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REVIEW ESSAY:

BALZAC IN ENGLISH, II: *LOST SOULS*

Honoré de Balzac, *Lost Souls* (*Splendeurs et misères des courtisanes*), translated and with an introduction by Raymond N. MacKenzie, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, MN, 2020. 481 pp. (Referenced as M, below.)

Honoré de Balzac, *A Harlot High and Low* (*Splendeurs et misères des courtisanes*), translated and with an introduction by Rayner Heppenstall, Penguin Classics, 1970. 554 pp. (Referenced as H, below.)

Honoré de Balzac, *Splendeurs et misères des courtisanes*, Éditions Garnier Frères, Paris, Introduction, notes et choix de variantes par Antoine Adam, Paris, 1958, 750 pp. (Referenced as B, below.)

Here's a gift to world literature in English that keeps on giving: Raymond MacKenzie keeps making fine translations of Balzac's huge, great novels and the University of Minnesota Press keeps publishing them in the same handsome format: after *Lost Illusions*, *Lost Souls*. They have given us convincing, eminently readable versions of Balzac.

This the first American translation of *Splendeurs et misères des courtisanes*. Two British translators have attempted it: Ellen Marriage in the 1890s as *A Harlot's Progress* and the novelist and poet Rayner Heppenstall as *A Harlot High and Low*, which is still easily available. No one with an ear for English would translate the title literally. Mackenzie's, as he tells us in his knowledgeable, instructive introduction, is meant to emphasize the continuity with *Lost Illusions*, of which it is a sequel, although you don't need to have read the earlier novel to appreciate it.

Besides, Balzac's novel seems to have outgrown its original conception: the last two parts of *Splendeurs et misères des courtisanes* are not about courtesans or "harlots." Above all, MacKenzie's choice to call it *Lost Souls* does more than emphasize that continuity. It suggests the center of Balzac's novel, whose deeper subject is failure and loss. The two main characters, Lucien Chardon or de Rubempré, back in Paris from *Lost Illusions*, and his lover, "the harlot" Esther Van Gobseck or Bogseck—a profoundly virtuous harlot—both commit suicide; Esther, because she has sacrificed what she considers her virtue by selling herself to the rich banker Nucingen in order to enrich Lucien, and Lucien, because he has lost everything he cares about and will soon lose his

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life, or so he thinks. The only major character who does pretty well in the end is Jacques Collin or Abbé Carlos Herrera or Deathcheater (in MacKenzie), or Vautrin, a satanic figure, “a lost soul” in another sense. (Deathcheater—Trompe-la-Mort in French—is Dodgedeath in Heppenstall, surely a less natural nickname.) This master criminal, a recurring character in Balzac’s work, will manage to end up in the police. The novel is full of changing identities and disguises, twists and turns and intrigues, but despite a brief visit to the happy household of Lucien’s saintly sister and her husband, his virtuous old comrade David Séchard, its vision of the world is clearly and firmly pessimistic if not cynical.

In 1832, Balzac decided to write a “natural history of France,” to connect his works and lay out the *état-civil* of France, the exact civil status of all classes of society, its main *métiers*, and many of its regions. *La Comédie humaine* is the name he gave to this vast enterprise: it comprises over ninety works—novels, short stories, tales and essays. Balzac’s general title echoes Dante’s *Divine Comedy* and transforms it, for its basic assumptions were new. They were the foundational assumptions of realism: all subjects are worth writing about, from the lowest to the highest; and our material environment—houses, apartments, neighborhoods, offices or workshops and above all, money—has immense importance in our lives. As Stefan Zweig said, “...everybody became an actor in the *human comedy*. There was no distinction between high and low. Every grade of the social hierarchy had to be represented, the artist...the lawyer and the physician, the wine-grower, the porter’s wife. . . the duchess and the streetwalker, the water-carrier and the banker.” And the criminal and the policeman. “All these spheres were interwoven.”¹ The series began in 1829 and ended with his death in 1850 at the age of 51. From 1832 on, he decided to link his works together so that characters reappear from novel to novel. If we follow Balzac, we already have an idea who they are when we see them in a new story. A quick web search will give you a complete biography of many of these “people.” And indeed, when you read their bios, it does feel like you're reading the biographies of real people. According to one count, there are six hundred recurring characters in the *Comedy*. Forty-two of them appear in *Lost Souls*. Aside from the major characters, two of them from *Lost Illusions* and many minor ones we know from the earlier novel, there are other minor ones from other works: want an honest lawyer, for example? try

¹ Quoted by MacKenzie in his introduction, p. viii, from the Austrian writer’s unfinished biography of Balzac.

Derville, he's shown his worth in eight prior stories. Depending on what you count as "major," *Lost Souls* is the fifteenth or twentieth major work in the *Human Comedy*.

