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The Southern Literary Journal, Volume 33, Number 1, Fall 2000, pp. 55-81
(Article)

Published by The University of North Carolina Press

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/slj.2000.0006>



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Balzacian Evolution and the Origin of the Snopeses

by Merrill Horton

Malcolm Cowley's short essay "William Faulkner's Human Comedy"¹ probably created the Honoré de Balzac-William Faulkner source study field by briefly suggesting organizational similarities between *La Comédie humaine* and Faulkner's *oeuvre*. After Cowley, scholars incrementally but steadily added plot, name, and thematic similarities; Philip Cohen provides a bibliography of their work, and his own contributions are the most thorough in the field.² Over-determination is always a potential danger in source study, however, and recently, while contributing more plot and name resemblances, Jacques Pothier has suggested that design similarities between the two oeuvres are attributable to Cowley rather than to Faulkner (123) and even doubts the Balzacian influence that Cohen sees in Faulkner's banker Flem Snopes: "Would it not be vain to claim that Flem Snopes is inspired by Rastignac, du Tillet or Nucingen, rather than by Dickens's Uriah Heep? . . . Flem is a variation on a type common in the nineteenth and early twentieth century novel . . . when such characters can be read about in the novels of Balzac, Dickens, Twain, to name but a few" (112).

To trace Flem's acquisitiveness to Rastignac would be, of course, wrong, but Rastignac's relationship with Nucingen's wife and marriage to his daughter certainly afford parallels to Gavin Stevens' relationship with Eula and Linda Snopes, and to Flem's complicity in his wife and Manfred de Spain's liaison. Cohen observes that Faulkner's "A Dangerous Man" (*Uncollected Stories* 575–582) mentions "Baron de Nucingen, Balzac's great financier," and that a character there "allows his wife to have an affair just as . . . Nucingen . . . allows his wife [hers]" with de Marsay and then Rastignac

(Cohen 331). Variations on the phrase “Caesar’s wife must be above suspicion” appear several times in Faulkner’s work, most notably in reference to *The Town’s* Manfred-Eula-Flem triangle, which “A Dangerous Man” appears to foreshadow. The phrase was and is so well-known that Faulkner probably encountered it in a number of works, but I believe that his uses of it derive principally from the *Comédie’s* “The Rise and Fall of César Birotteau,”³ in which multiple biographical parallels between its protagonist and Julius Caesar⁴ and Birotteau’s own puns on Caesar/César (15:14, 21, 130) make it clear that the perfumier Birotteau is a modern capitalistic incarnation of the Roman original (or avatar) and would have been plain to Faulkner. Part of the story’s plot also would have been obvious to Faulkner: quite unlike Caesar’s second wife, César’s wife rejects a man’s amorous advances (du Tillet’s) (46–47) but in the *Comédie’s* turbulent motion leitmotif, Mme.’s commendable behavior dooms her husband because the spurned lover, playing the role of Brutus, vindictively devises César’s bankruptcy and therefore his eventual death. The phrase also combines Balzac and Faulkner’s posthumous motion (the past alive in the present) and genealogy leitmotifs and appears at least twice elsewhere in the *Comédie*: “A Commission in Lunacy,”⁵ in which the exemplary magistrate Popinot is removed from a case because he erroneously appears to have violated the letter of judicial procedure—he is told “Caesar’s wife must not be suspected” (3:364); and the unfinished “The Deputy for Arcis,”⁶ in which a character self-righteously exclaims, “My friends, like Caesar’s wife, must be above suspicion” (30, pt. I:349).

Two general remarks regarding the design issue: Cowley’s observations of certain patterns in Faulkner’s work do not preclude strategic roles for those patterns (which emerge very early in Faulkner’s work), and Cowley makes it clear that the generally ascendant sequencing of *Collected Stories’* contents and section titles are Faulkner’s (*Faulkner-Cowley File* 115–120). At his death, Faulkner owned thirty of the thirty-three volumes in the Gebbie Publishing Company’s Library Edition of *The Novels of Balzac* (1897–1899), and since his own work occupies twenty-four volumes, anyone who wishes to investigate Balzac’s influence on him must be familiar with fifty-seven volumes of primary text, thirty-three of which are translated, often poorly,⁷ from French into English. As will become evident, “translation” has several meanings with regard to Balzac’s influence on Faulkner. Pothier logically defines “design” at the macro level: he believes that Faulkner did not appropriate Balzac’s unprecedented scientific conception of his major work and, unlike the Frenchman, employed the serial novel only in the Snopes trilogy. In this essay, I go beneath the macro level while addressing

the design question; in focusing on some of his appropriations of the *Comédie's* leitmotifs, I suggest that Faulkner borrowed so much of Balzac's design, including elements of its science-, philosophy-, art-, and theology-influenced manifestations and assumptions as he understood them, that we finally are able to clarify some of the Mississippi writer's more obscure intentions, such as what is meant by "avatar," "tableau," "anchorite," "apotheosis," multiple uses of motion and its cognates, and *The Mansion's* transcendent conclusion.

First, I trace the Snopeses' comedic qualities to the *Comédie's* concept of "social species." In a 1925 book review, Faulkner sneered at John Cowper Powys' novel *Ducdame* via its Shakespeare-inspired title, which, according to *As You Like It's* Jacques, is "a Greek invocation, to call fools into a circle" (qtd in Collins 340). Situating Balzac in even loftier company than Shakespeare's, the nascent critic rhetorically opined: "To gather fools into a circle: God has already done that. God and Balzac" (345).⁸ The title *La Comédie humaine* hardly could have failed to emphasize to the young Faulkner the human foolishness of the work's denizens: animated and impelled by forces that Faulkner calls "they, them, or it," Balzac's characters are *les comédiens sans le savoir* (to borrow one of Balzac's titles) or *mariottes* (to borrow one of Faulkner's). Gail Mortimer insightfully calls the Snopes family a "caricature of the processes inherent in Darwin's theory of natural selection" (187), and says that each family member "possesses a single trait that dominates his behavior" (189). Balzac's own "Author's Preface" traces his *Comédie's* division of characters into social categories to late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century advances in natural science taxonomy begun by the Comte de Buffon, and scholarship assigns the taxonomy a determinative role in the *Comédie's* design:

The organization of the *Comédie humaine* is a reflection of the scientific debate about the original unity of the cosmos then being vigorously conducted by Georges Cuvier and Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire. Balzac opted for an original 'unity of composition' and conceived of a series of derivative 'social species' analogous to biological species, with each human social type existing in a characteristic milieu. (Kanes 3–4)

So far as I can observe, avarice is the only definitive Snopesian trait that surfaces in some of the *Comédie's* ambitious bourgeois families, but elsewhere among its "circle" of unconscious comedians we find so many of the activities and traits that animate individual Snopeses and render most of them lower-class versions of Balzac's "social species" that the question of over-determination dissolves.

So far as I know, Balzac's uses of "Caesar's wife," unlike Faulkner's, never reference noble bastardy, which belongs to Balzac and Faulkner's genealogy, hermeticism, and evolution leitmotifs. Illegitimacy and its implications were not recurrent literary fare in 1830s and 1840s France or 1920s and 1950s America, but the *Comédie's* heraldic bars sinister⁹ denote noble illegitimacy and, as we will see, Faulkner's Januarius Jones claims one for himself in *Soldiers' Pay* and Linda Snopes converts hers to legitimacy in *The Mansion*. The revelation of I.O. Snopes' bigamy in *The Hamlet* complicates an already comically-indeterminable Snopes genealogy and probably was influenced by the *Comédie's* "A Second Home" (1830), in which a wife's morbid religiosity drives her patrician husband to a plebeian woman with whom he has a bigamous family. The best gloss on this Faulknerian borrowing is Balzac's own title, "Une Double Famille."¹⁰ I.O.'s bigamy also may have been influenced by the highborn but caddish M. de la Chanterie's in "The Seamy Side of History."

