The relationship between otherness and the construction of space in Balzac’s *La Fille aux yeux d’or* offers a means of reframing the question of disenchchantment. The link between enchantment and space is not surprising when one recalls the manner in which the question of enchantment seems to require that of empire, and the manner in which the question of empire requires, as Said has argued, that of space. For Said, as I demonstrated in the introduction, physical space is the base around which all other concerns organize, and, although he writes in *Culture and Imperialism* on the grander scale of “territories, lands, geographical domains,” his ideas also pose useful questions in the tighter confines of the urban (78). The last chapter showed that Vautrin’s character is poised somewhere between rationalization and romance in *Le Père Goriot*; this ambivalence accompanies an aborted reenchantment of known Parisian space, an incomplete attempt to envision uncontrollable elements in the capital’s own backyard. Moreover, because an understanding of Vautrin is inseparable from an understanding of the Chinese Mandarin, Vautrin and the Mandarin serve, in a sense, to fix Paris within a global geography. Balzac’s apparent unwillingness to give us Vautrin as a fully and uncomplicatedly romantic figure finds a different home in the character of Henri de Marsay in *La Fille aux yeux d’or*, the final third of *L’Histoire des Treize*. The strategy by which Goriot is structured by elements from outside and underneath, is less subtle in the story of Paquita Valdès and her two lovers, as the novelistic work of opening Paris to the
wider world finds more excessive and destructive form.

This analysis of the world and the city in La Fille aux yeux d’or grounds itself in a primary challenge to any exegesis of the novel, namely the apparent stylistic and thematic imbalance between the first fifth and the rest of the text. If part of the task of critical reading is to explore possible coherence in a work—or barring that, to explore the purpose of incoherence—then any examination of La Fille aux yeux d’or must, by necessity, ask the question of how these two parts can possibly function together. There is immense critical unease over the textual rupture, but the text’s two parts do function together if the novel’s central concern is Paris. Otherness is negotiated spatially in the Paris of La Fille aux yeux d’or, and the otherness of Paquita Valdès in particular presides over blatant moments of what John McClure has called “unmapping”; familiar, rationalized Paris is reenchanted at the fundamental level of space and one’s intimate understanding of it. The novel’s disordering of Paris and the effects of this process on the cynicism and rationalization of Henri de Marsay recall the dueling narrative modes of the text’s two sections: the bitter social anthropology at the outset and the foregrounding of the exotic and romantic thereafter. Olivier Bonard has claimed that La Fille aux yeux d’or is “a new stage in the evolution . . . that leads [Balzac’s] style and his vision toward the great novels” (155). This chapter suggests that, by construing Paquita’s otherness as against urban and domestic order, part of the novel’s importance rests on its explicit exemplification of the more subtle epistemological and narrative tensions that organize La Peau de chagrin and Le Père Goriot. La Fille aux yeux d’or is, on this level, a text about a disenchanted metropolis seeking an enchantment of which it remains wary, and which it finally destroys.

(a) The World in Paris: Paquita Valdès and the Ubiquity of the Foreign

The apparently remarkable pairing of what critics have insisted on seeing as two distinct portions of text in La Fille aux yeux d’or has had a complex effect on the reception of the novel. This confusion is most evident in the widespread terminological slippage. Critics have referred to the novel’s first portion as an “essai” (Bordas 340), “introduction” (Tintner 243), “préface” (Dubois 177) or “prologue” (Heathcote 109; Kadish 270; Massol-Bedoin 32; Soelberg 459), and to the second portion as a “roman” (Bordas 340), “récit” (Massol-Bedoin 32), “histoire” (Soelberg 459) or “story” (Tintner 243). Then there are Jean-Yves Debreuille, who splits the work into two “demi-romans” (151), and those who ignore the first portion completely. A few critics have
dealt with the parts together and essayed to explain their coherence: Frølich by focusing on the theme of fire, Diamond by attending to textual excesses and the focus on speculation in the two parts, and Shoshana Felman by linking the class concerns of the first portion to the gender concerns of the second. Soelberg’s explanation is that both the “prologue” and the “histoire” counsel the reader, “Distrust language: see!” (465), a nod to an optical epistemology that this chapter will revisit later. Perhaps because it is simply too obvious, the idea that the first portion’s focus on Paris might forecast a novel about Paris has not gained as much traction. Since my concerns here revolve simultaneously around exploring a possible structural coherence in *La Fille aux yeux d’or* and reading the novel’s articulation of Parisian space, the very Parisian preoccupations of the so-called prologue will weigh in as a thematic center for the entire text. Yet, if this novel is, ultimately, a novel about Paris, it approaches this object in a complex manner that is best understood in the context of otherness and disenchantment.