Henry James, as the translator recalls in his introduction, notoriously called some generally respected novels "loose, baggy monsters." *Lost Souls* is even looser, baggier and more monstrous than most, 456 pages in this translation without the notes and 554 in the noteless Penguin edition. But it is a great "monster." The novel evolved over twelve years of Balzac's life, from 1835 to 1847, at the same time as he was turning out many other stories, including a few that are generally considered masterpieces. *Splendeurs et misères des courtisanes* has elements both of high melodrama and gritty realism; it is a tragic love story, a social satire and a crime novel (its third part has been called "the foundation of the French detective novel" and "a wonderful document for those interested in the history of criminal law in France");² the novel uses Gothic or Romantic tropes (the Imprisoned Woman, for example); it is full of schemes and deals, plots and sub-plots; it depicts the world of high society and finance (money is always crucial in Balzac), the demi-monde of the courtesans and just beneath, a glimpse at the depths of prostitution and poverty into which the courtesan can always sink. Finally, we have the specialized world of justice and the law, often indistinguishable from their enemies. It has power, wit (some scenes are surprisingly funny) breadth and depth. The novel is mainly written in Balzac's sometimes heavy style of literary French, but it is full of lively dialogue and occasional slang. The Alsatian financier Nucingen, an important character, speaks in his own idiolect of fractured French. All these extremely diverse qualities demand the careful attention, skill, knowledge and agility of the translator.

MacKenzie's translation is attentive, skillful and agile from the start. Thus the first section of the novel, *Comment aiment les filles* is appropriately rendered as "How Women Love" (and not girls), whereas a chapter in the first section, *Ce que c'est que la fille*, is ingeniously titled "Anatomy of the Whore" (M, 27.) *Fille* here certainly means prostitute and not "girl," but I confess I was slightly shocked when I first read this: "whore" sounded too harsh (after all, Balzac did not write *putain*)—until I re-read the chapter, and tried to find another word for it. He got it right. "Anatomy of..." is a clever way of rendering *Ce que c'est que*, far more elegant than the other available translation: "What constitutes a whore." (H, 44.) No translation is perfect, however, not even for titles,

² <https://www.editionsdelondres.com/Splendeurs-et-miseres-des#titre2>

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where MacKenzie generally excels: why call one chapter “La Torpille,” Esther’s former nickname, which means absolutely nothing in English? Why not “The Torpedo,” which is not only what the word means today but a fitting nickname for this thrillingly attractive young woman? That’s the way Heppenstall does it and it’s one of the rare places where he’s more effective than MacKenzie. (H, 27 et seq.) While it first was the name of a fish in French, it already had a military meaning at the time of Balzac’s novel.³ True, the reason for using the French is explained further on, as MacKenzie tells us in an endnote, as usual: a *torpille*, the electric ray in English, stuns its prey, as Esther does. But no English reader would know this without MacKenzie’s notes. *Torpille* has no impact at all on a more or less Frenchless reader and that should be the translator’s main consideration. If we knew French, we wouldn’t be reading his translation. I also wonder why MacKenzie “translated” Balzac’s chapter called *Charlot* as just that: “Charlot,” which an Anglophone reader may well pronounce like Charlotte. “Charlot” is what the French call the character invented by Charlie Chaplin. Heppenstall does better here, by naming the chapter “Charlie.” Here and there, I find his translation preferable to MacKenzie’s. But only here and there.

There is another feature of this new version that is somewhat bothersome, although it has its compensations. Most of MacKenzie’s twenty-four pages of notes are instructive, especially for someone curious about nineteenth-century France, but an over-reliance on them can be a drawback. Sometimes MacKenzie seems to prefer an explanatory endnote to a translation. And do people really like to see numerical superscripts over a word every fourth line or so when they’re reading a novel, constantly nudging them to interrupt their reading and consult a note at the back of the book? After all, this is not a scholarly monograph. It is perfectly possible to do away with the numbers and still put notes at the end, citing the name or phrase being explained. When readers want to know something, they can simply turn to the back and see the name or phrase that puzzled them along with its explanation. That’s the way it’s done in the Random House edition of *Lost Illusions*, for example, and it works very well.⁴ However, the opposite extreme, which we encounter in

³ Étymol. et Hist. 1842 « sorte de mine sous-marine. » [“A kind of underwater mine.”] Centre National de Ressources Textuelles et Lexicales <https://www.cnrtl.fr/definition/torpille>

⁴ Honoré de Balzac, *Lost Illusions*, translated by Kathleen Raine, Introduction by Richard Howard, notes by James Madden. Random House, The Modern Library, New York, 1997. I used the same method in *Coma Crossing*, my bilingual edition of the Surrealist poems of Roger Gilbert-Lecomte (Schism2

the other extant translation, has even greater disadvantages. The Penguin edition has no notes at all. This is a pity: sometimes we really need them. Often, we can guess what or where a place is, or even who a historical figure was, but more often still, perhaps, we cannot, and they are sometimes important for our understanding of the story.