Cohen convincingly details Flem Snopes' resemblance to several of the *Comédie's* "misers, usurers, and financiers" (331–336), and another resemblance is Flem's exercise of nepotism. Until his discovery of respectability, the chief Snopes incrementally inserts his "cousins" into the economies of Frenchman's Bend and then Jefferson. The miserly banker Pierre Graslin's hiring practices, in the *Comédie's* "The Country Parson,"¹¹ predict the younger Flem's: "He chose his [bank] clerks from his family circle" (6:21). While nepotism is predominately a tool of the *Comédie's* nobility (it was one of the genealogy-related practices that the Revolution meant to supplant with a meritocracy), "The Peasantry" involves several middle-class and *nouveaux riches* arrogations of it, including two that generally suggest *Sanctuary* and *The Mansion's* politician and "constable" Clarence Snopes and *The Hamlet's* schoolmaster I.O. Snopes, respectively: "The united efforts of both deputies [i.e., legislators] . . . had successfully created a post of commissary of police and filled it. The elder Sibilet's second son had the appointment. Sibilet's eldest daughter had married M. Hervé, a schoolmaster; within a year. . . . Ville-aux-Fayes received the boon of a headmaster of a grammar school" (18:166).

Although there are numerous instances of voyeurism in Balzac's work, Byron Snopes' peeping in Faulkner's *Flags in the Dust* seems to be inspired by incidents in the *Comédie's* epistolary "Letters of Two Brides": Baron Macumer twice hides in a tree ("perched like a squirrel") and once atop the walls of a house in order to observe Louise de Chaulieu through her bedroom window (22:215, 218, 234). Unlike Faulkner's Narcissa Benbow, Chaulieu detects her admirer, who then uses a hollow tube to "blow" her

a love letter (215). After claiming that she burned the Baron's first letter—"it was not fitting that I . . . should read it" (216)—Chaulieu pores over succeeding ones. In Faulkner's "There Was a Queen," Narcissa admits that she lied when she told Miss Jenny that she would burn the first anonymous letter that she received and also admits to having received ten more (*Collected Stories* 739). It seems likely that "Two Brides" also influenced Byron's theft of his own letters to Narcissa: testing his love, Chaulieu allows the Spanish grandee to take home what she claims is a letter from her friend (22:200) but later implies that the letter was stolen and demands its return (223). Macumer returns the letter "stained" with his tears (223); tear-stained letters betray the frosty Narcissa's repressed animal desire in "There Was a Queen" (*Collected Stories* 739).

Balzac and Faulkner's contemporaries sometimes objected to the writers' subject matter; in Balzac's case, objectors once included government censors (Robb 106–107). Readers believed that they had reason to protest. Like bigamists and voyeurs, pornographers were not stock characters in early nineteenth- or twentieth-century fiction, but the *Comédie's* motion-stasis leitmotif includes parodies of artists and art that briefly and somewhat daringly involve them. In "A Distinguished Provincial at Paris,"¹² Lucien Chardon attempts to discount some notes with a usurious pawnbroker and pornographer named Samanon (13:307), and in "César Birotteau," the miserly landlord Molineux scathingly mentions an "artist" tenant who creates "obscene drawings! and the police tolerated it; nay, they were made with the connivance of the police" (15:92). Faulkner parodies and otherwise employs artists and art in *Mosquitoes*, *Elmer*, *Wild Palms*, "Artist at Home," and *The Mansion*, but also in *The Town*, in which beret-sporting Montgomery Ward Snopes poses as a photographer as he surreptitiously purveys pornography while apparently under the protection of "night marshal" G. C. Winbush (154). I have no reason to question John Cullen's recollection of an Oxford photographer who "got into trouble by selling lewd pictures" (77) or Ben Wasson's memory of a Hollywood bookstore owner who would "produce" a book of pornography for "those he knew well" (140), but pornographers' appearances in the *Comédie* and in Faulkner's *Elmer* and Snopes trilogy are atypical enough, historically, to warrant notice here. And they present the first of several parallels I will mention between Balzac's fiction and Faulkner's life.

The narrator of "Louis Lambert"¹³ identifies a component of the *Comédie's* motion-stasis leitmotif as "the Word, the Logos" (21:266–267; cf. 158–159), which is a Heraclitean and Judaic concept that Balzac incorporates into his eclectic synthesis of Plato's divided line continuum;

Descartes's observation that language separates humans from other animals suggests itself as an influence as well. Among the Word's many incarnations are historical references such as "Caesar's wife," the devices (or mottos) on coats of arms, and proverbs. The latter directly influenced Faulkner's characterization of I.O. Snopes. Catherine Denham Holmes has traced I.O.'s fractured proverbs to Cervantes' Sancho Panza (87), but while Panza's proverbs quite possibly influenced the *Comédie's*—Balzac admired Cervantes—I now believe that I.O.'s "fracturing" derives directly from the *Comédie's* stasis or art leitmotifs. Proverbs permeate the *Comédie* to such an extent that a prohibitively lengthy note would be required to give even a representative sampling. One example is the upwardly-mobile César Birotteau's lofty assertion that "punctuality" is "the courtesy of kings" (15:77), a phrase that I.O. jumbles in *The Town* (253). The probable inspiration for most of I.O.'s proverbs is the artist Léon de Lora (a.k.a. Mistigris) who, in the *Comédie's* "A Start in Life,"¹⁴ almost incessantly spouts proverbial transpositions and puns. Balzac's narrator explains: "At that time there was in the Paris studios a mania for distorting proverbs. It was considered a triumph to hit on some change of letters or some rhyming word which should suggest an absurd meaning, or even make it absolute nonsense" (19:254). After noting the difficulty of translating French epigrams that are, moreover, intentionally garbled, Gebbie's translator Ellen Marriage does her best to make their humor accessible: "As the saying goes, there is safety in grumblers" (273), "Do in Turkey as the Turkeys do" (276), "Drive nature out with a pitchfork and it comes back in a paint-box" (276), "A baker's children are always worst bread" (282), "All is not old that titters" (287), "Killing two-thirds with one bone" (290), "Discretion . . . is the mother of inattention" (291), and "When you take to your heels you can't take too much" (292). De Lora's travelling companion and fellow artist Joseph Bridau also plays the game: "Paris was not gilt in a play" (254) and "Manners take the *van*" (255). One purpose of De Lora's transpositions is to parody the bourgeois tendency to reduce life's unpredictable motion to static maxims. I.O.'s confused platitudes possess a chaotic truth: they have not hardened into formulaic stasis because I.O. has not achieved a principled and orderly bourgeois existence.

Like I.O.'s proverbializing, each Snopes characteristic is traceable to one or more of the *Comédie's* leitmotifs, which, rather than plot, character, or name borrowings, are the most pervasive of Faulkner's appropriations from Balzac. Forty years ago, Olga Vickery perceptively wrote that the first Snopes novel, *The Hamlet*, is "a study in metamorphosis" (167) and went on to remark the "critical commonplace" that "the Snopeses are, by

and large, associated with animal imagery" (177). Michel Gresset includes *all* of Faulkner's characters in chrysalic animality: "The transition is related to a kind of mutation, or a metamorphosis, which is reflected for example in the writer's penchant for a word such as *avatar* and his interest in polymorphism in general" (235). I agree that "mutation" of the types that inform Gresset's thesis is evident throughout Faulkner's work, and suggest that its inspiration is Balzac's pre-Darwinian *Comédie*, in which the "Author's Introduction" declares that the work's "idea" came from "a comparison between humanity and animality" (*Comédie* 1:xii).¹⁵ I argue that the various strands of the *Comédie*'s evolution leitmotif animate the most obviously bestial of Yoknapatawpha County's human inhabitants, the Snopes family, and an architectural relationship between the *Comédie*'s design and families and Faulkner's work and (primarily) his Snopes family is inherent to the argument.

