of a fashionable dandy attempting to raise his station in Paris as a young man; he seems to have first arrived in Paris as a *parvenu* with illusions and goals quite similar to those which he would later observe and destroy or inflate in his protégés. Collin recites for Rastignac a very specific inventory of all the expenses entailed in the lifestyle of a young *parvenu*, the knowledge of which he claims to have acquired through experience: “J’ai mené cette vie-là, j’en connais les débours. [...] Croyez-en un vieillard plein d’expérience ! reprit-il en faisant un *rinforzando* dans sa voix de basse” (PG 215-216). We cannot be sure in this passage to what extent Collin's statement here about his past is truthful.<sup>81</sup> However, my edition of *Le Père Goriot* writes of the first phrase cited above and a line in Racine's *Bajazet*—“Cet alexandrin de treize pieds parodie les paroles du grand vizir Acomat : « La sultane d’ailleurs se fie à mes discours : / Nourri dans le sérail, j’en connais les détours »” (215)—draws a parallel between Collin and Acomat, whose reference to his long experience and consequential familiarity with the affairs of high politics is founded on fact.<sup>82</sup> Furthermore, it is very easy to imagine in this speech the tone of bitterness, the sting of loss, the *slowly building intensity (rinforzando)* in the speech of someone who cannot but betray the feelings which s/he still

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<sup>80</sup> Camusot's version of Collin's story, cited at the beginning of Section 2.2, asserts Collin had already been arrested by 1812; furthermore, before the interrogation, Camusot requests that the prison director bring any convicts who had been incarcerated “de 1810 à 1815, le bagne de Toulon” (XI: 340) to the Conciergerie with the hopes of unmasking the supposed priest. Collin was probably first arrested no more than a year or two before this.

<sup>81</sup> In any case, Collin's knowledge of these figures belies a detailed familiarity which could only come from personal experience or close acquaintance with one who did lead such a life (i.e. Franchessini or Raoul, the latter of whom we know for sure that he did support in precisely such a lifestyle, though after his first arrest).

<sup>82</sup> In the end, this experience does not prevent the failure of Acomat's plot against the sultan, and his betrothed kills herself.

associates with the conversation at hand through an experience long past. We just saw in the soliloquy that before his first arrest, Collin had harbored ambitions for his ascension in Paris inasmuch as he there distances himself from the other criminals by asserting that unlike them, he did not become associated with the underworld as a young man—he was already around thirty when he was first arrested. Collin also appears to have had legitimate potential for success in his pursuit of his ambitions: if his statements to Granville on his education when making the case for his eligibility as chief of the secret police—“J’ai de plus que Bibi-Lupin de l’instruction ; on m’a fait suivre mes classes jusqu’en rhétorique ; je ne serai pas si bête que lui, j’ai des manières quand j’en veux avoir” (XI: 523)—are less than trustworthy, we receive more trustworthy evidence of it through his *thoughts* when he remembers “son enfance heureuse, au Collège des Oratoriens d’où il était sorti” (XI: 362). This would explain his knowledge of literature, philosophy, religion, and history as well as his ability to comport himself in a civilized or even regal manner, which he exhibits most remarkably in his long-term depiction of Carlos Herrera; the real bearer of this name had been the offspring of royalty, though illegitimate, and had personally served the king of Spain. Considering that Balzac himself attended an Oratorian school and had found that education a more than sufficient basis for his grandiose ambitions, it would not be a stretch to believe that Collin had as well.<sup>83</sup> Overall, we can imagine without too much difficulty a young Collin pursuing like his protégés the two apparently complementary ideals promoted by Post-Revolutionary Parisian society, which almost always proved mutually exclusive: on the one hand, a life in which success attained through traditional values, a good education, and hard work would allow him to reach a new level in the social hierarchy and to attain a significant level of influence and respect; on the other hand, a life in which he would take a spouse anointed by true love with whom he would experience a sense of oneness and understanding and have children, raising them in a way that would provide them with an equal or greater measure of success to that which he had enjoyed. (*Plus ça change...*) Collin even acknowledges that he had once held these beliefs while lecturing Rastignac on the stupidity of duels, putting the young man’s fingers in the scars left by one that had not gone his way: “Mais dans ce temps-là j’étais un enfant, j’avais votre âge, vingt et un ans. Je croyais encore à quelque chose, à l’amour d’une femme, un tas de bêtises dans lesquelles vous allez vous embarbouiller” (PG 161). Though we do not know if at that age he really (at least consciously) felt this way for a woman or if he is here describing his love for a man, what is important here is that he admits that he once shared these illusions about romantic love. Furthermore, Collin responds to Rastignac’s reaction to his offer with outrage by saying, “Là, là, là, du calme [...] Ne faites pas l’enfant : cependant, si cela peut vous amuser, courroucez-vous, emportez-vous ! [...] Je vous pardonne, c’est si naturel à votre âge! *J’ai été comme ça, moi !* Seulement, réfléchissez. Vous ferez pis quelque jour” (PG 174, my emphasis), implying that he once shared his noble (but naïve) illusions.

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<sup>83</sup> Camusot’s recounting of Collin’s past suggests that Collin may have had legitimate means of maintaining a Parisian life for a while. He refers to “la maison de banque où votre tante vous avait placé comme commis, grâce à l’éducation que vous aviez reçue et aux protections dont jouissait votre tante” (XI: 362). Though I have already expressed my doubts about Camusot’s version of Collin’s past and even whether or not Jacqueline Collin was his aunt, the judge’s statement that Collin worked at a bank before his initial arrest might be wholly or half-true; he might have worked there with or without Jacqueline’s help, and this experience would certainly explain his success when he later assumed the position of the underworld’s financial manager.

If all of the evidence of Collin's lost potential and illusions undermines the prejudice held by Balzac's nineteenth-century readers that all criminals are inherently base, mentally inferior, and driven by depravity and selfishness, so also do the sentimental circumstances of his first arrest. Regardless of what brought him to Paris or what kind of life he lived there when he loved Franchessini, the contrast posed by his apparent romantic willingness to sacrifice himself on behalf of the young man and the longing he later experienced to regain a legitimate social status in the soliloquy as well as his vehement condemnation of altruism to his protégés evokes to what extent Collin changed in relation to trauma. If this version of the story suggests that he once embraced in relation to Franchessini the same vision of romantic love as Raoul does in relation to Inès, Rastignac to Delphine, and Lucien to Esther, the truth is, apart from Bibi-Lupin's statement of it, we know almost nothing about the nature of their relationship at the time of Collin's confession on the young man's behalf, though we see in *Le Père Goriot* that they remain in touch. According to Collin's description of their relationship to Rastignac, they share sort of father-son or mentor-protégé dynamic. He brags of how eagerly Franchessini would do a favor for "son papa Vautrin" (173) and gushes about how the colonel had benefited from his advice: "J'ai un ami pour qui je me suis dévoué, un colonel de l'armée de la Loire qui vient d'être employé dans la garde royale. Il écoute mes avis, et s'est fait ultra-royaliste : ce n'est pas un de ces imbéciles qui tiennent à leurs opinions" (172). Tho his reference to Franchessini as his "ami" falls in the vocabulary which Lucey highlights as frequently used in this period to refer to same-sex relationships, this is by no means an explicit proof of their liaison. Furthermore, these two statements' appearance during Collin's attempt to make Rastignac his protégé means that he likely there exaggerates both the warmth of his relationship with Franchessini and the benefit that the colonel procures from it. Collin's use of the *passé composé* in expressing his devotion for Franchessini makes these statements all the more ambiguous: it is somewhat unclear whether he is saying that he is currently devoted to him or whether he once devoted himself to him. The stress of the sentence definitely seems to lie less on the fact that he continues to devote and to sacrifice himself for this young person than that his influence can help a person to obtain powerful positions when we consider that though he counsels Rastignac on the idiocy of duels—saying, "le duel est un jeu d'enfant, une sottise. Quand de deux hommes vivants l'un doit disparaître, il faut être imbécile pour s'en remettre au hasard. Le duel ? croix ou pile ! voilà" (PG 161)—he nevertheless suggests to Rastignac that he could get Franchessini to kill Victorine's brother in a duel, stating quite strongly that he can get the young man to do whatever he pleases: "Il remettrait Jésus-Christ en croix si je le lui disais" (173). And indeed, Franchessini does kill Taillefer in a duel not long afterwards.

Though the fact that Collin essentially gambles with Franchessini's life and the brutal imagery used in the last quote suggest that by 1819, their relationship had devolved on the one hand to Franchessini's obligation to oblige all of Collin's request (through honor less than self-preservation, given that Collin knows that Franchessini is guilty for the crime for which he took the blame and at this point still bore considerable power as king of the underworld) and on the other hand to Collin's abuse of this power, we find that Collin's mistreatment of Franchessini may in fact be a sign of their previous closeness through something Collin says when he first shows Rastignac his benevolent side:

— Vous voudriez bien savoir qui je suis, ce que j’ai fait, ou ce que je fais, reprit Vautrin. Vous êtes trop curieux, mon petit. [...] Voilà ma vie antérieure en trois mots. Qui suis-je? Vautrin. Que fais-je? Ce qui me plaît. Passons. Voulez-vous connaître mon caractère? Je suis bon avec ceux qui me font du bien ou *dont le cœur parle au mien*. A ceux-là tout est permis, ils peuvent me donner des coups de pied dans les os des jambes sans que je leur dise : *Prends garde !* Mais, nom d’une pipe! je suis méchant comme le diable avec ceux qui me tracassent, *ou qui ne me reviennent pas*. (160, my emphases)

Given that Collin later tells Rastignac that for him, a man “est tout ou rien” (225), thus implying that he could not be bothered or betrayed by someone whom he did not care about, Collin essentially here says that he does not take lightly the rejection of those to whom he devotes himself: *those whose hearts speak to his own*—a speech act which evidently occurs without those hearts’ owners ever realizing it. Furthermore, we see in *Splendeurs* that Rastignac would have done well to heed this warning: Collin punishes him for his failure to go through with their plan by threatening him and repeatedly involving him in compromising situations over the course of the novel.<sup>84</sup> In other words, the fact that Collin puts Franchessini in danger for the sake of Rastignac (as he later puts Rastignac in danger for Lucien) suggests that Franchessini, like Rastignac or in another way, left Collin behind in a way that caused him suffering and thus led him to exert his wrath over the colonel. This reading gains some support through the only direct vision readers ever have of Franchessini, which we glimpse through Rastignac when he enters de Beauséant’s final ball before leaving Paris; upon seeing a sublimely beautiful couple, he describes the man by saying, “Pour tout exprimer en un mot, l’homme était un Antinoüs vivant, et ses manières ne détruisaient pas le charme qu’on éprouvait à le regarder. [...] Tout le monde les contemplait avec plaisir et enviait le bonheur qui éclatait dans l’accord de leurs yeux et de leurs mouvements” (PG 369). When Rastignac asks his cousin who the woman is, she responds, “C’est lady Brandon, elle est aussi célèbre par son bonheur que par sa beauté. Elle a tout sacrifié à ce jeune homme. Ils ont, dit-on, des enfants. Mais le malheur plane toujours sur eux. On dit que lord Brandon a juré de tirer une effroyable vengeance de sa femme et de cet amant. Ils sont heureux, mais ils tremblent sans cesse” (PG 369). When he asks about the man, he surprise and fear at hearing the name Franchessini becomes evident: “Une sueur froide lui coulait dans le dos. Vautrin lui apparaissait avec sa figure de bronze. Le héros du bain donnant la main au héros du bal changeait pour lui l’aspect de la société” (PG 370).<sup>85</sup> Several elements of this passage suggest the romantic or sexual nature of Collin and Franchessini’s relationship under the previous regime: for example, the fact that as a young, aristocratic, romantically-inclined, ambitious, and gorgeous young man, Franchessini is the perfect archetype for the other protégés; the fact that Rastignac’s admiration of him positions him as the object of a male gaze; the

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<sup>84</sup> If Collin speaks to Rastignac in a soft and intimate voice before being carried away by the police at the end of *Le Père Goriot*, giving him instructions on how to find him and take him up on his offer, when he next sees him almost four years later at the opera ball and hears him mocking Lucien, he startles him so badly and so effectively threatens him—whispering over his shoulder, “Jeune coq sorti du poulailler de maman Vauquer, vous à qui le cœur a failli pour saisir les millions du papa Taillefer quand le plus fort de l’ouvrage était fait, sachez, pour votre sûreté personnelle, que si vous ne vous comportez pas avec Lucien comme avec un frère que vous aimeriez, vous êtes dans nos mains sans que nous soyons dans les vôtres. Silence et dévouement, ou j’entre dans votre jeu pour y renverser vos quilles. [...] Choisissez entre la vie ou la mort” (48)—that he not only gives Rastignac vertigo, but is able to use him as a minion for Lucien’s cause throughout the entire novel.

<sup>85</sup> Balzac deleted this passage from his final version of *Le Père Goriot*.

possibility that Franchessini may have wrongly identified the source of the *vengeance* constantly troubling his relationship; and the last sentence's oblique projection of the image of Collin and Franchessini holding hands in a way that makes Rastignac break out in a cold sweat clearly related to fear of Collin—though whether Rastignac fears Collin's influence or his advances is hard to tell. But most importantly, by making a connection between Franchessini and Antinous, the narration evokes a historical example of an older-man younger-man pairing which Collin so often engages in as a mentor; however, this specific reference carries both romantic and sexual connotations.<sup>86</sup> Though none of these phrases prove anything and the passage makes it quite clear that Franchessini is both romantically and sexually engaged with Lady Brandon (and has been for a long time as they have children together) and though we cannot make any final conclusions about Collin's relationship with Franchessini (whether it resembled those which Collin forms with his protégés, whether they shared romantic feelings, whether or not it was ever consummated, etc.), I have left this passage for last in my consideration of their relationship because the concentrated ambiguity within it mirrors the tone with which the narration elsewhere alludes to Collin's homosexuality, though it inarguably makes the latter much more clear.

If I have here taken such pain to highlight the proofs of Collin's feelings for Franchessini (which, taking Bibi-Lupin's lead, I will refer to as love), it is because in order to see how the situation of Collin's initial trauma resembles that which initiates the prohibition complex, we must acknowledge that selfless love is in itself the crime for which Collin is punished. Given that primary trauma is first and foremost a conflict with authority in relation to a prohibition *of which one was previously unaware*, Collin's punishment in the context of *official* laws for obstructing justice is not here relevant, given that he would have obviously already been familiar with those laws by the time of his trauma. The situation of his arrest resembles primary trauma when we consider it in relation not to official laws, but rather to *the set of unwritten rules* by which Parisian society operates, which we see outlined in Collin's words to his protégés only after having already encountered them in the advice given by madame de Beauséant to Rastignac just after having been betrayed and humiliated by her long-time lover. Overall, this most powerful of fashionable ladies and this king of the underworld both attest through their own experience that the two ideals glorified by society as promising completeness, success and romantic love, are almost always mutually exclusive inasmuch as the former cannot be obtained without absolute selfishness whereas the selflessness involved in the latter renders one vulnerable not only to heartbreak, but to exploitation. By promoting expectations of both, the Symbolic order thus sets up its subjects for disappointment. In any case, even if one were able to find a trustworthy partner and achieve a successful career, the fact that some sacrifice is always necessary (here, one's public commitment of crimes, one's complete honesty, etc.), the fact that language will always allow one to believe that another possesses a greater measure of satisfaction than oneself, and the fact that one's primary processes (not to mention chance) prevent one from ever having complete control mean that

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<sup>86</sup> Antinous was a young Greek man by whose beauty the Roman emperor Hadrian was so struck while on tour of the Empire that he sent him off to be educated, later making him part of his entourage; they became lovers and the emperor was so enamored of him that upon the young man's precipitous death, he had him deified. C.f. Royston Lambert's *Beloved and God: The Story of Hadrian and Antinous* (1984).

the Symbolic order is incapable of providing the completeness which it promises. In this sense, whether Collin became aware of the prohibition of selflessness (unofficially required by this society rewarding selfishness) only after suffering the consequences of breaking it, or disobeyed it believing that the results of this act would provide him with complete satisfaction (in accordance with a different set of rules), he nevertheless receives the ultimate penalty for his transgression: permanent exclusion from society, which he finds out is synonymous to isolation from his beloved. Furthermore, just as primary trauma constitutes a disillusioning encounter with proof of negative absolutes as the universal effect of the symbolic order's limitations (first and foremost that one will never be completely satisfied because one will always have to choose between social membership and the pursuit of prohibited objects of desire), Collin's irreversible marginalization led to his confrontation with several such truths.<sup>87</sup>

Given that the prohibition complex is usually resolved long before a child develops the frame of reference or mental capacities to recognize negative absolutes as such, whether or how Collin consciously recognizes the manifestations of negative absolutes evoked by his situation (and whether he retains that vision) is not as relevant to our consideration of primary trauma, as is his conviction in the wake of this trauma that he had lost access to a state of completeness (or at least potential completeness) which, though it never actually existed, he nevertheless begins desiring to "regain." He attempts in all of the works to find some connection to his previous life, even if it is only a vicarious one. We saw in the soliloquy that he mournfully yearns to reenter society and recover his lost potential, and he bitterly says to Raoul a few scenes later: "L'enfer ! c'est le monde des bagnes et des forçats décorés par la justice et par la gendarmerie de marques et de menottes, conduits où ils vont par la misère, et qui ne peuvent jamais en sortir. Le paradis, c'est un bel hôtel, de riches voitures, des femmes délicieuses, des honneurs. Dans ce monde, il y a deux mondes ; je te jette dans le plus beau, je reste dans le plus laid ; et si tu ne m'oublies pas, je te tiens quitte" (XXIII: 82). With a tone evoking the Beyond and yet reflecting his moral nihilism given the substitution here of good and evil with *beau* and *laid*, Collin here exposes the value system he embraced after his trauma, in which his present state—that of marginal criminality marked by an absence of agency given the need which drives one to it, the medals of dishonor by which one is defined therein, and one's inability to ever escape from it—constitutes the worst possible frame for existence, and the state from which his trauma definitively separated him—that of an individual enjoying success as the sum of luxury, pleasure, and the esteem of others—as the best one, effectively placing in purgatory all existences outside of these frames. However, this passage evokes to what extent there is no more agency in the latter than the former not only because the label of honor is equivalent to that of dishonor inasmuch as it is assigned from the outside and excludes much of a

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<sup>87</sup> For example, he discovers the incapacity of that which the Symbolic idealizes to actually provide completeness (evoking the impossibility of complete satisfaction); that the Symbolic offers no effective means of fully controlling or understanding another person, of guaranteeing the sustainment of love, or of allowing one to control, anticipate, or even articulate one's feelings (evoking the impossibility of complete knowledge); and that the Symbolic order's reliance on criminals as scapegoats to sustain order and consequential motivation to permanently dehumanize them meant that he would henceforth be treated unfairly and would never be able to be recognized as more than a criminal (evoking the impossibility of complete identity—that is, the containment within language of an individual's singularity).



person's subjectivity, but more importantly because this vision is clearly not his own. He does not care about women and certainly does not find them delicious (given for example the fact that he disdains and abuses even Esther, whose got the nickname *la Torpille* because of her ability to immediately attract any man). In spite of his access through his status as the underworld's banker to considerable wealth, we never see him living extravagantly.<sup>88</sup> However, as is clear when he refused Inès' offer, it becomes apparent that he really does care about being respected. Perhaps it is this desire that leads him to embrace the above vision of paradise; he believes that living such a lifestyle is the surest way to earn the respect of Parisians. His personal desires are much more evident in the last sentence of the above passage: to perform (and perhaps receive in return) selfless devotion, to be seen and remembered as an individual, and to occupy the position of judge in relation to another because they care about his opinion, presumably because they care about him. In brief, Collin's expression of the above value system shows to what extent his desire to regain his former state leads him to embrace the authority that took it away from him—Paris' unwritten rules. It is thus by focusing on his way of doing so that the ensuing section will explore the resolution of the prohibition complex as a redefinition of desire in line with the status quo—that is, on the level of consciousness.

### **3.2.2 Collin's Reactive Formation of his Worldview as the Prohibition Complex's Resolution**

As the introduction explained, the prohibition complex's resolution constitutes one's entrance into society—that is, one's willing acceptance of the sacrifice demanded by the representative of authority, repression of continued desire for the prohibited object of desire and knowledge of negative absolute's universality, and one's idealization of a master signifier through a preexisting value system as that whose attainment would realize the fantasy of one's ideal self and consequently return one to the state of "lost" completeness presumably interrupted by prohibition. This section will show that Collin's worldview was primarily formed in relation to trauma by exploring how Collin's embrace of ideals paired with Paris' unwritten rules sheds light on what motivates the willing sacrifice necessary for social membership, by showing how certain connections between the situation of his trauma and his ensuing worldview demonstrate how the way in which the prohibition complex' resolution is accomplished sets a precedent for responding to trauma in a way that provides unconscious desire with a means of still finding gratification, and will begin to examine the consequences of repeating this precedent.

We saw in Chapter Two that the way in which Collin supports his advice to his protégés (immersing it in structural observations of society's hypocrisy; images of luxury and power awaiting those most determined to nab it; an inseparable blend of official history and the "real," secret stories behind it; his air of mystery and adventure; and the call of desires stoked by his rhetoric) often leads readers to feel convinced of his perspicacity without ever really assessing his arguments. However, certain connections between the

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<sup>88</sup> In *Vautrin*, when Collin is not playing a role, he always dresses in simple bourgeois attire. In *Le Père Goriot*, he lives in a sparse room, wears worn-out clothes, and engages in the sole luxury of having a drink now and again. In *Splendeurs*, the narration describes his room in the house which he shares with Lucien as a cell.

circumstances of the trauma described in the previous section and the consistent elements of Collin's worldview indicate that the latter constitutes a reaction to the former resembling the way of interpreting primary trauma which allows for the prohibition complex's resolution. In other words, this section's approach to Collin's worldview reveals that it is not the result of Cartesian reflections on human nature or the omnipresence of social corruption, but was rather fashioned with the specific purpose of allowing Collin to preserve his belief in completeness' possibility in the wake of that traumatic experience. Considering that we humans only gain wisdom through painful experiences and that everyone passively or actively tries in some way or another to benefit from social membership while secretly conning their way out of actually accepting social sacrifice, we may at times feel tempted to regard Collin's worldview as more mischievous than dubious. However, when we consider the horrible acts which that worldview permits him to commit without a shred of guilt, all of that wretchedness (which we do not like to think about, as it makes our feelings for Collin hard to defend) places a lot more pressure on Collin's justification for committing those acts to be not just sound, but bulletproof.<sup>89</sup> Given that this section will highlight the social determinism, repression, and fantasy characterizing Collin's worldview, it will ultimately allow us to see the emptiness of its promises to strip adherents' vision of illusions, its claims to be justified against corruption as revolt, and its promises to fulfill their desires.

If the situation of Collin's initial arrest resembles that of primary trauma, Collin's way of responding to his traumatic arrest highlights the key elements involved in the prohibition complex's resolution: the repression of proof of negative absolutes' universality evoked by the trauma through the identification of some master signifier on whose *correctable* absence in the *particular* circumstances of that trauma one can identify as its cause; one's reillusionment in relation to the context which most supports one's idealized vision of this signifier as a goal whose attainment will resolve the presumably *temporary* disruption of the "lost" state of completeness; one's additional employment of repression to deal with anything that undermines this new set of illusions; and the re-

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<sup>89</sup> On the mild side, we see in *Vautrin* that he invaded Raoul's mother's privacy by sending men to spy on her confessions, he ruins Joseph's chance at living an honest life, he manipulates his criminal minions for months with no apparent intention of rewarding them for their service, he plans on tricking Inès into marrying Raoul while her father is away so that by the time he gets back she will not be able to denounce the young man for fear of her own reputation, and he locks Raoul in an undisclosed location in order to keep him from telling the truth to his beloved; in *le Père Goriot*, he gets Michonneau and Poiret kicked out of the boarding house, he threatens the reputation of Vauquer's establishment and thus her ability to provide for herself, and he not only contributes to Rastignac's disillusionment, but drugs him and makes him complicit in a crime against his will; and finally, in *Splendeurs*, his disguise as a priest performing the last rites for a dying woman allows him to steal the fortune which she desired to go to charity, he abandons Theodore in order to run off with Lucien, he makes Prudence and Paccard betray the underworld in order to serve him, he bleeds Nucingen for money by abusing the first genuine love the old man ever felt, he blackmails a banker as well as Lucien's lovers, and he ensures that Camusot's effective performance of his job ends his career. But these are only the least of his crimes: in *Vautrin*, he also conspires to kill the man who challenges Raoul in a duel until he discovers that he is in fact Raoul's brother; in *Le Père Goriot*, he has Victorine's brother murdered even though Rastignac never agrees to this plot, meaning that he scars Victorine for life for no reason (*l'Auberge Rouge* depicts her later life; in that novel, she is not yet married and marriage seems unlikely); and in *Splendeurs*, he leads Esther to become religious only to force her back into prostitution which ultimately causes her to commit suicide, his attempts to get the police off of his trail lead him to threaten Peyrade by kidnapping his daughter and forcing her into sex slavery, which drives her mad (once again to no purpose as he ultimately has his aunt poison Peyrade and even then is still caught by the police), he pushes the spy Contenson off of a roof to his death, and ultimately is named by Lucien in his goodbye letter as the principle cause of his suicide. There are certainly other crimes I have forgotten, but these should suffice to make my point.

initiation of one's anticipation of completeness in relation to the reformed vision of one's ideal self (as the image projected into the future of having attained the master signifier and therefore regained the "state of completeness" lost through trauma) through the pathways provided by the new authority. The benefits of Collin's finding a master signifier to fill the place of the Thing becomes clear not only through the relative consistency of his worldview compared to those of the other characters, but in relation to the deaths of Goriot, Esther, and Lucien in the wake of trauma, which highlight the potentially mortal consequences of not refilling the vacated place of the Thing after a disillusioning encounter with the Real. Trauma occurs when desire is interrupted by its attainment or definitive blocking from its object (as Goriot is blocked from his Daughters once he has nothing left to give them, Esther from her worship of Lucien when she is forced to prostitute herself, and Lucien from his Success when he is arrested) and initiates not only a feeling of *disappointment* in relation to the subsisting feeling of unsatisfied desire or *frustration* at one's failure, but the removal of the *point de capiton* on which one's worldview and therefore one's ability to find meaning or pleasure in life are founded. This trauma becomes life-threatening only if one cannot find a signifier to replace the one whose signified has either plummeted from the beyond to shatter on the ground or floated off into the abyss. If the repetition of the prohibition complex's resolution is an avoidance of both falling into despair and of progressing to a state of self-awareness, on the one hand we can say that Collin's idealization of a signifier *benefits* him by allowing him to avoid the former and to continue believing in completeness' possibility. However, given that Lacan asserts that the only enjoyment to be found in life that is not marked by disappointment can only become possible through one's recognition and acceptance of negative absolutes, it is also clear that Collin's idealization of a signifier makes him a slave to the Symbolic order. As the next section will show, the longer that he uses language to block out his feelings, the more obsessed with *control* and less aware of his *desire* he becomes. Ultimately, the exploration of these pros and cons will allow us to see how the prohibition complex's resolution only serves to defer one's experience of the trauma which one repressed.

Given that the function of the Thing is clearly the factor on which the resolution of the prohibition complex operates, we can continue by seeking to identify that which Collin elevates to that idealized position in the wake of his encounter with prohibition in order to then consider the master signifier's specific characteristics and roles therein. If the Thing is first and foremost that whose absence in the situation of one's trauma one blames for the ordeal's occurrence in order to avoid experiencing the displeasure associated with encounters with the Real, it is interesting to consider how Collin's attitude toward *success* shifts from complete indifference before his arrest to the mournful regret which he expresses for the loss of its potential (as is evident in the soliloquy), his alignment of it with Paradise (which I cited in the previous section), and his obsession with experiencing it, if only vicariously, through his protégés. Before his traumatic marginalization, he readily sacrificed himself (and therefore any chance he had of obtaining success) on behalf of Franchessini, showing that he either did not realize or did not care that this would ruin his social prospects *forever* due to his society's unwillingness to ever reconsider criminal status once assigned. In either case, he clearly did not hold success as his highest priority; Collin would only have sacrificed himself because he believed that doing so would bring him more

pleasure (or less pain) than not doing so. Without even considering what ideal priority led him to sacrifice himself, the fact that he begins stressing above all else the value of something which he had once given up willingly shows that no matter what the Italian's gratitude or other effects of Collin's martyrdom entailed, its results did not bring Collin enough satisfaction to avoid undermining the validity of his value system (presumably founded on Love), thereby creating an empty space in the position of the Thing. I will argue that Collin comes to place *success* in this vacant position (transforming it into Success). This supports my reading of Collin's arrest as the consequence of transgressing Paris' unwritten rules, inasmuch as in response to this trauma, he embraces the ideal of the value system associated with the authority encountered therein (as validated by Beauséant, who tells Rastignac, "A Paris, le succès est tout, c'est la clef du pouvoir" [PG 136]). As is evoked when Collin said in the soliloquy that he wanted Raoul to be great, but now he will *only* be happy, Collin's Success is different than the ideal achieved through a bourgeois work ethic described in the former section; it is the ideal of Fortune as the key to the city captured by any means possible. However, even if his infamous worldview has become synonymous with his character, as I noted at the beginning of the chapter, by the time he first expresses it in *Le Père Goriot*, *Beauséant has already done so*, as reflected when Rastignac thinks in response to Collin's first seduction speech: "Il m'a dit crûment ce que madame de Beauséant me disait en y mettant des formes. [...] 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" (175). Even if Rastignac seems more impressed upon hearing this worldview expressed through Collin (which is unsurprising, as the criminal was interested in corrupting him), even though Collin is constantly painted as so singular and omniscient, Balzac makes sure to provide a brief summary of Collin's worldview in the mouth of a figure of authority (Paris' social queen) before the mastermind even expresses it, showing that Collin's knowledge is not exclusive, but is rather his internalization of the principles whose application has already spread in response to society's having rewarded those who follow them. If Collin's formation of his worldview in response to his trauma thus places the symbolic moment of his *entrance to society* at the moment when he did in fact enter the criminal world, Prendergast's argument that *Splendeurs* serves to highlight the "complete obliteration of moral distinctions between the outlaw and 'respectable' organized society" (160) shows that reentering society through the underworld is not reentering a completely different moral edifice (i.e. a completely different society) as much as entering the same one through the back door. Collin's ensuing assimilation to this new authority can thus serve as a valid model for one's subjection to the Symbolic; Collin's ensuing prioritization of Success evokes how the resolution of the prohibition complex constitutes one's willing embrace of the same value system whose enforcement by a representative of authority initiated primary trauma. If considering how Collin benefits from embracing Success and his treatment of Love as the repressed Thing will reveal what motivates this perplexing acceptance of prohibition involved in the complex's resolution, it also shows to what extent each of these "benefits" comes with an *unperceived consequence* substantial enough to question its meriting the name—particularly considering that these consequences show how one's subjection to the Symbolic order is simultaneously a subjection to negative absolutes.

Examining the circumstances in which Collin accepts Success as a valid replacement for Love as master signifier, we find that if the enforcement of Paris' unwritten rules leads to the permanent disruption of his ability on the level of consciousness to find pleasure and meaning through his former illusions, it is also what draws his attention to an alternative value system whose adoption promises to provide Success as the *attainment of a state of completeness* (a goal whose realization *he has not yet experienced* and thus has not yet been disappointed by, and which is *vague enough* to allow him to visualize his future in relation to it) and whose authority *does not block him from attaining it* due to his criminal status or any other attribute. The fact that Collin's idealization of Love is both dethroned and supplanted by Success in relation to a single, previously-unrecognized authority evokes how the resolution of the prohibition complex is essentially the exchange of one fantasy (which recalls the illusory oneness with the caregiver which one *believes* primary trauma to have interrupted) for another fantasy (whose emphasis on Success *as an individual* evokes one's subjection and assimilation to the Symbolic order after the prohibition complex's resolution) involved in the process of signification. Though this transaction's benefit for the standing order is immediately apparent (given that for the sole price of an empty promise, the pursuit of Success motivates Collin to obey these rules and even to perpetuate them by educating his protégés to do the same), it is not immediately apparent why Collin would effectively lick the hand that slapped him by accepting this offer—apart from its *convenient* provision of *something to look forward to* at the precise moment that his inability to reverse the effects of prohibition's enforcement (his marginalization) forces him to recognize the permanent impossibility of ever realizing the vision which he associated with completeness (sharing Love with Franchessini) and therefore interrupts his ability to enjoy thinking about the future. Evoking how one's repression of the Thing without ever having attained it means that one never ceases to desire it, the next section will show how the specter of romantic Love never ceases to hover around Collin's relationships with his protégés without his ever articulating it as such. If Collin's appointment of Success to the position of the Thing vacated by Love constitutes his acceptance of the equivalence drawn between them respectively as the idealized destination purportedly accessible through *obedience* (of the prohibition of selflessness whose enforcement had initiated Collin's trauma) and the idealized destination annihilated through *the punishment of his transgression of an unknown rule* (given that it definitively blocks his access to the enjoyment that he once experienced in anticipating his arrival there by clarifying arrival's irreversible impossibility), this shows that even if the master signifier is ultimately that in relation to which one establishes one's approach to the world at large, the only quality which a person, object, or concept (as a signifier) must have in order to ascend to this position in one's mind is its ability to *accommodate one's visualization of its future attainment* as the reversal of primary trauma's effects—a visualization which one must be able to *enjoy in anticipating* its realization. Because such phenomena of feeling's coincidence with language come about not through logic but rather through the latter's evocation of positive or negative manifestations of the former through already-established associations, a signifier can only occupy the space of the Thing if one has not yet attained it (as it would thus already be associated with a feeling of disappointment), if it is possible for one to attain it (even if only slightly possible), and if it does not have or can be emptied of any meaning already associated

with it which would block one from fantastically enjoying the anticipation of its attainment. On a practical level, the ease with which Collin was apparently marginalized, as is evident in the absence in the police's notes of details about his former career, suggests the absence of Success in the situation of Collin's arrest, meaning this signifier fits the criteria of him not yet having attained it. Furthermore, its equivalence to wealth as opposed to a bourgeois work ethic or an honest reputation in the context of Paris' unwritten rules makes it possible that he could attain it, even if it remains unlikely that he could find a way to regain the public's trust or an honest reputation (at least under his own name). The slightness and distance of this chance at redemption makes his reaction to the trauma of his arrest resemble the prohibition complex's resolution in (at least potential) durability and longevity. If Collin veils the fact that completeness will always be impossible by identifying Success' absence as the *particular* rather than universal cause of his past trauma, his idealization of Success furthermore resembles the prohibition complex's resolution inasmuch as that which he idealizes is something to which he is blocked. The obstacles to Success provide him with a scapegoat for the absence of completeness *in his present circumstances*. This obscures the universality of empty space, allowing him to sustain his desire to live through the slim hope that Success could one day provide him with a different, greater satisfaction than that which he has thus far experienced—a hope which leads him to reconstruct his entire mindset and way of living in the way that he believes optimizes the likelihood of this fantasy's realization. In the wake of disappointed ventures based on naïve beliefs in romantic or noble values, Beauséant and Collin both assert that in Paris, success is the only true value and that it permits one *to do anything one wants* without losing the keys to all luxuries Paris has to offer. However, they also stress that it is only attainable and maintainable through ruthless, duplicitous manipulation and secretive self-isolation. Along with these ideas, his frequent encounters with evidence that Parisians at large are driven by selfish ambition and cannot be trusted could easily have led Collin to convince himself that the reason that selfless Love had failed to fulfill his expectations was not due to the irremovable limits to human satisfaction and control, but rather his lack of Success in the situation leading to his trauma—a particular, resolvable cause rather than an unresolvable one. We can see how this would allow him to avoid despair (i.e. his loss of all confidence in the Symbolic as opposed to [the repressed] part of it), injuries to his narcissism, or any other encounter with the Real. For example, rather than recognizing that his action on Franchessini's behalf would have in any case failed to fulfill the expectations of completeness which he associated with the results of such an act, Collin's belief that Success (as the final product of supremely selfish and thus properly executed machinations) permits all could have allowed him to believe that if he had already been successful when Franchessini got in trouble, he would have been able to use his endless influence to guarantee the young man's freedom without compromising himself, thereby preserving each of their good reputations and freedom. Similarly, he does not recognize that nothing—not knowledge about the mind's functioning, not any measure of understanding of another person's past or desires, not even a knife to another person's throat—can guarantee one human complete *control* over another or facilitate one's infallible prevention of one's vulnerability to manipulation, betrayal, exploitation, etc. by providing one with the kind of *control* associated with the representative of authority, as this perceived power is rather a manifestation of the Symbolic to which that

individual is also subjected. Instead, the idea that all human action is driven by selfishness *whether or not its agents realize it* could have led Collin to reason that if he had already secured a successful position when he had acted on behalf of Franchessini, he would without doubt have been able to enjoy and retain Franchessini's love in a completely satisfying way because an intimate relationship between them would have served the young man's interests, guaranteeing him Franchessini's affection and control over him through it, creating an environment in which he could selflessly serve the latter without fear of vulnerability. These lines of reasoning manifest in the *visions of the future* through which Collin enjoys his potential Success—that is, in his protégé plan. Beyond his mourning of the loss of his former potential in the soliloquy and his statements to Raoul associating Success with Paradise, certain explicit statements he makes to Rastignac and Lucien suggest that he believes that the acquirement of wealth and influence (and nothing else) can provide the level of security needed for one to indulge penchants for engaging in selfless love or for the practice of honesty, honor, or noble virtues—behaviors which his advice to his protégés otherwise identifies as serious threats to the continued possibility of realizing one's ambitions. Firstly, Collin redresses Rastignac for his naivety in allowing moral qualms to make him hesitate in accepting his would-be mentor's offer: “Encore deux ou trois réflexions de haute politique, et vous verrez le monde comme il est. En y jouant quelques petites scènes de vertu, l'homme supérieur y satisfait toutes ses fantaisies aux grands applaudissements des niais du parterre” (PG 223). If this passage stresses Collin's belief that displaying one's virtue can protect one from suspicion, it could also be read as Collin's acknowledgement that the performance of virtue can also have value through the pleasure it brings as the realization of a fantasy. This suggests his recognition that embracing moral nihilism does not necessarily extinguish the enjoyment he feels in performing the noble or romantic principles which he did not always find so empty—an enjoyment here equivalent to that which he feels in being perceived and applauded by others for a well-done performance. This makes sense given that Collin's merciless behavior seems to imply he cares more about getting back others' respect at any cost than about actually performing the actions normally required to do so—a disjunction that does not prevent him from being celebrated even after his arrests by the other characters in *Vautrin*'s final scene, by the boarders in *Le Père Goriot*, or by his criminal cohorts in *Splendeurs*. Similarly, he says to Lucien in *Illusions perdues*: “Quand, après avoir su trouver légalement une fortune, vous serez riche et marquis de Rubempré, vous vous permettrez le luxe de l'honneur” (606). This once again shows to what extent Collin came to see *access to the prohibited* as a *benefit of the Ideal*, thus evoking how the Thing not only becomes identified as the missing piece which could restore “lost” completeness, but how one's continued desire for it even after that desire's repression becomes apparent without one intending it to or even realizing that it does.