MacKenzie handles dialogue nicely throughout. Here's the masked Vautrin in the first chapter threatening a hostile Rastignac, the recurring character first seen in *Le Père Goriot* in the Vauquer boarding house, a young man from the provinces vacillating between virtue and ambition (and famously choosing ambition at the end, though not the criminal path Vautrin has proposed to him):

-- Jeune coq sorti du poulailler de maman Vauquer, vous à qui le cœur a failli pour saisir les millions du papa Taillefer. . .sachez pour vote sûreté personnelle, que si vous ne vous comportez pas avec Lucien comme avec un frère que vous aimeriez, vous êtes dans nos mains. . .Silence et dévouement, ou...(B, 10.)

“My little rooster from Mama Vauquer’s barnyard, you’re the one who lost his nerve when it came to getting your hands on Papa Taillefer’s millions. . .and right now the one thing you need to know is that if you don’t treat Lucien like a brother you dearly love, well, you’ll be in our hands. Keep your mouth shut and be devoted to him, or. . . (M, 7.)

Vautrin is as scary, and the spoken English as natural, as one could wish. Compare Heppenstall:

‘Young cock out of Ma Vauquer’s chicken-run, you whose heart failed him in laying hold of Papa Taillefer’s millions. . .know, for your own safety’s sake, that if you don’t behave towards Lucien as to a brother whom you might love, you are in our hands. . . Silence and friendship, or. . .’ (H, 21.)

The spoken lines are far less natural (“you whose heart failed

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him”. . . the imperative “know,” “Silence and friendship” as compared to “keep your mouth shut”.) Moreover, their Britishness is bothersome to this American reader. Other things being equal, it’s always good to have an American translation if that’s the brand of English you speak.

Of course, other things are not always equal, and in fact there are some kinds of dialogue that British English is well suited to render, particularly when class stratification is emphasized in dialogue or in the description of various milieus.⁵ Thus when Esther reads a long love letter Nucingen has sent her, she exclaims ‘Christ, the old money-bags, what a bore he is!’ (H, 199.) Perfect, and a freer translation than many of Heppenstall’s when it comes to dialogue. The French is -- *Eh ! il m’ennuie, ce pot à millions ! s’écria Esther redevenue courtisane.* (B, 232.) MacKenzie here is certainly acceptable, but not quite as good: ““Oh, what a bore he is, this old moneybox!”” cried Esther, all courtesan again.” (M, 157.)

On the whole, MacKenzie’s dialogue is the freer of the two, while always carefully preserving the sense of what is said. Take another speech in the same opening scene of the novel, the world of Society and of critics and journalists, Lucien’s former “friends” who surround him at the Opéra Ball, “judges, all old hands in the knowledge of Parisian depravities,” as Balzac says later, “all of them of superior intelligence in their various ways and métiers, all equally corrupt, all equally corrupting, all consumed with insatiable ambition.” (M, 16.) Heppenstall renders the last phrase by “all pledged to insatiable ambition” (H, 31), *tous voués à des ambitions effrénées* in Balzac (24). Again, his translation is closer to the dictionary meaning of the words than MacKenzie’s, but it’s less successful in conveying their force. And now the journalist Blondet has just heaped sarcastic “praise” on Lucien and he replies:

-- Si tu veux à souper, dit Lucien à Blondet pour se défaire de cette troupe qui menaçait de se grossir, il me semble que tu n’avais pas besoin d’employer l’hyperbole et la parabole avec un ancien ami, comme si c’était un niais. (B, 17)

“Look, if you want a meal,” said Lucien quietly to Blondet in order to get free of the throng that threatened to get even larger, “you didn’t need to use all that phony rhetoric with an old friend as if he were some simpleton new in town.” (M, 12)

⁵ See *Metamorphoses*, Fall 2020, pp. 127-29, on the British poet Kathleen Raine’s translation of *Lost Illusions*.