Otherness and foreignness have already been important to the discussion of *La Peau de chagrin* and *Le Père Goriot*. Seen broadly, the foreign is a pervasive element in Balzac’s œuvre, even if it refers most often to European foreignness. Martine Gärtner has examined Germany’s influence on certain of Balzac’s novels and his narrative style, for example, and Victor Leathers has catalogued the appearances of Spain and Spanish characters in the *Comédie humaine*. Fernand Baldensperger’s exhaustive account of what he calls Balzac’s *Orientations étrangères* extends its range beyond Europe; yet, because of a debilitatingly strict correlation of the foreign and the oriental, Baldensperger’s analysis passes over the foreignness of characters who are either not referred to as oriental or not explicitly visible as representations of the oriental.¹ One of the most remarkable aspects of *La Fille aux yeux d’or* is that, to an astonishing extent, the entire text is determined within Paris by characters who come from elsewhere (Paquita Valdès) or who are clearly attached to an elsewhere, by their birth or blood (Henri de Marsay), for example. Trollope’s *The Way We Live Now* and Fontane’s *Cécile* will perform the same urban consolidation of distant places by importing characters from elsewhere. *La Fille aux yeux d’or* differs in that it draws together, within certain characters, numerous distant cultures into a sort of controlled constellation of otherness that approaches but is not yet an internationalism or cosmopolitanism. This finally provides a stark counterpoint to the apparent focus on Paris that opens the novel and the attention to Parisian space that dominates it. A brief look at precisely how Balzac’s narrative accomplishes this drawing-together underscores the reduction of global distance and rear-

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¹ Jourda falls prey to a different error, essentially cataloguing instances of any foreignness—be it Danish, English, or African—as similarly exotic.
articulation of global space—at the level of character—that complicates Paris in *La Fille aux yeux d’or*.

He may not know it, but Henri de Marsay is the son of a French mother and an English father, “the natural son of Lord Dudley and the famous Marquise de Vordac” (5.1054). Balzac’s narrative uses this hidden knowledge—the identity of de Marsay’s “father, whose name it is doubtful he knew” (5.1056)—to score some ironic comic points, as when de Marsay claims, in ignorance of his own half-Englishness, “We are taking so many things from the English these days that we could become hypocrites and prudes like they are” (5.1071). Despite de Marsay’s joking, however, *La Fille aux yeux d’or* does not rely on the cultural clef between England and the continent to any great extent, as Thackeray and Collins will later do; consider the half-English and half-French Becky Sharp of *Vanity Fair* (1847–48), whose villainy is repeatedly linked to her French half, or Franklin Blake in *The Moonstone*, whose continental education is said to evince itself in Germanic philosophizing and Romanic flares of temper. It is more interesting to note here what the movements of Lord Dudley, his lovers, and his “masterpieces” (as the narrator wryly refers to his scattered children and the “relations that he creates for them everywhere”) say about the increasing irrelevance of global distances in the aftermath of and as a partial result of the Revolution. De Marsay’s unknown half-sister, Euphémie, is the daughter of lord Dudley and a “dame espagnole,” and she is raised in Cuba and returned to Madrid, but comes finally to Paris (5.1058). The distance between Paris and Cuba is, one might argue, required by the novel’s desire to emphasize the late reunion of a half-brother and half-sister who do not know each other until the very end. (It is a recognition gambit of which even Heliodorus would be proud.) Balzac resolves the plot structure by anchoring it to a historical event and deferring first to geographical distance and then to its diminution. This tendency announces, well before the fact, the bundle of various geographical origins, races, and cultures brought into Paris by Paquita and her retinue.