If Collin's approach to Success involves a demonization of the Love which came before it, this highlights an important aspect of repression as that which divides the subject of the signifier from the subject of *jouissance*. Repression allows one to escape the feelings experienced in trauma; however, it does not do so by allowing one to *deal with one's feelings*, but rather defers the necessity of doing so, whether by consciously denying those feelings' existence or by refusing or failing to reconcile oneself with the trauma

that caused them (e.g. by instead using them as motivation to accomplish a goal that one believes will bring one closure as a symbolic victory over that trauma)—though neither of these alternatives will work, as the feelings can only be resolved by confronting and making peace with their true cause: negative absolutes. Collin never admits to being heartbroken over Franchessini; his approach to primary trauma gives him a reason for avoiding that which he associates with it (disappointing Love) without his ever having to admit that he is afraid to let himself be vulnerable again or to blame himself or Franchessini for what happened between them. He never articulates a romantic aspect of his affection for his protégés, and his worldview demonizes everything which he had previously idealized and which had definitively failed to provide him with satisfaction in the wake of his arrest. In Collin’s soliloquy, we can already see the negative values he assigns to these former ideals when he there emphasizes his need to replace Raoul’s idiotic courage, his willingness to sacrifice himself in battle, and other noble “illusions” with *positive* values (i.e. qualities whose value could be verified in the material world) like duplicity, cunning, and a general *coldness*. His comparison of the other, gullible criminals to soldiers and himself to a general regarding these inferiors as cannon fodder shows that he believes in his having fully embraced selfishness and sees his ruthlessness as the mark of his superiority and his sacrifice of inferiors as the requirement for sustaining it.

The soliloquy also highlights a point that Collin consistently makes to all of his protégés—one that I did not recognize at first and that definitively connects his worldview to its origin in his traumatic arrest: his ongoing insistence that romantic love poses a threat to the attainment of success. Collin’s statements that Raoul’s love for Inès ruined his plans for the young man and that Raoul *will not be great, but only happy* evoke his beliefs that one must choose between Love and Success and that Success can bring completeness whereas Love and happiness alone cannot. Given that the presence of happiness signifies in itself the presence of enjoyment and absence of suffering associated with the “lost” state of completeness, the fact that Collin asserts that Success can bring more satisfaction than happiness not only evokes the fact that his idealization of Success over all else leads him to abandon several relatively happy situations (e.g. his position as the underworld’s banker, his relationship with Theodore) any time that a chance to pursue it through the enactment of his protégé plan becomes possible, but also highlights the difference between those who can experience both symbolic and Other jouissance and those who can only experience symbolic jouissance. The former become capable of experiencing both by accepting completeness’ possibility, embracing the pleasure and meaning available through both language and feeling without expecting them to resolve negative absolutes or trying to completely understand or articulate them, and employing their self-awareness to avoid compulsively pursuing idealized signifiers similar to those whose pursuit led to trauma in the past. Contrarily, the latter remain so focused on their lack of completeness and apparent proofs of others’ possession of it that even when they manage to find stability and some measure of contentment in the time between their disillusionment with one master signifier and their idealization of a new one, they sacrifice this peace as soon as they are presented with the opportunity to pursue completeness in a new way, as it seems obvious to them that greater satisfaction will be gained from pursuing something “greater” than what they already have. If this shows why those believing in completeness’ possibility only find enjoyment through the anticipation of attaining



it, this also shows why Collin never tries to take a more direct route to Success. The necessity of sacrificing present happiness for the sake of increased *control* while pursuing Success manifests in Collin's advice to Raoul, Rastignac, and Lucien: he advises each of them to only use women to further their goals and to never actually fall in love with them—a rule whose enforcement in every case leads to their rebellion against him. In his first conversation with Raoul in the play (a few scenes after his soliloquy), Collin reproaches the young man several times for falling in love with Inès, saying that Raoul should, “prendre les femmes pour ce qu’elles sont, des êtres sans conséquence, enfin s’en servir et non les servir,” sighing in defeat, “Ah ! les jeunes gens doivent frapper longtemps sur ces idoles, avant d’en reconnaître le creux” (77). If the association he makes between youth in general and beliefs in Love suggests that as he was once young, he once also worshipped love, he also here predicts that Raoul will find his Love empty once it is achieved, as he himself presumably did. The only value in love that Collin acknowledges is in the social and fiscal capital which it can provide for his protégés. We see this when Collin explains to Raoul that he will only abide the young man's romance because it has *Fortune*-ately attached itself to a person who can serve Raoul's advancement:

Tu aimes Inès de Christoval, de son chef princesse, d'Arjos [...] une Andalouse qui t'aime et qui me plaît, non comme femme, mais comme un adorable coffre-fort qui a les plus beaux yeux du monde, une dot bien tournée, la plus délicieuse caisse, svelte, élégante comme une corvette noire à voiles blanches, apportant les galions d'Amérique si impatiemment attendus et versant *toutes les joies de la vie*, absolument comme la Fortune peinte au-dessus des bureaux de loterie : je t'approuve, tu as tort de l'aimer, *l'amour te fera faire mille sottises... mais je suis là*. (80, my emphasis)

Here juxtaposed with Collin's belief that Success' attainment permits all, we find his attempts to insert himself between Raoul and Inès by stressing that love can skew one's reason, only to then assure the young man that he will be there to keep this from happening. Apart from evoking the close association of the two ideas in Collin's mind, this recalls Collin's similar failure to recognize the apparent equivalence of Goriot's parental affection and romantic passion. In the novels, Collin similarly takes advantage of his position as benefactor or mentor in order to disrupt the development of his protégés' romantic relationships when they do not fit into his plan for them, persistently reduces women's value to the wealth and power accessible through them, and a tension always exists between himself and his protégés' beloveds. He tells Rastignac that the young man will need to use love to gain the fortune needed to fulfill his ambitions: “Vous irez coqueter chez quelque jolie femme et vous recevrez de l'argent. Vous y avez pensé ! [...]comment réussirez-vous, si vous n'escomptez pas votre amour ?” (PG 174). He similarly tells Lucien, “Ne voyez dans les hommes, et surtout dans les femmes, que des instruments ; mais ne le leur laissez pas voir” (VIII: 602). He thus stresses that romantic love threatens his protégés' ambition inasmuch as it blocks their utilization of one of the only resources available to them (that is, the love borne for them by rich and powerful women). The idea that love and Success are mutually exclusive becomes most explicit in his statements to Lucien. In *Illusions*, when he responds to Lucien's interrogation of his motives for helping him by saying that he would *enjoy* life through him, he says, “je me réjouirai de tes succès auprès des femmes” (VIII: 612). His choice of the word success is interesting; since Collin obviously does not mean that he would enjoy Lucien's sexual relationships with women, this word suggests that beyond enjoying the suffering of Lucien's lovers wrought by the artist's exploitation and betrayal of them through his maintenance of several

relationships at once, Collin would enjoy these relationships as successful business transactions allowing Lucien to accumulate influence and money. In *Splendeurs*, just after Esther has finally left the convent and Collin has supplied Lucien a love nest to share with her, when the couple's menacing benefactor arrives to see how they are settling in and advise them on the arrangement, the view which greets him from a window carelessly left open of the undressed Esther leaning on Lucien for anyone to see leads him to admonish the pair quite strongly:

Écoutez-moi, mes amours ! Amusez-vous, soyez heureux, c'est très bien. *Le bonheur à tout prix*, voilà ma doctrine. Mais toi, dit-il à Esther, toi que j'ai tirée de la boue et que j'ai savonnée, âme et corps, tu n'as pas la prétention de te mettre en travers sur le chemin de Lucien ?... Quant à toi, mon petit, [...] tu n'es plus assez poète pour te laisser aller à une nouvelle Coralie. Nous faisons de la prose. Que peut devenir l'amant d'Esther ? rien. Esther peut-elle être madame de Rubempré ? non. Eh ! bien, le monde, ma petite, dit-il en mettant sa main dans celle d'Esther *qui frissonna comme si quelque serpent l'eût enveloppée*, le monde doit ignorer que vous vivez ; le monde doit surtout ignorer qu'une mademoiselle Esther aime Lucien, et que Lucien est épris d'elle... [...] Le jour où qui que ce soit au monde, *dit-il avec un terrible accent accompagné d'un plus terrible regard*, saurait que Lucien est votre amant ou que vous êtes sa maîtresse, ce jour serait l'avant-dernier de vos jours. (96, my emphases)

Given that he begins by stating his totalizing approach to happiness—the approach that drives him to repeat his protégé plan and sacrifice any presumably lesser happiness he might have had otherwise—the rage that then creeps into his words and face could easily be justified by Collin to himself in relation to his having invested everything in this scheme for Success. However, the unspoken presence of jealousy is highly suspect. Collin physically envelops Esther in a way that not only isolates her from Lucien, but makes her feel threatened, and his absolute judgment that there are only two possible outcomes of their liaison—their secrecy and Lucien's success or their discovery and Esther's death—belies his desire for Esther's removal from the situation.<sup>90</sup> A master of manipulation would not have highlighted the lose-lose situation that Esther found herself in unless he wanted to motivate her to leave. Collin's harshness in this passage turns out to be mild when compared to the lines which follow it. The above paragraph continues with him reflecting on how he foresees Lucien's life playing out, but when Lucien jokingly hints that it could end with them in prison, Collin makes clear both the seriousness of their situation and his disdain for all women and those who love them:

— [...] On a obtenu à ce cadet-là une ordonnance qui lui a permis de porter le nom et les armes de ses ancêtres maternels [...] [L]e titre de marquis ne nous a pas été rendu ; et, pour le reprendre, il doit épouser une fille de bonne maison en faveur de qui le Roi nous fera cette grâce. Cette alliance mettra Lucien dans le monde de la Cour. Cet enfant, de qui j'ai su faire un homme, deviendra d'abord secrétaire d'ambassade ; plus tard, il sera ministre dans quelque petite cour d'Allemagne, et, Dieu ou moi (ce qui vaut mieux) aidant, il ira s'asseoir quelque jour sur les bancs de la pairie...

— Ou sur les bancs... dit Lucien en interrompant cet homme.

— Tais-toi, s'écria Carlos en couvrant avec sa large main la bouche de Lucien. Un pareil secret à une femme!... lui souffla-t-il dans l'oreille.

— Esther, une femme?... s'écria l'auteur des Marguerites.

— Encore des sonnets ! dit l'Espagnol, ou des sornettes. Tous ces anges-là redeviennent femmes, tôt ou tard ; or, la femme a toujours des moments où elle est à la fois singe et enfant ! deux êtres qui nous tuent en voulant rire. (96)

Completely caught up in his outline of Lucien's future (which he voices without the young man's input, intermittently congratulating himself for having single-handedly preserved its ongoing possibility and suggesting overall that this venerated *vision of the future* is

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<sup>90</sup> The latter prediction turns out to be accurate, as Lucien's downfall comes about largely because Sérizy sees him in Esther's box at the Opera; Esther kills herself the following day.

closer to his heart than to that of Lucien), Collin's fantasy that he has made Lucien into a man serious enough about his ambitions to enter the world of *le Cour* is abruptly shattered by the poet's carelessness and continued dedication to romantic notions. This confronts Collin with his overestimation of his power over Lucien by showing that his protégé is still very much a child living in the world of *le Cœur*. Sneering at the author (who named his collection of poems after the game she-loves-me-she-loves-me-not) and mocking his poetry as *tall tales*, Collin here exposes not only his hostility to passions which are not necessary to (and actually do ruin) their plot, but more importantly to the manifestations of Lucien's separate will in a way that not only challenges Collin's influence, but shows to what extent the years of lessons which the mastermind had by then forced on his protégé had had little effect. Considered here in our demonstration that Collin's worldview is formed in relation to unresolved trauma rather than some logical contemplation, Collin's uncharacteristic outburst of emotion in this scene shows what his worldview leaves out—his vulnerability, fear, blindness, lack of control, and his desire for something more than Success. If Collin's conscious account of his motivations which we examined in the soliloquy was comprehensive, he would not here be touching Lucien on his lips and whispering into his ear, bellowing angrily and stalking about with the serious air which dominates his demeanor throughout *Splendeurs* and is so unlike his jovial one in *Le Père Goriot*, and unjustly stripping the sensitive Esther of her humanity in front of her and her idol without considering how what he learned through his close personal relationship with her contradicts everything which he says about women at large or caring in the slightest how she feels about it. His advice to Lucien that all idealized angels eventually become women again is quite ironic at this moment when Collin himself is confronted with proof of his skewed perception of Lucien. Though Raoul never appears in his life again after the play and Lucien dies before Collin loses faith in him, the way that Collin treats Franchessini and Rastignac after they part ways shows the relevance of this advice to his own life.

All of this stresses that *repression is not a permanent solution* and that the more one veils, the thinner than veil becomes. His emotional responses here highlight the necessity of his conscious resistance to recognizing not only futility of his attempts to control Lucien, but of his plan to satisfy his desires. All of this stresses that the precedent for reacting to trauma set by the prohibition complex's resolution is only a temporary solution to trauma, and that though it serves an important function in one's development, an adult's continued reliance on it and belief in completeness can have serious consequences—consequences whose most extreme form Balzac depicts through Collin. If Collin's behavior throughout all of the works (but especially in *Splendeurs*) shows to what extent the denial of one's vulnerability leads to one's taking increasingly extreme measures to accumulate control, we can see how this reflects the final aspect of the prohibition complex's resolution which I would here like to discuss, which addresses the quandary of why the child would embrace the specific ideal of the representative of authority rather than some other branch of the Symbolic. Whether Collin identified the authority backing Paris' unwritten rules through a preexisting frame of reference, his vision of society's hypocrisy from its margins, the fact of Franchessini's indifference, or the necessity of embracing it in order to survive while incarcerated, the authority which enforced the prohibition of selflessness and which maintains the validity of his ensuing worldview is

*selfishness itself*, a signified that Collin can attach to every human action he perceives and whose value system justifies any action that he could possibly need to commit in order to attain Success—whether by asserting the emptiness of people’s claims to order their actions in relation to virtue or the necessity of acting selfishly in order to prove one’s superiority and attain Success. However, the most important aspect of the situation in which he became aware of Success as an available master signifier is the fact that *his experience of the enforcement of its accompanying value system associated it not just with a statement, but a proof of the power backing it through its direct application to him*. Given that narcissism has already developed by the point of primary trauma through one’s association of one’s (perceived) control of the caregiver and one’s image in the mirror with pleasure, one is more likely to submit to an authority whose provision of its representatives with control one has already verified through experience. The assumption that possessing such control includes possessing the means to completeness motivates one to submit to that authority in the hopes of one day becoming part of it or of appropriating its power. However, this assumption only serves to veil the truth of negative absolutes—a fact that can only be discovered through experience. Collin’s belief in possessing at least some measure of the power of selfishness is reflected in his comparisons of himself to a general, a king, Satan, or even God. By identifying with the authority that has been exerted over him, Collin is able to avoid losing confidence in his ability to realize his vision for the future when recognizing his former trauma—that is, his having been dominated by authority—by perceiving the illusions that this new authority demands he sacrifice as an *exchange* that will ultimately reward him with the same power that was exercised over him. As it allows him to view the trauma of his arrest as an experience providing him with an exceptional vision of the clandestine rules regulating Parisian society (which he *assumes* is the means of transcending its structure and dominating its inhabitants) and his willing submission to this new system of rules as that which will allow him to attain a level of superiority and satisfaction which is unavailable by other means. Therefore, we find once more how he can interpret his sacrifice as a *temporary deferral* of his attainment of completeness. The exchange of fantasies (Love [unity with another] for Success [social membership]) benefits him by first of all allowing him to enter society at all (given that without his worldview and modus operandi, he would not have been able to dominate the underworld and then to continuously escape the grasp of the police in order to remain in Paris at large) and by second of all granting him an effective means to mediate his social interactions and his personal aims. His worldview and modus operandi show how embracing this system of values allows him to better understand and anticipate individuals’ actions and society’s functioning—knowledge that he uses to his advantage in order to impress, intimidate, or otherwise manipulate others in relation to their expectations or desires and thereby create an effect favorable to his pursuit of his goals; to commit crimes and move freely between supposedly exclusive spheres while avoiding the consequences associated with doing so; etc. However, the fact that he never articulates them as such reflects Saussure’s remarks that one’s speech can respect the rules regulating the production of meaning without one’s realizing it inasmuch as Collin’s actions are regulated by lessons that he has learned through experience without necessarily ever articulating them as such. This highlights how one’s *anticipation* of the master signifier and narcissistic enjoyment of signifiers interpreted as indicators of one’s progress toward

attaining it distracts one to the phenomenon of one's continuous internalization of and ensuing regulation of one's behavior in relation to lessons learned in this social environment. This all shows how the prohibition complex's resolution with the appointment of a master signifier identified in relation to the representative of authority's ideals and the repression of the Thing coincides with one's entrance into society. Because one's outward appearance of *obedience* of a specific social context's rules is the necessary condition for entering it without a chaperone and being assigned an identity as an individual therein, one would only ever freely and actively seek to enter a social context after having come to value the potential effects of obedience. Attaining the master signifier which one learns to idealize through the Symbolic (at least at first) always requires social membership. Because one's social interactions with other individuals are mediated by the same rules whose performance one comes to associate with one's anticipated state of completeness, embracing the value system of the authority whose prohibition initiates primary trauma (particularly in the case that this authority figure is aligned with that of society at large, but even in the case when it is not) benefits an individual by allowing them to find pleasure simply by obediently fulfilling the requirements of one's social role.<sup>91</sup> If we have established that Collin's idealized Success occupies the space vacated by the Thing in the situation which we are here reading as a representation of primary trauma, this provides the opportunity to observe the first important developmental role played by the Thing—that which it plays in the *Imaginary* order. After primary trauma, one's establishment of an association between the Thing and the “lost” feeling of completeness initiates one's ability to orient desire toward objects identified through the Symbolic order (signifiers), given that the Thing is that which one perceives to have been prohibited by the representative of authority. The fact that one proceeds to idealize a master signifier after repressing one's desire for the Thing shows how one role of the Thing is to *support social order* by allowing one to experience *enjoyment* (the juncture of language and pleasurable feelings in *jouissance*, including the French implication of orgasm) in a world ordered by the Symbolic. However, if this process sustains one's *hope* of finding “the idea of a *jouissance* that never fails” (Fink 36), allowing one to *enjoy* the master signifier through anticipation of its attainment, the expectation associated with attaining such a signifier “never fails to diminish still further the little *jouissance* we already have” (Fink 36) when one actually attains that signifier. The possibility of learning to *associate positive feelings with the performance of obedience* depends on one's establishing a master signifier whose pursuit requires social membership, but one's veiling of the truth that no signifier can provide completeness with the

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<sup>91</sup> If in the introduction I showed that the prohibition complex is resolved through the child's identification with the representative of authority, this is to place the signifier of the representative of authority into the place vacated by the Thing. This means that the child will come to associate pleasure with performing social behaviors resembling those of the representative of authority, taking them as signs of one's capacity to capture the control exercised by the representative of authority. However, whether by recognizing the limits to that person's control, discovering one's individual attributes, talents, etc. through education and play, or some other reason, the child will inevitably become distanced from the representative of authority and come to identify with the Symbolic order itself, leading one to pursue signifiers therein—whether Success (as the proof of one's superiority and/or the exercise of power), Romantic Love (as union with another person), Enlightenment (as one's having learned the meaning of life through the Symbolic order), Eternal Salvation (as the evidence of one's worthiness for a perfect afterlife), etc.—as that which one believes will provide completeness (that around which the child's ultimate vision of the ideal self projected into the future forms) until they have either exhausted all available signifiers, lost faith in the Symbolic order as a whole, or recognized negative absolutes.

fantasy that the master signifier can provide completeness causes one's division and depends on fantasy and repression. If this means that humans are torn between contradictory aims which can never be completely reconciled, it is nevertheless also true that without the hope invested in one's vision of the future formed in relation to the Symbolic, one would not only have no reason to internalize and obey altruistic principles (as the prohibition complex's resolution compels the individual to obey *through its own self-interest*), but would potentially lose the will to live. Having said this, we nevertheless see that though the prohibition complex's resolution serves the important function of promoting social order by delaying a child's confrontation with the Real long enough to allow them to establish associations between positive feelings and obedience, altruism, and other signifiers, the precedent that it sets for reacting to trauma eventually ceases to be practical. The longer that one does not literally or symbolically recognize negative absolutes' universality, the more one has to repress, leading one to experience increasingly disruptive involuntary symptoms.<sup>92</sup> We see from Collin's aggression toward that to which his access is barred through trauma (i.e. demonized Love, whose presence threatens to revive his feelings associated with trauma) and toward a rival for possessing his object of desire (Esther) rather than the system which does the barring; from his failure to recognize in his own behavior the proof that not all actions are selfish and that dedicating one's entire will to an aim will not give one control over oneself; and his blindness to the possible similarity of parental and romantic affection that repressing one's emotional reaction to trauma and the universality of negative absolutes through increasingly complex and precarious rationalizations instead of experiencing the pain associated with it in that moment just means that these feelings and realizations will find a way of expressing themselves in unexpected ways, more often than not without one's awareness. If Collin's idealization of Success allows him to continue believing in completeness' possibility by denying the universality of negative absolutes evoked in his traumatic marginalization, to enjoy his anticipation of the future, to justify his avoiding situations which he associates with trauma without recognizing this motivation, and to feel narcissistic pleasure by systematically dominating others the same way in which he feels his was dominated, all of this is built on his continued repression and fantasy, resulting in *symptoms*. Before the next section explores how the return of the repressed manifests in Collin's repetition automatism, blindness, an ever-increasing focus on consolidating his control leading to isolation from others and his feelings, and even involuntary physical side effects, the rest of this section will consider evidence of this primary process' contributions to the formation of Collin's worldview. Though Collin is able to continue finding meaning and pleasure in life in relation to this frame, his symptoms stem directly from its flaws—the contradictions and leaps in logic characterizing it to which Collin remains blind.

First and foremost, the fact that Collin's way of pursuing Success always involves his engaging in a situation almost identical to the one that led to his initial arrest demonstrates that by allowing one to avoid recognizing the *universality* of negative absolutes

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<sup>92</sup> We can see in Balzac's social critique how modernity's failure to provide a frame of reference allowing individuals to come to terms with negative absolutes (which he identifies principally with religion) means that they are less likely to progress to self-awareness, as the conclusion will show.

evoked by primary trauma, the prohibition complex's resolution allows one to consciously believe that one will be able to avoid the painful feelings experienced in relation to past trauma by actively seeking to correct that specific cause. If Collin's engagement in the protégé plan allows him to unconsciously enjoy in some measure the same thing that he enjoyed through his relationship with Franchessini, he is only able to engage in it after having finding a frame allowing him to view his engagement in the situation as the only way that he can pursue his new master signifier—the Success whose absence in the circumstances of his marginalization he blames for having experienced trauma—and allowing him to dissociate the present situation from the past one, which he accomplishes by viewing his motivation as the pursuit of a goal whose attainment requires absolute selfishness and therefore the eschewal of blinding love. As is evident in the soliloquy when he describes his plans to use Raoul as an instrument, Collin believes to have changed his behavior to respect Paris' unwritten rules' demand for the sacrifice of noble values and genuine connections with others. Since these are the only measures required by his new worldview, Collin's ensuing confidence that he is no longer in danger of encountering trauma leads him to pursue Success through the first plan that presents itself to him—a plan that appears attractive to him not because it is truly the only way that he can have access to Success (as he could have tried to pursue it alone under a new identity, in a different country, by initiating a social insurrection, etc.), but because he never stopped desiring a connection like the one he once believed himself to have with Franchessini. This shows the misunderstanding at the heart of repetition automatism; by focusing on the particular and remaining blind to the universal, one's belief in having gained new knowledge through one's survival of painful experiences can increase one's confidence in one's ability to avoid trauma without increasing one's ability to sense one's vulnerability. By believing that his trauma was caused by a lack of Success whose pursuit demonizes Love, he avoids romantic love without realizing that by setting himself up with a new protégé, he is still setting himself up to repeat the past situation leading to his trauma. If Collin initially adopted his worldview because in the wake of trauma, it provided him with a master signifier that preserved his ability to find pleasure and meaning in life by preserving his continued belief in completeness' possibility while providing him with an excuse for demonizing the Love associated with the painful feelings of his trauma, he is only able to maintain his belief in this worldview so consistently because once he finds himself confronted with the opportunity to engage in a situation resembling that of his past trauma, it provides *an acceptable conscious justification for his performance of actions already determined through unconscious desires*. Overall, Collin's repetition of the protégé plan shows that he never addressed the true cause of his trauma—that is, belief in completeness' possibility, of which unconscious desire represents the earliest manifestation, given that it originates in relation to the perceived object of prohibition as that which could restore “lost” completeness.

This brings me to my second point: besides giving unconscious desire a space through which it can enjoy objects without his conscious awareness, Collin's idealization of Success blinds him to how his new worldview *is not void of illusions* as he claims, but still hinges on Success' ability to provide completeness, which is in itself an illusion. We see this in the passage where Collin convinces Lucien that they will need to sacrifice Esther to Nucingen's passion in order to fund their plan. Reminding Lucien of their

position and proposing his solution (“Tu oublies donc notre position ? [...] Plus d’argent, reprit l’Espagnol, et soixante mille francs de dettes à payer ! Si tu veux épouser Clotilde de Grandlieu, tu dois acheter une terre d’un million pour assurer le douaire de ce laideron. Eh bien ! Esther est un gibier après lequel je vais faire courir ce Loup-cervier de manière à le dégraisser d’un million” [XI: 113]), when Lucien contests that Esther will die if they make her do this, Collin responds:

— Ça regarde les Pompes Funèbres. D’ailleurs, après ?... [...] Combien y a-t-il de généraux morts à la fleur de l’âge pour l’empereur Napoléon ? [...] On trouve toujours des femmes ! En 1821, pour toi, Coralie n’avait pas sa pareille, Esther ne s’en est pas moins rencontrée. Après cette fille, viendra... sais-tu qui ?... la femme inconnue ! Voilà, de toutes les femmes, la plus belle, et tu la chercheras dans la capitale où le gendre du duc de Grandlieu sera ministre et représentera le roi de France... Et puis, dis donc, monsieur l’enfant, Esther en mourra-t-elle ? Enfin, le mari de mademoiselle de Grandlieu peut-il conserver Esther ? *D’ailleurs, laisse-moi faire, tu n’as pas l’ennui de penser à tout : ça me regarde.* [...] Allons, va roucouler sur ta planche de salut [chez les Grandlieu] [...] et joue bien ton rôle [...] Il s’agit de notre livrée de vertu, de nos casaques d’honnêteté, du paravent derrière lequel les grands cachent toutes leurs infamies... *Il s’agit de mon beau moi, de toi qui ne dois jamais être soupçonné.* Le hasard nous a mieux servis que ma pensée, qui, depuis deux mois, travaillait dans le vide. (113-114, my emphasis)

Unlike the passages presented before this one (which only evoke Collin’s depravity in theoretical or hypothetical ways, excepting his plan to kill Taillefer, which in any case feels less evil due to his and his father’s treatment of Victorine), the coldness, selfishness, and complete lack of guilt with which Collin dismisses the significance of Esther’s potential death reminds us of why we must question the validity of his worldview. The above passage presents in unison many of the topics discussed to this point. It presents Collin’s idealization of Success as that whose attainment promises the fulfilment of all desires. It shows how the worldview formed around this idea permits the justification and externalization of blame for actions required to pursue it at all costs through the idea that superiority requires the use of others as instruments (Napoleon’s sacrifice of generals, Clotilde and Nucingen as bank accounts, Esther and Lucien as sexual bait) and the idea that all women are the same and thus dispensable as compared to one’s unique, random chance to seize one’s dreams. By saying that Lucien cannot worry about whether the plan will kill Esther, Collin stresses that until attaining success, woman can only be instruments to him; this evokes his estimation of love in the absence of Success as a worthless threat to ambition. Finally, given that his thought always, not just for the past two weeks, works within a void (because it is framed by negative absolutes and motivated by desires sustained by empty space), it shows how he recognizes negative absolutes’ consequences as the temporary effects of a particular cause. The two sentences that I emphasized—one in which Collin urges Lucien to let him think for him and another in which he calls Lucien *mon beau moi* (“my beautiful self”) who should never be suspected of anything—once again show the inadequacy of Collin’s conscious understanding of his motivations. By saying it is not Lucien’s responsibility to think and that he will do it for him, using a *singular* rather than plural first person possessive pronoun to describe *moi*, and saying that Lucien should never be suspected of anything, Collin attempts to establish himself as the sole thinker controlling both himself and Lucien, claims the entirety of Lucien’s self and thus refuses to share, and suggests that Lucien be voided of all agency inasmuch as this would prevent him from making decisions or acting and thus of being suspected for anything. His apparent desire to exorcise Lucien’s subjectivity from his body so that he could then possess it is understandable through his conscious explanation of his goals, given that it serves his pursuit of Success. However, this desire for *fusion with another as complete control of and through Lucien* shows to what extent his



desire for Success is always also his desire for prohibited Love, which he failed to attain with Franchessini and thenceforth refused to admit that he still wanted. This shows once again to what extent Collin, who believes he can unite his will to one goal, remains unaware of the complexity of the desires motivating him and thus of the influence of primary processes on his perception and behavior.

The above passage also presents a somewhat sickening irony inasmuch as what Collin there identifies as Lucien's a signifier of Lucien's lucky chance for Success can also be interpreted as an affirmation of the quest's futility. On the one hand, Lucien's ultimate willingness to take advantage of Esther's and Clotilde's love is motivated by his belief that the Success that he can attain by doing so will allow him to do whatever he wants—including, as Collin explicitly states, to love without fear or reservation. On the other hand, their plan hinges on Esther's manipulation of the love which Nucingen—one of the richest and most powerful men in Paris whose ruthless dealings in the financial world leads *Collin himself* to call him "un Nucingen qui a été Jacques Collin légalement et dans le monde des écus" (XI: 521)—bears for Esther, the capital's most beautiful woman. Neither Lucien nor Collin here recognizes the irony of the fact that they are attempting to acquire an exceptional level of success that will allow them to love without fear of manipulation by manipulating a successful man's love, and they move forward with their plan in spite of the fact that its performance in itself disproves the capacity of their motivating ideal to satisfy their expectations of its attainment. This shows that as long as one remains determined to believe in completeness' possibility through the idealization of a signifier, this blinds one to all proof, no matter how clear, of that signifier's inability to provide one anything but disappointment. Neither Success nor Love nor anything else can guarantee one's invulnerability in love or the eradication of any other negative absolutes. Given that Collin contrarily decries all illusions other than Success, we similarly see how his belief in completeness' possibility allows him to see only those manifestations of negative absolutes which support his belief that Success alone can bring completeness and that selfishness is the only way of pursuing it. We begin to see how Collin himself is no different from the *hommes à passions* he described in *Le Père Goriot*, helplessly seeking the fountain (for him, Success) in order to drink from its water (i.e. achieve the satiation of desire and by extension a supernatural control over time and death truly befitting the name *Tromp-la-Mort*). This evokes how the conscious identification of any master signifier can lead people to prioritize their attainment of that goal over everything else without realizing until after having attained it (if ever) that their prioritization of this goal—which they only ever desired because they learned to do so through their environment (e.g. Collin's definitions of Paradise and Hell, which do not represent or even take into account what he elsewhere most associates with pleasure [male friendship, intellectual pursuits, humor, helping others, etc.])—caused them to pass over opportunities which might have actually provided them with a more lasting and consistent satisfaction (Other *jouissance*). We also see how this single-mindedness spreads to encompass Collin's approach to life at large when we consider his selective vision in constructing his worldview. His strategic combination of arguments from diverse fields and historical or personal observations when validating his modus operandi and his overall advice to his protégés includes only those isolated points which strengthen his position and excludes

their greater context, allowing him to profit from others' arguments without fully embracing any of the systems from which he extracted them as such, incorporating these lines of reasoning found elsewhere only to then present a final point which those arguments' original contexts actually opposed. If this demonstration of the University discourse shows how not only the experiences and knowledge which he encounters after the trauma, but everything leading up to that point as well gains a new meaning when his master signifier changes, it also shows that no matter how many times one reaffirms one's belief in completeness in relation to a new master signifier in the wake of trauma, this way of responding to trauma will always be a pure repetition of the prohibition complex's resolution because the enjoyment experienced through any aims seemingly promising completeness will always be marked by disappointment.

