

METAMORPHOSES

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REVIEW ESSAY

BALZAC IN ENGLISH: *LOST ILLUSIONS*

Honoré de Balzac, *Lost Illusions*, translated and introduced by Raymond N. MacKenzie, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, London, 2020. 585 pp.

Honoré de Balzac, *Lost Illusions*, translated and introduced by Herbert J. Hunt, Penguin Classics, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, UK and New York, 1971. 682 pp.

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 (Translation 1951 by Kathleen Raine). 721 pp.

Honoré de Balzac, *Illusions perdues*, Introduction, notes and bibliography by Philippe Berthier, Chronology by André Lorant, Éditions Flammarion (G/F), 1990. 665 pp.

Balzac is not only one of the great French novelists of the 19th century, but one of the great figures of world literature. He can also be “overheated,” as his most recent translator and the blurb on the back cover admit, ponderous, clumsy, and sometimes just silly. Yet he won the admiration of such refined stylists as Charles Baudelaire, Oscar Wilde, Henry James and Marcel Proust: James commented on him perceptively and Proust wrote a parody that shows he knew every flaw—and virtue—of the novelist he so deeply admired.¹ Less important for the translator, who deals primarily with language, but more important for the heart of *Lost Illusions*, is the fact that Balzac was also admired by Marx and Engels for his searching critique of nascent capitalism, and the twentieth-century Marxist critic Georg Lukacs wrote an astute essay on his work. This, despite the fact that Balzac was an arch-reactionary in the politics of his day.² Proust said he particularly appreciated the “great fresco” of *Lost Illusions*³ and many critics and authors, including Balzac himself, consider this long novel his most important work. A recent scholarly French paperback edition is preceded by an interview with the bestsell-

¹ The parody is in *Pastiches et mélanges*.

² He detested the French Revolution, admired counter-Revolutionary thinkers like de Bonald and de Maistre and supported monarchy—an interesting example of the contrast between an author’s political opinions and what his work actually conveys.

³ *Correspondence*, Philip Kolb, ed., vol. XVI, Plon, Paris, 1982, October 25, 1917.

ing contemporary writer Catherine Cusset, who explains why she loves this novel. Through the mirrored stories of the “poet” Lucien Chardon or de Rubempré,⁴ the familiar young-man-from-the-provinces-on-the-make in the capital (spoiler alert: he won’t make it) and the printer and inventor David Séchard who remains down in the provincial town of Angoulême, the novel shows how the quest for money, status and power destroys all natural human bonds: Séchard’s father ruins his son to enrich himself, Lucien’s literary friends in Paris betray each other for gain and temporary glory. And literature, like everything else in print, is no more than another commodity on the market. Like actresses, like critics and journalists, like prostitutes—all closely associated in *Lost Illusions*—authors must sell themselves with no regard for their feelings, their opinions or their art. In the provinces as in Paris, we see a competitive jungle where creativity in the arts and industry is stifled or stolen and merit is not rewarded, but guile and ruthlessness are.

Now we are treated to a handsomely produced, new annotated translation by Raymond N. MacKenzie, a prolific translator of 19th century French literature who knows Balzac well, as his instructive introduction amply shows.⁵ But a version by the interesting British poet, scholar and critic Kathleen Raine, who had previously translated Balzac’s *La Cousine Bette*, has been available for many years and so has a translation by another British scholar, Herbert J. Hunt, who translated Balzac’s *Le Cousin Pons* as well. There are also two nineteenth-century translations. Mackenzie gives us the first modern American translation and that in itself can be a good thing: British translations can sometimes bother an American reader,⁶ although I think British English has certain advantages over ours for translating Balzac, as we shall see. Still, we may reasonably wonder why there was a need for this new version.

The translator himself raises this question and attempts an answer in his introduction. After complimenting his predecessors, he asks:

⁴ His mother was an aristocratic de Rubempré, his father a vulgar druggist in the lower part of Angoulême, “lower” both spatially and socially. One of Lucien’s ambitions is to have his aristocratic name recognized by the royal authorities and that, among other such illusory ambitions, comes into conflict with his desire to be a great poet and novelist.

⁵ There is an interview with him in *Metamorphoses*, Vol 25, Issue 2, Fall 2017, 314-320, following his translation of the 19th-century writer Barbey d’Aurevilly.