No concept of hybridity can accurately capture the chaotic intermingleings of *La Fille aux yeux d’or*, in which various alterities are often conjoined within single characters and, broadening the perspective, within groups of associated characters. Paquita’s entourage is the best example of this. Surrounding her in Paris, in the apartment owned by her father, are her manservant Christemio and her mother. The African figure of the servant/bodyguard Christemio, “a mulatto by whom Talma would have been inspired to play Othello, if he had met him” (5.1075), is marked off by the narrator as the epitome of colonized peoples, as “a man whom every imagination, from those that shiver in Greenland to those that sweat in New England, will paint by the phrase: *this was an unfortunate man*” (5.1076). The text explicitly
positions Christemio in the colonies before situating him in Paris and finally waffling on his actual otherness by comparing his misery to that of Parisians. These disturbances are bolstered when Paquita’s mother is introduced by Paquita herself as “a slave purchased in Georgia for her rare beauty” (5.1081). The Asian-ness of Georgia could certainly have been a matter for debate, but Balzac’s narrator will situate it thus when describing Paquita later, and Georgia brings further complexity to the picture of Paquita’s origins and what they signify in Paris. Paquita is, the narrator points out, a “beautiful creature tied to the houris of Asia by her mother, to Europe by her education, to the tropics by her birth” (5.1093). Add to these details the mysterious letters that Paquita receives from London, and she becomes a nexus of geographical instability, a novelistic embodiment of the world’s arrival in and confounding of Paris. I have already mentioned Balzac’s conflation of the “oriental” and the “foreign,” and Baldensperger’s chief example of this tendency is the depiction of Paquita in La Fille aux yeux d’or (10). The narrative indecision here recalls the ambivalence in La Peau de chagrin’s depiction of the Magic Skin as engraved alternately in Sanskrit and Arabic, a testament to the idea that general foreignness and not any cultural specificity may have mattered most to Balzac. What is accidental in the regional incertitude of La Peau de chagrin, though, is apparently methodical in La Fille aux yeux d’or, where great care is taken to highlight the many sources of Paquita Valdès. Sharp-ley-Whiting asserts that “the situating of Paquita is somewhat frustrated by a fluid Balzacian cartography that traverses countries (France, Spain, Cuba, England, and Georgia) and cultures” (44), but the frustration itself is important; the difficulty in situating Paquita is the main point. Moreover, if Paquita represents a site of cultural mixture and cartographical confusion that has come to rest in Paris, she opens up a connection between the text’s two parts which critics have not considered. Paris, too, is marked off by the narrator as a site of mixture, in terms alternately colonial and commercial, when the prologue describes the “commerçants” of Paris, the “petty bourgeoisie . . . that spreads its hands over the Orient, takes from there shawls disdained by the Turks and the Russians; harvests from as far away as the Indies” (5.1045). The capital of the nineteenth century appears as the world’s center, “the head of the globe, a brain bursting with genius that leads human civilization” (5.1051). This suggests a point of contact between the narrator’s descriptions of Paquita, who literally represents much of the outside world, and the space of Paris in relation to the outside world, hinted at in the first pages.

Yet neither the introduction to nor the narrative of Paquita and Henri is primarily concerned with this outside world. The focus here is Paris and what happens to it when distances between periphery and center decrease, and when traffic between the domestic and the exotic becomes almost mundane,
commercialized, rationalized. *La Fille aux yeux d’or* recognizes this problem early and tests the possibility of reversing the process. If Paris represents, as the narrator suggests it does, “Nécessité,” then the presence of Paquita offers the possibility of contingency,2 of indeterminacy, perhaps what Sharpley-Whiting calls “fluidity” when speaking of Balzac’s cartography. Indeed, the fluidity here, in the introduction and origins of Paquita and the depictions of Paris’s reach into the world, is analogous to a larger, more fundamental enactment of cartographical uncertainty. Having based its notion of alterity on ideas of distance and space, *La Fille aux yeux d’or* uses Paquita and uses Henri’s attempts to access her in order to unmap the metropolis, ushering in elements of mystery that the novel’s bitter preface assures us have been effaced by the rationalizing powers of post-Revolutionary global commerce. The narrative consequences of the unmapping reveal a text finally at odds with its own efforts at reenchantment and uncomfortable with the increased profile of the world within the metropolitan center. Trollope echoes this discomfort in the face of the foreign throughout the 1860s and 1870s, while Fontane’s Berlin novels phrase the dilemma differently, pondering instead the possibility that the rationalized metropolis is beyond saving, even by the enchanted exotic.

(b) Unmapping Paris: The Space of Enchantment

I thought of the eyes of a researcher who doesn’t want to discover anything but wants, rather, to make something unknown, to pace off and enlarge the realm of the unknown.

—Peter Handke, *Repetition*

Andy Horowitz, one of McCandless’s friends on the Woodson High cross-country team, had mused that Chris “was born into the wrong century. He was looking for more adventure and freedom than today’s society gives people.” In coming to Alaska, McCandless yearned to wander uncharted country, to find a blank spot on the map. In 1992, however, there were no more blank spots on the map—not in Alaska, not anywhere. But Chris, with his idiosyncratic logic, came up with an elegant solution to this dilemma: He simply got rid of the map. In his own mind, if nowhere else, the *terra* would thereby remain *incognita*.