MacKenzie really *feels* the text and re-creates it in English—that prefatory “Look,” for example, is what someone in that situation would actually say in English. Heppenstall translates more literally except for the British-sounding slang at the end which I find slightly jarring, partly because of the rhythm of the phrase, although his “growing mob” is more elegant than “the throng that threatened to get even larger.” But Heppenstall’s whole passage, while faithful to Balzac’s meaning, is weaker and less convincing to my ear:

‘If you want to eat,” said Lucien to Blondet to be free of this growing mob, ‘you had no need to use hyperbole and parable with an old friend, as though I were green.’
(H, 27)

We can do without the “parable,” for example, a word that’s not even in Webster’s online, although it is, in the OED. MacKenzie keeps his dialogue as natural as possible. A man trying to wangle money out of the lovestruck (or lust-struck) Nucingen says to him “But what the hell! If your life isn’t worth a thousand écus...” (M, 83) for Balzac’s *Eh! que diable! si votre vie ne valait pas mille écus...* Compare to Heppenstall’s ‘Ah well, so! if your life isn’t worth a thousand crowns...’ (H, 129). I doubt if that works in British English; it certainly doesn’t work in ours.

The pattern holds for more dramatic lines. When Corentin, a recurring character in the *Human Comedy* who is now chief of police in Balzac’s Restoration France, has concluded that the false Abbé Herrera (Vautrin) is responsible for the death of his old associate, the police spy Peyrade, and the rape and ensuing madness of Peyrade’s daughter, he says, in the original, *Et maintenant, à nous deux, don Carlos Herrera...* (B, 333), an exclamation reminiscent of Rastignac’s famous line at the end of *Le Père Goriot*, which Balzac had published five years earlier; looking down at Paris from the heights of the Père-Lachaise cemetery, he utters “these grandiose words”: *À nous, Paris!*⁶ It is the challenge to a duel. MacKenzie translates it as “And now it’s you and me, Don Carlos Herrera!” (M, 229.) That seems to me as good as you can get, down to the added exclamation point. Heppenstall is stilted and feeble in comparison: ‘Now, Don Carlos Herrera, it is between us two...’ (H, 280.)

⁶ The line is so famous that the young Jean-Paul Sartre, Beauvoir recalls, standing on those same heights, looked down at the city and said the words aloud to a group of friends. It was intended to be amusing, of course, but I’m sure he was also quite sincere.

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Baron Nucingen's massacred French, a Balzacian invention that appears again and again in one whole section of the novel (and elsewhere in Balzac), presents a special case. It sounds Germanic. He's supposed to be Alsatian, so that's logical.⁷ But he's also a converted Jew, and to modern ears, both French and English, it will sound like the broken language of a Jewish immigrant. In fact, as Heppenstall points out, his speech is referred to as similar to that of a Polish Jew, Alsatian though he may be. (H, x.) He is, as we know, immensely wealthy, greedy and unscrupulous. As MacKenzie observes in his introduction, Balzac's work has "at least the odor of anti-Semitism" despite an interesting passage he quotes in which Balzac satirically denounces ethnic stereotyping. And yet, says MacKenzie, "[his] Jews are often stereotypically obsessed with money." (M, xxi.) The beautiful Esther is also a Jewish character and *la Belle Juive*, the Beautiful Jewess, is another trope of European anti-Semitism, a polymorphic figure of the Other.⁸ The two translators of Nucingen's speech that we are considering are both reasonable—and ethical, for translators have an ethical duty to render the source text into an English that produces an effect as close as possible to the produced on readers of the source language, *whatever the translator may feel about certain aspects of the text*. MacKenzie comes close to apologizing for the "somewhat cartoonish Katzenjammer German-like accent" he has given Nucingen (M, 24) and Heppenstall, whose introduction analyzes and explains Balzac's phonetic system in transforming Nucingen's speech in such a way that sometimes makes it nearly incomprehensible—quite true, for the French—comments ironically "No doubt to the reader, as it was to the translator, it will be a great relief when he finally disappears on page 290, having been replaced briefly by a supposed Englishman." (H, x-xi.) Readers may or may not have his reaction, but I think the translators have nothing to be ashamed of. Two examples will suffice. Here's a relatively easy one:

-- *Que vaire montame ? demanda le baron à sa
femme.*

⁷ Alsace has, of course, gone back and forth between France and Germany for centuries. (Hitler annexed it, while he merely occupied the rest of France.) Many Alsatians speak a Germanic dialect in addition to French, although their accent in French today is nothing like that of Balzac's character.

⁸ A number of scholars have made this point, among them Ewa Maczka in *Scripta Judaica Cracoviensia*, Volume 8 « La « belle Juive », avatars d'une figure de l'Autre en littérature française. <https://www.ejournals.eu/Scripta-Judaica-Cracoviensia/2010/Volume-8/art/1103/>

-- *Attendre.*

--*Addentre ! reprit-il, la nature est imbidoyable.* (B, 234.)

“What shall I do, matame?” the baron asked his wife.

“Wait.”

“Vait?” he replied. “But ze needs of nature iss vit’out pity.” (M, 159.)

Heppenstall translates more freely here, though he gets the point across with a good English equivalent, and his phonetic distortions are similar to MacKenzie’s:

‘Vot vill I do, Maame?’ the baron asked his wife.