⁶ A British translation I was asked to evaluate some years ago spoke of a man reaching down to his “flies.” It took me a moment to realize it was the part of a man’s pants we refer to as “the fly,” but it was hard to get rid of the image of insects buzzing around a man’s nether regions.

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“What does a new translation have to add?” and replies, “For one thing, none of the four includes any significant annotation or apparatus to help the modern reader through the labyrinth of Balzac’s historical, political, literary and scientific allusions” and his edition does. Good idea, as we do need help and there are no notes in the Penguin Classics edition (Hunt). However, if Madden’s notes at the back of the Modern Library edition (Raine) are half as long as Mackenzie’s thirty pages, they are extremely helpful—especially his brief summary of the historical and political background to the novel, lacking in Mackenzie, although he and Hunt both provide some background in their respective introductions. Madden’s notes have another advantage: they’re not numbered by superscripts above the words, but only indicated by page and line at the back. After all, we’re reading a novel, not a scholarly monograph and footnotes in a novel are intrusive. If you’re puzzled by something, you can flip to the back and usually find it easily enough in the Raine edition. On the other hand, if you’re not simply reading *Lost Illusions* because it’s a great novel, but studying Balzac in depth, MacKenzie’s notes give you a mine of detailed information.

The main justification for Mackenzie’s new translation, he says, is producing “a readable, more modern-sounding text: times change, idioms change, audiences change and so does our sense of what sounds dated and what sounds right.” (M, xvi)⁷ That’s why the two 19th century translations are not considered here: it is a truism that if great literature does not age, translations do. MacKenzie continues “But while seeking a more modern feel and tone, I’ve tried to balance that goal with the equally important one of avoiding anachronism. Balzac should sound real to an American or English reader, but he should not be made to sound *like* a modern American or English speaker. Whether I’ve succeeded in that balancing act, the reader must judge.” (Ibid.) Most literary translators are familiar with that challenge or its corollary: how to deal with differences not only of time, but of social and geographic space—a character in a novel who speaks in a regional dialect, for example. In the following pages, this reader/translator will try to judge how well MacKenzie rises to the challenge compared to the other available versions, which, after all, were not produced so very long ago.

First, a subjective overview: I enjoyed reading through Raine’s Balzac and Mackenzie’s, too, whereas Hunt’s was a bit of a struggle. One reason for this has nothing to do with translation, but with the physi-

⁷ All references to the Mackenzie, Raine and Hunt translations are abbreviated by the first letters of their names. The French edition I used is referred to as F.

cal object, the book—part of the experience of reading, after all: the Penguin Classics edition has rather small font and the lines are set close together on dull paper of inferior quality, no longer white. Interestingly, the first and last parts of Balzac’s novel deal with printing, the material basis for the production of literature (or journalism, a career Lucien falls into the temptation of pursuing) and the manufacture of paper is central to the last section of the novel. Other reasons for my reaction will become clear as we consider the translations themselves.

The novel is divided into three great movements: I. *Les deux poètes* “The Two Poets” (M, R and H)... Lucien and David in Angoulême), II. *Un grand homme de province à Paris*: “The Parisian Adventures of a Great Man from the Provinces” (M), “A Provincial Celebrity in Paris” (R), and “A Great Man in Embryo” (H). III. *Les souffrances de l’inventeur*: “The Ordeals of an Inventor” (M), “The Sufferings of an Inventor” (R), “An Inventor’s Tribulations” (H). I would quibble with MacKenzie’s added “Adventures of...”, not only because it’s unnecessarily longer and not in the text but because Part II does not exactly narrate “adventures,” like *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. If Hunt’s translation of Part III sounds worse, to my ear, than the other two versions, his translation of Part II verges on the unacceptable: it is not at all what Balzac wrote and the novelist has emphasized the triptych Angoulême (the “provinces”) – Paris – Angoulême, whereas Hunt erases it from the title. It is essential to *Lost Illusions*. Paris and the provinces both have pitfalls for the would-be creator and each has its own kind of sleaze, greed and corruption.