—Jon Krakauer, *Into the Wild*

2. Warning’s chapter, “Chaos und Kosmos: Kontingenzbewältigung in der Comédie Humaine,” holds that Balzac’s overall project seeks to minimize chance (35–76). Chance might seem problematic in a realist project, but I am suggesting here a more sustained tension between necessity and contingency, just as there is a more sustained tension between disenchantment and romance than traditional understandings of realism allow.
The prolific critical attention to Balzac’s painstaking recreation of nineteenth-century Paris, from Friedrich Engels and Lukács to Jeannine Guichardet and Christopher Prendergast, has often focused on his mimetic exactitude and its perfect relevance to typical understandings of literary realism as mimetic exactitude. Guichardet and Prendergast especially have addressed Balzac’s vision of Paris as city but largely divorced it from the imperial apparatus of which Balzac makes it an integral part. *La Fille aux yeux d’or* specifically inserts Paris within a global network of empire and commerce, and its position in this framework both enables and enriches the production and disturbance of Parisian space in the novel. If Franco Moretti is right to claim, in *Atlas of the European Novel*, that the need for the colonies in the western European novel has more to do with narrative necessity than with historical-economic veracity, then *La Fille aux yeux d’or* presents a new possible perspective on the nearness of the colonies to the metropolitan center.

Scholars have, however, been primarily preoccupied with elaborating Paris in isolation (or, in the case of Nicole Mozet, Paris in relation to the provinces), and Guichardet, Prendergast and David F. Bell have written at length on the ordering of Parisian space in Balzac’s texts. Guichardet leans on the idea of Balzac as an archeologist, bringing coherent narrative to scattered aspects of the city, as if ordering ancient ruins. The cataloguing of Paris commences in earnest quite early, as Prendergast points out in *Paris and the Nineteenth Century*. He quotes Maxime du Camp who, already with a hint of disenchantment, wrote “in the later part of the century . . . that never before had the city been so minutely described, monitored, surveyed, classified, generally ‘cleaned’ up taxonomically as well as practically: ‘It [Paris] is registered, catalogued, numbered, surveilled, lit [éclairé], cleaned, directed, cared for, administered, arrested, judged, imprisoned, interred’” (2). The vocabulary here is telling, and especially in the context of Balzac’s novels; du Camp’s choice of words repeatedly hints at a dark story of bureaucratization (“enregistré,” “administré”), legal intervention (“arrêté,” “jugé”), and the reduction of mystery (“éclairé”), all of which have served to imprison and bury Paris. Prendergast later mentions Parisian planner Georges-Eugène Haussmann in the mid 1840s and the lament of a disciplined and managed city from which all surprise had been stripped; and Alfred de Vigny, who, in 1844, calls public transportation a “silent and cold calculation” (quoted on 10–11). Balzac articulates these same sentiments earlier in the century, and they anchor my reading here of this important stage in the *Comédie humaine*.

Balzac’s Paris in the 1830s is, like that of Haussmann and Vigny, a city being modernized, for better and worse. In *Real Time: Accelerating Narrative from Balzac to Zola*, Bell argues that technological advances and
population growth in the nineteenth century fundamentally altered western European culture’s perception of space, time, and, by extension, distance. He postulates that “there was a growing sense of speed—in both the movement of people and the conveying of messages—before the extensive development of the railroad in the 1840s and 1850s in France” (1).\(^3\) As an investor in transportation projects in the 1830s, Balzac knew railways, and he registered the acceleration of life (Robb 139). Biographer Graham Robb writes that, “in the seemingly quiet residential areas of Paris, Balzac estimates the speed of interesting rumour at about 9 m.p.h. When the Duc de Berry was assassinated on the steps of the Opéra in 1820, the news spread to the heart of the Île Saint-Louis in ten minutes” (52). Reading a passage from Dickens’s *Oliver Twist* (1837), Bell introduces the idea that punctuality and regularity in public transport (here stagecoach lines) had become expected and even demanded before train schedules were normalized.\(^4\) Bell points out that the criminal Sikes, after committing murder in London, is dogged by “the pursuit organized by the quick dissemination of information about the crime and about Sikes himself” (3). The scene as read does indeed demonstrate that fast transport was becoming a commonplace, but it also says something important—and new—about the city that complicates Bell’s case for the increasing connectedness and organization of urban space. Sikes returns to London, Bell writes, because there “he believes he has a better chance to hide than he does in any village along the stagecoach line.” (Similarly, Mr. Bennet in Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice* [1813] concludes that Lydia and Wickham must be in London, because, he asks, “where else can they be so well concealed?” [227].) Turning to Balzac’s Vautrin, then, Bell renders the mysterious neighbor of Goriot and Rastignac instead as a master cartographer who has “thoroughly explored” and theorized the connection both between and within the city and the pension (72). If the previous chapter has demonstrated the dual nature of Vautrin between rationalization and mystery, though, a careful reading of *La Fille aux yeux d’or* can similarly complicate the idea of a relentlessly ordered Paris. The familiar city, in this novel, does not stay familiar.