Collin's adoption of this worldview shows how submitting to the Symbolic order allows one to interpret and cope with primary and ensuing traumas with the overall effect that it even when it is not the case, one can at least *feel* like one is in control and thereby avoid becoming incapable of making decisions, being overwhelmed by despair or involuntary symptoms, falling into a state of psychosis, etc. Nevertheless, the character fails to recognize how one's subjection to the Symbolic order's prohibitions, authority, ideals, value system, and limits does not in any case reward one who submits and obeys with complete control or the fact that such submission primarily serves to stabilize and perpetuate the status quo as such.<sup>93</sup> By highlighting that one's identification of a master signifier glorified by the Symbolic follows an individual's encounter with prohibition as proof of authority's power, the connection in Collin's experience between his subjection to society's unwritten rules and his embrace of this system's ideal evokes how an exchange of one fantasy denying negative absolutes for another is also always an exchange of one's obedience to one form of authority for another. Though Collin's idealization of Success may appear to free him from consequences for transgression and thus from having to sacrifice, we cannot ignore that his submission to the *unwritten rules* of Paris leads him to obey them and thus involves his sacrifice of what they prohibit and consequential isolation from others. We see this in the contradiction in his seduction speeches between his simultaneous description of his mindset as both obedience of and revolt against society, present both when Collin plays the role of a criminal and then that of a priest. Collin starts off his seduction speech to Rastignac by emphasizing the superiority that his vision provides him: "Je vais vous éclairer, moi, la position dans laquelle vous êtes ; mais je vais le faire avec la supériorité d'un homme qui, après avoir examiné les choses d'ici-bas, a vu qu'il n'y avait que deux partis à prendre : ou une stupide obéissance ou la révolte. Je n'obéis à rien, est-ce clair?" (PG 161). However, when he outlines for Rastignac how Success can be obtained through the practices of

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<sup>93</sup> The great irony is that though this status quo (i.e. the fantasy of a meritocracy veiling the elite's hoarding of wealth and power at the expense of those below them) only rarely elevates individuals to the full extent of their ambitions (and does not fully satisfy even these "lucky" few), its continued existence as such is supported by the majority of those submitted to it because they have invested it with their own hopes for completeness. Though this statement should not be taken as proof of my agreement with Balzac that popular rule cannot successfully maintain social order indefinitely, I do believe that money has come to play too great a role in the United States' democracy and that reform in this and many other areas is needed to address the general selfishness that has permeated our culture and is identical to that which Balzac criticized in nineteenth-century Paris.

public virtue, private depravity, and secrecy, he refers to them as “toute la morale de notre époque” (167). We thus see that even when projecting his criminality and declaring himself to obey nothing, he is in fact telling the young man to follow the model already set by the powerful—those whose actions shape the status quo. Similarly, even though in his speech to Lucien the overall theme is studying society and publicly *obeying* its surface morality while privately *matching* the ruthless behaviors which it actually rewards, he rounds out his speech by showing that doing so is a subversion of the law: “Pourquoi vous ai-je dit de vous égarer à la Société ?... C’est qu’aujourd’hui, jeune homme, la Société s’est insensiblement arrogé tant de droits sur les individus, que l’individu se trouve obligé de combattre la Société” (VIII: 607). Fulfilling this exigency to obey in public while doing whatever one wants in private—the classic way in which people try to trick the system and get social membership while avoiding the required sacrifice—depends on one’s obedience of *the rule of secrecy*, which is to say on one’s sacrifice of relationships with others, one’s suppression of emotion, and the enjoyment one feels in the performance of noble virtues. If this equivalence drawn between obedience and revolt reflects that they are both initiated by desire for a *signifier* whose pursuit requires social interaction and therefore leads to one’s subjection to the Symbolic order in one way or another, it gains another meaning when considered in relation to the environment of Balzac’s Paris, which is secretly dominated by the unwritten rules; Collin’s revolt is simply the sign of his conformity to the reigning culture. We also see this through his description of the goal for his protégé plan as *revenge* against society (e.g. in his soliloquy, but whose other manifestations the following section will discuss), which contrasts with his pursuit of society’s ideal of Success, given that the fantasy of Success that he shares with his protégés is in no mean terms the motor by which modern society perpetuates itself.<sup>94</sup> If Collin believes that in spite of his status, he can still attain completeness and thereby *take vengeance* on society for unfairly marginalizing him once he has gained access to an ideal level of Success by becoming superior through the rejection of illusions which compromise one’s vision and will, this only veils the truth that his rejection of illusions fails to include the illusion that Success is more capable of providing completeness as Love, meaning that his vision is still skewed, and furthermore veils the truth that the plan whose realization he envisions as his revenge on society will actually only serve to support its continued existence as such. This evokes how the employment of language to assert completeness’ possibility through a production of sense is always also an unwitting evocation of completeness’ impossibility through the production of nonsense. Beyond feeding his narcissism (which is not wholly good given that undue pride ultimately causes him to make several crucial mistakes, as the next section will show), Collin’s identification with and apparent domination using the unwritten rules does not constitute his transcendence, but merely his subjection to the Symbolic order and even perpetuation of it in a less obvious way. Overall, we thus find that if his worldview (as University discourse) allows him to veil the universality of negative absolutes in a way that makes him feel and seem singular, it is actually just a recombination of the

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<sup>94</sup> Given the absence of a state religion, without this dream there would be no motivation for people at all levels of society to tolerate hypocrisy and ineffectiveness and follow the status quo, and there would be no reason for the powerful to even pretend to be honest and to follow rules, as they would need to return to outright force as the means of maintaining their position of dominance.

Symbolic's preexisting elements and fails to represent the singularity contained in his unconscious or the part of his identity lying in language's beyond. The next section will deal with this discourse's production: the symptom.

### **3.3 Collin After 1816: Balzac on the Symptoms of Subjection to the Symbolic Order**

If we saw in the soliloquy that Collin experiences his suffering not as joining him to but rather as separating him from his fellow criminals, this mindset exhibits the kind of interaction between language and feeling involved in one's constant bouncing between repression and the return of the repressed evoked in the opposition of the Hysteric's discourse to the University discourse. On the one hand, the Hysteric's discourse is the product of feeling's guidance of language; inevitably, one's failure to attain completeness through idealized signifiers inspires one's articulation of a request for meaning that fails to account fully for the insatiable desire inspiring it. When a question requests guidance on how to address what it identifies as the particular causes of the subject's suffering (e.g. the absence of a certain idealized signifier, the absence of a signifier to idealize), this reveals that the speaker's unwillingness to tolerate this suffering stems from the speaker's belief that not everyone is subjected to it and that this dissatisfaction can be definitively resolved. On the other hand, we find that the University Discourse that responds to these questions constitutes language's guidance of feeling inasmuch as it rearranges the knowledge available for one's appropriation from the Symbolic order into a worldview resolving the questions through which the speaker voiced displeasure and enabling the speaker to once again find enjoyment through the anticipation of an idealized signifier—that is, until the speaker once again feels displeasure and voices it through a new set of questions. If this bouncing between the two discourses demonstrates how following the precedent for responding to trauma set by the prohibition complex's resolution manifests in repetition automatism, this contrasts with the potential results of responding to questions articulating one's continued desire with a worldview that acknowledges the impossibility of anyone enjoying complete satisfaction or control (and therefore the impossibility of any answer ever definitively resolving the feelings informing the speaker's question). By recognizing that the feelings associated with a specific trauma are not the result of a *particular* cause but rather of negative absolutes at large (whose recognition is only possible by letting go of expectations of completeness), one avoids having to repress a juncture between a signifier associated with trauma and the signified of the feelings experienced in relation to it as well as the implications of negative absolutes' universality carried by it and having to veil this repression with increasingly precarious rationalizations supporting one's continued belief in completeness' possibility whose flaws provide a channel for the return of the repressed. Through Collin, we see that if we never stop expecting completeness and respond to every encounter with the Real only through repression, this requires us to progressively distance ourselves from our feelings. The more encounters with the Real we experience, the more signifiers become associated with feelings of trauma or thoughts challenging one's current worldview and therefore have to be repressed, until practically everything—both signifiers specifically involved in past traumas and any obstacle, no matter how trivial, that stimulates any level of the feelings also experienced in trauma (disappointment, frustration, anger, physical pain, grief, etc.)—threatens to bring these to mind, winding one into a constant tension as one waits to combat the next song on the radio or stubbed toe to trigger an

eruption of disruptive feeling inspired not by the situation at hand, but by one's continued suffering in relation to an unresolved trauma. In the case that everything through which one ever managed to find pleasure becomes associated with disappointment or failure in the unchanged frame of one's expectations of completeness, the only safe pleasure remaining is the *control* apparently offered through language. One's embrace of a worldview allowing one to avoid encountering the feelings associated with trauma (which stand as proof of negative absolutes' universality) and engagement only in those situations allowing one to prove one's ability to escape one's dissatisfaction and fallibility can allow one to believe in one's possession of complete control in spite of its absence. However, the sustainability of this strategy's effects is threatened by one's connections to others (inasmuch as their observation of the symptoms of one's mindset might lead them to demand that one change) as much as chance, which constantly endangers to interrupt one's capacity for enjoyment by confronting one with unanticipated proof of everything that one has repressed. Collin's failure to respond to trauma with anything but repression and consoling rationalizations is thus reflected in his increasing isolation—both that from other people required by the unwritten rules' exigency of secrecy and selfishness as well as that from his own feelings resulting from his unceasing determination to attain completeness. The first section below will thus explore Collin's pattern with his protégés in order to consider how that pattern demonstrates the functioning of repetition automatism, and the second one will explore how his obedience of Paris' unwritten rules ultimately results not in the validation of his dominance, but rather in a loss of vision and agency that accelerates upon his adoption of Lucien as his protégé and climaxes in the wake of Lucien's suicide.

### 3.3.1 Collin's Protégé Plan as Repetition Automatism

From 1816 onward, Collin pursues completeness in one way only: by attempting to dominate Parisian society through his disillusionment and reeducation of a young, handsome, aristocratic, man without resources and without meddling family members, whose formation into Collin's social surrogate would allow him to exercise his will in the capital's most exclusive spheres, grant him access (even if only vicariously) to an unassailable position of Success, and accomplish his revenge against the society that he believes to have unfairly marginalized him for the crime of selfless love. Considering that by the time of his arrest, Collin had supposedly already adopted Raoul, one can imagine that while contemplating his future during his first incarceration, Collin's protégé plan dawned on him because he already possessed the resource of a malleable young man.<sup>95</sup> Given that Raoul was still a child at the time of Collin's arrest, the young man's required period of maturation gave Collin just enough time to build influence in the underworld, gather up the cronies and money he would need to organize Raoul's convincing entrance into Parisian society, and escape from incarceration. Even if Collin's plan does not work out how he would have liked, it clearly never leaves his mind; as soon as he recognizes Rastignac's and then Lucien's simultaneous potential to rise to positions of power and to be influenced by him, he does not

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<sup>95</sup> Collin says in an aside to himself and to Raoul's mother that he had picked Raoul up from the side of the road twelve years before; however, as this would have been before his initial arrest and he says that it happened on the road from Toulon to Marseille, I highly suspect that this is an exaggeration. However, in the case that it is true, I imagine that Raoul was off getting educated while he was in prison, as they both allude to the education that Collin provided him.

hesitate to put this plan back into play. If Collin's behavior is thus striking because he keeps trying to realize this plan even though the young men invariably slip from his grasp, it is even more so because in spite of his conscious belief in his obedience of Paris' unwritten rules, he unwittingly replicates his situation with Franchessini in his relationships with them by actively offering to protect them by sacrificing himself for them. He engages in a pattern of careless, malicious, or even self-destructive behavior when he believes that the realization of his protégé plan is possible. Interestingly, when Collin is not actively seeking to realize his protégé plan through his relationship to a young man, it seems that he treats other criminals with an honesty that even Bibi-Lupin—his worst enemy—recognizes when speaking of why Collin does not run off with the underworld's money: "Collin est un gaillard incapable de faire un trait semblable, il se croirait déshonoré" (PG 232). Though Collin does in fact run off with the coffer entrusted to him in *Splendeurs*, we know that he only gained access to it in the first place due to his exceptional integrity. Similarly, Fanger's comments in relation to *Le Père Goriot* that Collin "operates a sort of welfare scheme for convicts, in which he shows himself strikingly more honest with money than any of the respectable characters in the book" (54) show that in addition to the many other ways explored in the second chapter, Collin is set apart from the novel's other characters through the fact that his worldview apparently allows him to exercise the restraint needed to prioritize his long-term well-being over the short-term pleasures he might enjoy by indulging his impulsive desires. What is more, when Collin is not in pursuit of a protégé's success, he also follows certain rules preserving his freedom; his protégés are the only non-criminals whom he tells about his true identity, they are the only individuals with whom he shares any measure of his knowledge, and it is only on their behalf that readers witness Collin committing crimes by his own hand. Ultimately, every time he is unmasked or arrested, it is after he has involved himself with a protégé; they are the only reason he compromises himself, and yet he never sees any benefit from this self-sacrifice beyond the few moments of affection, respect, deference, or gratitude that they offer him and the pride that he feels through his refracted view of their Success (which sometimes seems to magnify it).<sup>96</sup>

This pattern evokes a key quandary highlighted by Freud and taken up by Lacan in his 1956 seminar on *The Purloined Letter*—the question of why one would repeatedly engage in behavior that until that point had only brought one pain. Through Collin, we see that this symptom is connected to the obstacle posed by the desire to continue believing in completeness' possibility to experiencing

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<sup>96</sup> Rather than dominating Raoul and his family or attempting to remain near him, he walks away in order to let Raoul be happy; the empty space of the Montsorels and the Christovals in the *Comédie humaine* and his continued search for another protégé suggest that he let Raoul be. Though he does not sacrifice himself for Rastignac, he offers to several times, for example by saying that he would make him his heir or when he responds to Rastignac's question of whether he was created to torment him by saying, "Mais non, je suis un bon homme qui veut se crotter pour que vous soyez à l'abri de la boue pour le reste de vos jours" (PG 224), and when Camusot is questioning him in the guise of Herrera, he pleads, "J'aime tant cet enfant, monsieur, que s'il fallait être le criminel pour qui vous me prenez afin d'éviter un désagrément à cette idole de mon coeur, je m'accuserais, dit-il à voix basse. J'imiterais la pauvre fille qui s'est tuée à son profit. Aussi, monsieur, vous supplié-je de m'accorder une faveur, c'est de mettre Lucien en liberté sur-le-champ..." (378). Though Camusot does not give in, we see here to what lengths Collin is prepared to sacrifice himself on behalf of his protégés, particularly given that he is willing to give up this upstanding identity which had preserved him from the police for almost a decade and which had just withstood an intense interrogation without a second thought.

the release entailed in recognizing one's inescapable limitations and allowing oneself to mourn one's powerlessness to regain the state of "lost" completeness apparently interrupted by trauma. Allowing oneself to experience painful emotions at the time of their occurrence offers several potential benefits unavailable to those simply repressing their feelings in the wake of trauma. Firstly, in most cases one is granted a period of lenience allowing for these feelings' disruption of one's fulfilment of social obligations that is not necessarily offered to those suffering from the delayed symptoms of repression. Secondly, one becomes motivated to confront the questions inspired by these feelings within the frame of the trauma that initiated them, increasing the likelihood of one's recognizing and addressing their origin in one's expectations of completeness and of one's becoming more aware of others' having experienced similar suffering, which can respectively lead to the expansion of one's capacity for self-awareness and empathy. Finally, one's ongoing confrontation of the painful feelings and truths encountered in trauma without taking recourse to repression allows one to gradually become acclimated to them, eventually leading to the diffusion of their capacity to disrupt one's life. Considering the proofs presented thus far that Collin's exceptionality and dominance stem from the limited recognition of negative absolutes contained in his worldview's approach to the mind's and society's functioning (e.g. his assertions that one cannot change one's desires, that consciousness is informed by primary processes, that no system of morality could make transgression impossible, that conforming to the Symbolic order's approved guidelines for behavior cannot provide happiness), it seems that his way of responding to the trauma of his arrest proves functional for so long because it not only allows him to recognize his own dissatisfaction and fallibility in the frame of his lack of Success, but more importantly because it convinces him of the unlikelihood that he will ever be able to correct that lack. Nevertheless, Collin's knowledge of this unlikelihood does not prevent him from seizing any opportunity to engage in the protégé plan as a potential chance for his attainment of completeness. This shows how even the slightest conscious or unconscious belief in completeness' possibility can prevent one from fully moving on from a past trauma; such beliefs sustain the tension created by repressed feelings firstly because worldviews conserving such beliefs are incompatible with the conscious recognition of negative absolutes necessary to resolving these feelings, and secondly because such beliefs' culmination in repetition automatism is driven by assertions that these feelings can be resolved (by addressing the particular cause blamed for their origin in trauma) and by a determination to *beat* one's past (i.e. to disprove the universality of negative absolutes evoked by the trauma) that can only subsist in relation to these ongoing unresolved feelings as motivating proof of one's continued failure to address the aforementioned particular cause, which can only veil negative absolutes.

By failing to see how negative absolutes' universality challenges one's continued association of one's greatest hope for happiness with the attainment of a master signifier idealized through one's identification of its absence as the particular cause of one's trauma, one ironically guarantees that the greatest pleasure that one can experience is the anticipation of completeness enjoyed during one's pursuit of this master signifier. Though the preservation of completeness' possibility in Collin's worldview clearly leads to his compulsive repetition of the protégé plan, the functioning of his repetition automatism notably differs from that of other characters in

the works where he appears. Though the texts show that Collin's repetitions of the protégé plan each lead to his disappointment and a shift in his vision of what he hopes to accomplish through it, Collin is able to keep laughing and smiling, to retain his same worldview, and to come back optimistically to Paris to wait until another opportunity comes along to fulfill his protégé plan in spite of his failure to realize his vision with Raoul and Rastignac. Contrarily, the majority of Balzac's other characters' failures in social or emotional quests leads to their disillusionment and a significant change in their attitudes, the halt in their upward mobility, or their marginalization, whether self-enforced or otherwise.

Though responding to the question of Collin's exceptional consistency and self-satisfaction by attributing this to his worldview may seem reasonable considering that the previous chapter traced the character's most singular qualities to his understanding of the mind; however, this postulation is undermined by the fact that de Beauséant adopts a similar worldview in similar circumstances with a different overall result. She articulates Paris' unwritten rules just after having heard the news of her longtime lover's engagement through secondhand gossip; however, even though her knowledge of them may have granted her the means to seek revenge on her former lover and to assert her supreme status in Paris' social sphere, she instead opts to exile herself from Paris. Beauséant's actions in the wake of trauma (a self-enforced marginalization) directly oppose those of Collin (a reversal of marginalization and return to Paris) in spite of their sharing a practically identical worldview; this stresses that one's way of consciously framing one's desire is secondary in determining one's actions to the desire that it frames. What is more, Beauséant's departure suggests that what she perceived as her humiliation, betrayal, and loss of her only trustworthy companion definitively interrupted her ability to envision a happy future in Paris, whereas Collin's betrayal or abandonment by Raoul and Rastignac ultimately has no effect on his ability to envision his Success in Paris through the accomplishment of his protégé plan—indeed, by the time he engages Lucien in this plan, the strength of his belief in the possibility of realizing his vision of the future seems to have reached an unprecedented height. If a comparison between Beauséant and Collin suggests overall that it is not Collin's worldview but rather some aspect of his desire that explains the adaptability of his worldview, the constancy of his vision for the future, and serves overall to set Collin apart from the other characters, a certain distinction between his desire and that of other characters becomes clearer through his comparison to Goriot.

As the archetype of Collin's *hommes à passion*, Goriot's endless attempts to acquire his daughters' love lead him to ruin himself on their behalf until he has nothing left to offer them. If this single-minded pursuit of a single aim thus draws a parallel between Goriot and Collin, this is undermined by the fact that Goriot recognizes how his desire affects his perception only after his daughters abandon him on his deathbed (Goriot's final moment of clarity leads him to belatedly proclaim that his unconditional fulfillment of their desires served only to ensure their indifference to him) and the fact that Goriot ultimately loses the will to live in the wake of this disillusionment. Given that Goriot exclusively depends on his daughters as the source of meaning and pleasure in his life, his behavior clearly reflects that which Collin described in the fountain allegory, which evokes how the compulsive aspect of repetition automatism resembles addiction: “[C]es gens-là chaussent *une* idée et n'en démordent pas. Ils n'ont soif que d'*une* certaine eau prise à *une* certaine



fontaine, et souvent croupie ; pour en boire, ils vendraient leurs femmes, leurs enfants ; ils vendraient leur âme au diable” (PG 99, my emphases). If the words emphasized in the above passage stress that the pursuit of completeness through repetition automatism is accomplished only through one’s repetitive engagement in a specific situation, the attractiveness of this situation results from its similarity to that in which one first idealized the Thing as that whose absence one blames in the situation of trauma as its particular cause. If this stresses the primacy of the signifier (which is to say, of one’s unconscious desire) in determining an individual’s actions, we interestingly find that one aspect of Collin’s desire that sets him apart from other characters is that desire’s aim. Goriot’s inability to resist doing whatever he thinks will please his daughters is reflected in Collin’s own tendency to serve his protégés’ desires even when this does not necessarily work in his interest, Collin idealized his protégés just as Goriot idealized his daughters. However, this is not the case. On the one hand, the fact that Goriot’s idealization of his daughters ultimately leads to his disillusionment and his loss of the will to live shows how depending on specific idealized figures invested with their own agency as one’s sole means of finding pleasure and meaning in life places one in a precarious position. In fact, it represents the form of repetition automatism evoked by the fountain allegory above inasmuch as Goriot can only enjoy one kind of water (his daughters’ love and recognition) provided by one kind of fountain (his daughters themselves), meaning that becoming blocked to this fountain blocks him from any chance of finding enjoyment in life. On the other hand, the fact that Collin exhibits an ability to resist compulsively indulging his protégés’ every whim at moments when doing so would render the protégé plan’s realization impossible makes evident that the enjoyment Collin finds in servitude to his protégés’ desires is subordinated to his highest priority: Success, but more specifically *Success attained through the realization of the protégé plan*. By staking his only hope for attaining completeness in an abstract principle rather than a person, Collin reduces the likelihood of his disappointment in his idealized object (and thus of his disillusionment); unlike a person capable of betraying him or resisting his control, the ideal of Success cannot disappoint him unless he attains it, which remains very unlikely given his criminal status. Furthermore, Collin’s differentiation of his master signifier and those whom he engages as intermediaries to it posits a different version of the fountain allegory. With his protégés each representing a fountain and the water representing his idealized Success, it seems that rather than remaining restricted to drinking from a single fountain like Goriot, Collin can drink from any that he believes to contain *essence du succès*. In other words, Collin is able to pursue Success through several different vessels without undermining his worldview. The individual playing the role of protégé is only the means to an end—at least in Collin’s conscious estimation of the plan.

This last sentence brings our attention to a final way in which Collin differs from other characters whose desires are framed with beliefs in completeness. Given that Collin so openly dotes on each of his protégés, how does Collin avoid recognizing the inadequacy of his conscious understanding of his motivations in relation to the complicated? Many characters in the works at hand are troubled by the disparity between their desires for signifiers idealized through the Symbolic order and their desires for signifiers idealized for unknown reasons; for example, all of Collin’s protégés express the conflicting desires evoked on the one hand by their standing

worldview and on the other hand by that presented by Collin. Nevertheless, even though Collin openly recognizes his underlying desires or sexuality in some measure (as the following section will show), he never admits to feeling conflicted, and furthermore never explicitly expresses romantic or erotic overtures to his protégés. If this suggests that Collin's single-minded prioritization of the protégé plan's realization exhibits his exceptional level of self-control, we find that the patterns of behavior and fates of Esther and Lucien serve well as counterpoints not only to Collin's having apparently unified his will to a single aim, but to his exercise of considerable restraint. Esther and Lucien's deaths, like that of Goriot, are precipitated by their disillusionment; however, their repetition automatism is more complicated than his one-dimensional infatuation with his daughters. If each of them repeat self-destructive patterns, this is evoked overall by the fact that though both Lucien and Esther are saved by Collin from suicide, they both ultimately kill themselves. Esther's pattern involves her repeatedly allowing herself to be imprisoned in a space where she serves to enhance the pleasure of another. Until three months before *Splendeurs* begins, Esther had led the life of prostitution into which she had been born; if her love for Lucien after meeting him by chance inspired her to run away from the whore house and to try to be worthy of the artist, her love allows Collin to enclose Esther first in the convent where she is educated, then in the love nest that she shares with Lucien for several years while only leaving at night, and finally in the mansion in which Nucingen sets her up as his kept woman. Similarly, Lucien's pattern involves his repetitive submission to the influence of others; in *Illusions*, his friendship with David Séchard is replaced with his playing courtier to madame de Bargeton (whom he first and accompanies to Paris); after she dumps him, the writer Daniel d'Arthez takes him under his wing; he then falls in with a group of journalists and begins a relationship with the actress Coralie, which ultimately leads to his leaving Paris in disgrace; but before he can kill himself, Collin drags him into his carriage and successfully convinces Lucien to obey him completely. Esther and Lucien's limited agency may have to do with another similarity between them: their conscious struggle between conflicting desires. In spite of the religious education that provides Esther with such joy and a sense of self-worth, Esther's love for Lucien troubles her inasmuch as it surpasses even her love for the God and is therefore blasphemous and furthermore renders her incapable of refusing to commit debasing acts on his behalf. Lucien's artistic sensitivity to his emotions means that he is constantly divided between equally forceful desires; his fierce dedication to Collin's plan as his means of finding redemption with his family as well as Paris at large, a platform for his vision, and vengeance against those whose cruelty led to his initial, disgraceful departure from Paris is challenged before *Splendeurs* even begins by his budding infatuation with Esther, whose charm and unlikely purity of heart leads him to initiate a compromising relationship with her that contributes to his ultimate fall from grace just as his relationship to Coralie had once done. Their ultimate need to choose between these desires shows that one cannot necessarily consciously reconcile one's desire to pursue a signifier with a powerful yet mysterious appeal with one's conscious goals inherited through the Symbolic order—that is to say, with one's desire to maintain one's social membership, whose loss would subvert completeness' possibility in a different way. Esther chooses Love, Lucien chooses Success; however, neither of them manages to seize their aim as they wished to. If we saw above that repetition automatism can be explained

by the fact that through it, the subject experiences a level of pleasure unavailable to it elsewhere because it *believes* that such pleasure is unavailable to it elsewhere, the enjoyment involved in this process can never be more than frustrating symbolic jouissance. Though this is the only kind of enjoyment that can be experienced in relation to an idealized signifier through conscious desire, the *feeling* of attraction to that signifier invariably stems from unconscious desire (i.e. the inaugural desire for completeness as desire for the Thing). Though Esther enjoys both her piety and Lucien through their alignment with the unknown and social ideals, her belief that Lucien changed her life and that she cannot live without him leads her to prioritize him over all else. Though Lucien enjoys both Esther and the pursuit of Success through their alignment with the prohibited and a feeling of domination, the fact that he came back to Paris from the edge of death for the sake of Success means that he prioritizes it over all else.

The question of Collin's consistency even in the face of failure thus comes down to three factors: his worldview's partial recognition of negative absolutes, the fact that his master signifier is a concept rather than a person, and the fact that the vision of the future centered around his master signifier is capable of *engaging all forms of desire simultaneously in a way that averts him feeling consciously conflicted*. Beyond having created the appearance of his exceptional self-control, Collin himself apparently believes his having followed his own advice to Lucien to connect "tous vos vœux, toutes vos actions à une idée" (VIII: 603) considering for example his statement to Rastignac, "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" (PG 225). If Collin's advice to Lucien suggests his recognition that one might be simultaneously subjected to more than one desire, it also suggests his belief that one can control those desires and that an *idea*, a purely symbolic entity, can bring enough satisfaction to be worth investing all of one's energy into it. The indecision produced by simultaneous attraction to objects whose pursuits cannot be reconciled, the volatility involved in pursuing, attaining, and replacing desired objects in rapid succession, and the need to distract oneself when unable to identify a clear object for one's desire all threaten to disrupt the coherence or potential impact of an individual's life. Collin and those like him seem to sidestep these disruptions by investing all of their energy in pursuing a *single, practically unattainable* master signifier that simultaneously appeals to conscious desire, repressed desire, and desire for the return of the repressed. The impressive consistency of Collin's worldview and aims even when confronted with failure stems from the fact that he remains convinced that the protégé plan is his only available means of finding greater enjoyment in life than he currently possessed, as we see in his description of his plan in the soliloquy or in *Splendeurs'* description of Collin's vision of Lucien: "Contraint à vivre en dehors du monde où la loi lui interdisait à jamais de rentrer, épuisé par le vice et par de furieuses, par de terribles résistances, mais doué d'une force d'âme qui le rongait, ce personnage ignoble et grand, obscur et célèbre, dévoré surtout d'une fièvre de vie, revivait dans le corps élégant de Lucien dont l'âme était devenue la sienne" (XI: 115). If the narration constantly suggests that Collin resembles humanity's greats due to the feverish, forceful energy driving him to pursue his aims at all costs, the fact that such a pursuit hinges on his having identified an aim led me to consider that what sets these "greats" apart from the rest of the population has at least as much to do with these individuals' choice of object and ability to envision

the future as it has to do with their exceptional qualities. If such individuals' refusal to be deterred by the fact that realizing the visions for the future associated with these master signifiers is very unlikely is striking and even admirable at times, the citation above associates the energy fueling this refusal with forceful, relentless, and unpleasant *résistances*. This word could refer to one's general resistance to anything threatening one's life or specifically to one's resistance to authority and social assimilation; however, in the frame of psychoanalysis, this statement specifically evokes the strength of these individuals' resistance to recognizing the repressed. If these individuals' single-minded pursuit of their goals makes them more likely to challenge the status quo and thus to make a place for themselves in history, their dependence on a single master signifier as the principal if not the sole source of meaning and pleasure in their lives makes the preservation of this signifier's idealized status and their belief in its attainment's continued possibility so important to their well-being that this leaves very little room for them to recognize negative absolutes in any form. Each time Collin is presented with the opportunity to set his protégé plan in action, his seizure of it prevents him from moving on from the unresolved, repressed trauma of his marginalization, whose circumstances he relives by reproducing the situation that led up to it. Though this *engages all of his desires* and therefore *unites his energy* to accomplishing a single aim, his compulsion to pursue his master signifier and his repressive forces are consequently much stronger than those of other characters.

This brings to mind the second key function of the Thing: if Lacan wrote about the *primacy of the signifier*, just as much as the fact that the shape of our lives is determined by the preexisting Symbolic order, he wanted to show that once our desire for the Thing is repressed as such, it determines for the rest of our lives what we can enjoy, the application of our will, our intersubjective relationships, etc. As the object of primary repression, it serves the function as the fixed point ordering the unconscious, which comes to rotate around the intersection of the Thing as a signifier and the signifieds attached to it through both emotional and symbolic means. As the signifier of empty space, it is the primary juncture of language and language's beyond; it is what hold open the space between signifier and signified in all ensuing signification, meaning that it is fundamentally associated with the conviction that there is "something more" than the material world and the enjoyment produced by it as well as all negative absolutes and the trauma caused by them. However, its more specific signifieds established through one's individual experience are also important because they directly affect how one's unconscious desire determines one's perception. Its Imaginary signified as that which one *first* idealized as capable of providing the "lost" state of completeness associates the Thing with the feeling of completeness itself, the specific circumstances in which we believed to have experienced completeness and which fostered the development of our narcissism (e.g. unity with another, unconditional love, complete control), the specific attributes of that which we identified as the prohibited object (particularly its subversive quality) whose recovery we continue to believe unconsciously could restore "lost" completeness, and the way in which we fantasized about this restoration's accomplishment. Its Symbolic signified as that which authority actively and permanently prohibited associates the Thing with the feeling of being dominated through an exercise of control, the specific circumstances of one's experience of prohibition's initial enforcement, the ideals and value system which this enforcement of prohibition defended, the specific attributes

of the representative of authority that on the one hand inspires one's resistance and resentment to authority and on the other hand motivates one's ultimate identification with this representative in the hopes of wielding the same power that it had exerted over one, and the way in which one fantasized about attaining and exercising that power (i.e. an act of symbolic *vengeance*). Finally, its Real signified as that which the Symbolic's limitations blocks from being restored to consciousness and correcting the subject's division associates the Thing with the feeling of trauma evoked by one's initial separation from "lost" completeness (which makes sense considering that "[a]bove all the real is associated with the concept of *trauma*" [Homer 83]), with the specific circumstances in which one recognized and accepted one's inability to attain the Thing before repressing one's desire for it, and with the truth contained in the circumstances in this and all ensuing encounters with the Real, given that all cycles of idealization of and traumatic disillusionment with master signifiers are a repetition of one's initial experience with the Thing (inasmuch as one's first encounter with the Real in shocking, disorienting primary trauma led to one's idealization of the Thing and one's second encounter with it [frustration, disappointment at finding oneself blocked] led to repression) and are therefore all opportunities to recognize the universality of negative absolutes first made clear in relation to the Thing.

This brings me to my next point: the fact that we can find enjoyment in contradictory ways is directly connected to the fact that the Thing is associated with so many contradictory signifieds. The above paragraph highlighted seven different dimensions of desire. If all desires are desire for the articulation of language's beyond (i.e. the resolution of negative absolutes), desire can also specifically attract us to signifiers associated with unity with another (i.e. a state of unconditional love and shared agency), the prohibited, one's submission (i.e. social acceptance), one's domination (i.e. vengeance), trauma (i.e. the means of finding truth), and self-awareness (i.e. the correction of one's division). This is why Collin's desire for the protégé plan's realization is so interesting: it reflects all of these dimensions of desire, showing that Collin's *repetition automatism* is the result of his having identified a master signifier capable of simultaneously engaging his unconscious desire functioning in relation to the Thing's Imaginary signifieds (which attracts him to the protégés themselves, as his underlying desire does not seem to have changed since his self-sacrifice on behalf of Franchessini), his conscious desire functioning in relation to the Thing's Symbolic signifieds (which we see in Collin's declaration in the soliloquy that he plans to use Raoul as an instrument of his own domination and the mechanism of his vengeance as well as the fact that by gaining access to Success, he hopes to regain his social membership), and his desire for the return of the repressed functioning in relation to the Thing's Real signifieds (which drives him to place himself in situations which will likely lead to trauma and thus create an opportunity for him to recognize and accept negative absolutes). As I said in the second chapter's last section, Collin's conscious approach to the protégé plan does shift between the three; it evolves from wanting to prove his continued value to society by providing it with a good man (Raoul), to wanting to prove to himself the emptiness of noble values by corrupting a potentially good man (Rastignac) through force of will and intellect, to wanting to embrace in full his one chance to realize his vision and prove his

supremacy by truly becoming one with a young man destined for Success (Lucien). However, at the same time we see in each of these repetitions that the six dimensions of desire that I highlighted above become apparent through his words or actions.

Whether because Collin's relationship with Raoul is the earliest after his trauma with Franchessini (meaning that the distance he has established from his emotions is not yet as great as it is in the following novels), *Vautrin*'s format as a play means that he only appears through his speech (i.e. the point at which consciousness and the unconscious as well as the subjects of the signifier and jouissance collide), or because this work is shorter than the others and directly focused on Collin, the six dimensions of his desire are very apparent in the play. If Collin says to himself in his soliloquy, "Raoul n'est pas seulement le fils de mon esprit et de mon fiel, il est ma vengeance" (68), his response to his minions the scene before when they grill him about why he is dedicating himself so fully to Raoul's cause suggests other motivations as well, even if he would not admit they were true to himself:

Par ce que je suis en train de faire de Raoul, voyez ce que je puis. Ne devait-il pas avoir la préférence ? Raoul de Frescas est un jeune homme resté pur comme un ange au milieu de notre borborygme, il est notre conscience ; enfin, c'est ma création ; je suis son père, sa mère, et je veux être sa providence. J'aime à faire des heureux, moi qui ne peux plus l'être. Je respire par sa bouche, je vis de sa vie ; ses passions sont les miennes, je ne puis avoir d'émotions nobles et pures que dans le cœur de cet être que n'est souillé d'aucun crime. Vous avec vos fantaisies, voilà la mienne ! En échange de la flétrissure que la société m'a imprimée, je lui rends un homme d'honneur, j'entre en lutte avec le destin (66-67)

In his first conversation with Raoul himself, another side of his motivations emerges—that of selfless devotion:

Ton bienfaiteur ! Tu m'insultes. T'ai-je offert mon sang, ma vie ? suis-je prêt à tuer, à assassiner ton ennemi, pour recevoir de toi cet intérêt exorbitant appelé reconnaissance ? Pour t'exploiter, suis-je un usurier ? Il y a des hommes qui vous attachent un bienfait au cœur, comme on attache un boulet au pied des...suffit ! ces homme-là, je les écraserais comme des chenilles sans crois commettre un homicide ! Je t'ai prié de m'adopter pour ton père, mon cœur doit être pour toi ce que le ciel est pour les anges, un espace où tout est bonheur et confiance ; tu peux me dire toutes tes pensées, mêmes les mauvaises. Parle, je comprends tout, même une lâcheté. (XXIII: 77-78)

However, later in this same conversation, he says off-handedly, "Mais, hélas ! une fois riche, une fois grand d'Espagne, une fois que tu feras partie de ce monde, tu m'oublieras : en changeant d'air, on change d'idées ; tu me mépriseras, et... tu auras raison" (XXIII: 81). And finally, in his conversation with Raoul's mother at the end of the play (in which we find a rare case of him at least seeming to identify with someone other than a protégé on a profound level). He declares, "Raoul, mais c'est mon âme ! Que je souffre, que l'on me couvre de honte ; s'il est heureux et glorieux, je le regarde, et ma vie est belle," "Je ne me rattachais au monde et à la vie que par ce brillant anneau, pur comme de l'or," and "À moi l'infamie, à lui l'honneur !" (XXIII: 119), and he does not demand anything in exchange for his efforts that is not fulfilled by Raoul as the product of his efforts, ultimately moving to leave at the end of the act even before the officers enter to arrest him.