Geneviève Delattre says that the poet Dante and the scientist turned Christian mystic Immanuel Swedenborg were "perhaps the two authors who enabled Balzac to organize the essential masses of his universe; the works and above all the characters who excite his imagination are almost always those who can take their place in the angelic world where Séraphita soars or the demonic world where Vautrin reigns" (159). Implicit in Dalattre's observation is that most of Balzac's characters move between those extremities. *The Human Comedy* often is held to have been inspired partly by Dante's *Divine Comedy*, the late-medieval synthesis of classical and Christian thought that tracks its poet-protagonist from Hell to Heaven. Balzac applies Dante's upward motion so constantly and variously that it splinters into related leitmotifs; in the *Comédie*, everything and everyone are related to everything and everyone else. The *Comédie* leitmotif that made the most enduring impression on William Faulkner is motion versus stasis, which Balzac represents most frequently with imagery that opposes animality to art, a tension that in turn seems to draw on Plato's conceptions of the material and the ideal (or the changing and the permanent) as embodied in his continuum of cave, connecting divided line, and sun.¹⁶ Prior to Faulkner's *The Marble Faun*, "Black Music," "Carcassonne," *Absalom, Absalom!*'s description of Thomas Sutpen as "man-horse-demon," and "Centaur in Brass" (to list some results of Balzac's influence), the *Comédie*'s "Ursule Mirouët"¹⁷ personifies the animal half of the leitmotif in an artistic metaphor that grafts the beast onto the human and thereby designates animality as a source of human motion: "On seeing Minoret-Lévrault, an artist would have left his place to sketch this country townsman; he was so original by sheer force of being common.

Combine all the characteristics of the brute and you get Caliban, who certainly is a great creation" (8:2). I believe that Faulkner's exuberantly grasping Snopes family was inspired in general by the motion or animal half of the *Comédie's* motion-stasis leitmotif and in particular by the many-branched Minoret family of Nemours in "Mirouët."

Central to the origin and destiny of the Snopes family are the *Comédie's* genealogy, imprisonment, and evolution leitmotifs, which are subsumed in its upward motion leitmotif: in Balzacian evolution the animal becomes human, the human a peasant, the peasant a bourgeois, the bourgeois a *nouveau riche*, the *nouveau riche* a noble, and—transcending the temporal by uniting with God¹⁸—the noble an immortal. The goal of social evolution is aristocracy, which is fundamental to Faulkner and Balzac's work. Faulkner's slave owners are dispossessed by the American Civil War and the *Comédie's* *ancien régime* by the Revolution—at which point many of the latter become *ci-devants*, a word that "in the language of the French Revolution" means "a man of rank, i.e., one formerly such, the Republic having suppressed distinctions of nobility" (OED). Balzac's *ci-devants* and the sometimes antiquated descendants of Faulkner's old Mississippi families share a social devolution. In Faulkner's *The Mansion*, V.K. Ratliff creates the Anglicized verb "ci-devanted" to characterize Flem Snopes' exile of his "cousin" I.O. from Jefferson to Frenchman's Bend (152), thereby giving the Snopeses a mock aura of nobility and readers a clue to the family's French roots. Importantly for my ascending motion thesis, Balzac and Faulkner's social and genealogical evolution at last achieve the metaphysical: when the *Comédie's* noble Seraphita—Swedenborg's fictitious cousin—and Faulkner's peasant Mink Snopes die, they ascend (or are translated) to heaven. Faulkner's uses of the word "translation," his claim to be a Swedenborgian (Blotner 2:1655–1656), and Mink's stellar assumption imply Balzac's influence.

In Faulknerian literary history, the Snopeses are indeed *ci-devants*: their "patrician" antecedents are Faulkner and Sherwood Anderson's socially and biologically regressive Jackson family. Although a revised Al Jackson letter in *Mosquitoes* depicts an "aristocratic" descendant of the populist President Andrew Jackson devolving into an animal, only Morse Peckham and Mortimer have devoted significant space to examining possible Darwinian facets of Faulkner's work in general and the Jacksons' successors in particular. Peckham argues that in *Requiem for a Nun*, Faulkner makes clear "what was implicit in his work from the beginning, man as seen from the perspective of Darwin and Evolution" (11). We cannot specify Faulkner's knowledge of evolution,¹⁹ but his fiction is

replete with passages that appear to have intentional links to the general idea. *The Wild Palms*, for example, condenses animality, aristocracy, and evolution into a yard ornament with spiritual overtones, a “cast iron Saint Bernard with its composite face of the emperor Franz Josef and a Maine banker in the year 1859” (98). Francis Joseph I was the last imperial ruler produced by the Hapsburgs, once-petty German nobles whose inbreeding spawned their empires and their noted facial features, and Darwin’s *Origin of Species* was published in 1859. Perhaps the conclusion to *Absalom, Absalom!*, which invokes what we now call phenotypic variability, is Faulkner’s most unmistakable use of evolution theory; by way of demographic prediction it similarly presents animality and aristocracy as apogee and perigee in an evolutionary circle: “In time the Jim Bonds are going to conquer the western hemisphere. . . . As they spread toward the poles they will bleach out again like the rabbits and the birds do, so they won’t show up so sharp against the snow. . . . So in a few thousand years, I who regard you will also have sprung from the loins of African kings” (378). *Absalom, Absalom!*’s would-be patriarch Thomas Sutpen begins life as a poor white, progresses to nobility, and then is ci-devanted to peasantry. Sutpen’s black great-grandson Jim Bond is mentally handicapped, so, like Benjy Compson (*Lion in the Garden* 246) and, to a lesser degree, Louis Grenier’s terminal descendant Lonny Grinnup, Bond is an animal, a devolutionary state that is an occupational hazard for the inbred aristocracy. *The Sound and the Fury*’s only “sane” Compson, Jason IV, is a throwback to his mother’s lower-class Bascomb family and believes that the higher one’s degree of gentility the greater the likelihood of insanity (286). As motion begins and ends in inanimacy, so aristocracy begins and ends in animality. Seen in the light of general evolution theory and Balzacian animality, imprisonment, and genealogy, a section in Faulkner’s first Yoknapatawpha novel portends and helps to contextualize his seemingly random uses of “avatar.” *Flags in the Dust*’s decadent Horace Benbow recalls the jolting atavistic regression he experienced while attending his first circus:

He raised his head and found a tiger watching him with yellow and lazy contemplation. . . . It was an old tiger . . . and it had doubtless gazed through these same bars at decades and decades of Horaces, yet in [Horace] a thing these many generations politely dormant waked shrieking, and again for a red moment he dangled madly by his hands from the lowermost limb of a tree. (291)

Horace’s “red moment” is a psychosexual reaction to Joan Heppleton (290), and I reproduce it partly to introduce imprisoned animality and to

bridge chaotic primeval origins and the orderly notion of genealogy, including family branching, all of which in Balzac and Faulkner involve unions of opposites.

George Marion O'Donnell influentially argued that "in Faulkner's mythology there are two kinds of characters; they are Sartorises and Snopeses, whatever the family name may be"; the Snopeses "are amoral; they represent naturalism or animalism. And the Sartoris-Snopes conflict is fundamentally a struggle between humanism and naturalism" (83–84). I disagree. Initially in Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha work it is the Sartorises who are animals, not the largely absent Snopeses, but O'Donnell's familial counterpointing is insightful. Any apparent Sartoris-Snopes friction belongs to Faulkner's adaptation of the *Comédie's* motion-as-evolution leitmotif, parts of which depict the French aristocracy as a static and thus obsolescent social species that nevertheless retains cachet enough to generate imitation in a vigorously ambitious bourgeoisie. O'Donnell's polarity actually is an evolutionary cycle, which is one of the Balzacian ideas that suffuses *Flags in the Dust*. In a familial dichotomy that recalls O'Donnell's but is immensely diversified in the rest of Faulkner's work, *Flags in the Dust* crystallizes the motion-stasis leitmotif by juxtaposing the ungovernable Sartoris twins to the passive Benbow twins. The Sartorises embody motion or animality, as suggested by Bayard III's wild ride on Rafe MacCallum's horse and John III's congenial raft ride with a fox that he is supposed to kill (324), of which the latter implies a human who is at ease with his animality, while the Benbows incarnate stasis or art, as suggested by Horace's glass figurines and Narcissa's escapist reading. Narcissa's nauseous reaction to Bayard's brutal possum hunt (273–276) is one of the most glaring hints that the Sartoris-Benbow marriage, while allying families that are, to differing degrees, upper class, most notably is a union of opposites. In Jackson MacCallum's plan to "revolutionize the huntin' business" by crossbreeding foxes and hounds (311; 318), *Flags in the Dust* again foreshadows Faulkner's genealogy leitmotif by prominently implying an evolutionary framework that emphasizes antithetical unions and their frequently conflicted offspring. Assessing the experiment, *Flags in the Dust's* narrator observes: "No two of them [the pups] looked alike, and none of them looked like anything else. Neither fox nor hound; partaking of both, yet neither; and despite their soft infancy, there was about them something monstrous and contradictory and obscene" (319). MacCallum *père*, whose all-male children's fear of women and absorption in hunting seem to predict something of the famous Snopesian "masculine principle" (as well as Faulknerian hermeticism), is disappointed in the animals' progeny and his