The novel’s first portion repeatedly gestures toward disenchantment in Paris and often does so within the context of a materialism or empiricism that recalls the collection of curiosities in *La Peau de chagrin.* “À Paris,” the

\(^3\) As Bell himself points out, his point here feels analogous to David Harvey’s notion of compressed postmodern space and time. While the specifics are clearly different, this is another point—along with McClure’s on “unmapping”—at which the nineteenth-century novel first explores terrain that has been seen by critics as unique to postmodern writing. See Bell 8–9.

\(^4\) This observation is problematic. In Anthony Trollope’s *The Duke’s Children* (1880), for example, we learn that punctuality was precisely *not* expected by public transport; Lord Gerald, having missed his train by counting on its departing late, complains, “Who on earth would have thought that they’d have been so punctual? They never are punctual on the Great Eastern” (140).
narrator complains, “no sentiment can resist the burst of things,” and even basic passions like “l’amour” and “la haine” have been debased (5.1040). The narrator’s discussion of the Parisian worker, “le prolétaire,” describes “an existence where thought and movement combine less for the purpose of throwing joy in than for the purpose of regularizing the action of sorrow” (5.1042; emphasis mine). The business world is depicted similarly, in the disenchanted vocabulary of weights and measures: “At each moment, the man of money weighs the living, the man of contracts weighs the dead, the man of the law weighs conscience. Obligated to speak unceasingly, everybody replaces the idea with the word, sentiment with the sentence, and their soul becomes a larynx” (5.1047). The reduction of ideas and feelings to embodied language, of the soul to a physical organ, provides a stark and concrete image of Entzauberung. These images are not, however, restricted to the opening, pseudo-anthropological salvoes of the novel. Later, as Henri and his sidekick Paul de Manerville converse in Paul’s apartment, discussing Henri’s progress in his pursuit of Paquita, a pleasantly surprised Henri remarks, “I’ve ended up finding in this Paris an intrigue accompanied by serious circumstances, major perils” (5.1077). Henri incorrectly goes on to claim, though, that the romance is done: “Now that I know that this beautiful girl, this masterpiece of nature is mine, the adventure has lost its spice” (5.1078). In positioning himself as the conqueror of a woman who represents what is “de la nature,” Henri invokes again his being an agent of the very disenchantment that the book’s introduction adduces. Henri’s arrival in La Fille aux yeux d’or highlights this persuasively.

Here, as in Le Père Goriot, where Rastignac puts to Bianchon the dilemma of the Mandarin, public gardens (in Goriot, the Luxembourg Gardens, in La Fille aux yeux d’or, the Tuileries) are a site for the introduction of narrative complication with distinctly violent and colonial undertones. The scene begins with a transition from the narrator’s generalizing diatribe against Paris into a narrowing of focus on Henri:

Quod erat demonstrandum, that which was to be demonstrated, if one may be permitted to apply scholastic formulae to the science of manners [la science des moeurs].

Upon one of those fine spring mornings, when the leaves, although unfolded, are not yet green, when the sun begins to gild the roofs, and the sky is blue, when the population of Paris issues from its cells to swarm along the boulevards, glides like a serpent of a thousand coils through the Rue de la Paix towards the Tuileries, saluting the hymeneal magnificence which the country puts on; on one of these joyous days, then, a young man as beautiful as the day itself, dressed with taste, easy of manner—to let out the secret he was a love-child, the natural
son of Lord Dudley and the famous Marquise de Vordac—was walking in the
great avenue of the Tuileries. (5.1054)

Bordas has argued that this transitional moment is a “quite visible” “suture
point” between introduction and narrative (340) but that what dominates
finally is “the permanent instability of a hesitation between two récits, two
styles, two meanings” (344). This stylistic hesitation frames an epistemologi-
cal duel to be treated later in more depth, but the passage cited above should
show that Balzac’s narrator is precisely not pushing two unrelated bodies
of text together; rather, he is slowly inserting a specific character into the
Parisian world he has just laboriously created during the introduction, as a
means of testing his hypotheses about Paris. The idea that this transition is a
slow and careful one is bolstered when one recalls the narrator’s early con-
tention that “To the youthful beauty of English blood they [the young people
of Paris] unite the firmness of southern traits, the French spirit” (5.1053). In
this blend of English and French, the narrative is already preparing us before
the fact for the introduction of the half-French, half-English Henri. Despite
the syntactic break ushered in by the “Or” that commences the first sentence
of the story of Henri, this is a gradual shift from hypotheses to case study,
and there is even an occasional return, during the narrative, to the anthropo-
logical tone of the introduction (see 5.1059–61). Importantly, the testing of
these hypotheses on the disenchantment of Paris will require the introduc-
tion of an Other, Henri’s exotic love interest.