First of all, if the descriptions of his plan based on his identification with authority—including paternal and providential metaphors as well as his wanting to feel like a creator managing his creation—dominate his conscious understanding of the plan, they also allow us to better understand why desire for social membership, domination, and vengeance are linked to the Thing's Symbolic

signifieds and are always a veil concealing a different desire.<sup>97</sup> Given that his view of Raoul is always of a signifier emptied of its own meaning in relation to these motivations, it is clear that they are concerned first and foremost with Collin's identity, social membership, and exercise of the power that was once exercised over him, and are thus aimed at proving through his possession of another that even if he failed to realize the vision of his own ideal self, he still bears value for society and his narcissistic estimation of that value is valid. If he speaks this in conjunction with his aim of revenge without giving a precise description of that revenge's target, this evokes how identifying with the representative of authority founds one's ideal self in the Symbolic, meaning that one cannot express one's resentment toward its exigencies by attacking it directly (as it is that which makes attaining that identity a valid and possible goal), explaining why his "fantasy" expressed to the other criminals describes him taking this revenge by providing society with a good man, which is not an act against it but rather a peace offering reflecting his desire to regain his social membership. In any case, the fact that he is disgusted by Raoul's *bienfaiteur* comment and the disjunction between his saying he wants to be a *father* for him only to then describe this role as providing the young man a fantastical plane of unconditional love in which to safely voice *all* of his thoughts, whether good or bad (a role which contradicts the representative of authority's obsession with control and actually recalls that of the caregiver) shows how this conscious approach serves principally to allow him to distance this plan in his mind from that which he acted out with Franchessini while still actually performing the selfless devotion set by that precedent. We can thus move on to consider the descriptions of his plan evoking how his desire for the Imaginary signifieds attached to the Thing—including his desire for unity with another, selfless Love, and the prohibited—manifests as that which orders his actions in contradiction to his conscious understanding of his motivations.<sup>98</sup> His statement that he is Raoul's mother, his constant impulse to sacrifice himself for Raoul's happiness (as he is barred from it), his emphasis on living vicariously through him and as him while

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<sup>97</sup> I do not have space to here include the reading which I mentioned in the introduction as that which alerted me to a connection between Collin's alternation between paternal and maternal roles and Lacan's structures of sexuation. However, I can here mention that this line from the soliloquy mirrors the *duc de Montsorel*'s management of Armand's future in that play (telling him to obey absolutely and treating him like a pawn). If his securing a bright future for his illegitimate son instead of his legitimate one represents his vengeance against his wife for a nonexistent offense, the fact that he knew about his wife's epistolary affair with his friend before the Revolution and only became angered by it once that conflict threatened his identity as a noble and forced the couple to emigrate suggests that the duke only charged his wife with the corruption of his legacy (something he could control) as a means of distracting himself from the abolishment of privileges, which undermined the Symbolic order on which his conviction of his own importance was founded (something he could not control). His obsession with Armand's marriage to Inès and squashing his rival, Raoul, just months after having returned from that emigration thus represents his determination to reestablish his own identity threatened by *marginalization*.

<sup>98</sup> This aspect of his actions align Collin with the *duchesse de Montsorel*. After years of suffering in silence her husband's cruel, controlling treatment of her (enabled by his false assertions that he knows where her son is and that he will hurt him if she does not obey), after having become very religious, as soon as she *feels* that Raoul is her son (this is the only proof that she has, and she acknowledges to her aunt the craziness of her hope while refusing to ignore it) she becomes completely fixated on protecting him and finding out more about him, confronts her husband for the first time in decades, says she does not care about her own reputation as long as Raoul profits, and abandons her piety to help him. The fact that doing so is in itself defiant to authority (her husband) as well as her willingness to do anything to help Raoul evokes the transgressive aspect of this desire for unity with another, and the fact that she hopes for his Success in order to enjoy his happiness from afar echoes Collin's similar statement in the soliloquy. Most important is the fact of *feeling*'s supremacy in the formation of her ideal self rather than the Symbolic order; as she does not belong to the social group profiting from the status quo (aristocratic males), she does not believe that she can attain completeness through it.

sharing his passions, and his unconditional provision of the young man's needs without asking anything in return (as he says he has no interest in Raoul's situation but Raoul's good) but *reconnaissance* all evoke how the desire for unity with another person is founded on *feeling* rather than language. The fact that what he most cherishes in the young man (shown in his statement to the criminals, the fact that he preserved Raoul's nobility, and his statement to Raoul's mother) are those qualities that he apparently rejected after his situation with Franchessini, that he emphasizes that his love is unconditional no matter what Raoul says, that he is isolated from the rest of the world and the Symbolic and relates to it only in relation to this one object, and that he selflessly serves him by any means necessary in spite of Paris' unwritten rules highlights to what extent his unconscious desires dominate his conscious desire. On the one hand, his division and his attempts to resolve it at least symbolically here become clear through the fact that his selflessness is so opposed to his criminality and is exhibited in a way that aims at resolving his honest side and his ruthless side through their fusion into a single identity at least in the eyes of Raoul if not through the official reversal of his marginalization. On the other hand, the strength of his unconscious desire becomes clear because his feelings for the young man take supremacy over all other goals; this passion will make him rebel against any rule threatening to interrupt his capacity to enjoy Raoul and renders transgression a pleasurable act through its association with service to the object. Finally, we see his desire for truth and his overall desire for language's beyond through his conscious reminders to himself that the Symbolic cannot bring him satisfaction as he is barred from membership therein, his expressions of self-disgust as one who cannot embrace romantic or noble illusions and for the *bourbier* in which they operate, his placement of his fate in the hands of destiny, his anticipation of Raoul's abandonment, his repulsion by the word *bienfaiteur* in relation to people with whom emotional attachment becomes a ball and chain (whom he says he would murder without batting an eye), and in the fact that he leaves at the end of the play in spite of his potential power over the family. This shows that in addition to making his unconscious desire evident (given that unconscious desire would prefer to remain hidden in order to continue secretly enjoying something that would consciously repulse him), the return of the repressed stems from a desire for trauma that is a desire for truth and for the Beyond inasmuch as it pushes one to engage in a situation likely to end in trauma with the aim of providing one with the opportunity to recognize one's pattern of unfulfilling behavior in order to break free from it and seek something else, something different, something which the Symbolic order and even our attachment to the Thing cannot provide. Collin leaves when it is still possible for him to take possession of Raoul and control the manifestations of his Success (or to dominate him sexually), to enjoy Raoul's happiness from afar, or even for Raoul to realize Inès' inability to satisfy him and recognize Collin's greatness and desirability, leading him to become his lover. What does become impossible? Certainly, Love (as their fusion into one uninterrupted being) cannot happen once the young man acquires a family providing outside distractions; however, this still falls under the category of unconscious desire as unity with another. Perhaps we could instead say that it becomes impossible for him to completely realize his protégé vision *as he imagined it* in order to be freed from his orbit around Paris and protégés so that he could then pursue something else. If this desire for disappointment as freedom from the Symbolic is a desire for exploration of the Unknown, for isolation, for



reversion to the state of nature, it is also equivalent to a desire for death not only as the Unknown, but as absolute freedom from the Symbolic would bring the cessation of desire (which can only be sustained in relation to a signifier). It is thus ironic that I will argue in the following section and the conclusion that the return of the repressed allows for social responsibility; if the return of the repressed is that which allows for self-awareness through recognition of negative absolutes, this specter of empty space can only be comforting if one finds a way to accept it consciously—a way which can only come through the Symbolic, highlighting the impossibility of our escaping it once subjected to it.

The contrast between Collin's conscious aims and his actions shows the difference between the two positions on the graph in Lacan's original description of it in terms of structures of sexuation, as the former is based on Collin's continued hope (even if he would not admit it) that he may be able to regain social membership through Raoul, whereas the latter is based on his recognition that he will never be able to regain it and consequential recourse to his transgressive passions as his sole source of enjoyment. If "masculine" people can only have Symbolic *jouissance* marked by disappointment, this is because acknowledging that the availability of any enjoyment available outside of the Symbolic would undermine its importance and therefore their conviction of their own importance, meaning that they can only enjoy objects of desire as idealized signifiers whose attainment inevitably fails to provide the satisfaction for which they hoped.<sup>99</sup> Contrarily, those in a "feminine" position, because of their marginalization from power and their assignment of social status in relation to the group to which they did not choose to belong forces them to confront constant proof (provided by the return of the repressed) of the Symbolic's limitations in representing their identities (as it does so first and foremost in relation to their minority status [whether based on gender, race, religion, criminality, or any other label] in a way that excludes them from power and eschews their individuality) and to provide them with completeness (as they do not have access to society's ideals) allows them the opportunity to identify with an alternative authority appreciating their singularity or even opposing the status quo (e.g. Collin's role in the underworld, the duchess' dedication to religion) and to embrace the realm of feeling which may not fit into the Symbolic as such (given that it promotes feeling or intuition over reason and inherited knowledge and does not balk at transgression) without expecting completeness (as their recognition of the Symbolic's limitations makes them aware of negative absolutes, as they will never be able to have everything that they want) or to be able to make anyone else understand it, therefore allowing them to enjoy (through unconscious desire) anything which they treasure (e.g. Collin's and the duchess' love for Raoul) *in the moment* and *to its*

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<sup>99</sup> This is why the "masculine" structure of sexuation is headed by two formulas which are directly contradictory (one saying there is an enjoyment not marked by negative absolutes [the ideal] and one saying there is none [their experience]); their expectations of completeness prevent them from enjoying anything after they have attained it because they remain focused on its failure to be perfect rather than just enjoying it.

*fullest* without having to think about it fitting in to some plan for the future, appreciating it for what it is without wanting it or needing it to be anything that it is not in spite of the fact that they know it will end or may even cause them suffering.<sup>100</sup>

If Collin is not able to fully benefit from his access to this latter position through his marginality, this is because his repression of his continued desire for Love and conscious idealization of Success prevents him from letting go of his expectations of completeness *through the Symbolic* (i.e. his worldview centering on the unwritten rules), which would be challenged by his recognition of its flaws. This trend continues after Raoul; even if he decided on his social impossibility after *Vautrin* and even if Collin does not express his protégé plan as such in *Le Père Goriot*, the fact that he once again escapes from prison only to return to Paris shows that his dream is still calling him. However, we can see the difference in his approach to it through Collin's first words to Rastignac when he abruptly ends their intentions to duel in Vauquer's garden with his overture for a mutually beneficial partnership: "J'ai à causer avec vous. Vous êtes un bon petit jeune homme auquel je ne veux pas de mal. Je vous aime, foi de Tromp... (mille tonnerres!), foi de Vautrin" (PG 160). By almost saying his criminal moniker, he shows that he has begun to identify with this persona in the wake of losing Raoul. His willingness to duel (especially considering his words on its futility to Rastignac just afterwards) shows his nonchalance about facing death and craving for excitement and to dominate another. His allusion to Benvenuto Cellini as an influence at the beginning of this speech ("J'ai lu les Mémoires de Benvenuto Cellini, tel que vous me voyez, et en italien encore! J'ai appris de cet homme-là, qui était un fier luron, à imiter la Providence qui nous tue à tort et à travers, et à aimer le beau partout où il se trouve" [PG 160-161]) furthermore suggests his shift toward a more fatalist and hedonistic approach to life. He discourages the young man from dueling "en mettant le doigt de Rastignac sur un trou qu'il avait au sein" (161) left by a duel that went badly for him, when he later in this first conversation sees Rastignac becomes interested in what he is offering, he says, "Ah! ah! vous faites meilleure mine à votre petit papa Vautrin [...] vous êtes comme une jeune fille à qui l'on dit: A ce soir, et qui se toilette en se pouléchant comme un chat qui boit du lait. A la bonne heure. Allons donc! A nous deux!" (162), and he shows his appreciation of a challenge when he comments in relation to Rastignac's ambition, "Demandez aux femmes quels hommes elles recherchent, les ambitieux. Les ambitieux ont les reins plus forts, le sang plus riche en fer, le cœur plus chaud que ceux des autres hommes. Et la femme se trouve si heureuse et si belle aux heures où elle est forte, qu'elle préfère à tous les hommes celui dont la force est énorme, fût-elle en danger d'être brisée par lui" (162-163). In this initial speech, Collin seems to engage with Rastignac on the grounds of mischief-for-mischief's-sake, seizing destiny's proffered opportunity without necessarily knowing where it will lead. If his approach to Rastignac has the most decidedly sexual overtones of any, this suggests that he did not see the young man as a true potential protégé, as he speaks to him very differently than

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<sup>100</sup> This is why the "feminine" structure of sexuation is headed by one formula saying there is no enjoyment not marked by negative absolutes and one saying that not all enjoyment is marked by negative absolutes: together, these show that though no enjoyment can escape the limitations of language (i.e. be perfectly communicable and understandable), one can still embrace the dimension of feeling. Beyond the dimension of language—that is, the dimension of feeling whose determination by language (through the Thing) cannot be articulated.

either Raoul or Lucien. He may have taken on the challenge of corrupting Rastignac just to prove the validity of his worldview to himself; however, given his declaration of the plantation plan in this first speech, it seems likely to me that Collin intended to give Rastignac the means to power in a compromising way in order to create either an agent in the government or even a veritable surrogate whom Collin could use against his will. In any case, he certainly has fun unsettling the strong-willed law student; after much time has passed without Rastignac giving him an answer, we find a scene in which the *seduction* of “seduction speech” takes its full meaning. He begins by saying, “Je vous permets de me mépriser encore aujourd’hui, sûr que plus tard vous m’aimerez. Vous trouverez en moi de ces immenses abîmes, de ces vastes sentiments concentrés que les niais appellent des vices ; mais vous ne me trouverez jamais ni lâche ni ingrat. Enfin, je ne suis ni un pion ni un fou, mais une tour, mon petit” (PG 224), continuing suggestively, “Vous vous demandez pourquoi ce dévouement ? Eh bien ! je vous le dirai tout doucement quelque jour, dans le tuyau de l’oreille” (224). He goes on to extend his initial offer :

Je veux partir d’ici à quelques mois pour l’Amérique, aller planter mon tabac. Je vous enverrai les cigares de l’amitié. Si je deviens riche, je vous aiderai. Si je n’ai pas d’enfants (cas probable, je ne suis pas curieux de me replanter ici par bouture), eh ! bien, je vous léguerai ma fortune. Est-ce être l’ami d’un homme ? Mais je vous aime, moi. J’ai la passion de me dévouer pour un autre. Je l’ai déjà fait. [...] 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. [...] Pierre et Jaffier, voilà ma passion. Je sais *Venise sauvée* par cœur. (225-226)

If Collin initially did not pose the terms of his protégé plan to Rastignac, his offer of parentage and reference to Otway shows his inability to resist at least offering the post to Rastignac; he has not given up looking for a protégé, that much is clear. His evident pleasure in disturbing Rastignac and in propositioning him obliquely is nevertheless echoed by the intensity with which he pursues Rastignac’s complicity; the fact that he has another, unknown life as opposed to the case with Raoul and Lucien is undoubtedly due only to the fact that Rastignac did not ever agree to his mentorship. The scene the night before Taillefer is killed, both Collin’s determination to dominate him and his affection for him become obvious. After the drugged wine makes Rastignac unable to respond, Collin leans in and whispers in his ear as he passes out, “Mon petit gars, nous ne sommes pas assez rusé pour lutter avec notre papa Vautrin, et il vous aime trop pour vous laisser faire des sottises. Quand j’ai résolu quelque chose, le bon Dieu seul est assez fort pour me barrer le passage” (246), and then, “[e]n plaçant la tête de l’étudiant sur la chaise, pour qu’il pût dormir commodément, il le baisa chaleureusement au front” (248). The strength of his will and warmth of his kiss indicate his hope in spite of himself to keep open the possibility of Rastignac becoming his protégé. Encouraging Victorine to hold him, Collin says of the sleeping *parvenu*:

[V]oilà de ces scènes qui auraient inspiré de belles pages à ce bon Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, l’auteur de *Paul et Virginie*. La jeunesse est bien belle [...] ce qui m’attache à ce jeune homme, ce qui m’émeut, c’est de savoir la beauté de son âme en harmonie avec celle de sa figure. Voyez, n’est-ce pas un chérubin posé sur l’épaule d’un ange ? il est digne d’être aimé, celui-là ! Si j’étais femme, je voudrais mourir (non, pas si bête !) vivre pour lui. (251-252)

Even though he is playing to the onlooking ladies’ tastes, this admiration of virtue and youth and this tendency to live for another echo his words about Raoul, showing that he cannot help but to admire Rastignac and to imagine himself serving him as a lover serves the

beloved. When Rastignac awakes the next day too late to stop the duel, Collin speaks callously of Taillefer's death; they do not speak again until the scene of his arrest, in which Collin proclaims to the crowd, "Êtes-vous meilleure que nous ? Nous avons moins d'infamie sur l'épaule que vous n'en avez dans le coeur, membres flasques d'une société gangrenée : le meilleur d'entre vous ne me résistait pas" (PG 267-268) before looking straight at Rastignac and speaking the sad adieu I cited in section 3.1.1. This line suggests that his temptation of Rastignac was the inverse of his preservation of Raoul's noble nature—an attempt to provide the city with the kind of man it deserved. However, the isolation haunting his words and continued hope that Rastignac will take him up on his offer show that even if Collin seemed at the beginning of the novel to have embraced his marginality in a way that allowed him to enjoy his life, maybe even to the point of finding Other *jouissance* while serving as the underworld's banker in Paris, his protégé plan still haunted him beneath the surface; the fact is, Collin cannot not come to Paris for the sake of its possibility, and once there, he would inevitably find a young man who fit the bill, leading him to once more destroy anything in his path to realizing his vision.

With Lucien, there is no preservation of his morals, as his plan with Raoul had failed to satisfy him, and there is no light-hearted teasing, no distance to allow him to make his own decision, as this had allowed Rastignac to slip away from him; no, with Lucien, Collin's focus is on control above all else, and yet his passion for the young man is the strongest yet. His reaction upon first seeing Lucien shows how seriously he takes the opportunity presented through him: "Ce voyageur ressemblait à un chasseur qui trouve une proie longtemps et inutilement cherchée" (VIII: 595). Leading the young man to his carriage "en passant son bras sous celui de Lucien avec un empressément maternel" (596), he shows during their long ride that the young man's desire to kill himself is actually a benefit for Collin (saying to Lucien, "vous m'intéressez comme si vous étiez mon fils, et je suis assez puissant pour vous parler à cœur ouvert, comme vous venez de me parler. Savez-vous ce qui me plaît de vous ?... Vous avez fait en vous-même table rase, et vous pouvez alors entendre un cours de morale qui ne se fait nulle part" [603-604]); Lucien's disillusionment so pleases him because he knows how easy it will be to fill him with his own worldview. Collin demands his obedience with mixed metaphors and big promises, first saying, "Voulez-vous être soldat, je serai votre capitaine ? Obéissez-moi comme une femme obéit à son mari, comme un enfant obéit à sa mère, je vous garantis qu'en moins de trois ans vous serez marquis de Rubempré, vous épouserez une des plus nobles filles du faubourg Saint-Germain, et vous vous assierez un jour sur les bancs de la Pairie" (607), continuing by claiming his right to this control, saying, "Je vous ai pêché, je vous ai rendu la vie, et vous m'appartenez comme la créature est au créateur, comme, dans les contes de fées, l'Afrite est au génie, comme l'icoglan est au Sultan, comme le corps est à l'âme !" (608), making clear Lucien's lack of options when he says, "Eh bien ! le jour où ce pacte d'homme à démon, d'enfant à diplomate, ne vous conviendra plus, vous pourrez toujours aller chercher un petit endroit, comme celui dont vous parliez, pour vous noyer : vous serez un peu plus ou un peu moins ce que vous êtes aujourd'hui, malheureux ou déshonoré..." (608), and finally stating, not asking, "je vous adopte et ferai de vous mon héritier" (608). The application of his power as a captain (a military metaphor which he usually applies to the criminals, whose lives matter little to him), as a husband over a wife (claiming his right to his person as his dowry), as a mother over a child (showing that if

his authority over Raoul was unconditional love, his role as a caregiver now would be one of control and possession), his use of exotic evocations of creative power in order to heighten its association with the Unknown for the poet, his desire to put his own soul inside of Lucien's body (showing the kind of unadulterated control he hoped to exert over Lucien), his allusion to suicide as the young man's only other option, and his placing the duties accompanying inheritance on the young man all show Collin's frenzied hunger for control in the wake of his past failures, his turning of every metaphor toward supporting his appearance of mastery. Collin then uses the knowledge Lucien gave him about his past to inflame in him the vengeful emotions with which he most identifies:

Comment ! [...] après avoir joué sans connaître les règles du jeu, vous abandonnez la partie au moment où vous y devenez fort, où vous vous y présentez avec un parrain solide... et sans même avoir le désir de prendre une revanche ! Comment, vous n'éprouvez pas l'envie de monter sur le dos de ceux qui vous ont chassé de Paris ? [...] Je ne suis qu'un humble prêtre [...] mais si des hommes m'avaient humilié, vexé, torturé, trahi, vendu, [...] je dévouerais mon corps et mon âme à la vengeance. Je me moquerais de finir ma vie accroché à un gibet, assis à la *garrot*, empalé, guillotiné, comme chez vous ; mais je ne laisserais prendre ma tête qu'après avoir écrasé mes ennemis sous mes talons. (608-609)

His own *need* for revenge surfaces here, his need to get back at those who drove him from Paris (Bibi-Lupin), the justice as which he views this revenge in spite of his role as a priest, the single-mindedness with which he envisions crushing anyone who has harmed him. However, the fact that knowing the rules in the past has not yet allowed Collin to prosper, the fact that Lucien's vengeance can so easily be aligned with his own, whose object remains unclear, and his determination to pursue it even unto death all show that this energy is the empty product of repetition automatism, which pushes one further and further from one's initial goal through repression until one is so distant from the feelings underlying one's actions for fear of one's vulnerability that the blind need to assert one's control in order to continue avoiding them becomes the sole focus of one's life. This is what we see when he then responds to Lucien's queries about his motivations in an unprecedented way: "Mais, apprends ceci, grave-le dans ta cervelle encore si molle : l'homme a horreur de la solitude. Et de toutes les solitudes, la solitude morale est celle qui l'épouvante le plus. [...] La première pensée de l'homme, qu'il soit lépreux ou forçat, infâme ou malade, est d'avoir un complice de sa destinée. A satisfaire ce sentiment, qui est la vie même, il emploie toutes ses forces, toute sa puissance, la verve de sa vie" (611). If Collin here exposes at the beginning of his final cycle of pursuing the protégé plan the underlying fear, isolation, and vulnerability which he seeks to escape through it, we will find in the following chapter that once this plan fails, he becomes so focused on control that he loses all self-awareness and agency, ultimately becoming drained of the exceptionality which we have so admired. This section has aimed at showing that if the repetition of the prohibition complex's resolution engages all of one's desires toward one goal, this goal always serves different purposes in relation to the three different desires. On the level of unconscious desire, it is an attempt to *beat prohibition* inasmuch as it is an attempt to not actually have to sacrifice what is prohibited by appearing to obey while concealing to others and oneself that one continues to transgress. On the level of conscious desire, it is an attempt to *beat past trauma*, to disprove negative absolutes' universality by asserting one's ability to symbolically conquer that past experience and show that it was a fluke; if it begins with one's trying to beat as one was once beaten (by identifying with authority), when that fails, it progresses to trying to beat that which beat one

(by combatting authority or a representative of authority), and when that also fails to bring one satisfaction and leads one to progress more and more encounters with the Real, this ultimately leaves one compulsively beating anything that one can, obsessing over any proof of one's mastery, and prioritizing this control over happiness. And finally, on the level of the return of the repressed, repetition automatism is an attempt to *beat one's division* by driving one to engage in situations that will likely lead to trauma, which provides the opportunity to increase one's self-awareness.

If Collin's form of repetition automatism sets him apart from Goriot, Esther, Lucien, and other characters bearing beliefs in completeness' possibility, he is nevertheless similar to them inasmuch as his efforts to realize the protégé plan always end in failure, as the next section will show. However, even if the great majority of Balzac's characters reflect this "masculine" structure of sexuation, the author nevertheless presents counterpoints from time to time. I would like to briefly highlight one of these: Horace Bianchon, who appears in *Le Père Goriot* as a student of medicine who takes his meals at the boarding house and by *Splendeurs* has become one of the three most accomplished doctors in Paris. Bianchon poses a direct contrast to Collin through the fact that in *Le Père Goriot*, Rastignac poses the question about the mandarin to Bianchon while contemplating whether he will accept Collin's offer:

- Où as-tu pris cet air grave ? lui dit l'étudiant en médecine en lui prenant le bras pour se promener devant le palais.
- Je suis tourmenté par de mauvaises idées.
- En quel genre ? Ça se guérit, les idées.
- Comment ?
- En y succombant.
- Tu ries sans savoir ce dont il s'agit. [...] Te souviens-tu de ce passage où [Rousseau] 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.
- Oui.
- Eh bien ?
- Bah ! J'en suis à mon trente-troisième mandarin.
- Ne plaisante pas. Allons, 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. [...] tu poses la question qui se trouve à l'entrée de la vie pour tout le monde, et tu veux couper le nœud gordien avec l'épée. Pour agir ainsi, mon cher, il faut être Alexandre, sinon l'on va au bain. Moi, je suis heureux de la petite existence que je me créerai en province, où je succéderai tout bêtement à mon père. Les affections de l'homme se satisfont dans le plus petit cercle aussi pleinement que dans une immense circonférence. Napoléon ne dînait pas deux fois, et ne pouvait pas avoir plus de maîtresses qu'en prend un étudiant en médecine quand il est interne aux Capucins. 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.
- Merci, tu m'as fait du bien, Bianchon ! nous serons toujours amis. (PG 197-198)

Though Rastignac does ultimately go on to kill mandarins through his alliance with the Nucingens, Bianchon's speech probably had much to do with his attempt to save the life of the man to whose head Collin held a dueling pistol. Overall, Bianchon's words address so many of the topics here discussed. His statement that desire is not reasonable and the fact that he situates Rastignac's question at the precise locus of this study—the entrance to society, i.e., the situation in which the subject becomes divided—alert us to his extreme relevance to our study of Balzac's approach to the mind and morality. His statement about the Gordian knot also reflects this. Given that according to legend, this inextricable knot was tied by the founding ruler of a regime that Alexander the Great conquered

after having ceased trying to untie this symbol of legitimacy and severed it with a single cut, the knot represents the Symbolic order as authority. By saying that only a sovereign—that is, one occupying a position not subjected to the law—can sever this knot without being punished, Bianchon positions himself in direct opposition with Collin, who has promised Rastignac that by ascending to a position of Success, he will be able to have social membership with no sacrifice (i.e. satisfy all of his desires, even those which are prohibited). Furthermore, when Bianchon describes his own desire, he shows that it is limited in relation to his vision for the future and in relation to his understanding of the satisfaction available to human beings at large. Because his vision for the future is defined by familial devotion, the fact that his career ultimately far exceeds his expectations brings him enjoyment without blinding him with narcissism; it seems he remains humble and grounded not only because he continues serving all classes of patients, but because we see in the posthumously-published *Les Petits bourgeois* (1854) that after having been elected to the *Académie des sciences*, Bianchon even refuses a nomination to be on the municipal council. His statements above also show his recognition of the limitations to the satisfaction available even to the most powerful, and he furthermore shows his recognition of the role played by perception in one's satisfaction. This recognition of limitations aligns Bianchon with the “feminine” structure of sexuation so rarely applicable to Balzac's characters. Considering this, his statement that submitting to one's thought reflects the author's statements in the *Avant-propos* (presented in section 1.2) that thought has the dual potential to promote order and to threaten it. In an article about “the corrosive effect of the intellect on the individual and on society” (Brombert 5) as portrayed in *Le Peau de Chagrin*, the most famous of Balzac's *Etudes philosophiques* (which incorporate the fantastic as allegories used to demonstrate the principles underlying his works at large), Victor Brombert cites a comment made by Dr. Bianchon to Raphaël de Valentin, the novel's protagonist, while accompanying three other doctors whom Raphaël has consulted to shed light on the symptoms he has experienced since possessing the ass's skin (who do not have any useful advice to offer Raphaël): “There is at the bottom of medicine negation as in all the sciences” (5).<sup>101</sup> Brombert interprets this as follows:

Negation, however, means more here than the failure of specific scientific processes to cope with life: it implies a principle of self-destruction inherent in all intellectual effort. The constantly shrinking talisman is the very image of this wearing down and final destruction of life through thought. The one diagnosis of Raphael's malady that has to be taken seriously is the one provided by Dr. Brisset: “He is exhausted by excesses of thinking...” [...] There is greater thematic coherence and consistency in *La Comédie humaine* than one is frequently willing to grant. All of Balzac's great thinkers and creators—Promethean intellects or artists—are similarly afflicted with the disease of genius. They all appear in a grotesque light and [...] all seem at first physically strange and even ludicrous, but the details of their strangeness are ominously endowed with demonic undertones, and the demonic elements finally come to the foreground, leading to madness and self-annihilation. In all cases, they confirm Bianchon's verdict that at the bottom of all knowledge there is negation. Negation of the self and negation of life: here again caricature and the tragic view go hand in hand. (6)

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<sup>101</sup> *Le Peau de chagrin* recounts the story of Raphaël, a *parvenu* much like Rastignac or Lucien, after having come into possession of a magic piece of shagreen that grants its owner's every wish, but shrinks with every wish granted. Though he initially indulges his wishes and uses it to amass a fortune, he ultimately realizes that his life force is shrinking each time that the skin does; he isolates himself and arranges for his needs to be fulfilled in order to avoid wishing anything, but circumstances beyond his control mean that he cannot stop wishing, and he ultimately dies when it completely disappears.

Though we can obviously see how this assessment applies to Collin (as Brombert goes on to show), there is one genius who does not fit in with these others—Bianchon himself, whom Balzac often describes as having found success due to his remarkable intellect. Why does he stand apart from them? Because these others are bound by their mentality of totality. Seeking to attain some level of completeness, they drive themselves insane, extinguish their wills to live, or, like Collin, become fixated on constantly reaffirming their power. This brings me to my last observation about Bianchon's response to Rastignac: the student responds to it by saying that the student's words have *done him good* and have founded a permanent bond between them that is exactly the kind of relationship Collin so desires to establish with his protégés—eternal friendship. In the *Comédie humaine* at large, Bianchon does much more good than this; in the works at hand alone, we find him tending to the destitute Goriot in his final, wretched days, he comes to the aid of Lucien's lover on her deathbed in *Illusions perdues*, he arrives to help Peyrade's daughter after Collin has her abducted and raped, he attends to Sérizy when she loses her mind after Lucien's death. He is also a great carrier of truth; he observes Michonneau's connivance with the police and would have alerted Collin to it had the latter not distracted him with the party the night before Taillefer's death, and in *Splendeurs*, he reveals the cause of Nucingen's failing health as heartsickness to a gathering including Lucien, inducing the old man to describe his vision of Esther in the park at night and his incapacity to find her—a description that Lucien smiles in recognizing it as one of Esther, leading Bianchon to alert the others that Lucien knows her identity, which ultimately leads Nucingen to put the police on Lucien's track. At the end of the day, Balzac called out Bianchon's name on his deathbed, not that of Collin.<sup>102</sup> Why? Because Bianchon does much good for others, is able to be satisfied with what he has, and is a bearer of truth, whereas Collin only causes the suffering of others and himself, is a bastion of deception, and is ultimately blinded by his obsession with dominance and his fear of his own vulnerability. Indeed, I will now bring this chapter to a close by presenting the proof of this last fact.

### 3.3.2 Completeness as the Source and Limit of Collin's Control

This chapter's examination of the difference between mindsets framed by active or passive beliefs in completeness' possibility and those framed by recognition and acceptance of completeness' impossibility will here conclude with my interpretation of Collin's final appointment as police chief as an affirmation not of his supremacy, but of negative absolutes' universality and the consequences of Collin's failure to ever reconcile himself to them. The narration's account of the changes in behavior and thought accompanying Collin's moves to align himself with society's reigning authority after Lucien's suicide sheds light on the difference between the two structures of sexuation that Lacan originally designed his graph to represent—that is, the different relationship that those occupying

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<sup>102</sup> Robb comments on this in his account of Balzac's final days punctuated by "brief spells of delirium": "Perhaps it was during one of these moments of aberration that he called for Horace Bianchon, the great physician of *La Comédie Humaine*, saying that only he could save him. The anecdote dates from long after Balzac's death and was supposed to be another sign of his innocent belief in his own creations—proof that he had still not lost his grip on illusion; but it sounds like Balzac in his normal state of mind, and if he did call for Bianchon, it was surely a humorous recognition that nothing could now save him" (409).



either position establish to their own desire, which explain the different kind(s) of enjoyment available to them. Given that Lacan wrote that one's biological gender is not necessarily relevant to determining one's structure of sexualization, the equivalence of a "masculine" structure of sexualization to that of a person identifying with society's dominant faction and of a "feminine" structure of sexualization to that of a person recognizing his or her exclusion from and/or subjection to that privileged group is reflected in the fact that Collin becomes increasingly blind to proofs of his own subjectivity and negative absolutes' universality just as he begins maneuvering to efface his criminal status—that is, the marginal position that until this point had granted him an exceptional viewpoint from which he could understand and critique society. Considering this, the fact that "masculine" people can only find enjoyment on an Imaginary level through the idealization of signifiers and the anticipation a perfect future in relation to their attainment (i.e. symbolic jouissance) is clearly connected to these individuals' investment in the status quo's perpetuation. This group stands to benefit from the maintenance of the Symbolic Order in its current form because it outlines both a vision of future completeness and a path to it that these individuals are presumably exceptionally capable of pursuing; because it protects the statistical likelihood of their succeeding in this pursuit by exempting members of this group from legal or cultural limitations placed on everyone else; because it develops and conserves these individuals' belief in their superiority and importance by drawing a clear parallel between themselves and society's most influential members; because it allows them to expect to exercise the greatest possible measure of control and freedom regarding their ambitions and desires and therefore to enjoy the most satisfying existence available to humanity; and because it already provides them with a frame of reference allowing them to identify particular causes for their traumas through its dissemination of the most convincing justifications of the status quo that have ever been composed in support of society's current form—rationalizations that more often than not rely on the reductionist application of apparently mutually exclusive, "complementary" terms and/or on the externalization of blame to marginalized groups of individuals who have no means of defending themselves. If a person belonging to this group never encounters and acknowledges clear proof that the Symbolic Order as such is in fact incapable of performing the functions assigned to it (i.e. the facilitation of communication, the establishment and maintenance of social order, the preparation of individuals for social responsibility, the just enforcement of prohibitions, the provision of those who obey it with happiness) and/or that all human beings are connected through their capacity to articulate unrealistic ideals and their incapacity to realize them, this person's motivation to embrace everything that supports the status quo and to reject, ignore, or repress everything that challenges it will only increase as her or his prioritization of the pursuit of signifiers associated with completeness progressively requires that s/he make more and more sacrifices on this pursuit's behalf, leading to that individual's progressive isolation from her or his emotions and from other people. This is why the "masculine" structure of sexualization is headed by two formulas that are directly contradictory. The statement aligned with the Master's discourse that at least one enjoyment exists that is not marked by negative absolutes represents the belief in completeness' possibility underlying the expectations preventing such individuals' enjoyment of anything falling short of it, whereas the statement aligned with the Hysteric's discourse that no enjoyment exists that is not marked by negative absolutes

represents the lesson repetitively learned through their experience, but which their belief in others' having attained complete satisfaction through the Symbolic leads them to mourn only as an individual unfairly subjected to suffering. Contrarily, because the social positions of those in a "feminine" position are assigned primarily in relation to their membership in a group to which they did not choose to belong, these individuals' motivation to perpetuate the status quo as well as their overall beliefs in completeness' possibility are constantly challenged by proofs of the Symbolic order's limitations in representing their identities (as it does so first and foremost in relation to their minority status [whether based on gender, race, religion, criminality, or any other label] in a way that excludes them from power without accounting for their individuality) and in providing those who obey it with completeness (as legal and cultural distinctions established between them and the dominant group blocks their access to society's ideals). As a result, these individuals are more likely to embrace an alternative authority that accounts for their singularity and/or opposes the status quo (e.g. religion, a subculture, philosophy), to put greater stock in the emotional meaning contributing to their own and others' perception and behavior, and to consider more openly the proof of negative absolutes' universality (as their recognition of the Symbolic's limitations makes clear that they will never be able to have everything that they want). This is why the "feminine" structure of sexuation is headed by two formulas that can be reconciled in spite of their apparent contradiction. The statement aligned with the University discourse that no enjoyment exists that is not marked by negative absolutes represents these individuals' expectation that they will never be completely satisfied; however, the statement aligned with the Analyst's discourse that not all enjoyment is marked by negative absolutes represents the lesson learned through their experience that though no enjoyment can escape the consequences of the Symbolic's limitations (i.e. the impossibility of articulating complete meaning, of unequivocal communication, of maintaining social membership without sacrifice), it is nevertheless possible for one to experience enjoyment unmarred by disappointment if one is willing to embrace experiences that make one happy without expecting to completely understand them, to make anyone else understand them, or to become completely and definitively satisfied. By embracing a worldview that allows for one's proximity to stimuli producing pleasure without expecting such experiences to reverse one's subjection to negative absolutes, one can enjoy life in the moment, appreciating it for what it is without allowing one's desire for it to be something that it is not or one's knowledge that it will end and will certainly be marked by suffering to taint the truly sublime moments made possible by the juncture of feeling and language.