Here we touch on a basic principle in evaluating translations. As David Bellos puts it, “a relatively uncontentious way of saying what translation does is this: it provides for some community an acceptable match for an utterance made in a foreign tongue.” He naturally goes on to ask “What makes a match acceptable?”⁸ I think the first, absolutely essential criterion for it to be acceptable is that it must match as closely *as possible* the denotative meaning of the words, as recorded in dictionaries or in common usage. Translators don’t like to talk about this, because after all, Google Translate can do that, right? (Well no, not really.) But labeling a work a “translation” creates an implicit pact with the reader,

⁸ David Bellos, *Is That a Fish in Your Ear? Translation and the Meaning of Everything*, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York, 2011, p. 273. He adds two more questions: which qualities are those that a translation should match and “What do we mean by ‘match’, anyway?” And concludes: “Those are the questions that translation studies has always sought to answer, sometimes under heavy academic disguise.” This review will do away with the disguise.

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and that is one clause in the pact: readers expect something in their language close to the text in the foreign language. If Balzac says someone spends thirty francs and I render it as twenty—he usually tells us exactly what his characters spend and always tells us what they’re paid—I am violating the pact. Of course, matching “as closely as possible” raises many problems: since the literary translator tries to preserve the essence of the work, whatever it is that makes it literature, other factors may be more important than denotative meaning—the sound pattern in poetry, most obviously, but also prose rhythm, connotations, sounds, the deeper meanings of a word or sentence, and, in a novel where there is dialogue, the speaker’s style, diction and social class. There are certainly wrong translations, like twenty for *trente*, but “often there is no ‘right’ translation, only a negotiation between different imperatives.”⁹ Hunt’s “...in Embryo”, above, does not match the meaning of Balzac’s words, but it does suggest an important theme of this part of the novel: when Lucien goes to Paris, he may become a great man, as an embryo may become a human being, but he isn’t one yet. And, in fact, never will be. That’s why, to me, Hunt’s adaptation of the title only *verges* on being unacceptable.

First, two small observations on the translations, before we examine more important issues. I came across one obvious mistake in MacKenzie’s version. As I did not carefully read every page of the 554-page translation and compare it to the French, I can only hope they are few and far between. When David Séchard tells his bride-to-be, Lucien’s sister Ève, that Paris will be Lucien’s downfall, she exclaims, *Vous n’êtes donc qu’un faux ami !... Autrement vous ne nous décourageriez pas ainsi*. (F, 145.) She is showing her solidarity with her brother here, but Mackenzie mistranslates the *nous* (“us”) as “him ”: “If you were really his friend, you wouldn’t discourage him like this.” (M, 84). No such slip in Hunt or Raine. A caveat: I could not check the French editions MacKenzie used, as I was unable to get them in the midst of the pandemic. I relied on the newer, scholarly Garnier/Flammarion edition; it can’t be very different from the ones he consulted. But if the sentence in the edition he used for this particular passage reads *vous ne le décourageriez pas ainsi*, I owe Professor MacKenzie an apology.

Second small observation: Lucien is a budding poet, and Balzac inserts specimens of his work into the novel. He wrote Lucien’s early poems himself when he was very young; the others are by real poets. Lucien’s favorite sonnet was actually written by Théophile Gautier, a

⁹ Introduction to Roger Gilbert-Lecomte, *Coma Crossing: Collected Poems*, Translated, annotated and introduced by David Ball, Schism Books, 2019, p. xiii.

poet admired by many at the time, Balzac among them. Apparently, copyright laws were non-existent in nineteenth-century France; the novelist doesn't even credit the poets whose work he prints. These texts are not central to the novel, but they pose a special problem for translators. This is a case where the meaning of each line is not their important feature: the "match," to use Bellos' term, lies in the fact that they are poems and should sound like poems in English, while keeping the main idea of the French. Unsurprisingly, Raine, a poet herself, does a good job of this, finding equivalents for rhymes, meter and meaning, not exact equivalents (her rhymes are often approximate "sour rhymes," for example), but good enough. Hunt comes up with exact rhymes, but the poems themselves are terrible. They're not exactly masterpieces in French, but they're not *that* bad, especially Gautier's. As for MacKenzie, he sets them in unjustified margins so they look like poems, but that's about it.