own, and readers are left to wonder if the equivalently-experimental union between Narcissa and Bayard will produce offspring as disappointing (321). Faulkner keeps the aptly-named Benbow Sartoris in the shadows, usually, for the rest of his fiction. Our only glimpse of the adult Borry comes in *Knight's Gambit*, where his World War II involvement recalls his martial paternal line but his role in a “hush hush” operation suggests his more passive Benbow inheritance (239–240).

In Faulkner's work male-female relationships so frequently conjoin ethnic, social, and other contraries that they form at least a significant pattern. The social-climbing Caroline Bascomb's marriage to the aristocrat Jason Compson III is an obvious example, as is the Anglo liquor trader David Hogganbeck's marriage to a Chickasaw whose mother considers herself an aristocrat. Hogganbeck's mentally-underdeveloped but technically blue-blooded descendant Boon marries the prostitute Everbe Corinthia. *Go Down, Moses's* genealogy-conscious black character Lucas Beauchamp is one of the most conspicuous results of Faulkner's unions of opposites not least because he is an ideal combination of motion and stasis:

It was not that Lucas made capital of his white or even his McCaslin blood, but the contrary. It was as if he were not only impervious to that blood, he was indifferent to it . . . by being the composite of the two races which made him. . . . Instead of being at once the battleground and victim of the two strains, he was a vessel . . . in which the toxin and its anti stalemated one another. (104)

Like Beauchamp, the children of Faulkner's “mixed” unions are analogous to the hybrid animals produced by Jackson MacCallum's experiment. Faulkner's famous remark that the problems of children are not worth writing about is belied by his own texts: from *New Orleans Sketches* through *The Reivers*, children and adolescents with problems are among the most frequent of Faulkner's subjects. The Compson, Bundren, and black and white Sutpen and McCaslin children face dilemmas that would intimidate many adults, as do the orphaned child Joe Christmas and the bastard Linda Snopes. Even legitimate Snopes children must face circumstantial crucibles: Colonel Sartoris of “Barn Burning” is accused by his father of filial betrayal and wrenchingly decides to run away from home, and for all their feral antics, *The Town's* Snopes Apache children have reason to believe that they must defend themselves in an alien milieu. Reading the Snopeses through Darwin, Mortimer sees, like Gresset, “mutations”—Eckrum and his son Wallstreet Panic (189). Eck is such an atypically honorable Snopes that in *The Town* his genealogy is questioned, albeit humorously (31). After

Eck's death, Wall Street necessarily assumes his family's support, and an impressed Gavin Stevens speculatively implicates Wall in Coriolanus-like (and Balzacian) moral evolutionary processes: "Horse boy, dog boy, cat boy, monkey boy, elephant boy: anything but Snopes boy. And then suppose . . . and tremble: one generation more removed from Eck Snopes and his innocence . . . not horse boy but a lion or tiger boy: Genghis Khan or Tamerlane or Attila" (35).

Mortimer says that each Snopes "suggests a bizarre and limited form of adaptation to reality, and [the family's] success parodies the specialization of species" (189), and I suggest that the "social species" component of the *Comédie's* science-inspired design contributed to the creation of the Snopeses. The French naturalist Buffon discussed the possibility that humans and apes shared ancestries; Saint-Hilaire was a morphologist—not an evolutionist in the Darwinian sense—who late in life suggested ideas that appear to have affinities with natural selection; Cuvier invented paleontology and comparative anatomy but denied the possibility of evolution. I am not aware of scholarship that ascribes influence on Balzac to Jean-Baptiste Lamarck, who was Saint-Hilaire and Cuvier's colleague at the Musée National d'Histoire Naturelle (and whose patron was Buffon); *Philosophie zoologique* (1809) sets forth most of Lamarck's evolution theories. Lamarckism most famously differs from Darwinism in its assertion that animals necessarily relay acquired characteristics to their offspring. While scholarship, so far as I know, has not credited Balzac with even an awareness of Lamarckism, the narrator of the Gebbie translation's "Louis Lambert" seems to assert the idea:

The secret of the various moral zones through which man passes will be discovered by the analysis of the animal type as a whole. That animal type has hitherto been studied with reference only to its differences, not to its similitudes; in its organic manifestations, not in its faculties. *Animal faculties are perfected in direct transmission*, in obedience to laws which remain to be discovered. (21:231; emphasis added)

Lamarckism helps to explain the *Comédie's* (or its Gebbie translation's) repeated uses of "avatar"—e. g., its title "Vautrin's Last Avatar"²⁰—as well as Faulkner's, and informs its structuring mechanism of recurring characters, which includes those characters' antecedents, descendants, and collateral relatives, as well as Faulkner's. Aliases, elevations to nobility, nicknames (including *noms de guerre*²¹), disguises, impersonations, mistaken identities, and other persona changes most fully belong to the recurring character or avatar segment of the *Comédie's* evolution leitmotif, illustra-

tions of which are the perfumier César Birotteau, whose avatar is Julius Caesar, and the retired flour merchant Father Goriot,²² whose avatar is Shakespeare's King Lear. A number of the *Comédie's* most prominent characters have "real-life" avatars and many are portrayed explicitly as "higher" types. Examples of each are Louis Lambert (based on Balzac himself), Seraphita, the flawed Lucien Chardon (later, the noble de Rubempré), Dr. Benassis, Mlle. des Touches (based on George Sand), Napoleon, Dr. Despleins (whose name Faulkner punningly uses in *Pylon*²³), Mme. de Mortsauf and, in a diabolical vein, the members of the secret society known as The Thirteen²⁴ and the archcriminal Jacques Collin (a.k.a. Vautrin). To these frequently isolated or hermetic characters, Balzac attributes capabilities, thoughts, ambitions, and emotions that are well beyond the *Comédie's* general population's. Such characters are the *Comédie's* high evolutionary just as Donald Mahon, John Sartoris III, Quentin Compson, Darl Bundren, Joe Christmas, Joanna Burden, Judith Sutpen, Ike McCaslin, Linda Snopes Kohl, Mink Snopes, and others are Faulkner's.