Like Vautrin, Henri enters the story as a paradoxical figure, simultane-
ously an agent of disenchantment and a cutting romantic figure, an “Adonis”
(5.1054). Disenchantment here takes the distinct shape of pedagogically
methodical secularization, and its importance to Henri’s character and to
his pursuit of Paquita must not be underestimated. In perfect keeping with
Balzac’s tendency to distinguish between religious faith and the social insti-
tution of religion, Henri’s formation comes at the hands of an abbé who
schools the youngster in worldliness rather than otherworldliness.

He taught the child in three years what he might have learned at college in ten.
Then the great man, by name the Abbé de Maronis, completed the education of
his pupil by making him study civilization under all its aspects: he nourished
him on his experience [expérience], led him little into churches, which at that
time were closed; introduced him sometimes behind the scenes of theatres,
more often into the houses of courtesans; he dismantled [démonta] human emo-
tions for him one by one; taught him politics in the drawing-rooms, where they
simmered at the time, enumerated to him the machinery of government, and
endeavored out of attraction towards a fine nature, deserted, yet rich in promise, to virilely replace a mother. (5.1055)

Henri is molded, therefore, into precisely the sort of Parisian critiqued in the book’s opening pages. Beset by “ennui” at the ease of his romantic conquests, Henri approaches Paquita as a chance for adventure and romance (5.1070). The narrator explains that Paquita is an inspiration to the imagination, that she represents “the most luminous ideas, those expressed about women by oriental poetry” (5.1066). A romantic target so at odds with the dry and unimaginative picture of Paris that Balzac gives us earlier in the novel ought to fulfill Henri’s desires for enchantment and excitement, but Paquita does not, apparently: “Despite the fact that Paquita Valdès presented him with the marvelous collection of perfections that he had not yet fully enjoyed, the pull of passion was almost nothing in him” (5.1070). After Henri believes he has won Paquita’s affections, the narrator tells us that “he had come, like rulers, to implore of chance some obstacle to conquer, some enterprise that demanded the deployment of his inactive moral and physical forces.” Henri’s disenchantment demands the contingency that the narrator has already connected to the Orient, as against the necessity of Paris.

The narrator provides a series of literary intertexts that underscore Balzac’s negotiation of a narrative mode adequate to the task of capturing both the disenchantment of Paris and the urge for a reenchantment that will be situated in terms of imperial space. The first of these are references to Richardson and Beaumarchais that highlight the uniqueness that Balzac is claiming for La Fille aux yeux d’or. Due to Henri’s ennui, the narrator claims, “to render to him the emotions of a true love, he needed, as did Lovelace, a Clarissa Harlowe,” a woman whose conquest requires prolonged, heroic struggle. The narrator goes on to equate Henri’s friend Laurent with Beaumarchais’s Figaro, but only to highlight the elements of Henri’s and Paquita’s story that are new: “Thus, the living play [la pièce vivante] was more deeply knotted by chance [nouée par le hasard] than it had ever been by any dramatic author” (5.1071). By “la pièce vivante,” Balzac’s narrator means La Fille aux yeux d’or, and this is his preemptive claim to the veracity of the plot, which Balzac would later, in his “Postface de la première édition,” defend as “true in most of its details” before going on to write that “the most poetic circumstance, which makes the crux [nœud] of the story, that of the resemblance of the

5. The word is nouée, one with clear narratological implications (déroulement, e.g.); Balzac is clearly thinking here of emplotment, and defensively pitting the strangeness of his “real” (vivante) plot against the less strange dramatic ones. The word nœud, or knot, used in the following quote given, again shows a relationship between this later passage’s vocabulary and the vocabulary used in the passage that Balzac is defending.
two main characters, is exact” (5.1111). All that Balzac the writer—“un copiste”—will acknowledge as innovation is that he has dictated the novelistic structure of the true events, combining them in a new way; he blames a disenchanted society for his need to do this, just as the narrator links Henri’s own disenchantment to his thirst for Clarissa-like pursuit. “By leveling every condition, by explaining everything [en éclairant tout],” Balzac claims, modern society has made it incumbent on the writer to innovate, altering not the truth of events or content but rather the narrative manner—the form—of their discovery. La Fille aux yeux d’or, though, leading into the next literary reference that impacts the treatment of enchantment, space and otherness (a mention of Ann Radcliffe), will still seek more modest, subtle means of reenchantment.