We see MacKenzie's attempt to "produce a readable text" from the start—but not, I think, in a good way, not in the way he takes later on. The first paragraph of the novel describes the mechanics of printing and the "old tools" in the print shop, which "have a role to play in our story." (M, 3) Balzac says they have a role in *cette grande petite histoire*: in, literally, "this great, small story." MacKenzie simply does away with the rather pompous contradictory adjectives.¹⁰ Raine, on the other hand, finds an ingenious solution, interpreting the meaning rather than translating the words: "they play a part in this great story of small things." (R, 3) Again, Hunt wanders farther away: "this great and trivial story." (H, 3) Balzac does pay attention to "small things"; they are not "trivial" for him, nor is the story.

An important feature of Balzac's novels is the lengthy opening description of the setting and the characters who move through it. It provides a source of energy and direction for the rest of the novel and suggests the power their physical and moral environment has over human beings. These important first pages of *Illusions perdues* offer a number of challenges to the translator. Thus, in the middle of a three-page long paragraph that gives us a detailed physical and moral description of old Séchard, David's father, an ignorant retired printer who is now a miserly

¹⁰ Victor Hugo, to whom Balzac dedicated *Illusions perdues*, makes better use of them in *Les Misérables*: the scene of the death of Gavroche ends, famously, *Cette petite grande âme venait de s'envoler*. ("That small, great soul had just flown away.") While Hugo's novel came out almost thirty years after *Illusions perdues*, one wonders if he had Balzac's words in the back of his head.

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wine grower and drinker, we find this:

S'il avait peu de connaissances en haute typographie, en revanche il passait pour être extrêmement fort dans un art que les ouvriers ont plaisamment nommé la soûlographie (...) Jérôme Nicolas Séchard, fidèle à la destinée que son nom lui a faite, était doué d'une soif inextinguible. (...) Malgré les connaissances que son fils devait rapporter de la grande école des Didot, il se proposa de faire avec lui la bonne affaire qu'il ruminait depuis longtemps. Si le père en faisait une bonne, le fils devait en faire une mauvaise. Mais, pour le bonhomme, il n'y avait ni fils, ni père, en affaires. S'il avait d'abord vu dans David *son unique enfant*, plus tard il y vit un acquéreur naturel de qui les intérêts étaient opposés aux siens : il voulait vendre cher, David devait acheter à bon marché ; son fils devenait donc un ennemi à vaincre. Cette transformation du sentiment en intérêt personnel, ordinairement lente, tortueuse et hypocrite chez *les gens bien élevés*, fut rapide et directe chez le vieil Ours, qui montra combien la soûlographie rusée l'emportait sur la typographie instruite. (F, 63-65.)

First challenge: Anglophone readers are far less accustomed to extremely long paragraphs than the French, and *Illusions perdues* is full of them. Here as elsewhere, Raine cuts up the three-page paragraph in a way that makes sense and also makes the text easier to read. (R, 6-8). Hunt divides the paragraph, too, but not as much as Raine. (H, 6-8) MacKenzie's policy is generally to keep long paragraphs as is, out of fidelity to Balzac. (M, 5-7) "I have tried to represent Balzac's style as faithfully as I could," he says in his introduction (M, xxiv). Here that attempt comes into conflict with his other stated goal: readability. Raine's division into shorter paragraphs certainly makes it easier to read this long novel and I fail to see what is lost by it. This is not a work like Claude Simon's *La Route des Flandres*, where the absence of paragraphs makes a solid block of print that is the graphic expression of one bloc of memory rather than a linear passage through time. Yet MacKenzie, like Hunt, uses chapter titles as a way of guiding us through the novel, although they were eliminated by Balzac in later editions. Raine sticks to Balzac's final choice. Some readers may prefer the guidelines. Unlike Hunt, however, MacKenzie does not put the titles in the table of contents, so the guidelines are less useful than they might be.

The second challenge in this passage, wordplay, is an interesting

one for a translator but less important here, as it is not so common in Balzac. For those interested, I have dealt with it in a note to save space.¹¹ To summarize: Raine seems to me the most skillful translator of the three in this domain, although her Britishness may be a small problem for us Americans.