‘Wait.’

‘Vait!’ he went on, ‘de flesh iss veak...’ (H, 198.)

In the excerpt below Nucingen’s exclamation in French is a bit harder to decipher. Esther, using a term of endearment and claiming she now loves him and is ready to show it, inquires about his financial arrangements, of which she, or rather Lucien, is to be the beneficiary, she thinks. He replies, again wrenching French out of its normal shape. Balzac always puts Nucingen’s words in italics, as one would for a quote from a foreign language:

Oh ! mon tié ! birguoi m’afoir ébroufé... ch’eusse été si hireux tébuis drois mois...

-- Est-ce en trois pour cent ou en cinq ? ma bichette, dit Esther en passant les mains dans les cheveux de Nucingen et les lui arrangeant à sa fantaisie.

En drois... ch’en affais des masses. (B, 336)

“Oh! Mine Gott! Why you had to put me t’rough so much—I could haff been happy for ze last t’ree mot’s...”

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“Did you put it in the three percent funds or the five, my little doe?” asked Esther, toying with Nucingen’s hair, arranging it to suit her whim.

“In ze t’ree... I had many of zem.” (M, 231.)

‘Och, goot Lort! vhy dry me so. ...I would hef been so happy zese tree monts...’

‘Is it in three per cents or in five, my lambkin?’ said Esther playing with Nucingen’s hair and arranging it fancifully.

‘In tree... I had a lot of zem.’ (H, 283.)

Both translators have done a creditable job in giving us an English equivalent for Nucingen’s accent in French, whatever we may think of what Balzac did with it. But MacKenzie’s “put it in the three percent funds or the five” does seem a lot clearer to me than Heppenstall’s “in three per cents or in five.” Perhaps the “three per cents” would be clearer to an English reader, as it was especially used to refer to “a portion of the consolidated debt of Great Britain.”⁹)

The third part of the novel, *Où mènent les mauvais chemins*, “Where Evil Pathways Lead” (M), “Where Evil Ways Lead” (H), and the fourth, *La dernière incarnation de Vautrin*, “The Last Incarnation of Vautrin” (H), deal with the criminal justice system, which is finally catching up with the protean master criminal. Part four, especially, is full of underworld slang. Heppenstall would seem particularly qualified to cope with these parts of the novel, as he wrote four books on French criminal history, including *French Crime in the Romantic Age*, precisely the topic here, and he translated the twentieth-century lawyer René Floriot’s book *Les erreurs judiciaires*.

In typical fashion, Balzac puts a purely explanatory chapter near the beginning of the third part, since the subject of his novel has changed radically and he is always interested in the way things are actually done in the world: *Du droit criminel mis à la portée des gens du monde*,

⁹ Chambers Twentieth Century Dictionary, <http://www.finedictionary.com/Three-per-cents..html>.

“Criminal Law Made Plain for Ordinary People” (M) or “Criminal Law for the Man in the Street” (H.) It is not easy to translate and it’s worth examining at some length how each of our two translations faces this unique challenge, all the more so as the basic structure of the French system of criminal justice has remained the same to this day—some of the vocabulary is still used in French, even slang like *violon*—and it is quite different from what we have in the US and the UK. It thus requires the translator to find a way to describe a foreign system for which English may have no precise equivalents. This is the second paragraph of that chapter and parts of the third and fourth:

Un crime se commet: s’il y a flagrance, les *inculpés* sont emmenés au corps de garde voisin et mis dans ce cabanon nommé par le peuple *violon* sans doute parce qu’on y fait de la musique : on y crie ou l’on y pleure. De là, les inculpés sont traduits par-devant le *commissaire* de police, qui procède à un *commencement d’instruction* et qui peut les relaxer, s’il y a erreur ; enfin les inculpés sont transportés au *dépôt de la Préfecture*, ou la police les tient à la disposition du Procureur du Roi et du Juge d’Instruction, qui, selon la gravité des cas, avertis plus ou moins promptement, arrivent et interrogent les gens en état d’arrestation provisoire. Selon la nature des présomptions, le juge d’instruction lance un mandat de dépôt et fait écrouer les *inculpés* à la Maison d’Arrêt. . .

Remarquez cette expression d’*inculpés*. Notre Code a créé trois distinctions essentielles dans la criminalité : l’inculpation, la prévention, l’accusation. Tant que le mandat d’arrêt n’est pas signé, les auteurs présumés du crime ou d’un délit grave sont des inculpés ; sous le poids du mandat d’arrêt, ils deviennent des *prévenus*, ils restent purement et simplement prévenus tant que l’instruction se poursuit. L’instruction terminée, une fois que le tribunal a jugé que les prévenus devaient être déférés à la Cour, ils passent à l’état d’*accusés*, lorsque la Cour royale a jugé, sur une requête du Procureur-général, qu’il y a charges suffisantes pour les traduire en Cour d’assises. (. . .)