The narrator’s reference to Radcliffe occurs within a lengthy description of Henri’s initial journey (for so it is portrayed, despite the fact that it is merely a carriage ride within Paris) to Paquita, one of several specific moments of urban unmapping in the novel:

At the hour mentioned Henri was on the boulevard, saw the carriage, and gave the password to a man who looked to him like the mulatto. Hearing the word, the man opened the door and quickly let down the step. Henri was so rapidly carried through Paris, and his thoughts left him so little capacity to pay attention to the streets through which he passed, that he did not know where the carriage stopped. The mulatto let him into a house, the staircase of which was quite close to the entrance. This staircase was dark, as was also the landing upon which Henri was obliged to wait while the mulatto was opening the door of a damp apartment, nauseating, unlit, the chambers of which, barely illuminated by the candle which his guide found in the ante-chamber, seemed to him empty and ill-furnished, like those of a house whose inhabitants are away. He recognized the sensation which he had experienced from the reading of one of those novels of Ann Radcliffe, in which the hero traverses the cold, sombre, and uninhabited rooms of some sad and deserted place. (5.1078)

Massol-Bedoin has insisted that the enigma “poses itself very quickly in spatial terms, and the initial question Who? is displaced, very rapidly, by the question Where?” (38). Secrecy is, according to her reading of it, constructed spatially in La Fille aux yeux d’or, although she does not elaborate on the narrative means toward this. Speed here, the speed of the carriage through the streets of Paris, renders these streets mysterious and incomprehensible to Henri. Rather than confirm the easy connectedness and rationalization of urban space, Balzac’s narrator uses diminished distance as an instance of mystery. Henri’s journey takes him into a different narrative space and
time, and hints at a different sort of narrative altogether, the Gothic. Franco Moretti assures us in *Atlas of the European Novel* that “space acts upon style”—that the space being represented enables narrative but also limits it (43). Discussing *Illusions perdues*, he takes his point further and asserts that “without a certain kind of space, a certain kind of story is simply impossible” (100). Henri’s first journey in *La Fille aux yeux d’or* complicates this formulation. The story here and the problem of disenchantment that Balzac’s narrator specifically invokes and intends to address both seem to require the production of a certain kind of space, and, more importantly, a certain specific style of narrative associated with that kind of space. This strategy is repeated countless times, as the century progresses, and not least in the work of Trollope and Fontane.

The aim of this carriage-ride passage is to render a familiar Paris foreign. It accomplishes this first by unmapping regions with which de Marsay is intimately familiar and then by presenting us with ex-urban and pre-realist literary corollaries. The passage above is not even the starkest instance of this in *La Fille aux yeux d’or*; later, on de Marsay’s second ride in the carriage, he is actually blindfolded by Paquita’s Moorish bodyguard. There are similarities to the first carriage ride, but the context and description are radically different, and the text insists on Henri’s knowledge of Parisian geography even as his journey undermines it:

There was one resource still open to a young man who knew Paris as well as Henri. To know whither he was going, he had but to collect himself and count, by the number of gutters crossed, the streets leading from the boulevards by which the carriage passed, so long as it continued straight along. He could thus discover into which lateral street it would turn, either towards the Seine or towards the heights of Montmartre, and guess the name or position of the street in which his guide should bring him to a halt. But the violent emotions which his struggle had caused him, the rage into which his compromised dignity had thrown him, the ideas of vengeance to which he abandoned himself, the suppositions suggested to him by the circumstantial care which this girl had taken in order to bring him to her, all hindered him from the attention, which the blind have, necessary for the concentration of his intelligence and the perfect lucidity of his recollection. The journey lasted half an hour. When the carriage stopped, it was no longer on the street [pavé]. (5.1086–87)

The tension between Henri’s knowledge of Paris and its sudden unfamiliarity relates to another complex aspect of the novel’s space, one that Massol-Bedoin has highlighted: “A paradoxical place, this Hôtel San Réal: Henri must reconnoiter in full mystery while entering it, and yet it is one of the most
suitable places in the narrative, the most anchored in a ‘realist’ topology” (38). Paradoxically, the narrator has carefully led readers out of the urban without leaving Paris. The ensuing jungle imagery that follows through on the departure from the pavement in the above passage becomes overwhelming, as Henri arrives in a garden where he “smelled the flowers and the odor particular to trees and greenery. The silence reigning there was so profound that he could distinguish the noise made by some drops of water falling from the humid leaves” (5.1087). Fontane’s narrator in Effi Briest similarly relies on the sensory impact of nature—the sound of wind in leaves—to mark a moment of potential enchantment. Beyond Paquita’s cosmopolitan provenance in La Fille aux yeux d’or; her exoticism and otherness are inseparable from the reenchantment of urban space that occurs en route to her. Content, to twist Moretti’s words, seems to act upon both form and space here.