The last eight lines of the above quotation bring us to the preparation for the crucial act by which old Séchard is going to cheat his son. As so often in Balzac, it flows naturally from the description. Note the cynical sentence at the end. It is worth considering an excerpt from this passage in some detail. Raine:

In spite of the fact that his son must have learned a great deal in the great school of the Didots,¹² he proposed to drive a bargain with him, which he had been thinking over for some time—a good bargain for the father, but a bad one for the son; but for the old man there was no question of father and son in matters of business. If he had ever looked upon David as his only son, he had later come to regard him as the natural purchaser of the business, whose interests were opposed to his own. He was determined to sell dear, David would want to buy cheap. His son was, therefore,

¹¹ What to do with the jocular slang noun *soûlographie*, based on the adjective *soûl*, common slang for “drunk”? And then, the play on the name Séchard, which starts with *sec*, “dry”. Raine’s equivalent for the former is “topeography” (R, 6) as “tope,” according to Webster’s, means “to drink liquor to excess.” Frankly, I had to look it up, whereas it is fairly common in British English—a typical disadvantage of a British translation for an American reader. Hunt’s *tipsiography* (his italics, H, 6) is a bit clearer for us. Mackenzie invents “drunkography” (M, 6, his quotation marks)—simple, but topeography sounds like a real word and drunkography, like a clumsy invention of the translator’s. Raine simply assumes we know some French, as perhaps, most of her British readers did back in 1951: “Jérôme-Nicolas Séchard, true to the destiny of dryness conferred upon him by his name, was the victim of an insatiable thirst.” (R, 7) Hunt shows his academic colors by his wording and by handling the wordplay with a footnote: “Jérôme-Nicolas Séchard, true to the destiny which his patronymic marked out for him...” and the footnote: “*Séchard*. The root-word is *sec*: dry. ‘Séchard’ could thus be translated as soaker.” (H, 6) Really? Not for an American, it couldn’t! To explain the pun, Mackenzie sends us 552 pages further on to an endnote—an annoying interruption of our reading. (M, 6, 558.)

¹² Séchard has sent David to study with Didot. Madden’s endnote in the Raine edition: “The Didot family were famous printers in Paris. Balzac himself established a small printing house in the 1820s, and the text reflects his own experiences.” (R, 702.)

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an enemy to be overcome. This transformation of sentiment into self-interest, which is usually a gradual, tortuous, and hypocritical transformation among the educated classes, was rapid and direct with the old bear; and this only goes to show the superiority of shrewd “topeography” over expert typography. (R, 8.)

Clear, firm, natural writing and a nice contrasting rhyme at the end, as in the French. I think the opposition of “dear” / “cheap” is easily understood by American readers, even if we wouldn't “sell dear,” but “sell high”... and “buy low,” as MacKenzie has it. Hunt translates it like this:

In spite of the expert knowledge that his son must have acquired by training in the great Didot firm, he was proposing to strike a profitable deal with him—one which he had long been meditating. If the father was to make a good bargain, it had to be a bad one for the son. For this sorry individual recognized no father-and-son relationship in business. If in the beginning he had thought of David as being an only child, he later had only looked on him as an obvious purchaser whose interests were opposed to his own: he wanted to sell dear, whereas David would want to buy cheap; therefore his son was an enemy to be vanquished. This transformation of feeling into self-interest, which in educated people is usually a slow, tortuous and hypocritical process, was rapid and undeviating in the old ‘bear’, who thus showed how easily guileful tipsiography could triumph over expertise in typography. (H, 8.)

Rendering *la grande école des Didot* by “the great Didot firm” instead of Raine’s literal “great school of the Didots” is a clever way of dispensing with a footnote and MacKenzie will do the same. On the other hand, Hunt’s “this sorry individual” unnecessarily explains Balzac to the reader rather than translating him and “an only child” has the wrong emphasis, as it focuses on David, compared to Raine’s “his only son.” It is unnecessary and slightly annoying to underscore its status as a nickname by putting “bear” in quotes; Raine’s “the old bear” with no quotation marks works fine. Hunt’s “one which he had long been meditating” is far stiffer than Raine’s version of the same line. In fact, a slight stiffness or ornateness of diction mars Hunt’s translation here and there throughout. Mackenzie does it this way:

Despite whatever his son had learned while working for the Didot firm, he was planning to strike a bargain he had long been contemplating with the boy. For, with this man, there was never any question of father or son. While he had at first seen David as his only child, later he came to see in him a natural purchaser, and one whose interests were opposed to his own. David would want to sell high, and David would want to buy low; therefore, his son was now an enemy to be conquered. This transformation of feeling into self-interest, which is usually a slow, tortuous and hypocritical process among well brought-up people, was a rapid and direct one with the old Bear, which illustrates how cunning drunkography can win out over educated typography.