Le détenu, c’est le condamné. Notre Droit criminel a créé des *Maisons d’Arrêt*, des Maisons de Justice et des Maisons de détention, différences juridiques qui corre-

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spondent à celles de prévenu, d'accusé, de condamné. La prison comporte une peine légère, c'est la punition d'un délit minime ; mais la détention est une peine afflictive, et, dans certains cas, infamante. (B, 358-360.)

A crime is committed; now, if it is flagrant, the suspects (the *inculpés*) are brought to the nearest guardhouse and put in the cell they call the "violin," no doubt because music is made there: there is screaming, and there is weeping. From there the suspects are taken before the police commissioner, who proceeds to a basic examination and who is empowered to release them if he finds there has been some kind of error; otherwise, the suspects are transported to the police station of the prefecture, where the police hold them according to the disposition of the king's prosecutor and the examining magistrate, who, depending on the gravity of the case, are notified more or less swiftly, arrive, and interrogate the individuals, who are now in a state of provisional arrest. According to the nature of his presumptions, the examining magistrate issues a warrant for imprisonment and orders the subject to one of the three *maisons d'arrêt* in Paris (. . .)

Note the term "suspect," or *inculpé*. Our Code lays out three essential distinctions in criminality: *inculpation*, or the first level; *prévention*, the state of being detained while under interrogation; and *accusation*, the level reached where the accused is committed for trial. As long as the warrant for arrest has not been signed, the presumed perpetrators of a serious crime are considered suspect, or *inculpé*. But with such a warrant they fall into the category of *prévenu*, and they remain in this category as long as the investigation proceeds. Then, once the Royal Court has determined, at the request of the prosecutor, that there are sufficient grounds to indict them and bring them to trial, they fall into the third category of *accusés*. (M, 246-247.)

A crime is committed: if it is flagrant, the *inculpés* or persons detected are taken to the nearest guard post and put in the cell popularly called a *violon*, doubtless because of the music which is heard there: shouting or weeping.

Thence, the prisoner is taken before the police superintendent, who conducts a preliminary investigation and who may discharge him at once, if there has been a mistake; otherwise the *inculpés* are taken to the central police station, where the police hold them at the disposition of the district attorney and the examining magistrate, who, according to the seriousness of the case, alerted more or less promptly, arrive and question those in custody. According to the nature of his first findings, the examining magistrate issues a warrant of committal and consigns the *inculpé* to a remand centre or *maison d'arrêt*, of which there are three in Paris: (. . .)

Note the expression: *inculpé*. The French Code has set up three essential distinctions in criminal law: *inculpation*, *prévention*, *accusation*. Until a warrant of arrest is signed the presumed authors of a crime or misdemeanour are *inculpés*; placed under arrest in due form, they become *prévenus*, they remain purely and simply *prévenus* so long as the judicial inquiry proceeds. Thereafter, the tribunal being convinced that the case against them should be brought before the courts, their condition is that of *accusés*, once the Crown has been advised by the Attorney General that they may appear on indictment before a court of assize. (H, 302-303.)

Both translators sensibly decided to quote the specialized French terms in italics and translate them or use Balzac's explanation. In both versions, the passage is as clear an explanation of the system as it can be.

However, I'm afraid MacKenzie's "police commissioner" for *commissaire* is simply a mistake.¹⁰ Simenon's Commissaire Maigret, for example, is not the Police Commissioner of Paris! nor did the word have that meaning in Balzac's day. Heppenstall gets it right, but his "police superintendent" is the British term and means little to us: we say "captain." His "remand centre" is another case in point. Again, we see the advantage of having an American translation for American readers, despite the silly tradition among some U.S. publishers of preferring Brit-

¹⁰ For full disclosure: I made this mistake myself long ago, and it is, unfortunately, still there. I wince every time it comes to mind. It's in one of the Plume episodes in my *Darkness Moves: An Henri Michaux Anthology 1927-1984*, The University of California Press, Berkeley, 1994. 342 pp.

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ish translators, presumably under the post-colonial assumption that their English is somehow better than ours. (Not to fault Penguin, of course, a British publisher.) The rest is a matter of a few details. Heppenstall's "a preliminary investigation" is a bit closer to the French *commencement d'instruction* than "a basic examination" (M): the *instruction* is the investigation, which will be made by the *juge d'instruction*, as anyone who has watched the French series "Spiral" can attest. (Balzac devotes a full chapter to explaining the functions of the position.) Both translators render that by "examining magistrate," a position that does not exist in Anglo-American law, although our DA performs some of his (or, today, her) functions. We've all heard the words "arrest warrant" many times but I would venture to bet no reader has seen or heard "warrant for arrest" (M), although "warrant for *his* arrest" is common, oddly enough. The same goes still more strongly for "warrant of arrest" (H), although I can't vouch for usage in the UK. Finally, there are sentences and phrases of the French text that have not been translated in MacKenzie's version, but I am reluctant to pinpoint them because Balzac revised his text frequently; Professor MacKenzie says he "relied on three modern editions" (M, xxii) and in this time of Covid I have only been able to obtain one of them.