The parallel drawn between Collin's and Bianchon's worldviews illustrates the difference between the two approaches to negative absolutes represented by the two structures of sexuation—the former not only has a limited ability to bring one pleasure in life, but relies heavily on repression, which inevitably causes suffering. If Bianchon argued against killing the mandarin, Rastignac was only ever thinking about it after Collin had glorified such an action as an indication of one's superiority. If Balzac thus uses this parallel to align a worldview framed in beliefs in completeness with ruthlessness, he furthermore aligns it with futility through Collin's story, showing how the utilization of language's capacity to veil negative absolutes' universality in service of one's attempts to attain

completeness through the Symbolic cannot possibly succeed. First of all, because any worldview or plan founded on a mentality of totality or an illusion of actual or potential completeness can only withstand being challenged by proof of empty space (e.g. ongoing desire, incomplete meaning, the absence of proof of possibility) as long as the person enacting it can explain that empty space's presence by identifying a particular, resolvable cause for it, it will inevitably be prevented from accomplishing its aim (respectively, allowing one to find meaning and pleasure in life, finding a way to resolve insatiable desire in relation to an idealized signifier) by an unanticipated, subversive manifestation of the return of the repressed—that is a proof of negative absolutes' universality. Each time this worldview or frame veils the true origins of a disruption, this is always only a temporary deferral of recognizing the disruption's underlying cause, as the symptom will only stop once that cause is resolved.<sup>103</sup> This section will firstly explore how the pattern by which Collin gains and loses influence over each of his protégés shows that the effectiveness of Collin's *modus operandi* is limited by the illusions that make it possible in the first place. It will secondly examine how the end of *Splendeurs* shows that Collin shifts from a somewhat “feminine” to a “masculine” point of view once he can no longer believe in completeness' possibility through Success, leading him to lose his exceptional vision, self-control, and freedom from the social hierarchy.

If we have seen how Collin's repetition automatism is a symptom resulting from his belief in completeness' possibility through the protégé plan, it becomes clear that his influence stems not from his completely masterful abilities, but from his ability to construct and adopt a masterful appearance—a practice that not only utilizes his interlocutors' fantasies (e.g. their belief that they are capable of understanding him; their belief in his omniscience or omnipotence; their belief that he possesses knowledge whose appropriation could provide one with complete satisfaction or control), but depends on the maintenance of his own illusions. His presentation of himself in the frame of the Master's discourse shows his belief that mistreating others will grant him access to completeness elsewhere unavailable. The consistency of his worldview and his ability to control the manifestations of his emotions and desires stem from the certainty and the strength of will he garners from this belief. In other words, the façade on which his social mobility, influence, and even his continued will to live rely can only remain in place as long as he can sustain others' and his own belief that he possesses access to completeness elsewhere unavailable—a precarious position given that the dissolution of Collin's masterful appearance and the influence gained through it is always only one question that Collin cannot answer or desire that he cannot fulfill away. When examining patterns in his relationships with his adopted protégés, we find that Collin is trapped in a cycle of success and failure, of mastery and non-mastery. His initial *appearance of mastery*, always dependent upon the readers' or the other characters' perception of him, grants him power both as a structuring element in the text and as a disillusioning and reillusioning force. However, at least with his protégés, he is never able to completely maintain his sway over them indefinitely; by the end of each text, his protégé of the

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<sup>103</sup> As the second section of the conclusion will discuss, framing one's worldview or plan with one's recognition of negative absolutes does not mean that symptoms will stop completely, just that the worldview or plan cannot be undermined solely by evidence of symptoms because they account for symptoms' inevitability.

moment escapes from his grasp. What is perhaps most striking about this pattern is to what extent Collin is the sole source of his own downfall. It seems that each of his failures in the texts would not have happened if he first of all never reached out to these young men and if he second of all did not inspire in them ambitions incompatible with his very mentorship. Before discussing this further, let us first explore each step of this pattern. Collin gains the complicity of Raoul, Rastignac, and Lucien after first positing himself as a figure of *mastery* and convincing them that he has the exclusive power to *completely* satisfy their desires. He accomplishes this in his seduction speeches through his effusion of knowledge and experience, his seeming ability to read their minds as they react to his words, his air of confidence and certainty, his flattery of their potential, his decial of society's hypocrisy and perceptive observations on its corrupt functioning, his projection of their predicaments in Paris, his use of totalizing logic to disprove the validity of their standing worldview, his positioning himself as the *sole* arbiter of their desires, and his pledges to take *all* of the blame if worst comes to worst. Each of the young men is caught up by this presentation when he first dangles before them his purported ability to create for them *completely satisfying lives*—painting visions of their futures even including their ultimate romantic fulfillment in spite of their temporary need to avoid Love. For example, we see the echoes of these promises in his first conversation with Raoul when he reminds the young man, “Tu n’avais rien, je t’ai fait riche. Tu ne savais rien, je t’ai donné une belle education. Oh ! je ne suis pas encore quitte envers toi. Un père... tous les peres donnent la vie à leurs enfant, moi je te dois le bonheur...” (79), going on to ask, “Qui t’a jamais autorisé à douter de ma parole ? qui t’a donné un cheval arabe, pour faire enrager tous les dandys exotiques ou indigènes du bois de Boulogne ? qui paye tes dettes de jeu ? qui veille à tes plaisirs ? qui t’a donné des bottes, à toi qui n’avais pas de souliers ?” (81). Apart from emphasizing in his initial seduction speech to Rastignac that his plan to provide him a fortune would grant him the keys to the city, in a later speech Collin vocalizes all could do for Rastignac if he decided to join with him more permanently: “Ah ! si vous vouliez devenir mon élève, je vous ferais arriver à *tout*. Vous ne formeriez *pas un désir* qu’il ne fût à l’instant comblé, quoi que vous puissiez souhaiter : honneur, fortune, femmes. On vous réduirait *toute* la civilisation en ambroisie. Vous seriez notre enfant gâté, notre Benjamin, nous nous exterminerions *tous* pour vous avec plaisir. *Tout* ce qui vous ferait obstacle serait aplati” (223-224, my emphases). In his initial speech with Lucien, he similarly promises, “Je vous maintiendrai, moi, d’une main puissante dans la voie du pouvoir, et je vous promets néanmoins une vie de plaisirs, d’honneurs, de fêtes *continuelles*... *Jamais* l’argent ne vous manquera... Vous brillerez, vous paraderiez, pendant que, courbé dans la boue des fondations, j’assurerai le brillant édifice de votre fortune” (608, my emphases). After he poses their ideal visions of the future so mouthwateringly, each of the protégés eagerly questions Collin’s means of realizing these dreamscapes—a question he never answers entirely, but to which he always responds with a list of rules they will have to follow. As we have seen, he demands their *complete* discretion, their *complete* obedience, their *complete* rejection of illusions (or at least tolerance of his doing so), and their refraining from falling in love until after they have attained success—costs whose magnitude is reduced when compared to what they stand to get in return. Because he offers them money or more up front, he is able to downplay the sacrifices required enough to make them at least consider his proposition (as in Rastignac’s case) if not accept it

immediately (as in Lucien's case). Ultimately, Collin's mistake is this: though he takes pleasure in so accurately divining the young men's desires and so efficiently gaining their complicity, by promising completeness, Collin necessarily puts a limit on his control of them, as it can only last as long as they are willing to wait to for the realization of his promises and to suffer his presence and influence. The protégés' initial acceptance of his offer is thus followed by a period of their complicity punctuated by conflict. Their enjoyment of certain benefits makes it easier to reject old illusions in favor of those provided by Collin. Raoul gets nourishment, an education, entrance to society, and luxury. Rastignac gets money for his cavorting and knowledge of Paris that allows him to navigate it successfully. The following passage shows how Collin's manipulation of Lucien's desires allows him to subject Lucien to the full extent of his control and furthermore describes the fantasy life that Collin provides Lucien until their running out of money threatens to end it:

En prodiguant à Lucien toutes les joies de la vie parisienne, en lui prouvant qu'il pouvait se créer encore un bel avenir, il en avait fait sa chose. Aucun sacrifice ne coûtait d'ailleurs à cet homme étrange, dès qu'il s'agissait de son second lui-même. Au milieu de sa force, il était si faible contre les fantaisies de sa créature qu'il avait fini par lui confier ses secrets. [...] Ce garçon parut au faux abbé devoir être un merveilleux *instrument de pouvoir* ; il le sauva du suicide, en lui disant : — *Donnez-vous à un homme de Dieu comme on se donne au diable, et vous aurez toutes les chances d'une nouvelle destinée. Vous vivrez comme en rêve, et le pire réveil sera la mort que vous vouliez vous donner...* L'alliance de ces deux êtres, qui n'en devaient faire qu'un seul, reposa sur ce raisonnement plein de force, que Carlos Herrera cimentait d'ailleurs par une complicité savamment amenée. [...] Lucien était la splendeur sociale à l'ombre de laquelle voulait vivre le faussaire. — *Je suis l'auteur, tu seras le drame; si tu ne réussis pas, c'est moi qui serai sifflé*, lui dit-il le jour où il lui avoua le sacrilège de son déguisement. Carlos alla prudemment d'aveu en aveu, mesurant l'infamie des confidences à la force de ses progrès et aux besoins de Lucien. Aussi, Trompe-la-Mort ne livra-t-il son dernier secret qu'au moment où l'habitude des *jouissances parisiennes*, les succès, la vanité satisfaite lui avaient asservi le corps et l'âme de ce poète si faible. Là où jadis Rastignac, tenté par ce démon, avait résisté, Lucien succomba, mieux manœuvré, plus savamment compromis, vaincu surtout par le bonheur d'avoir conquis une éminente position. Le Mal, dont la configuration poétique s'appelle le Diable, usa envers cet homme à moitié femme de ses plus attachantes séductions, et *lui demanda peu d'abord en lui donnant beaucoup*. [...] En ce moment, non seulement Esther et Lucien avaient dévoré tous les fonds confiés à la probité du banquier des bagnes, qui s'exposait pour eux à de terribles redditions de comptes, mais encore le dandy, le faussaire et la courtisane avaient des dettes. Au moment où Lucien allait réussir, le plus petit caillou sous le pied d'un de ces trois êtres pouvait donc faire crouler le fantastique édifice d'une fortune si audacieusement bâtie. [...] Chacun doit maintenant deviner de quelle sombre joie Carlos fut saisi en apprenant l'amour du baron Nucingen, et en saisissant dans une seule pensée tout le parti qu'un homme de sa trempe devait tirer de la pauvre Esther. (XI: 115-118, my emphases)

We see here that if Collin is initially able to *possess* Lucien by proving his ability to fulfill his promises, this fantasy and his influence become tenuous as soon as his means of sustaining them come into question. Collin's narrow evasion of the piercing of the veil in this moment evokes the precariousness of his continued influence over the protégés; his promise of a *perfect* life means that he can only control them until they tire of the luxuries he provides them and set their eyes on new ones, until moments when old ideals arise, or until the sacrifice he demands seems too great. In other words, the knowledge and love that Collin offers have no value to the protégés on their own. When his influence over them is first threatened (Raoul wants more information on Collin's way of supporting him; Rastignac's high regard for Collin's worldview crumbles every time he is forced to abide his presence, as Collin always mocks Rastignac's noble illusions; Lucien does not want to sacrifice Esther), Collin is able to smooth this over by once again evoking the additional pleasures which he is in the process of providing. However, he ultimately cannot prevent the repetition of the conflicts, because his protégés' expectations of completeness—which his speeches strengthened rather than tempering—are impossible to

fulfill. Eventually, they become unwilling comply to Collin's demands for sacrifice; Raoul does not want to sacrifice his honesty with Inès, Rastignac does not want to give up his convictions or submit to another, and Lucien does not want to have his identity or that of his mother associated with Collin. At this point, Raoul and Rastignac seek to replace Collin with a different benefactor; Raoul gets a new family and Rastignac moves in with Delphine. However, because Lucien believes that the events leading up to and surrounding his arrest have severed all of his relationships to influential individuals, he hangs himself.

With his first two protégés, Collin is able to predict their rebellion and act in a way that prevents them from betraying him, ultimately managing to maintain a connection between them by avoiding a falling out. Raoul intends to denounce Collin's deception to Inès, but Collin preemptively has his men lock Raoul in an undisclosed location, buying time to resolve the question of Raoul's nobility by unveiling the young man's identity to his mother and providing Raoul with the means of marrying his beloved before Raoul is allowed to return. Though he is arrested as Raoul is launched into his new life of privilege, he promises to return as a distant observer in his life. Rastignac intends to disrupt Collin's plan for Franchessini to kill Taillefer, but Collin drugs him so that he cannot carry out his intentions of sabotage; before Rastignac can denounce him, the deed is done, and the young man is made complicit in this murder against his will. Rastignac's remaining desires to report Collin dissolve when the latter is arrested, as Rastignac at that point is only fearful for his future; however, even though Collin provides Rastignac with information on how to find aid to complete the plan, the young man never follows through. By predicting the dissolution of his influence (he always prepares a backup plan in case things don't happen as he hopes; he often says that his protégés will one day leave him behind, as if he is reminding himself of this possibility), Collin is thus able to shape the events surrounding it in a way that allows him to still appear and feel to be in control and to still have hope in the possibility of his protégé plan's realization. However, his situation with Lucien, differing on the levels of both his expectations for it and its traumatic ending, does not allow him to deflect the impact of his failure, as we will now explore in connection with Collin's shifting relationship to his own desire. Overall, no matter how close Collin becomes to a protégé or how long they stay together, the smallest shred of doubt in his infallibility and omnipotence, requirement of sacrifice, or belief that greater pleasure lies elsewhere can serve to undermine his influence permanently.

If Collin's control of others is thus limited by his ongoing ability to convince others of his exceptional freedom, knowledge, and power, we also find that Collin's infamous self-control is limited by his own beliefs in completeness—beliefs that remain latent when he does not have a protégé, but that lead him to engage in a pattern of careless, malicious, or even self-destructive behavior when he believes that the realization of his protégé plan is possible. Though he never shares this with his protégés, his ability to foresee potential challenges to his plans, to prevent emotion from affecting his actions, and to clearly perceive the world around him seemingly stems from the fact that he consistently consciously recognizes that *even he has desires and is not infallible*. As the second chapter showed, Collin subjects even himself to his statements about desire, for example when he compares Goriot's assignment of meaning in relation to his passion for his daughters and his own navigation of life in relation to his passion for certain men, or when in

*Illusions* he tells Lucien that everyone obeys a vice or a necessity. Nevertheless, when it comes to his desire for his protégés, Collin's conscious understanding of his plan always leads him to offer some explanation of his feelings for them that involves neither romance nor sex. If the previous section showed that Collin's statements about his "vice" for devoting himself to certain young men depict that passion as charitable or parental affection, the examples from *Le Père Goriot* and *Illusions* alluded to two sentences ago are each followed by Collin explaining his own passion in relation to Otway's *Venise Preserv'd* (1682).<sup>104</sup> In *Le Père Goriot*, Collin describes his defining passion by saying, "pour moi qui ai bien creusé la vie, il n'existe qu'un seul sentiment réel, une amitié d'homme à homme. Pierre et Jaffier, voilà ma passion" (226). He similarly says to Lucien, "Enfant, dit l'Espagnol en prenant Lucien par le bras, as-tu médité la *Venise sauvée* d'Otway ? As-tu compris cette amitié profonde, d'homme à homme, qui lie Pierre à Jaffier, qui fait pour eux d'une femme une bagatelle, et qui change entre eux tous les termes sociaux ?" (611). At first, I thought that Collin's allusion to this play indicated his recognition of his underlying romantic desire; I argued that his projection of homosexual connotations where none in fact exist showed the role of primary processes in his perception. However, I have since realized that it is actually the absence of romantic connotations in this way of describing his passion that is significant, as this shows how his belief that he can fulfill his protégé plan can only persevere as long as he believes that he can engage in a relationship with a young man without allowing love to compromise his vision and his selfishness. Pierre's friendship with Jaffier therefore provides Collin with a way of thinking about his relationship with his protégés without acknowledging (or at least rendering secondary and irrelevant) any romantic or sexual passion he might bear for them. What is more, this allusion allows Balzac to link Collin's way of misrecognizing his underlying motivations with the author's social critique; this allusion exposes the connection between the human mind's functioning and morality while still providing readers a way of misrecognizing the character as a representation of pure Revolt or a superhuman criminal mastermind rather than a complex human being—that is, of instigating readers' reduction of Collin's allusion to the play as a reference to his homosexuality, which is read much more often as the supreme proof of his criminality than as the proof of the typical subjectivity for which his story serves as an exceptionally insightful model. Delays in readers' recognition of Collin's typical subjectivity set them up to realize in relation to Collin's other textual appearances how their own desire played a role in their initial perception of the character solely in relation to his appearance of mastery. We see some of these aspects of the allusion to *Venice Preserv'd* in Berman's reading of it in *Le Père Goriot*:

The great books of the Enlightenment are not addressed specifically, yet they seem to permeate the story. [...] Rousseau observed of the "natural" man (of whom Vautrin is a representative figure) that he lives for himself: he is the whole unit of existence as

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<sup>104</sup> Set in early seventeenth-century Venice, the play recounts the efforts of Jaffier, a Venetian nobleman, and Pierre, a foreign soldier, to realize an intrigue meant to overturn the Senate of Venice. Seeing Jaffier's frustration that a senator whose daughter Jaffier secretly married will not endorse their union, Pierre manipulates his friend to join a band of conspirators—whom he had joined primarily to get vengeance on a senator who stole his mistress—through a disillusioning speech about the negative effects of unrealistic noble virtues. However, Jaffier's efforts to save both his own interests and the conspirators ironically leads to their arrest and orders for their execution. At the gallows, Pierre asks Jaffier to give him an honorable soldier's death rather than allowing him to be hanged; after Jaffier obliges Pierre by stabbing him, he takes his own life in order to redeem himself for his betrayal.

opposed to the artificial entity of the state. It is toward this dangerous condition that Rastignac progresses; in other words, the very things feared by Rousseau as forms of moral alienation are exposed (and perhaps mordantly accepted) by Balzac as characteristic of social life. Perhaps the most penetrating of the literary references in *Père Goriot* is addressed to this specific problem. [...] If there is one phrase that reverberates through Otway's tragedy that phrase is "Nature." And it is always used in the same way, to indicate the violent abuse of individual being by civilized corruption. When Pierre describes the origin of society to Jaffeur he sounds like nothing so much as Vautrin instructing Rastignac [...] *Venice Preserved* offers a definitive picture of the relationship of Vautrin and Rastignac: the preceptor who is on the side of "Nature" and the pupil striving to formulate his experience. [...] There are of course some vast differences. As the object of parody—and in a central sense all the literary models mentioned in *Père Goriot* are parodied—its grandiloquence is transformed into something more modern and subtle: heroic friendship reappears as homosexuality and sensibility becomes a loathsome form of physical responsiveness. We are expected to draw upon this tragedy for our own responses to Vautrin, and to divide ourselves in the ambiguous way it indicates. It too is a drama of decadence, and it offers to the intellect the dangerous consolations of unleashed feeling and amoral action. It offers as well what has been called the sense of an ending—the operatic finale of *Venice Preserved* shows the whole edifice of human organization toppled by its own weight. The story that begins with the apologetics of philosophy ends in the fact of anarchy. (14-15)

Berman here highlights Balzac's recognition of a key flaw in Rousseau's reasoning: the thinker's misrecognition of the personal interest driving selfish, antisocial behavior as the effect of a lack of civilization rather than civilization itself, which transforms instinctual imperatives into desires to resolve negative absolutes that can seemingly only be resolved in relation to idealized signifiers whose pursuit more often than not requires social interactions. Though Berman acknowledges the irony of the fact that in the post-Revolutionary environment created largely in relation to Rousseau's thought, the resistance driving Revolt becomes associated less with gallant calls for justice (which Rousseau himself promoted) than with individual's selfishness (here, Collin's homosexual desires), the limitation of his analysis to *Le Père Goriot* means that he does not fully explore the irony of Collin's allusion to this play in relation to the character's full story. On the surface, Pierre and Jaffeur's relationship appeals to Collin because it asserts the possibility of a relationship between two men founded on the intellectual resistance of empty values and the mutual pursuit of individual aims—a relationship that did not technically transgress the unwritten rules' requirement of selfishness. However, he probably would not have found the play so appealing if the bond between Pierre and Jaffeur stemming from this premise had not been so strong that it ultimately leads Jaffeur to commit suicide when Pierre dies, thereby asserting that Pierre's tutelage of Jaffeur had effectively inspired the selfless action of this character symbolizing Collin's protégés on behalf of his mentor. Though Collin consciously wants to justify the formation of a relationship between men only in the context of his protégé plan, his fixation on this story—and the fact that he never acknowledges how Pierre and Jaffeur's initial motivations by love for women, Jaffeur's betrayal of Pierre, and authority's ultimate victory are relevant to his own circumstances—shows that his desire for whatever he believed himself to have or to potentially have with Franchessini still plays a determining role in his actions and thought. The irony of Collin's allusion to Pierre and Jaffeur therefore lies in the fact that through it, readers can see that though he believes that his embrace of the unwritten rules constitutes the greatest indication of his superiority and strength, it is in fact that which leads to his downfall inasmuch as it causes the blindness to his desire and the limits to his control that precipitates each of his arrests, Lucien's suicide, and his final fall into blindness and loss of agency.



This sheds light on why Collin is able to consummate his relationship with Theodore (and possibly with Lucien) without leading him to reject his idealization of the protégé plan and the worldview that he formed around the unwritten rules. His mindset's continuity requires only that he continue believing that he can obey the prohibition of selflessness whenever he encounters an opportunity to realize that plan; therefore, it does not matter if he makes a sexual or even romantic connection with another criminal when no such opportunity has presented itself (as that connection could never exist outside of the underworld and is therefore irrelevant to his ideal vision for the future as long as he prioritized his protégé plan) and it does not matter if he engages a protégé sexually as long as this physical act is not accompanied by selfless love. In his first scene in *Vautrin*, readers already encounter proof that Collin believes to have put the mistakes he made with Franchessini behind him when he says, "Moi, j'ai eu des vices, et je les regrette... comme ça passe ! Et maintenant, plus rien ! Il ne me reste que les dangers et la lutte. Après tout, c'est la vie d'un Indien entouré d'ennemis, et je défends mes cheveux" (25). Collin's allusion to his *past* vices refers not to his homosexual desire, but rather to his having transgressed the prohibition of selflessness and thereby placed himself in a marginal, dangerous situation requiring ruthless self-defense. Because of this ongoing belief in having taken control of his desire, we find that even if Collin's partial recognition of negative absolutes and idealization of the protégé plan allows him for example to thwart Raoul's and Rastignac's attempts to turn against him and to keep himself from being disappointed when they do so, it is nevertheless also true that his repression of the complexity of his motivations is to blame for his loss of control over each of his protégés as well as his arrests. Every time that he becomes convinced (whether or not he allows himself to admit it) that he may have found a way to realize his protégé plan, his behavior changes dramatically; his compulsive dedication of his full will and resources to this plan leads him to become more ruthless and reckless, to miss key details, or to make uncharacteristic mistakes. In *Vautrin*, in spite of the fact that he has just spent the years after his arrest absorbing the underworld's ruthless mindset and methods, making connections and consolidating power therein, and finding a way to escape society's grasp, his desire to inspire Raoul's undying affection and to reinstate his own social membership in the same city from which he had been marginalized prevents him from enacting his plan in the most effective way possible (e.g. by instructing Raoul to wed someone other than Inès, by pursuing Success in a different locale). If Collin himself ultimately blocks the realization of his plan by revealing Raoul's relation to the Montsorels and by leaving them to their happiness rather than blackmailing them, he is ultimately arrested due to his failure to recognize Joseph's desire for an honest life—an oversight that reflects his refusal to see how this same desire also motivates him, as is the case with his blindness to the possibility that Goriot's desire is parental in nature. Similarly, we see in *Le Père Goriot* that if Collin escaped shortly after his arrest and spent the following years establishing and honestly performing his role as the underworld's banker and leader without ever compromising his false identity, his indulgence of a desire to dominate Rastignac ultimately distracts him from his surveillance of those potentially threatening his freedom. In the end, his freedom is lost due to Michonneau's collaboration with the police against him. Collin does not become aware of this arrangement in time to thwart it because by throwing a party the night before Taillefer's murder in order to prevent Rastignac's betrayal, he

unwittingly also prevents Bianchon from gossiping about Michonneau's meeting with Bibi-Lupin in the park. What is more, Michonneau initially hesitates to accept Bibi-Lupin's offer due to her suspicion that Collin might pay her more to refuse it than the detective offered for its accomplishment; however, she ultimately agrees to drug Collin and look for his brands after he brutally mocks her at the communal dinner table. If Collin's need to manipulate Vauquer, Victorine, and Sylvie had led him to treat them with respect or even to flirt with them, he fails to recognize how this frustrates his aggression toward women at large (an effect of his desire for a same-sex relationship), blinds him to the reasons that his interests demanded that he flatter Michonneau, and leads him to redouble his brutal treatment of the former prostitute.

However, if this shows that by blinding him to everything related to his continued desire for prohibited selfless love, Collin's repression in the wake of trauma leads him to compromise himself without realizing it, something clearly changes before *Splendeurs* that leads him to make increasingly frequent mistakes—ones that unusually seem to be the result of hubris, a level of narcissism whose consequences Collin manages to avoid before this last novel. For example, Collin declines Corentin's offer (i.e. blackmail) to stop investigating Lucien's involvement with the mastermind and a prostitute for a price, assuming that he can simply trick his enemy's spies; however, his attempts to do so are thwarted when Corentin spots Collin in disguise by recognizing him using a trick to make himself taller by standing on a deck of cards. What is more, his overestimation of his success in educating and influencing Lucien leads him to charge his protégé with accomplishing tasks without Collin's immediate supervision; as a result, Collin fails to prevent Lucien being publicly seen in Esther's opera box, which leads the young man to lose the protection of Sérizy, who had until that point been useful as a back door through which Collin could observe and influence the justice system and as a promoter of Lucien's interests among society's elite. Similarly, Collin's belief in his criminal minions' fear and respect for him and consequently absolute loyalty to him leads him to leave Europe and Paccard the opportunity to get away with Nucingen's money after Esther's suicide—the theft on suspicion of which he and Lucien are arrested. In addition, Collin stresses to Camusot how badly interrogating Lucien would threaten his ambitions, thereby “underestimating the efficacy of the bureaucratic system” (Lucey 215) that trained the judge, who goes on to question Lucien using the full extent of his skill, though he ultimately regrets it. Finally, Collin's belief that Lucien's interest in preserving the possibility of his Success would force him to support whatever story Collin gave to the judge leads Collin to tell Camusot that Lucien is his son—a strategy that may have secured Collin a permanent space in Lucien's life had events turned out differently. However, Lucien's revulsion and shame when Camusot repeats this story immediately leads him to confess the truth.

This progressive loss of clarity is certainly linked to the fact that as Collin observes the government officials milling about Sérizy's bed (just after Collin gave her Lucien's letter to assuage her hysteria) in the last scene of *Splendeurs*, his thoughts completely deny his subjection to the Symbolic order or to primary processes:

— Les voilà donc, ces gens qui décident de nos destinées et de celles des peuples ! pensa Jacques Collin [...] Un soupir poussé de travers par une femelle leur retourne l'intelligence comme un gant ! Ils perdent la tête pour une œillade. Une jupe mise un peu plus haut, un peu plus bas, et ils courent par tout Paris au désespoir. Les fantaisies d'une femme réagissent sur tout l'État ! *Oh ! combien de force acquiert un homme quand il s'est soustrait, comme moi, à cette tyrannie d'enfant, à ces probités renversées par la passion, à ces méchancetés candides, à ces ruses de sauvage !* La femme, avec son génie de bourreau, ses talents pour la torture, est et sera toujours la perte de l'homme. Procureur-Général, ministre, les voilà tous aveuglés, tordant tout pour [...] la raison d'une femme qui sera plus folle avec son bon sens qu'elle ne l'était sans sa raison. Il se mit à sourire superbement. Et, se dit-il, ils me croient, ils obéissent à mes révélations, et ils me laisseront à ma place. *Je régnerai toujours sur ce monde, qui, depuis vingt-cinq ans, m'obéit...* (XI: 531-532, my emphases)

Bouncing back and forth so quickly from spite to egotism to spite to euphoria, Collin's thoughts proclaim his *objectivity* as opposed to despicable females and the men chasing them, whom he collectively disdains until—ah! He smiles so brightly when he suddenly remembers that the people for whom he just expressed the deepest disdain are those who will grant him power for the rest of his days. If the first sentence emphasized above resounds with the absolute judgment of the University discourse, the second one provides evidence of Collin's obsession with and belief in his possession of an unrealistic amount of control as a symptom produced by the destabilization of his worldview through his disillusionment with the protégé plan as well as his repression of his responsibility in Lucien's death.

His newfound belief in his own omnipotence cannot be accepted as valid given that his caricature of all women presents the perfect image of his own behavior. His protégé plan apparently ruled the underworld for years (inasmuch as its three hundred thousand francs were drafted into its service), his own love reigned over him with the tyranny of a child and inverted his integrity—he betrayed his compatriots, killed at least two people for Lucien, and he is often compared to and even compares himself to a savage several times. Perhaps the only difference between him and the women he describes is that his maliciousness is not candid but calculated, which hardly seems a statement in his favor. If this complete loss of self-awareness after Lucien's suicide shows to what extent Collin's reaction to this trauma differs from that to the loss of Raoul and Rastignac, the reason for this begins to unravel when we first explore what was different about Collin's relationship with Lucien. If Collin manages to preserve the illusion of his mastery and the possibility of his plan's realization with Lucien much longer than with Raoul or Rastignac, this is because both he and Lucien sacrifice so much on behalf of their plan and feel such an intense conviction that their failure to realize it will prevent their ever finding happiness otherwise. They each become so invested in their fantasies that their interest in preserving them leads both Collin and Lucien to ignore several warning signs that should have at the very least led them to remove themselves from some dangerous situations, if not to abandon their plan temporarily or permanently. Firstly, Collin's potential for achieving the plan at the moment he met Lucien was supported by the fact that he had just attained (i.e. stolen) a practically airtight upstanding identity backed up with documents which would grant him immunity to arrest as a foreign ambassador, the immediate trust of those whom he convinces of his ecclesiastical status (i.e. practically everyone except the justice system), access to the public sphere at large and even to the exclusive realms of power, and an excuse for his practices of solitude. Secondly, by picking up Lucien and setting off to Paris, Collin made the decision to leave behind Theodore; though the Corsican had been returned to *le bagne* after having escaped with Collin (and thereby increased his

sentence), Collin abandons him to his fate. While isolated from Lucien in the *Conciergerie* years later, he thinks about why he made this choice, which has everything to do with his *vision for the future*:

Après avoir gagné l'Espagne et s'y être transformé en Carlos Herrera, Jacques Collin venait chercher son Corse à Rochefort, lorsqu'il rencontra Lucien sur les bords de la Charente. Le héros des bandits [...] à qui Trompe-la-Mort devait de savoir l'italien, fut sacrifié naturellement à cette nouvelle idole.