The *Comédie's* dizzyingly numerous fusions of the moving and the static—typically, the work of art that metaphorically quickens, the character who momentarily resembles an artwork, and the tableau—are proffered as Platonic Ideas; Balzac's points of reference here include Pygmalion's statue of Aphrodite, which comes to life. Faulkner's fusions of motion and stasis include the immobile Marble Faun's desire for life, Caddy Compson's figurative depiction as a living statue in *The Sound and the Fury* (203), and Byron Snopes' window-framed voyeurism: they are his most diversified and recurrent borrowings from Balzac. As we have seen, they even encompass the arrested lust of Montgomery Ward Snopes' pornography. An analogous *Comédie* blending that helps to explain Faulkner's intentions regarding the Snopeses is the pictographic animal-, human-, and inscription-festooned coat of arms. In the *Comédie*, an escutcheon is a badge of social evolution that artistically integrates the Word (the escutcheon's device, or motto) with the idea of nobility, which is depicted as avatar (animal) transformed into apotheosis (aristocracy). Arms became so integral to his massive work that "when the time came to revise his novels, Balzac inserted [his characters'] appropriate heraldic descriptions" (Robb 259). Balzac also employs the escutcheon in *Droll Stories*, which Faulkner owned²⁵ and which appears in *Soldiers' Pay* in Rev. Mahon's library (Faulkner 66).²⁶ In *Droll Stories'* "The Merry Vicar of Meudon," the "vicar" is Balzac's fellow Tourangeau Rabelais, who is recruited to satirize—before the French court—the very notions of human pedigree and its iconic coat of arms. I refer to Rabelais' iconoclastic "sermon":

He met in his path a pretty little shrew-mouse of the noble race of shrew-mice, who bear all gules on an azure ground. . . . It was proud of having been in this world since the Deluge, according to letters-patent²⁷ of indisputable nobility, registered by the parliament of the universe, since it appears from the Ecumenical Inquiry a shrew-mouse was in Noah's ark. . . . For it is certain . . . that a shrew-mouse was in the vessel from which we all came; but the men have made bad marriages; not so the mice, because they are more jealous of their coat-of-arms than any other animals, and would not receive a field-mouse among them. (290)

The *Comédie's* arms approach pervasiveness in their several permutations: they are avidly and intelligently discussed by otherwise passive and unlearned elderly nobles and eagerly imitated by bourgeois and sometimes even peasantry; Napoleon's invention of the Legion of Honor decoration is coveted at least partly because it (very roughly) approximates noble arms, and in a similar transmutation, Balzac occasionally converts escutcheons themselves into merchants' signs, an alchemy typified by the Gebbie title "At the Sign of the Cat and Racket."²⁸ An even more déclassé instance is a crude placard advertising a laborers' tavern in "The Peasantry": "A vulgar gaudy-colored advertisement on the left-hand side of the door announced 'Good March Ale,' a crude representation of a woman with an exaggeratedly low-necked dress, and a hussar, in uniform, strutting on either side of a foaming pint pot" (18:41). Because Balzac proclaims his Royalist sympathies everywhere, it seems probable that Faulkner noticed that there is more than a little cynicism and even parody in the French writer's assigning metaphorical arms to tradesmen and peasants—and remembered.

Escutcheons in Faulkner's writing are few and far between, and half are cleverly obscured in symbolism; directly or indirectly, however, they all emblemize the Snopes family's brutish origins and social aspirations and are deftly implicated, as I show later, in Mink's metaphysical evolution. Faulkner's most obvious coat of arms is his first: questioned about his origin, *Soldiers' Pay's* orphan Januarius Jones facetiously claims a bastard's non-existent heraldry whose ridiculous device is "*Quand mangerai-je?*" (248). Michael Millgate observes that Jones' lechery, which is his defining trait, is associated with mythological satyrs (62), woodland gods who combined human and animal features; Jones' spurious orphan's "arms" are clearly and anthropomorphically parodic. Like the Jacksons' libidinous Claude, the oversexed Jones appears to be an avatar of the Snopeses (per-

haps even of the priapic Virgil). Faulkner's first novel also contains his first extended prose use of Balzac's motion-stasis leitmotif: the frenetic Jones rebuts his chilly static name by counterpointing the almost lifeless Donald Mahon, around whom *Soldiers' Pay's* plot revolves (just as *As I Lay Dying's* revolves around the dead Addie Bundren and *The Hamlet's* motion orbits Eula Varner). Mahon's death is the earliest version of Mink Snopes'. Faulkner does not show us the aviator's ascension to Heaven, but as Mahon expires, his minister father wakes suddenly from a nap and exclaims, "Wait, Donald," implying that the demise involves something supernatural (292). Faulkner joins the stellar to the transcendent in Mahon's dying recollection of "the one trophy he had reft from Time and Space. *Per ardua ad astra*" (293), the Royal Air Force motto that means "through great difficulty to the stars." As we will see, elsewhere in his fiction Faulkner expands his arms imagery in order to unite the animal and human constellations—the *astra*—in ways that suggest that Mahon's allegorical surname is tied to Balzacian and Snopesian evolution.

The noble Compson family's Scottish avatars include partisans of the disinherited male branch of the Stuarts, but we plausibly may infer from a genealogy left incomplete by Faulkner that the Snopes family tree, like those of unpedigreed animals, is too muddled to trace even between currently living members;²⁹ readers' only certainty is the Snopes' kinship, which most conspicuously is to unspecified degrees of cousinship. The interlocking stories and recurring characters that help to integrate the *Comédie's* design are echoed by the massive work's interlocking families and their descendants. For inspiration, Balzac had to look no further than the part-Hapsburg Louis XVI and his Hapsburg wife: with European aristocracy and the plebeian Snopeses, everyone is everyone else's cousin. Just as the *Comédie's* interrelated nobles are mirrored by imitative bourgeoisie and peasantry, so Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha gentry are predicted by their Snopes avatars, as illustrated by Ab Snopes' naming his youngest son Colonel Sartoris and—as long observed—by his eldest son's ascent to the De Spain mansion from which Ab was expelled. Yoknapatawpha's preeminent nobility and peasantry initially converge in *The Unvanquished*, where environmental pressures drive Rosa Millard to confederate with Ab in a dead-end scam centering on, symbolically enough, mule ownership, and in which Yoknapatawpha's leading aristocrat, Colonel Sartoris, has killed men so routinely in his own crucible of war and reconstruction that he metaphorically devolves into a carnivorous animal. Although he later changes his mind, Sartoris decides to commit a passive form of suicide by meeting his enemy Redmond while unarmed

(266), much as *Absalom, Absalom!*'s Sutpen goads his avatar Wash Jones to kill him and *The Mansion*'s sated Flem allows himself to be murdered by his "cousin" Mink.

Above, I cite Balzac's symbolic use of Shakespeare's Caliban, who often is dramatized as an animal-human composite, and I observe the trope's application to the animalistic M. Minoret-Levrault of "Ursule Mirouët." In another parallel between Balzac's fiction and Faulkner's life, I suggest that the Snopeses primarily were inspired not by, in Phil Stone's memorable phrase, "the rise of the Redneck" but by the multitudinous and surreally avaricious Minoret clan of provincial Nemours in "Mirouët." Cohen (339–341) has traced Byron Snopes' covert pursuit of Narcissa Benbow (including his letters) and young Bayard's serenades to "Mirouët," a story that contains still other similarities to incidents in Faulkner's work. The original title for the novel that became *The Mansion* was *Ilium Falling*, which suggests subversive animality à la the Trojan horse. Faulkner planned for the Snopeses who survived Flem to attend the banker's funeral in order "to see what they are going to get," or inherit. One young male Snopes "waits till everybody is gone to the funeral and breaks into Flem's house to see what he can find" (*Selected Letters* 108). Ultimately abandoned, the "burgling" in *The Mansion*'s ur-plot evokes not only Balzac and Faulkner's absconders but also the "Mirouët" section that opens with the Minorets' waiting a gruesomely expectant vigil as a wealthy kinsman dies and concludes with the impatient Minoret-Levrault's slipping into his relative's house just prior to the old man's death and just afterward stealing cash and interest-bearing certificates meant for the deceased's goddaughter Ursule (8:168, 174–175).