And then there's the problem of translating nineteenth-century criminal slang, which appears in force in the final section of the novel. Balzac even gives us a "Philosophical, linguistic and literary essay on slang, whores and thieves" and says that "each word of this language is a brutal, ingenious, or fearful image." (H, 441.) What can be done with Balzac's enumeration of these French words and his explanations of them? Here, a problem for the American reader may be a sign of excellence for the British reader. Heppenstall often uses slang well known in the UK but less so in the US. British slang is richer than American, hence his wealth of slangy words for woman, for example:

En argot, on ne dort pas, *on pionce*.¹¹ Remarquez avec quelle énergie ce verbe exprime le sommeil particulier à la bête traquée, fatiguée. . . appelée Voleur. . . Affreux sommeil, semblable à celui de l'animal sauvage qui dort, qui ronfle, et dont néanmoins les oreilles veillent doublées de prudence !

¹¹ Words that were once limited to certain milieus sometimes enter the mainstream. *Pioncer* for *dormir* (sleep) is common slang in France today; it is has no special connection to thieves or prostitutes.

Tout est farouche dans cet idiome. Les syllabes qui commencent ou qui finissent, les mots, sont âpres et étonnent singulièrement. Une femme est une *largue*. Et quelle poésie ! La paille est *la plume de Beauce*. Le mot minuit est rendu par cette périphrase : *douze plombes crossent* ! (B, 525.)

Sleep is a gentle thing,¹² kipping and dossing are not, they suggest the hunted animal, The Thief, flinging himself down, exhausted. . .The animal may snore, but his ears, nevertheless, remain pricked, anxious.

Everything is savage in this idiom. The prefixes and suffixes, the words themselves shock, they are rough and rasping. From a moppet or a popsie or a doll, by way of a mere skirt, a woman may be almost anything and in Paris is a *largue*. And what poetry! Straw is a swede-basher's feathers. Midnight is rendered by a periphrase, knocking twelve, where a *plombe* is certainly a leaden hour. (H, 441-442.)

In argot, no one sleeps, they *roll up*: note the energy with which this phrase expresses the kind of sleep that a hunted, fatigued, wearied animal sleeps, the sleep of the thief who. . .just lies down and rolls up into the abysses of a deep sleep. . . just the way a wild animal sleeps, and snores, but never ceases listening!

Everything is savage in this language. The beginning and ending syllables of words are harsh, strangely shocking. A woman is a *largue*, for example. And what poetry! A straw mat is a *Beauce featherbed*. Midnight is *when the lead hands meet*. (M, 363.)

After his "A woman is a *largue*," MacKenzie inserts an endnote giving us the possible origins of the French word. Do we really need to interrupt our reading for this? On the other hand, I got a lot more out of

¹² I have no way of knowing if Heppenstall simply added these words or freely adapted Balzac here... or was using a different edition of the French text. *Covid oblige* again. In any case, it reinforces the idea. If he was using the same text we are, he has freely adapted this passage, while remaining faithful to its basic intentions.

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MacKenzie's expressive "roll up," for a criminal's sleep—his invention, as it has nothing to do with the origins of the French *pioncer*—than from Heppenstall's "kip" and "doss". (This, not from ignorance of the terms, but from their lack of force for this American reader: "kip" is familiar to me, B "doss" only in "doss-house," a grungy hotel. I don't know why either would be connected to the sleep of a hunted animal.) Elsewhere, and quite apart from the question of American vs. British vocabulary, Heppenstall has given us a freer adaptation, at least as strong as MacKenzie's. This small example shows that both translators have found a good solution to this problem here, as they have elsewhere, in response to a special challenge that has some importance in this part of the novel: they either quote the French word and explain it or find or sometimes invent equivalents, much as they did with the words describing the functions of the French system of justice.