*La vie avec Lucien, garçon pur de toute condamnation, et qui ne se reprochait que des peccadilles, se levait d'ailleurs belle et magnifique comme le soleil d'une journée d'été* ; tandis qu'avec Théodore, Jacques Collin n'apercevait plus d'autre dénouement que l'échafaud, après une série de crimes indispensables. (XI: 422, my emphases)

If the vision he associated with Theodore is the romantic death of two outlaws standing against society (that is, the fate of Pierre and Jaffier that he so often evokes in relation to his passion), his description of Lucien as his “idol” here shows not only the single-mindedness which overcame Collin when confronted with the possibility of his protégé plan's fulfillment, but the true vision that he associated completeness—finding a young man whose purity he could *bask in like the sun* in spite of the fact that he claims to disdain virtue as weakness. Furthermore, even though his vision for life with Lucien is set at a single time and in a single season and thus excludes all less-than-picturesque moments entailed in life with another, thus posing a stark contrast with Collin's very realistic vision of the passing of time with Theodore, we nevertheless find that Collin openly assigned hopes to his relationship with Lucien that he had not mentioned with any of his other protégés or with Theodore. With Raoul, Collin had already acted out the role of adoptive parent and of the selfless benefactor who walks away once the child's security is accomplished, taking private thanks and praises as his only reward, and later enjoying Raoul's happiness only from afar, if at all. With Rastignac, he had acted out the role of compromising another just for the fun of it or just for money. The disappointment Collin experienced in accomplishing each of these goals is evident in the fact that he engages Lucien in a different way—one which simultaneously allows Lucien to maintain his noble airs as an artist and ensures that Lucien would act out Collin's will as such. Though in *Illusions* Collin explains his motivations to the suspicious Lucien with the familiar reference to Otway and the parental dimension that he lends his “devotion” when describing it to Raoul and Rastignac, Collin's revelation of his desire for a companion shows that he opens up to Lucien at least indirectly about his suffering in the absence of an accomplice; however, the relationship which he projects for them once again paints the protégé's role less as that of a partner than that of a window opening onto a *vision* of the world from which Collin believed himself to be blocked:

— [...] *J'aime à me dévouer, j'ai ce vice-là.* [...] Je ne crains pas l'ingratitude, et je suis reconnaissant. L'Eglise n'est rien pour moi, c'est une idée. Je me suis dévoué au roi d'Espagne ; mais *on ne peut pas aimer le roi d'Espagne*, il me protège, il plane au-dessus de moi. *Je veux aimer ma créature, la façonner, la pétrir à mon usage, afin de l'aimer comme un père aime son enfant.* Je roulerai dans ton tilbury, mon garçon, [...] je dirai : — « Ce beau jeune homme, c'est moi ! ce marquis de Rubempré, je l'ai créé et mis au monde aristocratique ; *sa grandeur est mon œuvre, il se tait ou parle à ma voix, il me consulte en tout.* » [...] — Dois-je laisser derrière moi la désolation ? dit Lucien.  
— J'ai des trésors, tu y puiseras. (VIII: 612, my emphases)

By referring to his proposal as the indulgence of a vice while denying his fear of ungratefulness (an affront against him which both Franchessini and Rastignac pay for with their indentured servitude to the protégés established after them), we see how Collin simultaneously recognizes how his proposal sets him up to fall into his self-destructive pattern while downplaying its capacity to turn

out the same way. Lucien's desperation, beauty, disillusionment, and charm seemingly create the perfect circumstances for the realization of his plan. The trauma of Franchessini's abandonment is nevertheless here present in Collin's description of love as complete control or even possession (his object is as inferior to him as Herrera is to the king of Spain, is an extension of his agency into another body and the sphere of Success, is completely dependent on him and thus cannot leave him) inasmuch as Collin can only allow himself to enter this situation by believing consciously in his ability to dominate the young man and sustain their ties through their achievement of Success as one inseparable entity. The fact that Collin enacts the plan in spite of the fact that Lucien only capitulates to him due to his offer of money shows his inability to resist the possibility of completeness which the situation signified for him—even if there were already warning signs that he would not be able to realize his unattainable vision with Lucien. Having already failed to attain this dream more than once and thus seeing his encounter with Lucien as the harbinger of a unique chance to fulfill it, he sacrifices a chance at happiness with Theodore (whose freedom he might have been able to obtain using his newly stolen identity and fortune, given that he ultimately succeeds in doing just this several years later), the opportunity to make a new life for himself far from Paris using Herrera's papers and money, and even the supremacy and *respect* which he enjoyed as the criminal king. Collin makes a bet (*un paris*) on Lucien that could clean him out; he places all of his proverbial chips on the possibility that he would one day be able to realize his vision for life through this protégé—both the vision of himself enjoying Success in Paris through him and the vision in which their codependent security allowed them to enjoy the artist's sublime talents and selfless love without fear of vulnerability or interruption. Collin wholly invests himself in this venture, ultimately putting his life on the line by entering dangerous situations time and again in disguise, returning to Paris where he is most likely to be recognized, compromising himself by committing several crimes by his own hand, and even sacrificing Lucien's treasured innocence by requiring him to become cold. This shows that unlike his time with Raoul and Rastignac, with Lucien, the effects of Collin's belief in completeness' possibility are evidently not limited by his admission of the likelihood of his failure, by his maintenance of authority in the underworld as a source of additional funds and as a preventative measure in the case of his arrest and return to prison, or by his maintenance of substantial physical, emotional, or intellectual distance between himself and his protégé—he has no feeling, thought, or life apart from Lucien. Where he had kept Raoul ignorant of his machinations and about his past, he shares everything with Lucien; where he had continued occupying himself with the underworld's affairs during his intrigue with Rastignac, he dedicates all of his time and energy into Lucien's prospects and security. If, as the second chapter stated, Collin does not fully share with Lucien his knowledge of desire's capacity to influence one's perception, the reason for this at this point seems to be not his desire to manipulate the young man as much as his own growing blindness to this fact. This is why Balzac is able to deliver Collin's *dénouement*, which he had promised Castille; even if Collin ascends to a position of power, his transgression of the unwritten rules—whose obedience had long sustained his exceptional vision and social mobility—means that his punishment is carried out not by social authority, but by the *complete* selfishness *that*

*Collin had himself granted authority over his life* by adopting a value system subjected to it in ordering his plans and in expressing his identity.

We see the consequences of this even before Lucien's suicide; Collin's seriousness and quickness to anger in *Splendeurs* as opposed to his resignation to his marginalization in *Vautrin* and his lightheartedness in *Le Père Goriot* culminates in his anxious state when isolated in one of the *Conciergerie*'s cells, when he cries for the first time since childhood.<sup>105</sup> However, this susceptibility to emotions that he had apparently avoided even after Franchessini abandoned him is nothing compared to his response to the news that Lucien had hanged himself, which he receives when he tries to bribe the prison doctor to bring a message to his protégé: "Jamais tigre trouvant ses petits enlevés n'a frappé les jungles de l'Inde d'un cri aussi épouvantable que le fut celui de Jacques Collin, qui se dressa sur ses pieds comme le tigre sur ses pattes, qui lança sur le docteur un regard brûlant, comme l'éclair de la foudre quand elle tombe ; puis il s'affaissa sur son lit de camp en disant : — Oh ! mon fils !..." (XI: 423). Though briefly remaining in a state of denial (crying out, "Vous vous trompez, ce n'est pas lui ! Vous n'avez pas bien vu. L'on ne peut pas se pendre au secret ! [...] Paris tout entier me répond de cette vie-là ! Dieu me la doit ! [423]), his eyes are quickly "dénudés de chaleur et de vie" (424). He responds to seeing Lucien's body by collapsing: "[I]l tomba sur ce corps et s'y colla par une étreinte désespérée, dont la force et le mouvement passionné firent frémir les trois spectateurs de cette scène" (424). Though he reads the suicide letter addressed to him while obstinately holding the young man's icy hand, this solace is tainted given that "cet écrit suprême paraîtra ce qu'il fut pour cet homme, une coupe de poison" (425), given that Lucien there says in no mean terms that Collin is the agent of his death ("Vous m'avez voulu faire puissant et glorieux, vous m'avez précipité dans les abîmes du suicide, voilà tout" [425]). Furthermore, the final product of Lucien's sublime talent, which Collin treasured in itself, is principally a portrait of his mentor's depravity:

Il y a la postérité de Caïn et celle d'Abel, comme vous disiez quelquefois. Caïn, dans le grand drame de l'Humanité, c'est l'opposition. Vous descendez d'Adam par cette ligne en qui le diable a continué de souffler le feu dont la première étincelle avait été jetée sur Ève. Parmi les démons de cette filiation, il s'en trouve, de temps en temps, de terribles, à *organisations vastes, qui résument toutes les forces humaines*, et qui ressemblent à ces fiévreux animaux du désert dont la vie exige les espaces immenses qu'ils y trouvent. Ces gens-là sont dangereux dans la société [...] : il leur faut une pâture, ils dévorent les hommes vulgaires et broutent les écus des niais ; *leurs jeux* sont si périlleux qu'ils finissent par tuer l'humble chien dont ils se sont fait un compagnon, une idole. Quand Dieu le veut, ces êtres mystérieux sont Moïse, Attila, Charlemagne, Robespierre ou Napoléon ; mais, *quand il laisse rouiller au fond de l'océan d'une génération* ces instruments gigantesques, ils ne sont plus que Pugatcheff, Fouché, Louvel et l'abbé Carlos Herrera. Doués d'un immense pouvoir sur les âmes tendres, ils les attirent et les broient. C'est grand, c'est beau dans son genre. C'est la plante vénéneuse aux riches couleurs qui fascine les enfants dans les bois. *C'est la poésie du mal.*

Des hommes *comme vous autres* doivent habiter des antres et n'en pas sortir. Tu m'as fait vivre de cette vie gigantesque et j'ai bien mon compte de l'existence. *Ainsi, je puis retirer ma tête des nœuds gordiens de ta politique, pour la donner au nœud coulant de ma cravate.* (426)

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<sup>105</sup> The narration informs us of his anxiety: "L'idée d'un malheur causé par la faiblesse de Lucien, à qui le régime du secret devait faire perdre la tête, prit des proportions énormes dans l'esprit de Jacques Collin ; et, en supposant la possibilité d'une catastrophe, ce malheureux se sentit les yeux mouillés de larmes, phénomène qui, depuis son enfance, ne s'était pas produit une seule fois en lui" (XI: 422).

The letter concludes with Lucien writing that his last testament will compensate Collin for “les sommes appartenant à votre Ordre, desquelles vous avez disposé très imprudemment pour moi, par suite de la paternelle tendresse que vous m’avez portée” (426), his bidding adieu to this “*grandiose statue du mal et de la corruption*, [...] vous qui, dans la bonne voie, eussiez été [...] plus que Richelieu” (426, my emphasis), and his final command, which definitively shows that Lucien’s feelings toward Collin never came to fruition as the latter had hoped: “Ne me regrettez pas : *mon mépris pour vous était égal à mon admiration*” (426). In this artist’s rendering of Collin, it seems that Balzac uses this opportunity to judge him in a romantic style whose epic and absolute proportions (referring to him as Cain, the symbolic forbearer of all acting on violent passions, as a grandiose statue of evil whose formation out of stone suggests his permanent manifestation in this completely malevolent form, etc.) echoes that of Castille. However, we also find that it emphasizes the character’s subjectivity. Firstly, it recalls Collin’s own statement to Lucien when they first met stressing the *duality* of his personality (“Les uns descendent d’Abel, les autres de Caïn, [...] moi je suis un sang mêlé : Caïn pour mes ennemis, Abel pour mes amis, et malheur à qui réveille Caïn !” [VIII: 609]) in order to stress that interaction with Collin brings suffering even to those to whom he is worshipfully devoted. By returning to this allusion to the story of Cain and Abel, the letter emphasizes how the selfishness exhibited by both Cain and Collin always causes suffering and never manages to accomplish its aim.<sup>106</sup> There are many similarities between their stories. Just as Cain is angered and discouraged by authority’s judgment of his offering (because Abel’s offer is deemed acceptable whereas his is not), Collin resents authority’s condemnation of his selflessness. Just as Cain ignores authority’s command to try to do better and to resist the sin that becomes tempting in moments of discouragement, opting instead to murder his brother, Collin ignores authority’s command to serve his sentence in order to reinstate his social membership, opting instead to escape from *le bagne* and to enact his protégé plan. And finally, just as Cain’s plot fails to avenge or reverse the pain caused by the initial conflict while in fact increasing his suffering by causing the loss of that which made him special (his green thumb) and his permanent isolation from his family and God’s love, the letter shows that Collin’s ruthless pursuit of the protégé plan validates rather than contests society’s marginalization of him while also eradicating his exceptional capacity for love in a society dominated by selfishness (which he exhibited in the circumstances of his arrest), increasing his isolation from those around him and his own feelings, and ultimately preventing him from attaining that which he most wanted—the love and respect of one whom he loved and respected. Ironically, the letter suggests that if Collin is unable to lead Lucien—the only person he really cared about—to appreciate him for his singularity or selflessness or to identify with him as one who shared the suffering caused by the world and who nevertheless found joy in its beauty and in the feelings that it inspired, this is because the fear of vulnerability that made Collin command Lucien to obey him rather than requesting that Lucien love him led to the young man’s perception of him as *opposition*, as a *crusher of the weak*, as a *poisonous tempter*, as *belonging to an “other” type of men*. In other words, the authoritative form that he

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<sup>106</sup> For Cain’s story, see Genesis 4:1-16.

assumed in the hopes of creating an environment in which his selflessness could safely be appreciated ironically prevented this goal's realization by leading Lucien to resent and disdain him. Overall, the comparison of Collin to Cain shows that the antisocial, selfish attitude and ruthless actions that they are associated with stems from their refusal or inability to understand *why a trauma has occurred, why it has upset them, and why they are incapable of eradicating both this cause and this effect*—that is, the fact that no love is unconditional (because social membership always requires sacrifice) or controllable (because love is irrational). Their situations expose the truth that emotional meaning may or may not manifest in a way that validates verbal meaning; though primogeniture convinces Cain of his superiority as the elder child and the idealization of nobility and romantic love convinces Collin of his superiority as an honest and selfless person, God accords greater love to Abel than Cain and Franchessini (and society at large) accords greater love to Success than to Collin. Collin's submission to authority's requirement of selfishness led not to his attainment of the dominance which he craved, but rather limited the exercise of his vast powers to a *compulsive devouring* of everything in his path in pursuit of an ideal with no more value than that of *a game* (the mindset of winning or losing involved in repetition automatism), to the progressive expansion rather than reduction of the black hole which he sought to replace with wholeness, to his systematic emptying of any capacity but that of a ruthless exercise of strength whose impotence is reflected by Lucien's death.

However, if Lucien's description of Collin's similarity to Cain as genetic (i.e. the result of his having descended from Cain rather than from Abel) evokes the period's understanding of criminals as inherently different from "honest" people, the letter suggests that Lucien does not in fact share such a view given that it draws attention to Collin's potentially positive qualities (e.g. his wasted potential for leadership and accomplishing change, his capacity for devoting himself to another as made evident in his paternal affection). The letter's condemnation of Collin is therefore more complex than a denunciation of "Evil" in relation to a system of absolute values. If Lucien acknowledges Collin's humanity as a mixture of selfish and selfless tendencies, he furthermore highlights that the danger that Collin poses to society is partially society's fault through the contrast posed between Moses, Attila, Charlemagne, Robespierre, and Napoléon, whose consolidation of power and consequential stabilization of their realms allowed for important steps in the progress of their people if not humanity at large, and Yemelyan Pugachev, Joseph Fouché, and Louis Pierre Louvel, whose efforts to subvert the standing order caused many deaths while ultimately serving only to undermine the political causes they sought to support. The letter associates the latter group with individualism by citing the *fluidity* of the environment in which they developed, thereby evoking Collin's and the narration's comparison of Paris to an ocean as well as Balzac's criticism of moral relativism. The fact that Collin's selfishness is unleashed in relation to the unwritten rules supports the author's assertion that any society lacking an absolute value system has no dependable means of educating the desires not only of the masses at large, but most importantly of those individuals whose exceptional capacity for influencing their fellow humans can lend powerful support to social order when speaking on behalf of a unified authority or can conversely become powerful sources of dissension and cruelty when speaking the enchanting *poésie du mal* on behalf of their own interests. The letter also evokes Balzac's critique of individualism through its allusion to the



Gordian knot of Collin's worldview, echoing Bianchon's allusion to this ancient metaphor in *Le Père Goriot* in the passage cited at the end of the previous section. On the one hand, in the context of the legend through which it became famous, this knot, which appears impossible to untangle and yet which can be dissembled through a single cut, serves well to represent the Symbolic in the frame of absolute institutions. Its existence as such legitimizes authority in a way that cannot be challenged by the manifestations of negative absolutes; even when severed by Alexandre, this does not lead to the dissolution of the Symbolic but rather the exchange of one authority for another—an exchange whose association with the possibility that a new authority could resolve negative absolutes where the former failed is inevitably undermined by ensuing proofs of negative absolutes' universality. Bianchon approaches the knot in this frame; his statement that only Alexandre can cut it without being condemned reflects the fact that in the context of absolute institutions, only one positioned above the law (i.e. a monarch attributed divine authority) could challenge the preexisting Symbolic without being punished for doing so. By showing that Bianchon's worldview is framed by the recognition of his limitations made possible through his comparison of himself to figures of absolute authority, Balzac highlights how the establishment of absolute institutions promotes individuals' recognition of negative absolutes and consequential tempering of their expectations. On the other hand, in the context of Lucien's letter, this knot serves well to represent the Symbolic order in the frame of modernity. Alluding to it not to represent the Symbolic at large but rather Collin's individual worldview, the letter establishes the knot as the signifier legitimizing the authority of selfishness, which is to say as the master signifier of Success. Given that Lucien writes that he has removed his head from this knot at the moment that he has become disillusioned with this master signifier and therefore with Collin's justification of his *modus operandi*, this supports Balzac's critique of modernity as encouraging individual's expectations and incapable of maintaining social order. Because individualism makes it possible for any person to sever the knot from a position above the law (given that in the wake of the Revolution, all individuals are granted the right to challenge an authority's legitimacy), anyone presenting proof of the Symbolic's incapacity to resolve negative absolutes can potentially be found just in challenging its perpetuation as such. In other words, just as Lucien's loss of faith in Collin's ability to provide him with Success suffices to sever his ability to sustain his will to live in relation to Collin's worldview, leading him to remove his head from this knot and to place it in one containing death, any manifestation of dissatisfaction can threaten the Symbolic's perseverance as such in the context of modernity.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> This reading of Balzac's two allusions to the Gordian knot evokes Lacan's use at the end of *Encore* of the Borromean knot (a knot joining three separate loops that become separated upon severing any of the three) as a topological representation of the subject's structure as a juncture of the Imaginary, the Symbolic, and the Real. Given that he indicates the symptom is the product of their juncture and psychosis as the result of such a severing, it seems that the symptom to which he refers encompass not only the involuntary return of the repressed, but the individual's overall capacity to find meaning and pleasure in life. Without more deeply investigating Lacan's writings on the matter (which he expanded in his following seminar on the *sinthome*), it seems that the knot's separation with the cut of any thread represents how the interruption of one's idealization of the master signifier in relation to any of the three orders can terminate its functionality as *point-de-capiton*—a rupture that can threaten one's sanity or one's will to live in the case that it cannot be replaced by another signifier.

Overall, the letter allows Balzac to condemn the capitulation of figures like Collin to selfishness as well as the modern environment that encourages such figures to believe that attempting to resolve negative absolutes by any means possible could have any other outcome than suffering. This letter provides the context in which we are to read the rest of Collin's story. Collin's devastation and his consequential alteration in the wake of this trauma becomes evident particularly when the narration compares his state to a phenomenon known to those who work with metal that has no explanation: "Le fer cède à certains degrés de battage ou de pression *réitérée* ; [...] sans être en fusion, le métal n'a plus la même vertu de résistance. [...] Eh ! bien, l'âme humaine, ou, si vous voulez la triple énergie du corps, du cœur et de l'esprit se trouve dans une situation analogue à celle du fer, par suite de certains chocs *répétés*. [...] Ce danger est imprévisible. Le métal devenu mou, le métal resté résistant, offrent *la même apparence*" (XI 427-428, my emphases).<sup>108</sup> The emphasis here on how *repetitive* blows (the repeated failure of Collin's engagement with protégés) result in a weakening *veiled* by a *consistence of appearance* once again highlights Balzac's proximity to Lacan. The fact that Collin's ensuing behavior seems to assert his capacity to take even this trauma in stride is prefaced by this declaration of his *loss of mental integrity* after having *received repeated blows to the same spot*. If the metal's loss of integrity has the devastating side effect of causing trains to violently derail, this foreshadows the potentially devastating effects of appointing the imperceptibly broken Collin to a position of power. The narration does not report Collin's thoughts in response to this letter, nor does it depict him making any reference to it in the following pages. This implies that Collin *completely represses the letter's contents and the feelings that he experienced in reading it*—a hypothesis substantiated by the final chapter of his story presented by the novel. After guards take Lucien's body away, Collin's precarious situation (in which his criminal identity and complicity in the theft of Esther's money is still suspected) and his subsequent encounter with several crises whose resolution he is capable of achieving (e.g. Bibi-Lupin's trap in the prison yard, Theodore's imminent execution, his desire for revenge on Corentin) motivate him to immediately take control of his circumstances. Beyond forcing him to cease mourning in order to secure his survival, these distractions allow him to avoid ever dealing not only with his role in Lucien's death, but the ultimate proof of negative absolutes with which this death's circumstances confront him. From this point forward, he mechanically takes control of every situation presented to him with a remarkable swiftness and clarity of mind suggesting his eagerness to deny Lucien's statements about him and to avoid accepting how Lucien's suicide stands as proof of his lack of control in the very situation that he cared about most deeply and that he had taken pains to approach with adequate care. If the letter cites Collin's selfishness as the bearer of all blame for Lucien's death, it is unsurprising that after reading it, the only contexts in which Collin allows his grief to show are those in which his performance of it serves his interests. If Collin's display of anguish strengthens

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<sup>108</sup> Before this analogy, the narration has already described the trauma's effect on Collin, firstly by stating that when the guards come to take Lucien's body, "on trouva Jacques Collin, agenouillé devant le lit, cette lettre à terre, lâchée sans doute comme le suicidé lâche le pistolet qui l'a tué ; mais le malheureux tenait toujours la main de Lucien entre ses mains jointes et priait Dieu" (XI: 427), and then by asking, "Qu'était devenue cette nature de bronze, où la décision égalait le coup d'œil en rapidité, chez laquelle la pensée et l'action jaillissaient comme un même éclair, dont les nerfs aguerris par trois évasions, par trois séjours au bagne avaient atteint à la solidité métallique des nerfs du sauvage ?" (427).

the believability of his performance as Carlos Herrera—a role that his survival required that he continue to play—and evokes sympathy from the bailiffs, the criminals whom he betrayed, and the judge holding Collin’s fate in his hands, Collin’s absorption in this spectacle and enjoyment of these reactions to it furthermore support Collin’s delusion that he is just a victim in this situation, allowing him to distance himself from the truth that he is its perpetrator. If the letter shows that Collin does not have complete control over those around him (and apparently least of all over those whom he most wants to control), he apparently combats his recognition of this by manipulating all of those around him.<sup>109</sup> In the context of his response to trauma, Collin’s most interesting interaction while still in the *Conciergerie* is doubtlessly that with the attorney general, monsieur de Granville. Collin’s grand repentance speech—which convinces Granville to procure Collin’s pardon from the king himself so that the criminal can become the chief of the *police de sûreté*—is ultimately undermined by his statements to his aunt and his thoughts at the end of the novel, which indicate the continued selfishness of his motivations.<sup>110</sup> However, though the scene in which Collin makes a deal to join the police depicts him bargaining with Lucien’s high-society lovers’ salacious letters practically like his old self, we must note that he probably would not have gotten the chance to get so much out of the deal (a pardon for Theodore and himself, Bibi-Lupin’s position, the opportunity to go to Lucien’s burial) had he not poured his heart out about Lucien in his previous one-on-one scene with Granville, which impresses the *Procureur-général* so much that he allows Collin to leave the prison by himself for an hour in order to go get some of the letters as an act of good faith. Lucey remarks on an aspect of the two scenes (the first of which begins with Collin’s outburst into emotion and the second of which ends with their parting on more professional terms) which I did not even notice: “Here, along with the clear suggestion that Lucien proved seductive to men other than Vautrin, we see Vautrin’s new game. He is beginning to play with what we might call his queer social capital. The novel performs the odd balancing act, in its final sections, of showing Vautrin sometimes sincerely overcome by his emotions for Lucien, but now also able to understand that in certain contexts the sincere performance of those emotions for another man can be valuable” (216-217). It really is remarkable; the scene begins when Collin comes face to face with Camusot for the first time since Lucien’s death and almost loses control of the rage that he understandably harbors toward this man who

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<sup>109</sup> He does this for example when he reestablishes his authority over the other criminals; when he uses his role as a priest to justify his entrance into Theodore’s cell, where he discusses how he can save his former lover right underneath the disguised, furious Bibi-Lupin’s nose (whom he immediately recognizes) by speaking in Italian with Theodore; when convinces one of the criminals whom he betrayed to sacrifice himself so that others can be saved on the condition that Collin deliver his money to his mistress, thus managing to make this person trust him in spite of his disappearance for almost a decade with the underworld’s money; and when he controls his fury toward Corentin in order to threaten him with the utmost civility.

<sup>110</sup> Still bearing the stress of Lucien’s suicide, if he says to Granville with convincing sincerity, “Je n’ai pas d’autre ambition, que d’être un élément d’ordre et de répression, au lieu d’être la corruption même” (XI: 523), he explains to his aunt that he arranged for his conversion because it will serve his aim of vengeance. He wants to kill Corentin, whom he blames for Lucien’s death (saying “je ne vis que pour me venger de lui” [530]), and as we have seen, at the end of the book, his thoughts show that he is still preoccupied with dominating Parisian society.

interviewed Lucien and thereby led to the young man's despair for no purpose apart from curiosity.<sup>111</sup> Sending Camusot away, once alone, Collin's ensuing speech in response to Granville's question of what good vengeance would do is remarkable in that it begins with Collin's only expression of grief when not playing the role of the priest. Expressing the maternal sentiments which he often applies to his protégés ("Ah ! jamais une bonne mère n'a tendrement aimé son fils unique comme j'aimai cet ange" [499]), he then interestingly admits to most valuing those qualities in Lucien that his worldview derided as illusions: "Si vous saviez ! le bien naissait dans ce cœur comme les fleurs se lèvent dans les prairies. Il était faible, voilà son seul défaut, faible comme la corde de la lyre, si forte quand elle se tend... C'est les plus belles natures, leur faiblesse est tout uniment la tendresse, l'admiration, la faculté de s'épanouir au soleil de l'art, de l'amour, du beau que Dieu a fait pour l'homme sous mille formes !... Enfin, Lucien était une femme manquée" (499). He even bursts into tears, and yet by the end of this uninterrupted speech, he is already pledging his loyalty to Granville, his irresistible opportunism having seemingly seized him mid-speech:

Monsieur, j'ai lavé le cadavre du petit de mes larmes, en implorant *Celui que je ne connais pas* et qui est au-dessus de nous ! Moi qui ne crois pas en Dieu !.. (Si je n'étais pas matérialiste, je ne serais pas moi !..) Je vous ai tout dit là dans un mot ! Vous ne savez pas, aucun homme ne sait ce que c'est que la douleur ; moi seul je la connais. Le feu de la douleur absorbait si bien mes larmes, que cette nuit je n'ai pas pu pleurer. Je pleure maintenant, parce que je sens que vous me comprenez. Je vous ai vu là, tout à l'heure, posé en justice... Ah ! monsieur, que Dieu... (je commence à croire en lui !) que Dieu vous préserve d'être comme je suis... Ce sacré juge m'a ôté mon âme. Monsieur ! monsieur ! on enterre en ce moment ma vie, ma beauté, ma vertu, ma conscience, toute ma force ! Figurez-vous un chien à qui un chimiste soutire le sang... Me voilà ! je suis ce chien... Voilà pourquoi je suis venu vous dire : — « Je suis Jacques Collin, je me rends !... » J'avais résolu cela ce matin quand on est venu m'arracher ce corps que je baisais comme un insensé, comme une mère, comme la Vierge a dû baiser Jésus au tombeau... Je voulais me mettre au service de la justice sans conditions... Maintenant, je dois en faire, vous allez savoir pourquoi... (500)

Collin's claim that Lucien was *his* conscience is interesting given that he so often attempted to fill the young man with his own will and that his devotion to the young man so often led him to commit criminal acts. His employment of theatrics to fully abase himself, his calling on the divine judge in front of one who clearly values authority, and his appeal to Granville as one sharing his passion for Lucien all serve to verbally throw him at the judge's feet. Collin clearly cannot give a speech without seizing any opportunity to turn it to his advantage; his habit of forming his appearance in relation to others' desires is certainly reflected in his inability to express his own emotions without an express purpose for doing so. By the end, the judge has of course become emotional and decided to help Collin: "Le forçat avait profondément ému le magistrat qui fut pris d'une pitié divine pour ce malheureux ; il devina sa vie et ses sentiments. Enfin, le magistrat [...], à qui la conduite de Jacques Collin depuis son évasion était inconnue, pensa qu'il pourrait se rendre maître de ce criminel, uniquement coupable d'un faux après tout. Et il voulut essayer de la générosité sur cette nature composée, comme le bronze, de divers métaux, de bien et de mal" (500). Granville's *belief to have understood Collin* as the source of his benevolence alerts readers to the presence of an ambiguity resembling that present in the scene of his arrest in *Le Père Goriot*. If Granville's recognition of Collin's *division into conflicting parts* justly describes Collin's presentation of a mixture of genuine grief

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<sup>111</sup> "Monsieur de Granville regarda lentement Jacques Collin et le trouva calme ; mais il reconnut bientôt la vérité [...] Cette trompeuse attitude cachait la froide et terrible irritation des nerfs du sauvage. [...] Jamais il n'avait vu tant de sang dans les yeux d'un homme, tant de pâleur aux joues, tant de sueur au front, et une pareille contraction de muscles" (XI: 499).

and calculated statements, the following lines offer an interesting reflection on Collin and Lucien's relationship that I am surprised that Lucey did not cite—or perhaps unsurprised, given that Lucey argues that Lucien and Collin certainly did consummate their relationship. In response to Granville's informing Collin that Lucien allocated 300,000 francs to the criminal in his will, Collin cries out, "Pauvre ! pauvre petit ! pauvre petit ! [...] toujours *trop* honnête ! J'étais, moi, tous les sentiments mauvais ; il était, lui, le bon, le noble, le beau, le sublime ! On ne change pas de si belles âmes ! il n'avait pris de moi que mon argent, monsieur !" (501). The narration highlights the importance of this cry when it notes Granville's response to it: "Cet abandon profond, entier de la personnalité que le magistrat ne pouvait ranimer, prouvait si bien les terribles paroles de cet homme que monsieur de Granville passa du côté du criminel" (501). The contradiction of Collin's worldview (present for example when calling Lucien too honest) by his attribution to himself of evil sentiments (given that good and evil have no place in his worldview) and by his assertion of his continued appreciation for illusions that he elsewhere rejects is followed by this most striking of statements, which leads readers to ask, *what else might have Lucien taken from him? Is this exclamation a praise or a regret?* This is certainly a heavy empty space.

Interestingly, after this weighted statement and the evidence contained in Granville's reaction to it of having understood the possible causes of this despair, Collin immediately dries his tears and launches into his bargaining for Theodore's life. From this point forward, Collin progressively closes himself off from the judge and begins to seize every opportunity that presents itself to assert his control, to consolidate the power left to him, or to distract himself from the trauma of Lucien's suicide. When Granville challenges one of Collin's statements regarding the letters, this seems to flip a switch in Collin's behavior; he feistily responds, "Eh ! nous jouons donc ! [...] Je parlais à la bonne franquette, moi ! je parlais à monsieur de Granville ; mais si le Procureur-général est là, je reprends mes cartes et je poitrine" (XI: 502). Falling back into his regular rhythm of evoking the status quo's corruption in order to guide his interlocutor to respond favorably to his proposal, Collin gives a whole speech about society's hypocrisy before proposing what he wants. He grows more menacing while suggestively highlighting how much power the letters give him, grows humble and respectful once the deal is made, and when they part ways the last time that he leave the *Conciergerie*, Collin addresses Granville with the utmost formality. Even before dusk falls on the day which dawned on Collin's vigil over his idol's body, he seems to have succeeded in establishing a viable frame for his future and in exorcising himself of all grief. Indeed, his attitude becomes similar to the jovial one that he exhibited in *Le Père Goriot*. When he leaves to go to Lucien's funeral, he is in high spirits about the deal he has made: "Jacques Collin éprouva, quand il fut dehors, un sentiment incroyable de bien-être. Il se sentit libre et né pour une vie nouvelle ; il marcha rapidement du Palais à l'église Saint-Germain-des-Prés, où la messe était finie" (527). Considering his optimism here, this provides more evidence that Collin repressed the contents of the letter, inasmuch as just before crying out that Lucien took nothing but his money, he responds to Granville's reassuring words ("Vous avez un avenir!" [501]) with total nonchalance: "L'homme fit un geste par lequel il exprima la plus profonde indifférence de lui-même" (501). His distancing himself from Granville (and from his trauma) after his striking admission suggests that that puzzling statement makes the pain of Lucien's death (and the impossibility of his ever

attaining the ideal vision of the future that had become inextricably associated with Lucien for Collin) too real for him, comes too close to making him recognize the futility of his actions and the disgust that he bears for himself on some level, and leads him to become increasingly eager to *assert his control* in any situation possible—maneuvers accomplished by a more extensive repression not only of proofs negative absolutes’ universality threatening his continued belief in completeness’ possibility, but of proof of any aspect of his subjectivity, as his entire emotional life became associated with his guilt for having driven Lucien to kill himself on behalf of his own selfish desires and with his failure to prevent Lucien’s suicide due to the blindness caused by his enjoyment of their close relationship, his determination to realize his vision, and his narcissism.

In relation to the force and rapidity with which Collin distances himself from his feelings, most interesting of all is what happens once Collin joins those few faithful who come to Lucien’s burial after the funeral. First of all, he sees Rastignac there and, trying to once again assume his masterful persona, offers him his services.<sup>112</sup> However, once Rastignac hears about the vehicle by which Collin’s anticipated power will arrive, he “fit un mouvement de dégoût” and “marcha vivement pour se séparer de Jacques Collin” (528), showing none of the fear which he expressed at the beginning of the novel, and the appearance of Collin’s influence is fully undermined by his calling out rather desperately to Rastignac’s back, “Vous ne savez pas dans quelles circonstances vous pouvez vous trouver” (528). If this frantic attempt to reestablish ties with a past protégé suggests that Collin’s heightened level of repression has caused him to lose access to the knowledge that would have enabled him to assert his power over Rastignac, his reaction to Lucien’s burial definitively reveals his continued fragility in the wake of trauma. He thinks to himself as he arrives at the pit next to Esther’s grave, “Deux créatures qui se sont aimées et qui étaient heureuses ! [...] elles ont réunies. C’est encore un bonheur de pouvoir ensemble. Je me ferai mettre là” (528), and then, “Quand on descendit le corps de Lucien dans la fosse, Jacques Collin tomba raide, évanoui. Cet homme si fort ne soutint pas ce léger bruit des pelletées de terre que les fossoyeurs jettent sur le corps pour venir demander leur pourboire” (528). The emotions that Collin experiences when confronted with his definitive separation from his idol are so unbearably strong that the mastermind has to lose consciousness in order to escape the threat that they pose to his will to live. If this involuntary symptom allows him to avoid recognizing the thoughts accompanying those emotions and therefore to avoid having to abandon his worldview (which remains useful in relation to his new goal of vengeance as long as he can resist recognizing the connection between the selfishness it promotes and Lucien’s death), it is also a grotesque and pathetic imitation of Jaffeur’s guilty suicide beside Pierre’s body on the galleys. In other words, Collin enjoys this symptom not only because it protects him from intolerable pain, but because it symbolically pays tribute to the young man whose beauty and virtue had inspired unprecedented amounts of unrequited love in Collin.

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<sup>112</sup> “Mon appui n’est pas à dédaigner, je suis ou je serai plus puissant que jamais. Vous avez filé votre câble, vous avez été très adroit ; mais vous aurez peut-être besoin de moi, je vous servirai toujours” (XI 528).

Overall, we find that because Collin no longer pursues the protégé plan after Lucien's death, it becomes apparent to what extent this plan had allowed him to continue the circulation of his desire, to recognize negative absolutes partially without threatening his worldview, and to rely on repression only to avoid recognizing proofs of the plan's futility (e.g. the limitations on his control over others and himself, Success' incapacity to provide complete satisfaction and control). Once this plan becomes definitively associated with trauma, the vacancy of the Thing's place in the Imaginary leads him to begin simply pursuing those things most evidently absent in his life, ultimately believing himself to be progressing toward completeness without realizing that his new acquisitions each come with a sacrifice. Collin's loss of consciousness initiates a series of events that culminate in his appointment as chief of the *sûreté*—events that Collin interprets as indications of his domination and therefore fails to recognize as indications of the gradual decomposition of are in fact the erasure of his *exceptional* power and *singular* vision through his re-assimilation into "honest" society. The challenge to Collin's identity contained in the letter leads him to defend his belief in his capacity for attaining completeness all the more fiercely, ultimately blinding him to how he is in fact losing control rather than gaining it by facilitating his incorporation into society as a representative of authority. Given that the truth of his control's limitations becomes associated with Lucien's death, the fact that he relies entirely on repression to deal with this trauma means that he cannot consciously recognize this truth or any other proof of negative absolutes' universality without unleashing the unresolved emotions from which he blocked himself instead of experiencing them in the moment. This blindness to his fallibility allows his success in promoting his conversion to inflate his estimation of his own control; however, this is ironic considering that the events leading to his absorption into the police force continue even during his blackout, showing how little his agency has to do with this final ascension. While still unconscious, Collin is picked up by officers sent by Granville to make him fulfill his promise to heal Madame de Sérizy; he wakes up in their custody. Though Collin reacts with pleasure to the idea that this great man needs him, this transportation without his consent or even knowledge represents how he loses his *ideal freedom and mobility*. His status even as potential police chief subjects him to a chain of command and motivates him to follow rules in order to preserve this possibility. Furthermore, if the second chapter highlighted Collin's simultaneous possession of exceptional power and social mobility in the underworld and the upper world, the fact that this stemmed from his ability to dominate both spheres (i.e. *all* of society) means that once he loses his supremacy in the criminal realm by being absorbed into the institution of authority, this effaces his freedom from social hierarchies. Collin assures his aunt, "Moi, je serai ce que je dois être ! Je ferai toujours trembler tout notre monde!" (530), revealing his belief that entering this new position will change nothing but the seat from which he exercises absolute power. Clearly, he ignores how his assumption of this position will constitute a huge loss of power; no matter how high he rises in rank, there is no possibility that he will ever exercise sovereign power again. Given that his interest in maintaining this new position will force him to prove his exceptional ability to apprehend criminals, no amount of lenience or collaboration could prevent him from becoming the underworld's enemy; even if his recovery of the underworld's money probably allowed him to maintain some powerful connections with the criminal leadership, his conversion permanently restricts his

access to the network of spies and endless supply of loyal minions once available to him. Even if he sought to convince the criminals that he only took this position in order to aid them, his actions in support of the standing authority would inevitably undermine his legendary reputation as a figure of Revolt. Never again could Collin know with certainty that his arrest would culminate only in the comfortable return of a sovereign to his domain after a long campaign. Even if fired from his position in the justice system, he would never have the option of returning to the underworld as its ruler and hero; if he at that point tried to consolidate his power amongst the criminals' ranks once again, only his continued control of the sphere's finances would prevent his former compatriots from executing him as a traitor. As a result, both his interest in maintaining his newly regained social membership and his interest in avoiding assassination mean that he can no longer break laws with abandon or gamble the underworld's money away on a whim.