In addition to their animality and avarice, the formerly "redneck" Minorets' social evolution and genealogical intricacy strikingly predict Faulkner's Snopes, Gowrie,³⁰ and even McCaslin families:

These intermarriages of kindred race in provincial life may be the subject of more than one instructive reflection. . . . This middle class affords here, as in the Swiss cantons and other small communities, the curious phenomenon of the dispersal of a few families native to the soil [i.e., peasantry], perhaps ancient Gaulish [i.e., Celtic] clans, settling on a district, prevading [sic] it, and making all the inhabitants cousins. At the time of Louis XI . . . the citizens of Nemours were all Minoret, Massin, Levrault, or Crémière. By Louis XIII's time, these four families had given rise to Massin-Crémière, Levrault-Massin, Massin-Minoret, Minoret-Minoret, Crémière-Levrault,

Levrault-Minoret-Massin, Massin-Levrault, Minoret-Massin, Massin-Massin, and Crémère-Massin; all further diversified by “junior” and “eldest son” or by Crémère-François, Levrault-Jacques, and Jean-Minoret, enough to madden a Father Anselme, if the populace ever needed a genealogist.³¹ The changes in this domestic kaleidoscope . . . were so complicated by births and marriages, that the pedigree of the citizens of Nemours would have puzzled even the compilers of the “Almanac de Gotha,”³² notwithstanding the atomic science with which they work out the zigzags of German alliances. (8:115–16)

The *Comédie* is saturated with families who, like the Minorets, function partly to parody the exclusively intertwined demographics of aristocracy (while highlighting an essential identity with that species). For example, extended families in “Pierrette”³³ dominate provincial Provins: “three great tribes—the Julliards, the Guépins, and the Guénées—spread over the town like couch-grass on a lawn” (9:28). Other brief examples are forty peasant family members who share a house in “The Country Doctor” (3:85), and “eleven branches” of a provincial clan in “Modeste Mignon” (11:190).³⁴ Cohen has directed our attention to a host of similarities between Faulkner’s Snopes trilogy and *Flags in the Dust* and the *Comédie*’s “The Peasantry,” and there is at least one more. General Montcornet’s seignorial directives are subverted by his disloyal steward Gaubertin, who belongs to a complex of Bourguignon families: “Young Sibilet was related to Gaubertin (his precise degree of relationship would have been rather difficult to trace among the family ramifications of a small town where all the middle-class people were cousins” (18:117).

Cohen observes that the narrator of Faulkner’s *Father Abraham* negatively associates the Snopeses with “Democracy” and utopia (Cohen 339), ideas whose theoretical equivalence (or cause-and-effect relationship) the *Comédie* rejects, to put it mildly. A “Mirouët” passage resumes *Droll Stories*’s Noah’s Ark analogy in order to plunge all of the *Comédie*’s characters into the demographics of a leveling democracy that Balzac deplored: “Every citizen is cousin to other citizens, every noble is cousin to other nobles. As we are told in the sublime page of Biblical genealogy, in a thousand years, the three families of Shem, Ham, and Japhet could people the whole earth. A family can become a nation; and, unfortunately, a nation may become one single family” (8:17). Later M. Minoret-Levrault’s ambitious wife Zélie half-proudly and half-plaintively voices the middle classes’ imitative desire for social transcendence: “The Minorets can show five centuries of good

citizenship. It is as good as a noble pedigree" (8:90). What Millgate disappointingly terms Linda Snopes Kohl's "deracination" is Faulkner's overarching point respecting the Snopeses: they are his translation of a family's becoming one "nation," and in a variation on his genealogy leitmotif, Faulkner makes a noble female bastard who marries a Jewish artist and political activist embody their metamorphosis. In *The Mansion*, an exploding bomb has stolen Linda's hearing, and consequently she speaks in an impaired voice that reminds Chick Mallison of a duck's quack (199). After apparently orchestrating Flem's murder, Linda prepares to return to the larger world in an imported Jaguar automobile (423). Her connivance at Flem's death legitimizes the ersatz Snopes: altering the family's "masculine principle," Eula Varner and Hoake McCarron's daughter is translated into the first true female Snopes, an animal like the duck in whose voice she speaks and the Jaguar in which she leaves Jefferson.

The isolation implied by Linda's deafness, Marxism, and mission to black schools is accentuated by Gavin Stevens' refusal to have sex with the female Snopes, which practically and symbolically renders her a hermit, albeit one who, like a few of Balzac's, chooses to remain in the world rather than to abandon it. Balzacian and Faulknerian hermeticism is a stage of the evolutionary process that bridges social and metaphysical apotheosis; in terms of animality and metamorphosis, it is a chrysalis. Faulkner's many hermits have been traced to Gustave Flaubert's *La Tentation de Saint-Antoine*, a novel that depicts a series of infernal temptations undergone by the famous eremite, but while Faulkner owned Flaubert's book and mentions St. Anthony four times in his fiction (Dasher 406), I believe that the Mississippi Methodist's ascetics derive from the *Comédie's* hermeticism leitmotif, which also mentions Anthony four times, and in which sensitive characters at evolution's frontiers—Balzac's high evolutionaries—abandon the world's motion for the usually-celibate solitude of nunneries, monasteries, country homes, expatriation, or even the Romantic dismissal of suicide. Plato and the Pythagoreanism that influenced him probably underlie Balzac's pilgrim souls, and I have suggested Judeo-Christian scripture as a source as well (Horton 77, note 3), but numerous passages in the *Comédie* point to the eremites of the early Christian centuries as the dominant inspirations for its blending of hermeticism and evolution: singularly spiritual people decamped to the desert "primarily in pursuit of union with God" (Eliade 5:137). Scholars long have remarked Faulkner's sometimes oblique uses of "anchorite," which is a word that so frequently signifies the *Comédie's* (or its Gebbie translation's) hermeticism leitmotif that I cite only a single instance here. Describing a character known as "The Man of

the Vow” in “A Seaside Tragedy,”³⁵ that work’s narrator, Louis Lambert, says, “Never among my visions of the life led in the desert by early Christian anchorites had I pictured a face more awe-inspiring, more grand and terrible in repentance than this”—the face of a man who drowned his own ruinously reprobate and even murderous son by tying him up and then dropping him into the Atlantic (5:370). The prolicide connects Balzac’s genealogy, hermeticism, and translation leitmotifs: the Man of the Vow’s branch of his family concludes with his son’s death, but the penitent and his son’s bodies are envelopes and their souls are the letters, i.e., the Word. In “A Seaside Tragedy,” the son’s bound body is the imprisoning hermetic envelope writ large. Similarly, *The Mansion*’s letter-and-envelope motif, which appears in each of Faulkner’s novels, foreshadows Mink’s death and assumption.

Hermeticism for the Snopeses commences, understatedly, in “Barn Burning,” the initial story in a collection that concludes with the metaphysical section title “Beyond.” In “Barn Burning,” the awe-struck but hungry Col. Sartoris Snopes stands in the hub of sharecropper desire and imprisonment, the country store, and fleetingly imagines that he can smell the contents of “hermetic [i.e., canned] meat” (*Collected Stories* 3). In *The Mansion* Snopesian hermeticism culminates in devolutionary nadir and evolutionary apotheosis, and thus recalls Delattre’s implication that the demonic and angelic border the *Comédie*’s universe. Flem’s ascendant motion isolates the impotent and therefore celibate parvenu inside the noble De Spain’s “ancestral halls,” where he is murdered. Critics long have observed that *The Hamlet*’s “Ratiff’s Dream” section metaphorically attributes Flem’s success to a Faustian pact with Satan, and I have suggested that Flem and his cousin Byron were inspired by an absconding bank cashier who contracts with the devil in the *Comédie*’s “Melmoth Reconciled” rather than by Faulkner’s absconding maternal grandfather (Horton 75–77). It follows that the chief Snopes’ death intimates a retrograde motion: a return to hell. For Flem and Sarty’s “cousin” Mink, however, prison plays the hermetic desert’s purgative role by preparing him for heaven. Even before leaving prison, the celibate Mink begins to pierce his cocoon—his hermetic envelope—by revealing his “real” name, M. C. Snopes (88),³⁶ by becoming a Christian, and by developing a commensurate humility.