This omits Balzac's *en affaires* (in business matters) qualifying old Séchard's disregard for the father-son relationship and I don't see why. Raine, on the other hand, adds "of the business" to the Balzac's *acquéreur naturel* "natural purchaser", as the business is suggested but not said in the French text. The American translator's "his only child" is a literal translation of Balzac's *son unique enfant*. Perhaps Raine's less literal "only son" packs more emotional weight. MacKenzie's "he came to see in him a natural purchaser, and one whose interests were opposed to his own" (my emphasis) is unpleasantly heavier than Raine's simple "the natural purchaser of the business, whose interests were opposed to his own." An interesting difference between a good British version of the passage and a good American one—which MacKenzie's is, despite small flaws—is Raine's and Mackenzie's respective translations of *les gens bien élevés*, precisely rendered by the American as "well brought-up people." Raine's "the educated classes" is typically British. In the class-ridden UK those "classes" have traditionally been presumed to be "well brought-up." Hunt's "well-educated people" is simply a mistake.

The question of social class is crucial in this novel and British English is better attuned to its nuances than American. In this regard, Raine and Hunt have a certain advantage over MacKenzie. Typically upper-class British terms of address like "old boy", "my dear fellow," situate a character's place in the social ladder nicely. When an aristocrat puts down Lucien by calling him "insufferably dull" (Raine) the rather British expression nicely suggests the class distinctions in nineteenth-century Paris society. Thus I found Raine exceptionally convincing in the passage where Lucien walks out in the fashionable Faubourg Saint-

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Germain for the first time and becomes aware of his provincial clothes and bearing compared to the many details of a gentleman's attire, and the ease—we would say “sense of entitlement”—of the upper classes. “The more he admired those young men, with their air of gay irresponsibility, the more he became conscious that he looked like a stranger, like a man who has no idea where the road he is following leads to” (R 169.) MacKenzie seems to me more American and somewhat weaker: “The more he admired these young men, with their happy, relaxed airs, the more aware he became of how strange his own must appear, the air of a man who does not even know where the street he is on leads” (M, 134. I note, however, that his “street” is more appropriate here in Paris than Raine's “road.”) Hunt, British though he was, is weaker still, stiffer and further from the text to boot: “The more he admired these young people with their happy, care-free air, the more conscious he grew of his uncouth appearance, that of a man who has no idea where is making for” (H, 166).

It seems to me Raine has a better ear than the two other translators, not only in the small examples above, but throughout. After all, she was a poet and a good one, although her work is largely neglected today. Her versions of Balzac's dialogues are particularly noteworthy. Take this backstage invitation from the young actress Florine to the critics who are going to review her performance the next day. The “Matifat” she refers to is the sugar-daddy who keeps her in clothes and a fine apartment:

— Ah ! ça, mes amours, dit Florine en se retournant vers les trois journalistes, soignez-moi demain : d'abord, j'ai fait garder des voitures cette nuit, car je vous renverrai soûls comme des mardi-gras. Matifat a eu des vins, oh ! mais des vins dignes de Louis XVIII, et il a pris le cuisinier du ministre de Prusse. (F, 294.)

“I say, darlings,” said Florine turning to the three journalists again, “you will take care of me tomorrow, won't you? Meanwhile I have ordered cabs for tonight, because you are going home as drunk as lords. Matifat has ordered wines—wines worthy of Louis XVIII I do assure you, and he has hired the Prussian Ambassador's cook!” (R, 289.)

Perfect British theater-talk. In fact one might object, as MacKenzie does in his introduction, to the very Britishness of it: “[Balzac] should not be made to sound *like* a modern ... English speaker” (see above). But I think it works very well, as it captures the character of the

actress and her world. And besides, other elements of Raine's whole text are French enough: she keeps book titles, which are scattered through the second part of the novel, in French, and has other French touches here and there. Raine's opening "you will take care of me tomorrow," an almost literal translation of the original with emphasis added by the "will," is suggestive and effective. We don't need the explanatory translations of Florine's request that the two others give. Note Hunt's:

‘Well now, my loves,’ said Florine, turning round to the three journalists, ‘give me a good press tomorrow. In the first place, I’ve hired carriages for tonight, because I’m sending you back home drunk as carnival revelers. Matifat has found some wines, oh! wines fit for Louis XVIII, and he’s engaged the Prussian Ambassador’s chef.’ (H, 282.)