On another level, where vengeance on specific individuals who betrayed him was never a high priority for Collin until this point, killing Corentin apparently becomes the master signifier sustaining his will to live, as is evident when he tells Jacqueline, "J'ai eu mon petit bout de conversation avec le monstre qui m'a tué Lucien, et je ne vis que pour me venger de lui ! Nous serons, grâce à nos deux positions, également armés, également protégés ! Il me faudra plusieurs années pour atteindre ce misérable ; mais il recevra le coup en pleine poitrine. [...] Allons, la haine fait vivre ! qu'on travaille !" (530). This shows that Collin's continuous devouring of all around him described in Lucien's letter is actually accelerated after Collin repressed everything that could unleash the pain associated with the young man's demise. This endless consumption returns through his way of actively distracting himself from the truth evoked by Lucien's death and of externalizing the blame for it; he takes on the difficult to impossible task of destroying Corentin. Though this serves well to occupy all of his time, it is ultimately just a *game* whose tally marks' equivalence to fresh graves makes it more exciting, but whose initiation through the obstruction of Collin's potential means of regaining any measure of self-awareness evokes how the destruction involved therein cannot lead to his progress as an individual. Furthermore, in the final scene, just after Collin's thoughts proclaim his belief that his homosexuality provides him with objectivity that will allow him to completely dominate the easily-manipulated power players to whom he reports, the narration informs us that he then "resta pendant une heure entière, oublié, là, dans ce salon" (532). If this does not suffice to show Collin's insignificance to these elite individuals, his ensuing conversation with Granville reveals the power that these men whom Collin will supposedly control actually have the potential to exercise over every aspect of his life. Granville enters and approaches him with news of the king's approval of their arrangement:

— Eh bien ! vous remplacerez Bibi-Lupin, et le condamné Calvi aura sa peine commuée.

— Il n'ira pas à Rochefort ?

— Pas même à Toulon, vous pourrez l'employer dans votre service ; mais ces grâces et votre nomination dépendent de votre conduite pendant six mois que vous serez adjoint à Bibi-Lupin. (532)

Collin's final words in the novel are thus *a question* regarding the future of his own love life, showing to what extent even his personal life has been subjected to an outside authority. Though Collin repeatedly requested that Theodore be sent to a labor camp from which he would arrange the young man's escape—an arrangement that would have maintained a distance between them—Granville releases



Theodore and places him in Collin's immediate entourage without even first asking Collin if he wanted this. As if this were not enough to evoke how his new social position practically voids him of agency, we find that even though the conclusion goes on to say that Collin managed to replace Bibi-Lupin in eight days rather than six months, his life becomes (as Miller remarks) a simple exercise of functions—a continuous line of conflicts for him to take on and resolve, providing him with the means of constantly renewing his feeling of *control* and therefore of keeping the vulnerability and impotence asserted by Lucien's suicide at bay.

Collin only appears in the series one more time; in *La Cousine Bette*, set during the 1840s, a man seeking to resolve his family's intrigue "passa par la préfecture de police, où il supplia Vautrin le chef de la Sûreté de lui envoyer madame de Saint-Estève" (XII: 356). Collin replies to this request by saying, "On nous a défendu monsieur, de nous occuper de vous, mais madame de Saint-Estève est marchande, elle est à vos ordres" (356). Collin's incapacity to aid the man directly is already contained in the man's phrasing of his request (which was to send his aunt) and Collin's impotence in this matter is reaffirmed in his response (which shows that he can only indirectly participate in illicit affairs), evoking how the *limits* placed on Collin by his position leave little room for his former audacity. If this suggests that Collin can now only enter the sphere where he once reigned vicariously, another aspect of this final appearance similarly suggests that his conversion simply serves to marginalize him in a new way—that is, *Collin's reappearance as Vautrin*.

First of all, Collin's satisfaction in finally officially regaining social membership is surely tainted by the fact that he is not recognized as an "honest" citizen under his own name, but through the false identity that he first created to veil his criminal past. If this evokes how the Symbolic continues to fail to adequately account for and appreciate his individuality, the fact that he exists as Vautrin both as a criminal and as a police officer brings to mind the slightness of the difference between Parisian society's perception of the two during this period (as asserted by Prendergast, Deschamps, Carpenter, etc.). In that light, Collin's final ascension to the position in the *sûreté* constitutes little more than his no longer having to hide from police, and it certainly does not signify his sudden inclusion in Paris' most exclusive spheres of power. If anything, the above scene's evocation of his need to maintain a distance between himself and potential scandals shows to what extent his position as police chief prevents him from directly engaging in those unlawful situations that had once been the primary source of his power—a significant change considering that many of his most remarkable skills (e.g. his knack for creating disguises, predicting others' desires, positioning himself in line with others' interests, voicing threats with delicate finesse) could not be exercised secondhand. Though his duties might lead him to rub shoulders with the elites from time to time, he was almost certainly excluded from their social gatherings—as well as those of spheres much lower in the hierarchy.

Second of all, the fact that the changes noted in Collin's behavior and mindset after Lucien's suicide apparently culminate in his regression into "Vautrin" suggests that after the fifteen years of plots and the hundreds of pages through which readers have followed Collin by the end of *Splendeurs*, no significant change to his character prevents him from readopting his original, long-abandoned persona. Though this could be interpreted as an indication of his consistency and therefore of his exceptional vision and control,

everything that this chapter has discussed has shown that this absence of changes on the surface simply veils several changes of which Collin remains consciously unaware. Clearly, Collin's repetition of the prohibition complex's resolution in response to trauma means that any growth that he accomplishes in relation to one master signifier evaporates with its displacement and replacement. By placing Revenge in the position that his protégé plan once occupied, Collin loses access to the products of all of his self-reflection since he first appeared in 1816—and if everything that he perceives is now winnowed using a thicker filter, everything that he does must now stand up to the constant scrutiny of those who know about his past, those charged with command of him, and those eager to replace him.

In any case, the *Comédie humaine* does not report Corentin's death, meaning that readers' journey with Collin comes to an end as an encounter with a final empty space at the point where the question of his revenge's success or failure should be resolved—an empty space in relation to which readers can easily maintain the fantasy of Collin's mastery, and which I feel inclined to fill with my mental image of his mischievous smile upon first hooking Rastignac rather than with that of him holding Lucien's dead hand as he reads the young man's letter. However, the latter image is much more closely connected to Balzac's moral purpose. The author writes of that hand's coldness: "On ne connaît pas d'homme qui puisse garder pendant dix minutes un morceau de glace, en le serrant avec force dans le creux de sa main [...] Mais l'effet de ce froid terrible, et agissant comme un poison, est à peine comparable à celui que produit sur l'âme la main raide et glacée d'un mort tenue ainsi, serrée ainsi. La Mort parle alors à la Vie, elle dit des secrets noirs et qui tuent bien des sentiments ; car, en fait de sentiment, changer, n'est-ce pas mourir ?" (XI: 425). In light of this passage, it seems strange that though Lucien's final actions challenge Collin's perception of his idol and of himself, they do not ultimately disrupt Collin's conscious understanding of his motivations as his passion for Lucien; to the contrary, he claims that his continued passion for Lucien underlies his desire to avenge his protégé. However, the changes in Collin's behavior after Lucien's suicide suggest that the emotional death that the narration describes in this passage seizes Collin on a more profound level. Balzac's overall portrayal of Collin shows that one's passion for an idealized signifier can easily be interrupted if one is confronted with information that threatens one's idealized perception of it because one's idealization of this signifier rather than another stems from one's perception of it within a precise combination of circumstances (e.g. its association with emotional and verbal meaning capable of engaging one's desires, its accompaniment by an empty space of possibility through which one can imagine one's future attainment of completeness in relation to it, the absence of its association with unresolved traumas) that one cannot contrive to maintain or reproduce (as one can never completely understand exactly what initiated one's attraction). Even though Collin still clings to Lucien's image by ordering his life around avenging him, he undergoes an emotional death inasmuch as he distances himself from all signifiers bearing a connection to those unpleasant emotions that remind him of past trauma (e.g. grief, guilt, confusion, vulnerability) or to those pleasant emotions that remind him of what he has lost (e.g. love, selflessness, empathy, awe, joy). As a result, Collin becomes incapable of enjoying anything apart from the pleasure he receives through seeming proofs of his power and superiority. However, if "Death's dark secrets" here

“kill” Collin’s feelings by initiating his repression of emotion after changing his overall perception of Lucien, this is not to say that recognizing these secrets (i.e. negative absolutes) is not compatible with an emotional life. To the contrary, he shows for example through Bianchon that if one can idealize a signifier within a frame taking these truths into account, one’s expectations of incompleteness can stabilize the circulation of one’s desire in relation to this signifier by rendering it resilient to proofs of negative absolutes’ universality. Whether due to the traditional values he expressed in *Le Père Goriot*, his recognition that no amount of power can change the amount of enjoyment one can experience, or the frequency with which he encounters death, Bianchon remains clear-sighted, humble, and selfless throughout all of the many works in which he appears even though he makes endless friends in high places, never to readers’ knowledge fulfills his plans to return to the country, and has an unexpectedly vibrant career in Paris.

If this chapter has thus made clear that Collin’s way of dealing with trauma progressively decreases in effectiveness until he loses not only the exceptional vision and control that once distinguished him from other characters, but his ability to connect with others and even himself, the conclusion will explore how one can interrupt this empty repetition through the acquirement of self-awareness.

## CHAPTER 4. CONCLUSION: ON A NEW APPROACH TO THE MODERN MORALITY CRISIS

So, at the end of this long road, what purpose do I think Balzac assigned to Jacques Collin? The short answer is: whatever purpose he needed him to serve. Collin's flexibility rendered him invaluable to Balzac; we have seen how at times he even appears to be Balzac's textual surrogate. For this reason, *as long as an interpretation respects Balzac's attention to negative absolutes*, no one analysis of him is more valid than another. Collin certainly provided Balzac with a means of drawing popular attention to the works, of incorporating the criminal element of popular culture into his social history and of examining its relationship to other literary traditions, of fusing the diverse elements of his style, of articulating his critical vision of the underlying principles ordering society, and of vicariously indulging his own will to power and thirst for vengeance and revolt. This project has simply sought to stress the importance of adding another item to this list of meanings associated with Collin—one that almost seems to have been willfully omitted. Through our examination of the subjectivity which Balzac assigned to the character, we have seen that Collin grants Balzac a way of engaging those disillusioned readers on the brink of moral relativism who want to resist it but do not know how or even why they should. By presenting readers with a figure simultaneously epitomizing depravity and mastery and setting this character up in the role of a teacher who can set readers on their way to fully recognizing, embracing, and profiting from society's unspoken rules, Balzac gives readers the opportunity to fantastically embrace moral nihilism in its most extreme form, allowing their imaginations to revel in vicious and voluptuous visions of power and vengeance, allowing them to foresee themselves as sovereigns of society and the self. However, ignoring the story of Collin's subjectivity means ignoring the counterpoint that Balzac provides to this fantastical voyage down the road of selfishness. Balzac knows that once readers caught up in an existential quest for answers identify Collin as a signifier of that which they are resisting, he can use their need to understand him to lead them indirectly to what he has learned in life: that negative absolutes are inescapable, that no amount of ruthless will or knowledge or retribution will be able to provide completeness, and that realizing this is the first step to escaping the compulsive pursuit of completeness, finding one's connection to humanity at large, and discovering forms of satisfaction which, if not perfect, are nevertheless unmarked by disappointment and do not require the abuse of others. This conclusion will show that Balzac's text serves the role of the Analyst's Discourse because it allows readers to come to a new level of self-awareness. Though Collin's knowledge of the mind's functioning provided him with the sufficient means to himself pursue this moral purpose, he only ever employs this knowledge in order to manipulate others and to pursue his personal interests. This is the reading that we miss if we do not take Collin's subjectivity into account: inasmuch as his use of this knowledge opposes Balzac's use of it in several key ways, we can see that the author obviously designed the criminal mastermind to highlight the moral purpose which he designed his works to perform.

#### **4.1 Collin's Corruption as the Counterpoint to Balzac's Textual Ethics**

Given that he never manages to cease repeating the prohibition complex's resolution in response to trauma, we find that Collin ultimately fails to embrace the final important role of the Thing: it *preserves the trace of one's individual experience of negative absolutes* which can facilitate the expansion of one's self-awareness by allowing one to identify one's pattern of behavior. This is why Lacan writes, "Si l'inconscient est bien ce que je dis, d'être structuré comme un langage, c'est au niveau de la langue qu'il nous faut interroger cet Un" (*Encore* 63). The "One" to which he is referring is the *belief in completeness* which leaves one in a passive state after the prohibition complex' resolution: given that the Thing's determination of our desires leads to the manifestation of an observable pattern in one's behavior, if one can recognize this pattern, one can recognize one's self-destructive behavior as the futile pursuit of nonexistent ideals of completeness and abstain from reentering this compulsive pattern every time that one believes that it becomes possible. If this recognition of the futility of pursuing completeness does not necessarily mean that the goal in itself is without merit, the importance of recognizing negative absolutes is that in the case that their pursuit threatens to lead one to abuse another, one's knowledge that doing so will not bring one any closer to completeness (as well as the empathy born of recognizing the Real's omnipresence in human life) constitutes a clear limit for such indulgence.

Furthermore, psychoanalysis employs this trace in the treatment in a way that also allows for the association of pleasure with the recognition of negative absolutes—a way which therefore bears significant potential in addressing the modern morality crisis. Lacan's writings on the ethics of psychoanalysis deal largely with the analyst's utilization of *transference*, which is the authority, desirability, or other attribute projected by the patient onto the analyst due to his or her perceived similarity to another person in the patient's life or the patient's idealization of the analyst as a *subject-supposed-to-know*—that is, a person whose avowed ability to help others through their possession of privileged knowledge inspires a belief in those not sharing it that that person can provide them with completeness unattainable elsewhere—made possible by the empty space conserved in the signifier as which the patient perceives the analyst. Lacan emphasizes that as the influence which this can consequently provide the analyst over the patient comes from the latter's anticipation that the former can provide a perfect solution for the problem at hand (i.e. resolve her or his *request for meaning* and cease the drafting of questions or *request for satisfaction* and satiate insatiable desire), the analyst must resist the temptation to use this control and to advise the patient on how to fix her or his problems—not only because doing so would be to claim to possess an *answer* which one does not possess (an ideal answer which would fill the empty space of language's Beyond), but more importantly because *doing so does not work*, given that the effects of such *suggestion* can only ever be impermanent as the patient's blind obedience of the analyst will inevitably end once the answers s/he provides fail to produce the completeness which the patient desires. Lacan insists an analyst's refusal to answer the requests for meaning posed by spellbound patients expecting a magical cure is much more productive than offering one, as it will eventually elicit a strong emotional response in relation to the patient's unmet expectations, allowing the analyst to bring the patient's conscious attention to the phenomenon of transference itself. By highlighting the disparity between the

patient's knowledge of the analyst and the significance and expectations which the former has projected onto the latter and formed of the analytic experience (through unconscious assumptions or associations) as well as the potential power which the patient has unwittingly relinquished to the analyst solely in relation to this unfounded interpretation, the analyst can provide decisive proof of the patient's primary processes and *typical* subjectivity.

Furthermore, although this transference is not the involuntary symptom which led the patient to seek help from the analyst, because all reactions to trauma through repression are repetitions of the prohibition complex's resolution, the patient's *feeling of displeasure* (the *disappointment* of her or his expectations of analysis) in response to the absence of an ideal answer (identified as *the Thing* promising completeness) which the analyst (imagined to be a representative *both* of *authority* and of a connection to *language's beyond* and therefore capable of reconciling them) was assumed to have promised to provide by claiming to be able to help (an assumption which initiated the patient's *anticipation* of returning to the "lost" state disrupted by their symptoms) offers the analyst a direct link to the cause of the patient's symptom, as this feeling's association with trauma is evidenced by its evocation in relation to the *empty space* which the analyst poses in response to the patient's question (the *a* which is the agent in the Analyst's discourse). This feeling (which is the sign of one's continued desire, which has become synonymous with disappointment that one did not attain completeness as expected) becomes associated in the prohibition complex's resolution on the level of the Real with the Thing as that whose ascension leads to its repression as proof of the permanently empty space which is the origin and aim of desire. This connection to the Thing means that though this feeling is always the same and thus does not offer up any translatable information about the symptom's source, the feeling is also connected to all of the Thing's associations in the Imaginary and the Symbolic—that is, all of the fantasies (visions of past or future completeness) and idealized signifiers (ideals established in relation to prohibiting authority and the worldviews which accompanied them) which one once identified with the Thing, but which one repressed when one's disillusionment led to their association with the pain of trauma. By guiding the patient to talk about the other times that this feeling (which, as it cannot be completely articulated, in itself constitutes an empty space) has overtaken them, the analyst can help the patient to recognize the manifestations of *resistance* (nonsensical arguments, a hesitation to complete a thought, an abrupt change in subject, a dramatic outburst meant to distract from the matter at hand, etc.) which primary processes motivate in order to avoid one's experiencing the pain associated with the repressed source of the patient's symptom. In other words, by engaging the *feeling of anticipation* established through the patient's transference only by maintaining an *empty space* where this fantasy led the patient to expect that the analyst would provide *language*, the analyst can follow the patient's resulting *feeling of disappointment* to the source of the patient's symptom, which manifests as the *empty space* maintained by consciousness where the *language* recognizing negative absolutes' universality *as a permanently empty space* should be—a task whose accomplishment becomes evident only through the dissipation of resistance, transference, and the symptom. We thus ultimately find that if helping patients to recognize and accept negative absolutes is an ethical action, this is because *the patient's recognition of the repressed proof of negative absolutes' universality becomes*

*associated for the first time with a feeling of pleasure* through the dissipation of the symptom and the patient's newfound self-awareness, which manifests as the patient's ability to distinguish her or his impulsive emotional responses (as associations arbitrarily established through experience and education) from the products of rational thought and to resist compulsive tendencies to engage in potentially self-destructive situations in relation to knowledge of negative absolutes and primary processes. However, this can only happen in relation to the analyst's continued admission of subjectivity and fallibility, as the patient's transference cannot dissipate until s/he accepts that there is no form of language available which can definitively eliminate all empty space. Becoming an analyst thus has a required precedent: several years of training analysis which aims at firmly establishing the analyst's recognition through her or his own experience of the universality of negative absolutes and consequently *typical* subjectivity.

Considering this, we can thus firstly examine the difference between Balzac and Collin's methods and aims of employing their knowledge of the mind. This position of *subject-supposed-to-know* is clearly that which Collin purposefully projects in order to gain influence over his protégés; by manipulating them through their desires for completeness, Collin acts unethically not because honesty is objectively good and dishonesty evil, but because promising completeness *performatively produces future suffering*—the sole exception to this being when such promises are projected to be realized after death. We have seen that by initiating his protégés' expectations and anticipation of an impossible vision for the future, Collin's promises not only make his protégés more willing to passively authorize or actively perform deeds which in many cases lead to the suffering of others and their own suffering (given that though Collin's worldview can provide his protégés the determination to accomplish these acts, it cannot prevent them from experiencing the unpleasant feelings which they have already learned to associate with them), but set them up for inevitable disappointment—whether in relation to their incapacity to go through with what is required (as is Raoul's case), their continued dissatisfaction after achieving them (as is Rastignac's case), or their traumatic realization of their efforts' having culminated in failure upon encountering an irreversible block to achieving them (as is Lucien's case). Furthermore, we see in Collin's case how this suffering extends to the one who promises: given that his motivation for doing so involves his pursuit of his own vision of future completeness requiring the permanent perpetuation of his influence over his protégés, its limitation in relation to their continued belief in the value of that which he promises (which Raoul decides is not worth the cost of betraying his beloved and Rastignac decides is not worth submitting to Collin's will) and in his ability to fulfill his promises (which is always shattered by his inevitable demand of sacrifice) means that Collin himself will inevitably suffer when they betray him—a suffering manifesting as the dissatisfaction driving him each time that he attempts to conquer a new protégé, and after Lucien's suicide, each time that he compulsively expands his control to the detriment of his vision. As the last chapter showed, the reason Collin's utilization of his knowledge of the mind inevitably proves ineffective in accomplishing his aims in that he does not recognize its source as his recognition at least in part of negative absolutes' universality. Interestingly, Lacan outlined the approach to ethics here presented largely in opposition to certain groups of psychoanalysts—in particular, the proponents of Ego Psychology, which “developed in the United States in the years

following the Second World War and focused on ways of strengthening the defence mechanisms of the conscious mind rather than the unconscious motivation of our actions, as in classical psychoanalysis” (Homer 5)—who, like Collin, promised completeness to their patients, thus denying the universality of negative absolutes without realizing to what extent any effects which their treatments did manage to achieve depended on the traces in their practices of their predecessors’ theories, which had been established only in relation to their observation of negative absolutes. Furthermore, just as Collin’s influence is suspended by either the blindness resulting from his beliefs in completeness or his inability to provide it, Ego Psychology’s promises of being able to help patients to control the unconscious allowed them to reach prominence in the pragmatic and optimistic United States; however, when it was inevitably discredited and fell into decline, this unfortunately led to Americans’ rejection of the field as a whole and the rise of treatments relying on pharmaceuticals. The examples set by Collin and the Ego psychologists show that when analysts take advantage of patients’ assumptions of their possessing a knowledge which they do not in fact possess, they become blind to their own subjectivity (their subjection to *language’s limitations* and their *insatiable, unconscious desires*) through their simultaneous differentiation of themselves from the patients and assumption of their capacity to understand what the patients do not, meaning that the dialectic is reduced to their perpetual maintenance of their influence through their provision of an answer each time the patient inevitably formulates a new request for meaning in response to the last’s failure to be the ideal answer which was promised, with each new answer weakening that influence until it dissolves entirely. Obviously, this engagement inevitably fails to accomplish that which brought the patient to them in the first place: the need to eradicate an involuntary symptom—an uncontrollable, disruptive or even destructive pattern of thoughts or behavior *resulting from the patient’s repression of their encounter with negative absolute’s universality in relation to a past trauma*.

On the other hand, as I have shown through my experience reading Collin, the dialectic between author and reader produces self-awareness through unanswered questions. If the psychoanalytic experience hinges on the juncture of conscious and unconscious agencies in speech, the similarity of Balzac and Lacan’s styles shows how this dialectic can function between the reader and the traces of the writer’s subjectivity maintaining empty space in the text. They each purposefully make their texts difficult (through ambiguity, paradoxes, empty spaces, thickness of symbolism and references, etc.) in order to prevent readers from believing to have understood, forcing them to actively seek to understand; they both invest their works with their subjectivity in order to prevent readers from taking them as subjects-supposed-to know; and their texts are both marked by a failure to closure, showing to what extent language can never express complete meaning and thus must go on circling it indefinitely.<sup>113</sup> Balzac’s way of presenting Collin thus links him to Lacan

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<sup>113</sup> Miller’s article discusses the lack of closure characterizing Balzac’s works, writing for example, “the moment of closure only signals the displacement of narrative and the necessity of its further production” (169). If this suggests Balzac’s acknowledgement that the universal principles which his series sought to illuminate could never be adequately articulated, Homer similarly describes how Lacan’s style takes account of negative absolutes: “His writing is an attempt to force the reader to confront the limits of meaning and



not only by demonstrating their shared understanding of the human condition as subjected to certain negative absolutes and characterized by a drive to resolve them at all costs, not only their recognition of the need to acknowledge and accept these absolutes in order to gain any level of free will, not only through their similar critiques of modernity as promoting beliefs and expectations of completeness which deny these negative absolutes, but through their shared ethical purpose: the promotion of self-awareness (i.e. the recognition of negative absolutes). Balzac and Lacan both recognized that given their conscious or unconscious hopes for completeness and their primary processes defending the possibility of its attainment, people would only believe in the limitations and fallibility of their perception if led indirectly to witness it firsthand while simultaneously bearing the motivation needed to recognize and accept it. For this reason, Balzac and Lacan intentionally make the interpretation of their texts difficult, manipulating and evoking the gap between signifiers and signifieds in order to force readers to distrust and thus reexamine their initial understandings of the texts, causing a delay between reading and understanding which in itself is proof of involuntary thought processes' presence. We can clearly see how Balzac's way of presenting Collin to readers purposefully promotes their transference onto the character by attracting readers to Collin *on the level of feeling* as a figure of mastery which our desires for domination and transcendence can immediately idealize, initiating our anticipation of appropriating his power or his significance to Balzac's text. However, by maintaining empty space (paradoxes in symbolism, absence of origins, opacity of motivations, the ambiguity of the author's intentions) where we expect the language definitively explaining his *significance as an exceptional being* to appear, Balzac compels readers obsessed with the question of Collin's transcendence and significance to pay the highest attention to the character's appearances in the text and to systematically exhaust all available resources which could allow us to understand him. Devolving into a constant redrafting of inadequate questions, this search can never progress until readers recognize Collin's subjectivity—a task for which Balzac provides a frame of reference through his understanding of the mind's functioning (e.g. through Collin's manipulation of other characters, which is paralleled by the text's way of misleading readers; in his nonfictional writings) as the consequence of universal negative absolutes. Finding his façade of mastery undermined, this finally relieves the tension created by our attraction to Collin which had for so long driven our search. This conclusion provides us with the opportunity to attain a new level of self-awareness by allowing us to see the distance between our first impression of Collin and our final one, leading us to question not only to what extent our perception is untrustworthy in general, but to pinpoint the role of our own desire in constructing that first impression given that our conviction of Collin's importance dissolves once we no longer associate him with completeness.

By exploring the parallels drawn between Collin and Balzac—some of which I have already mentioned (e.g. they each highlighted society's hypocrisy, attended an Oratorian school, have the grandest of ambitions) and some which I have not (e.g. they both had a string of beautiful young men as protégés)—we find several more *differences* in their respective presentations to protégés

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understanding and to acknowledge the profoundly disturbing prospect that behind all meaning lies non-meaning, and behind all sense lies nonsense" (Homer 12).

and readers which gain significance in the context of Lacan's writings on the ethics of psychoanalysis. First of all, where Collin remembers "son enfance *heureuse*, au Collège des Oratoriens" (XI: 362, my emphasis), in *Louis Lambert* Balzac infamously depicts just how horrible his six years in Vendôme had been—marked as they were by his frequent imprisonment in an isolated cupboard as punishment, largely for his resistance to the rote style of learning.<sup>114</sup> Ironically, the author is in this sense connected to rebellion, whereas the criminal's thoughts bear evidence of an inclination to enjoy mindless assimilation. This evokes that if Collin accepts as such and seeks to perpetuate the precept that wealth and power can provide the greatest satisfaction a person can know, Balzac provides readers with his characters' stories (and indirectly, his own) so that we can make up our own minds about this ideal. Furthermore, whereas Collin *matches* society by selfishly using his knowledge only for his own benefit (evoking hypocrisy only in order gain influence over his protégés, hoarding what he knows about desire in order to manipulate others, etc.), Balzac siphoned *everything* he saw into his series, structuring his representation of society's reflection in relation to his extensive frame of reference and firm convictions in a way that has not only secured him a shining legacy, but has allowed society at large to benefit from it.

This brings me to my second point, to which Troy alludes when he remarks that there is "a sense [...] in which all the personages of the *Comédie* are autobiographical" in that they are all "a projection of the same terrific will that their creator is working off in his writing" (337). For anyone who has read about Balzac's life, everything I have presented to this point has evoked to what extent Collin reflects the dominant, if not vengeful side of Balzac's personality. Like Collin, he apparently compartmentalized his social interactions (Robb notes that he alters his personality in each of his private relationships in a way not unlike Collin's habit of forming his appearance according to his interlocutors' desires) and shared his notorious will to power (e.g. Robb shows that he expressed a desire for fame from an early age). Troy writes that as the "Fatal Man" (Troy 337), one of two types of hero with which the author particularly identified (with the second being Lucien as the "Man of Sensibility" [336]), Collin allowed the author to take to its extreme implications the idea which so often arises in disillusionment that if the (wo)man "of refined moral and emotional impulses fared so badly in a world given over to a cynical skepticism in thought and an uninhibited selfishness in action, one solution for the superior individual was to outwit this world at its own game" (337). With his usual thoroughness, in creating Collin, Balzac not only explored what doing *whatever it takes* to get Success might look like through a vehicle equipped with all the relevant skills, materials, and knowledge which one would need to get away with it, but allows Collin's strength of will to escape guilt's interruption by amassing all of the classic arguments used to justify crime (that the reigning value system is invalid because its effect is not utopia, that one has to be ruthless in order to keep up with everyone else, that one might as well transgress because not doing so will not stop others from doing so in one's place, that everyone is selfish underneath the surface), framing them with examples taken from his own

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<sup>114</sup> Balzac's biographies written by Théophile Gautier (Balzac's friend and fellow author) and Graham Robb each recount his suffering during these years, which ended with his exiting the school early after having fallen into a sort of walking coma generally attributed to his being mentally overwhelmed after having consumed too many advanced books which he had snuck into his solitary confinement.

society, and uniting them with Collin's explicit and implicit recognition of primary processes, essentially providing him with a translation of the *feeling* driving both individualism and revolt into a doctrine—something which few people living in a state of transgression actually possess—whose eloquent and calculated presentation can only be resisted through active effort, as it is questionable only for those willing to devote considerable effort to doing so. The resulting colossus shows not only the ease with which such an intellectual proclivity for selfishness could be exercised and the great reward which one could garner from doing so when such behavior is the norm, but the sheer amount of frustrated energy which Balzac poured into his depiction of such behavior.<sup>115</sup>

When compared to the supremely ruthless Collin, any measure of restraint on Balzac's part serves to distinguish him as conscientious and altruistic; however, it was not Balzac's choice, but chance that kept him from power (if, as Guyon says, readers are lucky he was never elected, we are also lucky that none of his business ventures turned a profit, as either of these cases would have certainly subtracted volumes from the *Comédie humaine*) and prison (given that Balzac did not completely abstain from crime).<sup>116</sup> If creating Collin thus created an opportunity to draw parallels between them (their shared acumen for intrigue, pursuit of worldly ambitions with fiery will, willingness to get their hands dirty, etc.) which others might have avoided, this is doubly true of another similarity between them, whose scandalous nature until the end of the twentieth century explains its treatment until then principally with pointed silence or vehement denial. Balzac may have channeled more than just his desire to exploit the system's holes in his creation of Collin, as Robb notes that from "1831 to 1836, Balzac 'adopted' several attractive, incompetent young men, literary slaves he hoped to form, as Vautrin forms Rastignac and Lucien" (157)—a group which Pierre Barbéris refers to as a "harem of secretaries" (qtd. in Lucey 88). Robb and Lucey present substantial evidence of Balzac's sexually-charged same-sex relationships, whether with these young men or some of his more established fellow writers (e.g. Robb describes his close working relationship with Hyacinth de Latouche and its fiery ending, Lucey quotes a flirtatious, sexually explicit letter from Eugène Sue), though there is no evidence of their consummation. If there is nevertheless an undeniably erotic tone surrounding these relationships, there are other tones as well, as is

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<sup>115</sup> Troy writes: "In Vautrin, Balzac exhausts imaginatively that contempt for the hypocrisy and corruption of Restoration society which might very easily, in a man of his extraordinary vigor and detachment, have been converted into action. [...] Vautrin corresponds [...] to what must have been in Balzac the temptation of the intellectual will. Confronted with the teeming world of Restoration society, with a world altogether without values of any kind, that temptation must have been great indeed. [...] But Balzac preferred art to action; he sought power elsewhere than in the Tuileries or in St. Lazare" (Troy 338-339). In his article, Troy mistakenly refers to the prison explored in *Splendeurs* as the Saint-Lazare prison rather than the Conciergerie, which significantly lies at Paris' center rather than its margin, and which Balzac himself visited when researching for the novel.

<sup>116</sup> Gautier recalls how Balzac even formed a secret society of authors which he intended to function as a literary underworld; however, though Gautier's description of how seriously Balzac took it is very amusing, he shows that it was little more than a scheme to promote each other's works and only met a few times. Nevertheless, Robb recounts two occasions when Balzac took violent revenge on (the property of) individuals whom he viewed as having escaped justice for wronging him. On the first occasion, when he lost a court case in which a publisher demanded he fulfill his contractual obligations and deliver a version of a book which had grown to Encyclopedic proportions in two volumes, Balzac broke into the press and spent eleven hours completely scrambling the typeface so as to gain more time for an appeal. Secondly, he threw a rock through the window of a bookstore which was selling an unauthorized copy of one of his books. He paid for the damage in these cases, in which he claimed to have been defending his "children," that is, his books. However, Robb says that these were not his only crimes of vandalism, and that they were not always so nobly motivated.

shown by Robb's exploration of his correspondence during the period of his successive employment of those young men in the mid-1830s.<sup>117</sup> We see therein the complexity of Collin's sexual identity and the motherly, erotic, romantic, and possessive feelings for his protégés, aligning creation with creator once more. However, the passage brings our attention to another difference between them: if Balzac remained loyal to his principles where Collin embraces moral nihilism, Balzac's evocation of his compliance and inability to resist temptation contrasts sharply with Collin's striking fidelity to his protégés (until it becomes definitively impossible for him to realize his vision for their unified enjoyment of Success).<sup>118</sup> If Troy recognizes in Collin Balzac's envy of those able to void themselves of principles and resulting freedom to defy the exigencies of modern life, it is possible that his depiction of Collin's prioritization of Love *even before Success became impossible for him* and his *unwitting* pursuit of it thereafter inversely allows Collin to fulfill Balzac's wishes to witness in his own involuntary actions some proof of his underlying selflessness, his transcendence of inherited desires and consequential aim at the beyond.<sup>119</sup> Furthermore, if Balzac's "profoundly and at all times moral" (Troy 344) convictions compelled him to write in good faith on behalf of the common good, Robb suggests that even his dedication to his definite principles was subjected to Success by remarking that "his independence as a writer coincided with his subservience to a political movement" (195) and suggesting that "Balzac's politics were a kind of mental hygiene rather than a set of convictions" (195), going

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<sup>117</sup> Robb offers the following excerpts from Balzac's letters: "[H]e refers to his 'androgynous genius', his 'woman's heart', his 'maternal' instincts; he wonders if Nature has not 'made a mistake'. When talking of *his compliant character or his inability to resist temptation*, he compares himself to a whore. [...] 'I shall flirt now only with men,' he told Eveline in a dubious attempt to set her mind at rest when she picked up more gossip about his womanizing. [...] Sandeau addressed him as 'darling' ('*chéri*'), as did a later secretary, Laurent-Jan, who signed off with the phrase, 'I press myself against your mighty breast'. [...] On the one hand, these allusions can be seen as a recognition that such master-pupil relationships often have a sexual component; in Balzac's case, they were also a product of that erotic energy that had once expressed itself in abject *worship* and was now barely distinguishable from a need to manipulate and mould. [...] He can hardly have been surprised, therefore, when friends started calling him 'Vautrin'" (260, my emphasis).

<sup>118</sup> The "worship" to which Robb is referring is that which Balzac described in a letter to Zulma Carraud in 1830, in which he writes that his "worship of women" and "need for love have never been completely satisfied," continuing that in "despair of ever being loved and understood by the woman of my dreams," he will return to the "tempestuous" and "mind-deadening" realm of politics and literature only because "common contentment has eluded me" (Robb 197) given that he cannot retire to "blissful obscurity," concluding that since he has to make his fortune, "it might as well be great and illustrious, for, if I must suffer, I would rather do so in high than low estate" (Robb 197). If this suggests that the passions he shared with the young men (and the general vigor with which he seized life) are his attempts to placate this need for love, Robb paints his treatment of them as actually less compassionate than Collin's treatment of his protégés ("In some ways, he had fewer scruples than Vautrin. His willingness to spend time and money and his tyrannical generosity are beyond doubt. Yet Vautrin's 'maternal' devotion to a young man's social ambitions contrasts with Balzac's dedication to his own cause" [Robb 261]).