The eremitic practices of sexual abstinence and periodic fasting were meant to reroute earthly desire into spiritual channels, and this allowed Balzac to extend his genealogical evolution leitmotif into the metaphysical. One of the *Comédie*’s clearest examples of sexual and spiritual confluence is Louis Lambert. The idea of his impending marriage propels the exquis-

itely sensitive Lambert into a semi-catatonic state in which his body exists on earth while his consciousness dwells in heaven (21:257; 262–265)—a semi-translation that inspired Donald Mahon's semi-catatonic state in Faulkner's *Soldiers' Pay*. However, translation never occurs literally in the *Comédie* (in the sense of a character's being bodily transported to heaven while still alive, as were the biblical Enoch and Elijah³⁷), although in the Gebbie translation Seraphita's cousin Swedenborg's death is referred to, metaphorically, as a translation (21:66). A feature of the *Comédie's* design is its stories' frequent thematization of single or clustered leitmotifs, and the heart of its genealogical, hermetic, and evolutionary strains is "Seraphita." As a noble who lives in seclusion, the androgynous Seraphita is a temporal and spiritual *ci-devant* whose suspension between two worlds is preparatory to apotheosis; the character herself says, "I am an exile far from heaven; like a monster,³⁸ far from earth" (21:21). The popularly recognizable source of Seraphita and therefore Mink's not-quite-literal translations is Jesus Christ's posthumous return to heaven. In the chapter entitled "The Assumption" (which excerpts poorly) Seraphita dies and her soul—transformed into a seraph, for which she is named³⁹—rises into and negotiates the Ptolemaic spheres on its way to unite with a Swedenborgian god who emanates and reconciles all, and who therefore is informed by Plato's prime mover: "[Seraphita's friends] saw the source whence the worlds—earthly, spiritual, and divine—derive motion. . . . Each species had its centre in the vast celestial region that is in communion with the inexhaustible and flaming *motor power of all that exists*" (21:148).⁴⁰

The Mansion reprises Horace Benbow's atavistic circus memory and Sarty Snopes' country store hunger pangs in a passage that contains Faulkner's final unambiguous use of Balzacian escutcheons, which, again, visually incarnate avatar and apotheosis as an immutable idea of nobility. In Memphis to procure a murder weapon, the hungry Mink buys a package of animal crackers: a "small cardboard box colored like a circus wagon . . . and blazoned with beasts like a heraldry" (290). The hodgepodge machine-stamped "minute vanilla menagerie" is a *Comédie*-derived commentary on the ignobly untraceable Snopes genealogy, which (by extension) is a humbling but promising one for all of us "poor sons of bitches": the box's illustration of caged animals is a coat of arms for imprisoned but evolutionary humanity (290).

Snopesian apotheosis is more literally realized than the allegorically-surnamed Donald Mahon's. After deciding to run away from home, "Barn Burning's" Sarty Snopes sleeps on a forest hilltop as "the slow constellations wheeled on" (*Collected Stories* 25), and constellations preface his

“cousin” Mink’s transcendent release: “celestial and hierarchate, [they] wheeled through the zodiacal pasture: Scorpion and Bear and Scales; beyond cold Orion and the Sisters” (433). Like Seraphita before him, at *Mansion’s* end the dead Mink is apotheosized (or idealized) by being raised into a cosmos that reconciles immortal opposites, animals and humans, in a motionless yet glimmering equality: Mink becomes a stellar escutcheon (435–436).⁴¹ Doubling as a literary history and evolutionary genealogy, a celestial bestiary in Faulkner’s *A Fable* implies the evolutionary lens through which Faulkner read the *Comédie’s* animal leitmotif, even as it echoes Balzacian arms in predicting and confirming Mink’s base origin and noble destiny:

Passion is ephemeral (which was why they had never found any better name for it, which was why Eve and the Snake and Mary and the Lamb and Ahab and the Whale and Androcles [and the Lion] and Balzac’s African deserter [and the panther], and all the celestial zoology of horse and goat and swan and bull, were the firmament of man’s history instead of the mere rubble of his past. (161)⁴²

Its ephemerality notwithstanding, passion is recurrent, as *A Fable’s* literary genealogy implicitly asserts, and therefore is a reliable source of animal motion. The animal/human pairings recall the genealogical decadence that is embodied in the regressive nobles Benjy Compson and Jim Bond, and in *The Wild Palms’* animal, human, and spiritual composite Saint Bernard. The implied cyclicity recalls humanity’s oldest explanations of existence, as well as their derivatives (e.g., Nietzsche’s eternal return), but Faulkner’s occasional uses of it were inspired by the *Comédie*—which employs it as a “technique” but finally rejects it as a philosophy (21:101). *A Fable’s* luminous menagerie and the *Comédie’s* circularity recycle the passionate Snopes family (and all of us “poor sons of bitches”) to a primal scene, of sorts: a terrestrial coupling of animal and human. Pritchett describes the socially-ambitious Balzac’s own self-designed escutcheon, a naked woman and a cockerel, as “grotesque” (112), and Robb observes that “the motto on [Balzac’s] own coat-of-arms, filched from the [extinct] Balzacs of Entragues, was . . . ‘Day and Night’” (259). Balzac’s spurious and radically conflicting arms insinuate what his *Comédie’s* “A Passion in the Desert”⁴³ and Faulkner’s *The Hamlet* make grotesquely literal. Thirty years ago, Antoniadis saw similarities between “A Passion,”⁴⁴ in which—contrary to eremitic celibacy—“Balzac’s African deserter” connubially shares a desert cave with a panther, and “the idyll of Ike Snopes and his cow” (Antoniadis 215). Peckham believes that Faulkner’s aspirant humanity is “caught, trapped, and torn between . . . spirit and nature,” poles that recall

O'Donnell's familial ones but equated by Peckham with the Faulknerian expressions "prevailing" and "enduring" (11). Peckham goes on to say that "the whole saga of the appalling Snopes clan seems to be an illustration of the transmutation of sex as a fury of nature into the family, and that in turn transmuted into the fury of the spirit" (13). With a nod to the RAF and a bow to Balzac, Faulkner ends his Snopes material with one of the most distinctive of the metamorphoses that critics have observed in his work, one that is predicted in Donald Mahon's death, and one that bears the device for Faulkner's oeuvres: *per ardua ad astra*.

Because Balzac's contributions to the Snopes family are comparatively easy to isolate, I have focused on them to the exclusion of the great majority of his others to Faulkner's work, but anything approaching a full citation of even the Snopes contributions is prevented by the source material's size and complexity. Balzac asserted the interrelatedness of everything in his *Comédie*, which surely is one of the first primarily secular literary works to attempt what some now would call a Grand Unified Theory of Everything, and what William Faulkner called "a cosmos in miniature." The cosmos' interrelatedness is achieved partly via interlocking stories, recurring characters, and cyclicity, mechanisms that in turn are supported and amplified by intricately interlocking families, which were translated—more than seventy years after Balzac's death—into the Snopeses and beyond.

NOTES

1. *New York Times Book Review* (29 Oct. 1944): 4.
2. Cf. particularly "Balzac and Faulkner: The Influence of *La Comédie humaine* on *Flags in the Dust* and the Snopes Trilogy." *Mississippi Quarterly* 37.3 (Summer 1984): 325–351. Cohen's bibliography appears on pages 325 (including note 2), 326 (including notes 3 and 4), and 327 (including notes 5, 6, and 7).
3. 15:1–342. I omit Balzac's titles when their English cognates are discernible; e.g., "Grandeur et Décadence de César Birotteau" is "The Rise and Fall of César Birotteau."
4. Four of the more arresting: like Caesar's final wife, Calpurnia, Mme. Birotteau dreams of her husband's destruction and warns him of it (15:1–4); prior to his own insolvency, Birotteau is a bankruptcy judge on the Roman-sounding Consular Tribunal (e.g., 218); César's "baldness cure" explicitly is connected to the Roman's baldness; and his daughter is named Césarine as Caesar and Cleopatra's son was named Caesarion.
5. 3:283–365; Balzac's title is "L'Interdiction."
6. 30, pt. I:1–405.
7. Harry Levin mentions the *Comédie*'s "bungled and garbled [English] translations" (166), and Gebbie's edition is one of these. See note 15.