His "my loves" and "carnival revelers" are closer to the French, but not to the speech itself, not to what an actress might actually say in English while respecting the sense of the French, of course, as in Raine. MacKenzie also has the good sense to use the British "drunk as lords" instead of a literal translation, but he nicely adds a touch of "Frenchness" to the opening and concluding lines:

“Now then, my loves!” said Florine, turning around and facing the three journalists, “you’ll be good to me tomorrow, yes? First of all, I’ve arranged for cabs tonight, because I want to see you all as drunk as lords. Matifat has seen to the wines, and oh! These wines are worthy of Louis XVIII, and he’s also hired the chef from the Prussian ambassador’s.” (M, 228.)

The spoken word in *Lost Illusions* is not confined to true dialogue. There are also a fair number of long speeches in this novel, often of great importance. The one that struck me most is given by another would-be poet in Paris, the journalist Étienne Lousteau, who befriends Lucien and ironically leads him to his ruin by doing so. After listening to Lucien read his poems and expressing his admiration for one of them, he shows him, at length, how impossible it will be for him to make a living as a poet or from writing of any kind except journalism. And yet, not only is journalism itself an uncertain source of income, he warns, but its practice is thoroughly corrupt, especially in the theater, where the critics reign—and where Lucien will soon begin his career in journalism, abandoning

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his dreams of literary glory. Lousteau's passionate jeremiad lasts a full six pages in Mackenzie, occasionally interrupted by a word or two from Lucien. To me, it is the heart of the novel and I wish I could quote the whole thing. In the first sentence of the following excerpt, Lousteau is using theater as a metaphor, appropriately enough.

Vous êtes encore au parterre. Il en est temps, abdiquez avant de mettre un pied sur la première marche du trône que se dispute tant d'ambitions, et ne vous déshonorez pas comme je fais pour vivre. (Une larme mouilla les yeux d'Étienne Lousteau.) Savez-vous comment je vis ? reprit-il avec un accent de rage. Le peu d'argent que pouvait me donner ma famille fut bientôt mangé. Je me trouve sans ressource après avoir fait recevoir une pièce au Théâtre-Français. Au Théâtre-Français, la protection d'un prince ou d'un premier gentilhomme de la chambre du Roi ne suffit pas pour faire obtenir un tour de faveur : les comédiens ne cèdent qu'à ceux qui menacent leur amour-propre. Si vous aviez le pouvoir de faire dire que le jeune premier a un asthme, la jeune première une fistule où vous voudrez, que la soubrette tue les mouches au vol, vous seriez joué demain. (...) ¹³ C'est ignoble, mais je vis de ce métier, moi comme cent autres ! Ne croyez pas le monde politique plus beau que ce monde littéraire : tout dans ces deux mondes est corruption, chaque homme y est ou corrupteur ou corrompu. (F, 263-64.)

This is how our three translators handle the passage:

You are still in the front of the house. There is still time—turn back before you set foot on the first step that leads to the throne of fame, for which so many ambitions are contending, and do not dishonor yourself as I have had to do in order to live”—and there were tears in Étienne Lousteau's eyes as he spoke.

“Do you know how I make a living?” he went on in passionate tones. “The small sum of money that my family could afford to give me was soon used up. I had just had a play accepted by the Théâtre-Français when I found myself without a penny. At the Théâtre-Français you may have the influence of a prince, or a first Gentleman of the Bedchamber, but that will get you nowhere; the actors will not lift a finger for you unless you are in a position to damage their reputations. If you have the power to spread a rumour that the leading actor has asthma, or that the leading lady

¹³ This ellipsis represents a full page of text.

has a fistula wherever you please, or that the soubrette has foul breath, your play will be put on tomorrow. (...) And you needn't imagine that political journalism is any better—everything in these two spheres is corrupt; there is not a man in the world who does not either offer bribes or receive them.” (R, 250-51.)