<sup>119</sup> Collin's repetitive self-sacrifice on behalf of his protégés constitutes a transgression in the sense that his selfishness is in fact obedience; though Balzac feels his capacity for it, his lifelong desire to raise his station—an inheritance from his father, whose birth into poverty and narrow escape from life as a criminal (he changed his name in order to escape the shadow of scandal) did not stop him from becoming respected and influential—prevented him from letting love fully overtake him. Though he claims that he shared once-in-a-lifetime love with Hanska, one might well question whether he would have remained devoted to her if her station and wealth had not appeared his most attractive (or perhaps even only) option for making an advantageous marriage in service of this Thing. Though they did not marry until the end of his life, her husband's ill health had led them to agree to marry upon his death in the early 1830s and this plan was from that point forward always only deferred into the near future by their circumstances, and he constantly anticipated its arrival.

on to comment on Balzac's "awkward self-awareness" (196) (which Robb notes allowed him to quite accurately predict the future evolution of his career) in relation to an article written by Balzac just before the 1830 Revolution:

The artist is not privy to his own intellect. He operates under the influence of certain circumstances whose precise combination is a mystery. He does not belong to himself...

A man who is accustomed to make of his soul a mirror in which the whole universe finds its reflection...necessarily lacks that variety of logic or stubbornness to which we have given the name 'character'. There is something of the whore in him; he gets excited like a child at anything that strikes his mind. There is nothing he cannot imagine; he experiences everything. (Robb 195-196)

Though we obviously cannot resolve the question of Balzac's intentions, I find most interesting this idea that Balzac's *recognition of his inability to control his mind* may have led him to embrace his controversial position—which accommodated his view of the mind, justifying the embrace of absolute institutions in relation to society's need to *educate the desires* of its citizens and thereby *prepare individuals' thoughts* to impulsively weigh their personal interests in relation to a fixed set of moral values—in order to provide a stable foundation for this artistic vision, whose capacity to capture everything from every angle would otherwise have been guided only by the author's interest of the moment. If the contrasts within Balzac's works or between his writings and his actions (e.g. he never ceases trying to *parvenir* while demonizing social mobility in his works [as highlighted by Clark]; he began making "a determined effort to break into the prison of marriage" [Robb 195] just after writing a book advising young men to never marry) show that his adoption of these principles did not eradicate his desire for Success or its influence, it is nevertheless also true that in spite of their popularity, the subversive nature of the works which his principles led him to compose blocked him from the recognition and influence enjoyed by other authors during his lifetime.<sup>120</sup> If his conscious establishment of principles thus ensured that at least when writing, his vision took precedence over Success, the argument that he embraced them in relation to his *awareness* of his mind's otherwise uncontainable capacity to wander suggests that Collin's lack of self-awareness and consequential ability to accept the Symbolic order as such may have on some level aroused Balzac's envy.

My point in examining how Balzac's own subjectivity becomes visible through Collin is to show that if Balzac is unlike Collin inasmuch as he provides readers with the opportunity to share the benefits from his knowledge, his openness on an *emotional* level contrasts with the façade of mastery which Collin projects in order to impress and gain influence over others by seemingly demonstrating his ability to deliver the completeness which he offers, allowing readers to recognize the limits of his knowledge *as language* and thus preventing them from assuming that he has all of the answers. Whereas Collin makes every effort to hide his subjectivity in order to avoid the vulnerable position in which its exposure could place him, Balzac does not censor his portrayal of Collin for the sake of his reputation, allowing his desires to flow freely therein. Furthermore, if Collin urges his protégés not to hold by their opinions in their quests for superiority, Balzac advises the opposite in the *Avant-propos*: "La loi de l'écrivain, ce qui le fait tel,

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<sup>120</sup> For example, though the two authors often wrote on similar topics, Hugo attained membership in the Peerage, the *Académie Française*, and the Second and Third Republics' legislatures.

ce qui, je ne crains pas de le dire, le rend égal et peut-être supérieur à l'homme d'état, est une décision quelconque sur les choses humaines, un dévouement absolu à des principes" (I: 82). Finally, if Collin often presents falsified worldviews in the place of his own or withholds some of its components in order to prevent others from predicting his actions or utilizing that knowledge against him, Balzac clearly states and stands by his principles while nevertheless allowing their shortcomings, his blind spots, and even his own emotional resistance to them to manifest in his works as they will. This is why Balzac's willingness to sublimate *everything* into his works, as opposed to Collin's constant mask-wearing, is so important.<sup>121</sup>

Once readers follow Collin into *Vautrin*, they can only realize that if Collin—this master who when not doling out lessons to his rapt protégés never ceases to surprise and impress us through his unmatched mindfulness of the process of perception, exceptionally successful enactment of the *modus operandi* of the "greats," and the fact that no enemy ever manages to "beat" him definitively—cannot circumvent the unavoidability of sacrifice, the insatiability of desire, the irrevocable limits to self-control, and the overall impossibility of completeness, then there is no way that they could hope to do so.<sup>122</sup> If we turn to consider the life of Balzac himself, hoping to there find proof that his mindset afforded him a decidedly better life than that of Collin or Rastignac, even I who would most like this to be true have to admit that no proof exists or could exist which provided this case a meta-ruling in relation to all value systems; both lives had pros and cons.<sup>123</sup> However, I will return to this question at the end of the following section in order to consider it in the frame which I outline therein.

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<sup>121</sup> Firstly, it allows readers to see his fallibility and therefore prevents them from treating him like a subject-supposed-to-know. What is more, if Lacan emphasizes the importance of analysts' recognition of their own subjectivity's role in the analytic experience, the first line of Balzac's Avant-propos shows that he recognizes how his subjectivity is involved within his writing: "En donnant à une œuvre entreprise depuis bientôt treize ans, le titre de la Comédie humaine, il est nécessaire d'en dire la pensée, d'en raconter l'origine, d'en expliquer brièvement le plan, en essayant de parler de ces choses comme si je n'y étais pas intéressé" (I: 77, my emphasis). Balzac does not say that he will try to explain his work "comme si je ne m'y étais pas intéressé" (as if I was not interested in it), but rather "comme si je n'y étais pas intéressé" (as if I was not there invested/concerned). Considering this, we find that if Balzac shows at the beginning of the Avant-propos that his self—as a divided subject of the Symbolic (who knows that he should describe that which he has built with language as if it is capable of producing objective meaning) and of negative absolutes (whose desires inhabiting language's Beyond are present in spite of this injunction)—is present in the text as its thoughts, origins, and structure, the reader cannot directly engage with that self due to the un-closeable distance between these three manifestation of the author's subjectivity and the text as such, but rather can only come to recognize the presence of that empty space and the consequential limitations to all interpretation—that is to say, a manifestation the universal negative absolutes.

<sup>122</sup> If tempted to blame his criminal status for this inability, they have only to look to the example set by Rastignac; though his enactment of Collin's lessons brings him great success (including a seat on the Chamber of Peers and two appointments to minister), he does not manage to get around negative absolutes any more than Collin: "Never will Balzac show Rastignac in a moment of gratification, in contented, triumphant possession of the humming Parisian hive he avidly covets" (Miller 168).

<sup>123</sup> Balzac's life was certainly extraordinary, full of interesting and diverse people and experiences, and his incomparable work ethic and incomparable vision led him to be counted among humanity's greats; nevertheless, he had more than his fair share of suffering—his coldly distant parents, his treatment at boarding school, his constant shadow of enormous debt, his many failed political campaigns and businesses, his inability to punish plagiarist publishers from stealing almost all of his revenue, the fact that he died only weeks after finally marrying the woman he had courted by far for almost two decades, etc.

## **4.2 Embracing the Potential of Art and Psychoanalysis**

The American and French Revolutions' abolition of absolute institutions and the prioritization of freedom of belief and tolerance inaugurated modernity in a frame of individualism whose absence of fixed values makes it very hard not only to establish laws, but to combat personal interests for the sake of the general welfare due to their accommodation by pervasive moral relativism (i.e. tolerance's consequences). By establishing ideals and even promoting expectations of completeness while failing to provide any uniform means of recognizing and making peace with negative absolutes and thereby gaining any measure of self-awareness and -control, empathy, and free will, modernity fails to adequately prepare individuals to bear the consequences for their actions, leaves a missing step in its members' path to social responsibility.<sup>124</sup> Though this thesis has presented my convoluted experience of reading Collin and the ideas I have come to understand better through it, I must here stress that my intention has not been to assert that what I have learned provides answers to the questions here raised about our society's current form, but rather to highlight those questions themselves, which I have never encountered or perhaps was not ready to acknowledge as such elsewhere. Balzac and Lacan's works show that no solution could ever resolve the effects of negative absolutes; all that we can do is focus on their disruption of order and happiness, seek to identify and address the precise blindness or contradiction causing these problems, and then wait until a new quandary presents itself in the unfamiliar set of circumstances created by the altered frame. The question of how to address the crisis in morality—and of how Balzac and Lacan's effective promotion of self-awareness is relevant to that question—opens up an unexplored approach not only to resolving many of the problems facing us, but to the question of morality on a universal level. Like masculinity and femininity, dominance and marginality are associated with the two approaches to negative absolutes represented by the structures of sexuation not because they are inherently connected, but rather because they have more often than not coincided throughout human history until this point. Though Balzac asserts that the absolute institutions of monarchy and Catholicism educated people's desires more effectively than modernity by providing individuals a frame through which to observe their own limitations, these institutions certainly suffered from mentalities of totality given that the requirement of the uniform faith of citizens led to increasingly frequent massacres leading up to the 1789 Revolution, that the idea of the ruling class' inherent superiority allowed for egregious abuses of power at the expense of the majority, that the repression of all that contradicted the doctrine sustaining the value system delayed the advancement of science in ways that could have reduced suffering, and that its differentiation of women from men prevented half of the population from contributing to humanity's progress and from enjoying life as they may have done otherwise. Thankfully, we do not have to weigh these problems against those of our own society and choose between the two; if my statement above aligned the worldviews that have dominated humanity until now with the precedent for responding to trauma set by the

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<sup>124</sup> If Aristotle said that we can identify the Good through the pleasure which we experience through its performance, this simply shows that his society provided him with an effective moral education; given that one's experience will not necessarily lead one to associate feeling good with doing good, this has to be an aim of society.

prohibition complex' resolution, this reveals an unexplored frontier for human progress—how could an individualistic society's system of government and ideology be framed by negative absolutes, and what would be the effects? This opens up a whole new dimension of questions. If authority cannot legitimately charge one with full responsibility for one's actions if it has taken no pains to first educate one about the functioning of one's mind, how could such an education be accomplished, given that Balzac and Lacan show that doing so directly proves ineffective? Furthermore, how could such an education be deemed adequate? How can society promote knowledge that completeness is impossible without losing its means of motivating individuals to obey laws or to strive for greatness? How could a society make space for disruptive desire, and how could a system of government function without adopting totalizing approaches to obedience and transgression? And finally, how are the ways of promoting self-awareness modeled by Balzac and Lacan relevant to these questions? Allow me to briefly present some of my reflections on these issues.

When we consider Balzac's emphasis on religion's importance as “un système complet de répression des tendances dépravées de l'homme, est le plus grand élément d'ordre social” (I: 82) in the context of psychoanalysis, the elements of an effective moral education become clearer. By projecting the promise of completeness beyond death and relying on a single text as the source of fixed values, it provides a consistent and unchallengeable basis for morality; through the doctrine of original sin (the constant threat of one's inherently evil nature to lead one to transgress), by providing God as an interlocutor as the source of all meaning whom one can nevertheless only experience as empty space, it allows for the recognition of negative absolutes; through the articulation of desire necessitated in prayer or confession, it promotes self-awareness even further; and by creating a community promoting altruism, empathy, and selflessness, it provides the opportunity for one to align performing such acts with pleasure and to incorporate these values into one's vision of one's ideal self—particularly in the case of state religion or a society in which its rules are established as unquestionable and enforced through social authority.

Clearly, a return to state religion is not a practical solution for the problems facing the United States. The proliferation of Christian denominations, the amalgamation of different cultures, advances in science, and the growing ease with which individuals can access intellectual resources means that the establishment of a state-enforced American religion could only be accomplished through the repression of outraged detractors and would immediately be challenged on deductive and semantic grounds. What is more, the reversal of individualism seems severely unlikely given that individuals' inherited expectations of freedom and knowledge of its possibility would certainly lead them out of personal interest to resist any action that placed additional limits on their ability to fulfill their ambitions and pursue their desires. Therefore, I find very interesting how Lacan and Balzac's principles explored in the previous section shed light on the possibility of establishing a civil ethics that could provide the basis for a uniform moral education and therefore a means of ensuring that all citizens are actually prepared for social responsibility. For one thing, we see above in our consideration of the Christian religion's means of educating desire that its doctrine, like that of many other religions, accounts for negative absolutes, meaning that establishing these values as fixed absolutes at the heart of a civil morality would not undermine



traditional values, as it underlies them. By placing empty space in the position of one's interlocutor, art and psychoanalysis bear the capacity to make one aware of primary processes' roles in perception by indirectly guiding one to observe their presence in one's own experience. Each of these furthermore promote self-awareness through the articulation of desire involved therein, given that psychoanalysis directs the patient to speak without censoring thought and that art provides a platform in which one's fantasies can be realized and promotes empathy by allowing one to recognize the universality of suffering in relation to empty space as the link between human beings. In addition, each of these bears the capacity to provide us with the capacity for Other jouissance and promote altruism because by leading us to confront negative absolutes' universality and making clear the futility of pursuing selfish ideals of completeness, they can encourage us to let go of expectations of completeness preventing us from enjoying anything in the present and can lead us to identify the cause of trauma as a universal rather than particular cause. If psychoanalysis allows us to align the return of the repressed and the recognition of negative absolutes with a feeling of pleasure rather than trauma through the alleviation of one's symptoms, the promotion of altruistic values through art bears the potential to become a key factor in the formation of the ideal self, allowing us to learn to associate feelings of pleasure with helping others. Finally, if psychoanalysis can only reveal negative absolutes in order for one to find a way to make peace with them on one's own, Balzac's principles provide a model for a consistent worldview to adopt in one's disillusionment: the results of Balzac's decision in relation to his awareness of his own capacity for moral inconsistency to adopt a set of absolute values as the consistent basis of his works (which hold open the empty space of negative absolutes) as well as his emphasis on *showing the wound* through the consideration of *contrasts* show us how establishing *the articulation of negative absolutes* (an impossible aim) as one's master signifier can *allow all of one's desires to find enjoyment in relation to the same aim*. This goal's subversive nature (inasmuch as it seeks to highlight the Symbolic's flaws) and its encouragement of empathy could engage unconscious desire. This goal's attention to the Real and promotion of an enjoyment beyond Symbolic enjoyment could engage desire for the return of the repressed. The goal of dominating oneself and those deceptively speaking in the Master's discourse and the idealization of love and altruism could engage conscious desire. Obviously, our ability to get pleasure in relation to this signifying chain would depend on fantasy—the fantasy that following these values could really make a difference and reduce the amount of suffering in the world—and as Balzac's own experience shows, even the promotion of this master signifier would never manage to be completely effective in eradicating transgressive behavior, as other master signifiers will always present themselves as alternatives. Furthermore, there certainly exist communities or individuals whose value systems' foundation in ideals of completeness would lead them to protest such a project; I can hardly imagine its being warmly embraced by those profiting from pervasive materialism. In any case, the vagueness of this idea evokes why I have continuously referred to Collin's *unmet* potential and *unexplored* implications; I have presented this idea simply to show the horizons to which my reading of Collin can still extend, how our attention to the intricate detail with which Balzac so carefully composed this portrait of subjectivity can render the author's social critique and conservative position much more comprehensible, how Balzac's arguments are relevant to a discussion of the crisis in

morality that no conspicuous authority of which I am aware has begun to frame and approach as such, and finally to respond to the question with which I ended the former section.

Having come to the close of my last point, I will offer my final reflections on the difference between Balzac and Collin in three frames. Firstly, the frame of Lacan's functional ethics suggests we evaluate these lives not as good or evil, but in relation to whether they achieved the goals to which they dedicated their energy. On the one hand, we can not only clearly identify at least on a romantic and professional level Balzac's aims of marrying his longtime lover madame Hanska and of completing the *Comédie humaine*, though he died mere weeks after marrying his Polish bride in 1850, it is also true that they had shared many great years since they had begun their correspondence in the early 1830s, and the fact that he did not complete his series is hardly a statement against him when considering the incredible size and quality of the oeuvre which he left behind and which has secured him a place among humanity's greats. As far as Collin's aims, they are more difficult to define, but can perhaps be posited as a combination of his obvious desire to be restored as a member of society, his protégé plan as both the shared attainment of success and the creation of a safe space for selfless love, and his sunny fantasy about his life with Lucien basking in the ideal. Our last glimpse of Collin in *La Cousine Bette*, where he appears using the name "Vautrin," as chief of Paris' secret police, and still ready to bypass the chain of command to which he is subjected through his aunt. Though he occupies a powerful position in the city he loves, his restoration to society is tainted both by his need to use a false name and by the fact that in this period, the police were hardly more respected than criminals themselves. Though we know nothing of his romantic life beyond Theodore's having been assigned to his charge rather than having been sent to the prison camp as he requested, leaving the question of his capacity for romantic fulfillment open-ended. As far as his connection to art and Lucien, the line before *Splendeurs*' last line informing us of his retirement in 1845 reads, "Le monument ordonné par Lucien, pour Esther et pour lui, passe pour être un des plus beaux du Père-Lachaise, et le terrain au-dessous appartient à Jacques Collin" (533).<sup>125</sup> In spite of the cold and final adieu which Lucien's suicide letter had bid Collin, in spite of the fact that he made monsieur de Sérizy the executor of his estate rather than Collin, in spite of the fact that this monument was intended to be something for Lucien and Esther alone to share, would it have not actually been more surprising if Collin had *not* found a way to possess the ground under this final work of Lucien's art, this shrine to his beloved, this battleground where he might yet still find a way of coming between Esther and Lucien, considering his comment during Lucien's burial? If Collin's final act of appropriation and assertion of control seems a slight triumph in comparison to all of the fantasies that he failed to realize and in comparison to the immense legacy which Balzac left behind, there are two more contexts in which I would like to compare their lives. When approaching them with *the*

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<sup>125</sup> In his last will and testament, Lucien indicated the amount of money to invest in this monument and described its design: "Je prie monsieur de Sérizy de consacrer une somme de quarante mille francs à un monument à élever au cimetière de l'Est à mademoiselle Esther, et je demande à être inhumé auprès d'elle. Cette tombe devra être faite comme les anciens tombeaux, elle sera carrée ; nos deux statues en marbre blanc seront couchées sur le couvercle, les têtes appuyées sur des coussins, les mains jointes et levées vers le ciel. Cette tombe n'aura pas d'inscription" (XI: 395).

*articulation of negative absolutes* in the place of the Thing, there is no question that when taking Collin's employment by the author out of the equation, Balzac made a positive contribution to humanity which Collin's refusal to recognize negative absolutes rendered him incapable of matching; we see this in the fact that his most zealous efforts to help the one he loved ended by killing him. Balzac directly and indirectly made infinite, profound connections with other people which brought him a notorious amount of joy, whereas Collin's approach to life left him isolated from others, from those values (selfless love, nobility) which he cherished before his arrest, and from himself, as is shown in his desperate pursuit of his own image in his protégés. Finally, in the frame of my own experience and the general assumption that reducing suffering is greater than creating it, I can say that Balzac has contributed enormously to my life where I was expecting Collin to do so. If this thesis has approached the human condition as a state of being relentlessly plagued by a special kind of suffering through its submersion in language, it seems the only compensation we receive for that sacrifice is the capacity for compassion that accompanies our status as speaking beings. Collin characterizes those seizing this gift as inferiors deserving to be manipulated on one's path to the top, whereas Balzac constantly presents his readers examples of the futility if not insanity of pursuing one's personal interests at all costs. Collin actively discourages those he most cares about from drinking from this one fountain whose water is not stagnant, whereas Balzac highlights it as the wellspring of society, leading me to contemplate the predicament of those who have never tasted that water and the ways in which we might assure that no one ever grew up without a moral education providing a lifelong ability to feel good about doing good, the basis of social responsibility. Now, when I hear Collin's words in the mouths of others encountered in my day-to-day life, I no longer wish for more than a moment that I could appropriate the character's fierce coldness and knack for formulating plans asserting his dominance; instead, after a rush of frustration or profound sadness, my heart swells in gratitude for Balzac as the primary benefactor of that which I feel in the wake of that despair: hope.

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## APPENDIX: SUMMARIES OF THE WORKS IN WHICH COLLIN APPEARS

The following summaries of the works in which Collin appears relate the details relevant to this thesis (and thus center on his story), but are by no means comprehensive.

Collin first appears in *Le Père Goriot*. We there learn that after escaping from jail for the third time in 1818, Jacques Collin returned to Paris and escaped suspicion by posing as a bourgeois named “Vautrin” and moving into a run-down but respectable boarding house owned by Madame Vauquer, a widowed bourgeois whose attention to money defines her sparse existence and that of her humble boarders. Among them are Mademoiselle Michonneau, an old spinster who was likely once a prostitute; Old Goriot, a once-successful merchant who ruined himself after his wife’s death in order to secure his daughters’ advantageous marriages (and then to support their social lives); and Victorine de Taillefer, a virtuous young woman whose father disowned her after her mother’s death in order to make his son his sole heir. The book focuses on the story of the recently arrived Eugène de Rastignac, a young, provincial aristocrat and determined law student whose ignorance of Parisian culture and very limited funds initially prove problematic to his boundless ambitions; though his cousin (Madame de Beauséant, the reigning queen of high society) provides him the connection needed to enter that sphere (where he becomes the lover of Delphine de Nucingen, one of Goriot’s daughters who married the baron de Nucingen, a ruthless financial giant), he falls behind financially and begins to push his moral lines—first of all by sending for money from his impoverished mother and sisters in order to buy a new wardrobe. Though Collin initially clashes with Eugène to the point that a duel seems imminent, as soon as he sees Victorine express concern for Rastignac and sees how he could profit from Eugène’s ambition, he immediately makes peace with the young man, draws him in with a perceptive speech about the deceptive nature of Paris and the means necessary to dominate it, and offers the young man his aid in making a fortune fast (for a percentage). Proposing to have Victorine’s brother killed in a duel so that her father will have to recognize her (which would make her very wealthy), he urges Rastignac only to appear to return her love before this assassination so that this already-established affection could then solidify in marriage and thus provide him the fortune needed to conquer Paris. Eugène departs without giving an answer; disgusted and yet tempted, he never definitively concedes, but his monetary troubles, his desire to impress and please his new lover, and his desire for success often become so insistent that he reluctantly borrows money from the criminal, flirts with Victorine, or unwittingly encourages Collin to carry through with the plan. While Collin arranges his plot in spite of Eugène’s demands not to do so, the reader sits in on two scenes in which “Gondureau” (who is really Bibi-Lupin, Collin’s longtime enemy and the chief of Paris’ secret police) recruits Michonneau (accompanied by another boarder, the retired, dim-witted Poiret) to drug “Vautrin” and check for the convict’s brands on his back—a plan made necessary by the fact that Collin “does not like women,” and thus would not allow a beautiful young woman (as Michonneau suggested) to get close enough to him to betray him—in order to prove his true identity as Jacques Collin A.K.A. *Trompe-la-Mort*, whose management of the criminal world’s money made his arrest a high priority for higher-ups interested in that money. Though she initially hesitates to accept the offer, thinking that she may be able to get more money from Collin than the 3,000 francs offered by Gondureau, one evening he mocks her so cruelly at the dinner table that she resolves to betray him. The night before the duel arranged to kill Victorine’s brother, Collin drugs both Rastignac and Goriot to prevent their planned attempts to stop it; they awake once the deed is already accomplished. Before Eugène, stricken with guilt and declaring that he will never marry Victorine, can fulfill his plans to denounce Collin, Michonneau has already drugged him, recognized his brands, and signaled the waiting police to swarm the boarding house and arrest Collin. Submitting in grandiose form (and thereby avoiding Bibi-Lupin’s plan to kill him if he resisted in the slightest), Collin gives a rousing speech which so impresses the assembled boarders that upon his exit, they threateningly insist that his betrayers move out immediately. However, even in the absence of Collin, Rastignac’s disillusionment is completed when his lover and her sister, after having squeezed all possible wealth from their devoted father, do not even visit Goriot on his death bed or attend his funeral; the law student pays for his medical care and burial only by selling a watch which Delphine gave him and by borrowing money from Christophe, one of Vauquer’s domestics. The book ends with Rastignac viewing Paris from the high vantage point of the Père Lachaise cemetery, contemplating his future progress in a ruthless Paris that he now believes to understand—an understanding signified by his heading off to have dinner with Delphine.

We learn in *Splendeurs* that after his arrest in 1819, Collin escaped from a forced labor camp in Roquefort with his shackle-mate (and lover) Theodore Calvi. The two men separate so as to better flee the police, but Theodore is recaptured. On the highway, Collin kills Carlos Herrera, a Spanish priest with no family and considerable power (as secret emissary of the King of Spain), so that he can adopt his identity, stealing the priest’s papers and money and burning his own face and body with acid so as to resemble the deceased priest and destroy the convict’s brands on his shoulders. It is on his way to rescue Theodore that Collin encounters the suicidal Lucien Chardon de Rubempré on the side of the road, as depicted in *Illusions perdues*. As an amateur poet and the lover of his home town’s most fashionable lady, Lucien had departed with her for Paris in order to pursue a literary career—eschewing the name of his father, an apothecary, and adopting his mother’s noble surname. However, after he is mocked for his provincial trappings and pseudo-nobility, his protectress abandons him, setting in motion an unfortunate train of events: he is forced to employ his talent in the production of gratuitous journalism; his conversion to conservatism (a vain attempt to get the rights to his mother’s name) destroys his reputation as a writer and initiates the literary community’s destruction in print of his lover, the actress (and high-class prostitute) Coralie; their resulting destitution leads to Lucien’s forging of his brother-in-law’s name (thus piling debt upon him), Coralie’s death in squalor (he has to publish a collection of happy poems in order to pay for her funeral), and his return to Angoulême, where he discovers the trouble he has brought to his family and, completely disillusioned, resolves to kill himself. He crosses paths with Collin

while searching for the ideal spot to throw himself into the river. Immediately interested by the young man's beauty, vacancy of will, and potential for social climbing, Collin (in the guise of Herrera) lures Lucien into his carriage and ultimately convinces the young man to return to Paris with him, promising that he will not only get a decree to restore his mother's name to him, but will help him to exact revenge on all those who wronged him and to become rich and powerful. Seduced by the false priest's promises of greatness, Lucien agrees to Collin's condition that he must obey his mentor blindly.

In *Splendeurs*, set from 1824-1830, Collin and Lucien cohabitate a house in Paris, and Collin uses all of the money stolen from the real Herrera as well as the money entrusted to him by other criminals to build a new reputation for Lucien as a wealthy power-player. Given that his notoriety prevents his occupation of a conspicuous position in society, Collin trains Lucien as his social surrogate by attempting to imprint his ruthless will on the young man, obtains the royal decree necessary to allow Lucien to go by his mother's name in the case of his marrying nobility, develops the possibility of a marriage between Lucien and Clotilde de Grandlieu, the daughter of a high-ranking aristocrat (on the condition that he buy back his family's property for the cost of one million francs), and simultaneously directs him to gain the protection of some of society's most influential ladies by seducing them and becoming their lover—the most significant of these is Madame de Sérizy, whose husband has a close relationship to the king and occupies a high position in the judicial system. However, two things threaten his rise. Firstly, as soon as he gets back to Paris, Lucien once again falls in love with a prostitute. Seeing this love and wanting to prevent Lucien's compromise, he sends Esther to a convent to be educated, and once she exits this experience, though Collin advises the young man that she could ruin their plans, he does not refuse Lucien the relationship as long as they keep it a secret (though he does encircle her with criminals whom he engages as her servants: Prudence, Paccard, and his "aunt" Jacqueline Collin). Secondly, Esther arouses the romantic passion of Delphine's husband the Baron de Nucingen, an exorbitantly rich and otherwise heartless banker, when he catches a glimpse of her during one of her nightly walks—the only time that Collin allows her to go outside. On the one hand, as keeping up the appearance of Lucien's luxurious lifestyle quickly depletes all of Collin's funds and to accrue considerable debt, Collin urges Lucien to demand that Esther get the amount needed to fund their scheme by manipulating the old man. On the other hand, this leads Nucingen to employ political police spies (Corentin, its chief, as well as Peyrade and Contenson), who begin to suspect Collin's true identity and thus to monitor his operation. Esther gets some money by leading Nucingen on and delays their affair's consummation as long as she can; however, as she had repented of her former life and pledged her undying love to Lucien, the necessity of sleeping with the old baron drives her to despair and she kills herself as soon as the act is completed. Word tragically arrives just after her death that she inherited eight million francs from a distant relative—an amount to which Collin lays Lucien's claim by forging a will on her behalf. As soon as she dies, agents arrest both Collin and Lucien on suspicion of her murder and the theft of the money given to her by Nucingen (which Paccard and Prudence had taken). As they are conducted to the *Conciergerie* prison, the heart of the justice system, Collin sends Lucien messages through his aunt on how to conduct himself during interrogation. Though Collin has the good luck of being interrogated first by the well-trained judge, the ambitious bourgeois Camusot, and though many of Camusot's superiors even hint to him not to interrogate a person with so many intimate connections to Paris' most powerful families, Camusot's curiosity leads him to crack Lucien quite easily (by telling him Collin said that he was his son), causing the young man to admit that he knows Collin's true identity. Believing that his reputation is ruined once and for all, Lucien hangs himself in his prison cell. His death is rendered more tragic because Madame de Sérizy storms Camusot's office and burns all evidence of his crimes in order to preserve her reputation; though Camusot is outraged, her husband's allies in the prison and the palace (Camusot's superiors) ensure that Lucien is expunged of all charges and the lady's destruction of evidence is swept under the rug. Though Collin is grief-stricken at Lucien's death, he uses this emotion to make his false identity more convincing. In an effort to expose him arranged by Bibi-Lupin (who rushed to the prison as soon as he heard Collin was being held there), the police bring in three criminals once incarcerated with Collin whose money Collin is (accurately) rumored to have embezzled. Bibi-Lupin believes that these criminals will throttle him; however, by merely implying his continued possession of their wealth, Collin regains their allegiance—they praise him as their "dab" (which in argot means boss or ruler). He learns from them that Theodore is in fact within the prison awaiting execution that evening. Feeling a new sense of purpose, Collin takes charge of the situation first by meeting with Theodore under the guise of a confession (conducted in Italian), by finding out information about Bibi-Lupin's underhanded dealings from his criminal compatriots as well as the location of the money taken in a recent theft (which later allows him to prove himself and to get Bibi-Lupin fired), by confessing his identity to Granville (the attorney general), expressing apparently genuine repentance for his crimes and a desire to serve justice for the rest of his days, and by bargaining with some salacious letters addressed to Lucien by his noble lovers in the possession of his aunt, ultimately convincing Granville to take his offer because he claims he can heal Madame de Sérizy, who fell into madness after Lucien's death. Collin's bargaining secures Theodore's safety, his pardon by the king himself, his appointment to Bibi-Lupin's position, and even his freedom to attend Lucien's funeral. However, after the burial the police bring him back to the attorney general, who demands he fulfill his promise to heal Sérizy; Collin gives the lady a letter written much earlier by Lucien which Collin had kept for its beauty, but which he uses to make it seem like he never stopped loving her. The book ends with him looking on at this private scene and thinking about how effectively he has dominated these power-players, going on to summarize his effective replacement of Bibi-Lupin and retirement from that position only after having held it for fifteen years.

There is one more Balzacian source which sheds light on his earlier escapades: the play *Vautrin*, written in 1840 but set in 1816. I've left this account for last because as a theatrical work, it is set apart from the *Comédie humaine* and thus generally unreferenced in studies of Collin, because I read it last. We learn over its course that Collin picked up a young man named Raoul (a handsome orphan ignorant of his origins and determined to join the military and there find a glorious death) twelve years prior on the road from Toulon to Marseille. Collin, calling himself Vautrin, took in the young man, apparently pledging his devotion to him as a replacement family,

promising him a bright future, and undertaking his education in order to mold him into a nobleman perfectly formed for social climbing. Throughout this entire period, Collin concealed his own past and paid special attention to preserving Raoul's gallant passion, which the convict treasured as a tangible proof of the young man's nobility (and as a beautiful thing in itself). After having Raoul educated and outfitting him with the trappings of his projected persona, Collin brought him to Paris, where the two moved into a suitable residence where Collin employed four cohorts from his past as the domestic staff, paying them only with promises of recognition and fortune once Raoul found success. Collin instructs Raoul to take on the surname "de Frescas," the name of the town where he found the young man, and sets him on the path to acquiring an advantageous marriage. Above all, he counsels the young man not to fall in love or to respond to questions about his origins. As Raoul began to circulate in the elevated social sphere, he fell in love with Inès de Christoval, the daughter of a Spanish duke left in the care of her mother upon her father's banishment to revolutionary Mexico. However, though Inès returns Raoul's love, the duke de Montsorel (a powerful player in Parisian politics with close ties to both the king and the police) had already made clear his wish to marry Inès with his son, Albert, the marquis de Montsorel. The play begins with the audience's listening to the duchesse de Montsorel recount to her aunt that upon meeting Raoul by chance at the Spanish embassy, she became convinced he is her son Fernand, whom the duke sent away in infancy twenty-two years ago on the false belief that he was the product of her innocent affair with his friend, the vicomte de Langeac. Forcing her to admit an indiscretion by threatening her son's life in the case of her refusal, she had falsely confessed that this was true. As revenge, the duke sent her son away, forcing her to raise his own bastard child, Albert, in Fernand's place. Invigorated by her belief that Raoul is Fernand, she confronts the duke, threatening him that she will go to the king if he will not return her son. However, he simply responds by attempting to intimidate her by once again threatening her son's life. In spite of this, she is still determined to learn Raoul's story: she writes to him to come to her house. The duke returns to his own affairs: he shortly after employs a police spy (going by the chevalier de Saint-Charles, but whose real name is Charles Blondet) to discover the truth of Raoul's origins so as to render him incapable of posing a threat to Inès' marriage with Albert. With the same idea, Collin has already recruited Joseph, a domestic in the duke's household whom Collin recognized as a past criminal, to become his spy; however, Joseph only does so quite reluctantly. Throughout the play, Collin uses different connections and disguises in attempts to establish Raoul in a false identity that would allow him to marry Inès, but in the end the mastermind discovers that the young man is in fact the duke's illegitimate son by snooping through his correspondence and by conferring with the duchess, his wife, who had recently taken a conspicuous and unexplained interest in Raoul trumping even that which she expressed for Albert. For this reason, even though Raoul rushes in to decry him before the assembled characters because he wants to be honest with Inès, Collin interrupts this accusation by revealing the truth of his family, confessing his true identity, and ultimately in the end accepts the sacrifice of Raoul which he knew all along he would have to make one day when Raoul became a powerful man and would inevitably forget him. Collin thus resolves the familial crisis, and Inès offers him as thanks a governing position on one of her properties in the Americas, which he refuses, saying that no one will shake his hand there any more than in France. The characters appeal to the duke to pardon him, but the latter says that the crimes Collin has committed (which go unspecified) are irreversible. At this moment, the police storm the duke's residence, and all of the family leaps in front of them to protect Collin. However, not wishing to sully the name which Raoul has finally acquired, he gives himself over to the police, telling the young man to look for him in the audience when his first child is baptized.



## **VITA**

Lauren Elise Pendas, a native of Watson, Louisiana, received her bachelor's degree in French from Louisiana State University in 2008. She waited tables for a year and, vainly attempting to escape Sisyphus' fate, entered graduate school to study French literature. She expects to receive her master's degree in December 2014 and upon graduation plans to...live.