Neither translator has any apparent difficulty in rendering the dramatic—or melodramatic—scenes of the novel, but MacKenzie is stronger throughout in this domain. Take Lucien's suicide in the Conciergerie, the same prison where Marie-Antoinette and other famous prisoners were held before they were guillotined less than forty years before (the novel takes place in 1830.) Balzac gives us a meticulous description of Lucien's preparations, as it's not so easy to commit suicide there: the preceding chapter is called *Difficultés du suicide en prison*. Once he manages to stand on a table and get to the high window whose crossbar he will use to hang himself with his cravat, he looks out on old Paris and has a vision of the building where Saint Louis supposedly lived in the 13th century, part of the Palais de Justice—the main Paris courthouse—as it was originally built. End of chapter. Cut to the characters in high society who have successfully maneuvered to save Lucien—too late! They are in an office when the news breaks: Lucien has been spotted hanging from the window of his cell. Madame de Sérizy, who loves him passionately, runs, nay, "flies," to his cell and... Here are the key passages (we recall that back in *Lost Illusions*, Lucien started out as a poet; his talent has ironically come to him again in the last few chapters):

Lucien vit le Palais dans toute sa beauté primitive. La colonnade fut svelte, jeune, fraîche. La demeure de saint Louis reparut telle qu'elle fut. . . En prenant ses mesures pour mourir, il se demandait comment cette merveille existait inconnue dans Paris. Il était deux Lucien, un Lucien poète en promenade dans le Moyen-Age, sous les arcades et sous les tourelles de saint Louis, et Lucien apprêtant son suicide. (B, 479.)

UN DRAME DANS LA VIE D'UNE FEMME A LA
MODE

(...)

Quand la porte de la cellule fut ouverte, et que la comtesse aperçut Lucien pendu comme si ses vêtements eussent été mis à un porte-manteau, d'abord elle fit un bond vers lui pour l'embrasser et le saisir ; mais elle tomba la face sur le carreau de la cellule, en jetant dans cris étouffés par une sorte de râle. (B, 480-483.)

Now Lucien saw the Palais in all its primitive beauty. The colonnade was slender, young, fresh. The dwelling of Saint Louis appeared to him now as it once was. . . While making his final preparations for death, he asked himself how such a marvel could exist and remain unknown in the heart of Paris. There were two Luciens: Lucien the poet was strolling through the Middle Ages, below the arcades and the turrets of Saint Louis, while the other Lucien was preparing his suicide. (M, 332.)

A Drama in the Life of a Woman of Fashion (M, 332.)

(...)

When the cell door was opened and the countess saw Lucien hanging, as if his garments had been hung on a coat hook, she leaped toward him, embracing and holding on to him tightly; but then she collapsed face down on the cell floor, uttering sharp, muffled cries, punctuated by what sounded like a dying gasp. (M, 334.)

Lucien saw the Palais in all its primitive beauty. The colonnade was slender, young, fresh. The abode of Saint Louis reappeared as it had once been. . . Taking measures intended to result in his death, he wondered how it was possible for this marvel to exist unknown in Paris. He was two Luciens, the Lucien who was a poet abroad in the Middle Ages, and the Lucien preparing to kill himself. (H, 403.)

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Drama in the Life of a woman of fashion (H, 404.)
(. . .)

When the cell door had been opened, and the countess saw Lucien hanging as though his garments had been placed on a coat-hook, at first she sprang forward to kiss and enfold him; but she fell face down on the tiled floor, uttering cries that were stifled by a kind of dying gasp. (H, 406.)

“While making his final preparations for death” (M) is more direct and far better than the wordy “Taking measures intended to result in his death” (H) in this crucial scene, as is MacKenzie’s “dwelling” compared to Heppenstall’s hifalutin “abode.” I do prefer “He was two Luciens” here (H) to “There were two Luciens” (M), though it could be one or the other; but to me, MacKenzie’s “Lucien the poet was strolling through the Middle Ages” captures the contrast far better than Heppenstall’s weaker and wordier “the Lucien who was a poet abroad in the Middle Ages.”

All in all, while Rayner Heppenstall’s older translation is perfectly serviceable and gives readers a good sense of Balzac’s immensely varied and powerful novel, we should be grateful to Raymond N. MacKenzie for his work. And it is remarkable work, coming as it does so soon after his fine version of *Illusions perdues*, especially when we consider not only the immense labor of making such a translation, but of carefully annotating it and introducing it in a way that uses his thorough command of the relevant secondary literature to illuminate Balzac’s literary project. His version is fresher, and conveys the power of Balzac’s novel more than the older one, even for a British reader, I imagine. Another advantage of the new translation is the physical book itself: I think Minnesota has used paper of better quality than the dull paper in the Penguin edition, which turns from white to sepia after a relatively short time. The font has more space around it in the Minnesota edition, so it is easier to read. The Penguin edition (new) is just two dollars less than the University of Minnesota’s; if you want to read Balzac and can’t read him in French, the \$19.95 University of Minnesota edition is well worth it. And given the critical apparatus of the MacKenzie edition, if you’re a serious student of the novelist or of nineteenth-century France, your choice has been made for you. Go for it.