You are still watching from the pit. There's still time to abdicate before you set foot on the bottom step of the throne for which so many people are fighting. Don't throw honour away, as I do, in order to live.'

Étienne Lousteau's eyes were moist with tears. 'Do you know how I live?' he continued with rage in his voice. 'The little money my family was able to give me was soon used up. I found myself penniless after getting a play accepted at the Théâtre-Français. At that theatre, even the patronage of a Prince or a First Gentleman of the Royal Bedchamber doesn't help one to jump the queue ; the actors only give way to those who threaten their self-esteem. If you were able to spread a rumour that the jeune premier is asthmatic, that the jeune première has a fistula on some part of her body, that the soubrette's breath is bad enough to kill flies on the wing, your play would be put on the very next day. (...) It's a dirty business, but I live by it, and so do hundreds of others. And don't imagine that the political world is much cleaner than the literary world: in both of them bribery is the rule; every man bribes or is bribed. (H, 245-46).

You're still seated in the audience. There's still time: you can still turn back, before you've taken the first step up toward the throne that all the ambitious people are trying to reach; there's still time before you dishonor yourself, as I have done.” With his, a tear could be seen glistening in the corner of Étienne Lousteau's eye.

He went on, now with rage in his voice: “Do you know how I live? the little money my family could manage to give me was soon spent. I found myself entirely without resources, though I had just had a play accepted at the Théâtre-Français. Now, at the Théâtre-Français, you might have a prince as your protector, or even a first gentleman of the king's chamber, but that will not get you anywhere; the actors will only cooperate with a person if he's in a position to threaten harm to their reputation. Now if you

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have the ability to make it known that a lead actor has asthma, or that the leading actress has a fistula, wherever you like, or that the soubrette's breath is so bad she kills flies with it—you'll have your play put on tomorrow. (...) And don't kid yourself that the political world is less corrupt than the literary one: both are corrupt through and through, and every man in each is either bribed or bribing someone else. (M, 198-99.)

We can feel the force of the passage in every one of these translations. All three translators divide the text into paragraphs, whereas the whole long speech is one discouragingly solid block of print in the original. But there are flaws in each translation, it seems to me. Above all, Raine makes the mistake of softening Balzac's *accent de rage* by transforming the phrase into "passionate tones": "with rage in his voice," as the two others put it, is closer to the text and absolutely essential. Lousteau is more than passionate: he is raging against society and himself. On the other hand, putting the tears in Lousteau's eyes as an extension to his words instead of isolating it in a separate sentence like the other translators strengthens the passage: I find Raine's "'do not dishonor yourself as I have had to do in order to live'—and there were tears in Étienne Lousteau's eyes as he spoke" the most moving of the three versions, even though Balzac himself has put it in a separate sentence. The translator has matched the emotion of the passage rather than its original construction. Her "leading actor" and "leading lady" is much better than Hunt's italicized *jeune premier* and *jeune première* (his italicized *soubrette* is also annoying, as this is spoken discourse) and her "leading lady" is a bit closer to theater usage than MacKenzie's "leading actress." But MacKenzie's "the first step up toward the throne that all ambitious people are trying to reach" is simpler, clearer and more natural than Raine's "the first step that leads to the throne of fame, for which so many ambitions are contending" and Hunt's "set foot on the bottom step of the throne for which so many people are fighting." In fact, MacKenzie succeeds in keeping his language as simple, clear and natural as possible from one end of the novel to the other. Here, for example, his version of this line is by far the strongest of the three: "And don't kid yourself that the political world is less corrupt than the literary one: both are corrupt through and through..."

Our detailed consideration of these passages could easily be repeated for every page of the novel, but that would amount to 1,500 pages and even a diligent reader would fall asleep at page 4. So let us sum up:

each translation has its virtues, Hunt's perhaps less than the others, and each has its flaws. No translation of a long literary work is perfect. I would recommend the new translation to a serious student of literature whose French is not good enough to read the original or to any reader who wants to experience this great novel. But if Raine's version is more easily available, I'd happily go with that. There is nothing dated about it and certain aspects of her work give a better idea of Balzac's novel than the others do. The power of Balzac's novel is not utterly lost in Hunt's translation either. In fact—and I conclude with a terrible literary heresy—I think *Lost Illusions* is quite as good as *Illusions perdues*.