8. Citing the same passage, Cohen made the same point in 1984 (330).
9. A “crass, vulgar phrase believed to have signification in relationship to bastardy and to heraldic differencing” (Franklyn and Tanner 26).
10. 26:277–350. Balzac’s title conceivably was too racy for the translator, publisher, or both. Little, Brown’s Centenary edition similarly translates the title as “A Double Life.”
11. 6:1–284; Balzac’s title is “Le Curé de Village.”
12. 13:1–359; Balzac’s title is “Un Grand Homme de Province à Paris.”
13. 21:156–274.
14. 19:209–389; Balzac’s title is “Un Début dans la Vie.” Faulkner uses the phrase “a start in life” in *Soldiers’ Pay* (14).
15. This page number is incorrect since another xii appears earlier; in Gebbie’s edition, at least, printing belongs to the problems remarked by Levin. See note 7.
16. Although Robb discusses the young Balzac’s intention to become a philosopher (48–50), I am not aware of scholarship that makes this connection.
17. 8:1–256.
18. “Seraphita” 21:1–155.
19. Faulkner demonstrated some familiarity with Henri Bergson’s *durée* concept (*Lion in the Garden* 70; 72) and so conceivably could have known of Bergson’s creative evolution, which is “willed” rather than, as Darwin’s natural selection, accidental. Blotner says that Faulkner and his stepson Malcolm Franklin “discussed Darwin and variations in species,” and that for the Christmas of 1938 Faulkner requested and received from Random House *Origin of Species* as a gift for Malcolm (2 vol. *Biography* 2:979, 1008; 1 vol. *Biography* 397); James B. Meriwether identifies the volume as a 1938 Modern Library Giant edition. Darwin’s books do not appear in Faulkner’s own library, but Meriwether points out that Faulkner would have had access to Malcolm’s *Origin*, albeit later in his career (Interview 3-20-99).
20. 26:15–168; Balzac’s title is “La Dernière Incarnation de Vautrin.”
21. Cf. Pothier 112.
22. 7:1–303. A character named Doriot appears in the “First Complete Screenplay” of Faulkner’s *The De Gaulle Story* (e.g., 164), but in his critique the Free French liaison M. Diamant-Berger complains that Doriot is “the name of a very well known traitor” (392), a revelation that Faulkner perhaps found ironic. The name is changed to Moellens in the “Revised Screenplay” (e.g., 290).
23. E.g., 27. The name of *Pylon*’s city, New Valois, probably was suggested by the *Comédie*’s (and history’s) Valois family, who preceded their Bourbon relatives as the House of France, i.e., were their avatars; Orleans was a Bourbon fiefdom. New Valois’s Grandlieu Street is named for the *Comédie*’s noble Grandlieu family.
24. Michael Millgate (260) suggests the *Comédie*’s collective title “The History of the Thirteen” as a source for Faulkner’s short story collection title *These 13* (“Histoire des Treize” consists of “Préface,” “Ferragus, Chef des Dévorants,” “La Duchesse de Langeais,” and “La Fille aux Yeux d’Or”). The quasi-sinister Thirteen are counterpointed by the altruistic Brotherhood of Consolation in “The Seamy Side of History” (20:1–228; Balzac’s stories “Madame de la

Chanterie” and “L’Initié” are subsumed under the title “L’Envers de l’Histoire Contemporaine”). Faulkner makes notable use of the secret society known as the Masons in *A Fable*, *The Town*, and *The Reivers*.

25. Missing from Faulkner’s *Comédie* is a double volume, 31: pts. I and II, which includes *Droll Stories*, but Faulkner also owned an undated volume of the work that was published by Walter J. Black (Blotner, *Faulkner’s Library* 90–92). I cite a [1928?] edition of *Droll Stories*, also published by Black.

26. Balzac may have written another book that appears in one of Faulkner’s characters’ libraries. *The Unvanquished*’s Colonel Sartoris owns *Napoleon’s Maxims* (18); *Maximes et Pensées de Napoléon* is attributed to J.-L. Gaudy, Jr., but was ghost-written by Balzac, whose own “maxims” are interspersed with his hero’s (Robb 317–318). The Gaudy/Balzac volume does not appear in the NUC’s pre-1955 imprints, so Sartoris’ book could be one of variously-titled translations of Napoleon’s war maxims, in which case Balzac would not be the author. However, Meriwether points out that Sartoris could have purchased French books or their English translations in New Orleans or Charleston. Another *Unvanquished* link to Napoleon is the full name of its character Ringo, “Marengo,” which is a Napoleonic victory that frequently is mentioned in the *Comédie*.

27. Probably a patent of arms, “the document confirming that a petition for a grant of arms has been successful, wherein the matter between [King] and the petitioner is published, and the resultant arms exemplified” (Franklyn and Tanner 252).

28. 20:229–290; Balzac’s title is “La Maison du Chat-Qui-Pelote.”

29. Cf. the recto of *The Town* typescript [57].

30. *Intruder in the Dust*’s backwoods Snopes–like Gowries are “integrated and interlocked and intermarried with other brawlers and foxhunters and whiskeymakers not even into a simple clan or tribe but a race a species” (35).

31. Anselme de Sainte-Marie (or, la Vierge Marie), born Pierre de Guibours (1625–1694). A monk of the order of St. Augustine, Anselme was a scholar of genealogy who published books on heraldry and histories of the royal houses of France and other European countries. Anselme perhaps is best known for his *l’Histoire généalogique de la maison de France et des grands officiers de la couronne* (1674) (*Nouvelle Biographie Générale* 751; *Dictionnaire de Biographie Française* 1426–1429). I am grateful to the University of South Carolina’s Eric Roman for locating and translating this information.

32. “A European social register. A German periodical publication, begun in 1763, it gives data on all royal or titled European families” (*Benét’s Reader’s Encyclopedia*).

33. 9:1–158.

34. 11:1–287.

35. 5:359–382; Balzac’s title is “Un Drame au Bord de la Mer.”

36. Eileen Gregory observes that in *The Mansion*’s typescript Mink’s initials are M.L. (161).

37. Faulkner’s “Black Music” associates its protagonist’s metamorphosis or translation into a faun with “Elijah[s] of old” (*Collected Stories* 799).

38. Reference is to Seraphita's gender, which is beyond the scope of this essay, but Philippe Bertault offers a useful interpretive abstract: "Humanity, personified in the androgynous Séraphitus-Séraphita, has reached the stage of angelization, according to the doctrine of Swedenborg" (77).

39. The name suggests *The Mansion's* concluding words, "the scornful and graceless seraphim" (436), which scholarship logically traces to Milton and Synge—the young Faulkner himself cites the latter (*EPP* 88)—but the similarity between the name and Faulkner's conclusion is too striking to be coincidental.

40. Balzac's knowledge and uses of classical philosophy probably mean that Seraphita's "release" derives from the Pythagoreans' tenet, absorbed by Plato and Christianity, that death would free the soul from the "prison" of the body. Bertault cites a letter from Balzac to his future wife Mme. Hanska: "Swedenborgianism . . . is nothing but a repetition, in the Christian sense, of ancient ideas" (87).

41. I do not know if Faulkner was aware of the expanding universe concept. An African American employed in Murry Faulkner's livery stable is the likely source of Mink's animal name, but a passage in the *Comédié's* "About Catherine de' Medici" contains its heraldic and thus heavily ironic avatar: "In France, and in other kingdoms, not only was the use of furs restricted by law to the great nobility, as is proved by the part played by ermine in ancient coats-of-arms; but certain rare furs, such as *vair*; which was beyond doubt imperial sable, might be worn only by kings, dukes, and men of high rank holding certain offices" (17:48). A related passage involves Seraphita, who owns "a sort of pelisse made of cashmere lined with black fox-skin; the name means, 'warm to the soul.'" Seraphita asks: "Do you suppose . . . that any sovereign in any court possesses a fur wrap to match it?" (21:28).

42. Faulkner takes liberties here. Cygnus (not Leda) is the astronomical swan and Cetus (not Moby Dick) is the whale. I note that astrology evolved into astronomy.

43. 31, pt. II:239–256.

44. Cohen remarks the similarity between the *Comédie* title and Faulkner's title "Idyll in the Desert" (332, note 2; Faulkner, *Uncollected Stories* 399–411). Each story's desert setting belongs to its author's hermeticism leitmotifs. The Gebbie volume that contains "A Passion" is not in Blotner's catalogue of Faulkner's library but Faulkner owned the story in *The Complete Novelettes of Honore de Balzac* and in a lone volume of Little, Brown's Centenary edition of *The Works of Balzac* (Blotner, *Faulkner's Library* 91–92).

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