(c) On Seeing and Not Seeing: A Sense of Disenchantment

The smells and sounds of the tropics that inflect the narrator’s description of Paquita’s residence emphasize the text’s empirical sympathies, but vision is the central sense in La Fille aux yeux d’or. If the first carriage ride only prepares us for the greater lengths the narrator will go to in the depiction of the second carriage ride, towards a more thorough unmapping of Paris, the unmapping during this second ride is qualitatively different because it addresses this sense. Henri’s first journey renders Paris unfamiliar through speed and the too-rapid adjustment of distances; the second renders Paris unfamiliar by robbing him of his eyesight. By addressing the reenchantment of the city in terms of first space and then stunted empirical knowledge, La Fille aux yeux d’or opens an epistemological duel that ultimately recalls the foundational questions of La Peau de chagrin and of my larger argument here. The two previous chapters have read La Peau de chagrin and Le Père Goriot as texts invested in but finally ambivalent towards the disenchantment of post-Revolutionary French culture as Balzac saw it, and furthermore as texts anxious to forestall the process of Entzauberung but wary of the means and implications of this resistance. The tension between empiricism and enchantment in this equation is an elemental aspect of La Fille aux yeux d’or as well, and, seen as such, it can bridge the narrative gap perceived between the novel’s supposedly disparate two parts.

What some critics have termed a visible rupture between the first and second portions of La Fille aux yeux d’or is, on closer reading, actually built as a far more subtle transition from one narrative style to another. If the
narration of Henri’s story begins with the paragraph cited above at length (“Or, par une de ces belles matinées de printemps . . .”), and if this beginning signifies a break from the more anthropological posturing of the novel’s opening pages, then how can one account for the similarly anthropological tone of the lengthy description of the youth of Paris, which is given well after the commencement of Henri’s story? (5.1059–61). This, paired with the sly introduction of Henri’s half-French/half-English ancestry mentioned earlier, renders much more complex the relationship between the novel’s two major narrative tones. They must be seen as alternating styles rather than cleanly delineated sections. More importantly, within each of these two separate styles, there is another duel going on, one that reproduces the duel between narrative modes as a conflict between two epistemologies at odds with each other: on the one hand an empirical, scientific epistemology encapsulated here most often by the use of vision; and on the other hand a more fantastic epistemology that sets itself explicitly against and degrades the empirical. In a manner very much like La Peau de chagrin, La Fille aux yeux d’or structures itself around this conflict.

On the occasion of his third carriage-ride through Paris to visit Paquita, Henri’s scientific instincts are, as if counter-intuitively, emphasized by his restricted vision. This time, the narrator explains, he “obligingly allowed his eyes to be covered. Then, with that firm will which only truly strong men have the ability to summon, he brought his attention and applied his intelligence towards guessing [deviner] through which streets the carriage was traveling” (5.1097–98). The lengthy passage that follows shows Henri thinking like a scientist or detective, prizing empirical knowledge and causal explanation to an extraordinary degree. Reflecting on the precautions that Paquita’s handlers take to ensure the secrecy of their locale—driving him in a carriage, blindfolding him—Henri knows that if he had walked to the hôtel San-Réal “he could have . . . picked off the branch of a bush, examined the nature of the sand that would have attached itself to his boots” (5.1098). Balzac’s language here makes Henri emblematic of the desire to explain or demystify through “recherches,” to “éclairer.” Though his ability to gauge the precise location of the boudoir is impaired, his impulses toward its discovery are clear. In a sharp departure from the frantic first two journeys to Paquita, the unmapping here is paired with a calm reflection on the means of charting the route and the possibilities for explaining it. It continues an empirical sense that figures earlier in Henri’s story, as when, for example, Paquita’s address is written out within the narration as an actual, complete address, along with the narrator’s description of the penmanship, “long, slender characters that announced [qui annonçaient] the hand of a woman” (5.1067).

Paquita stands against the empiricism emblazoned by Henri’s approach
to their relationship and to the mysteries of it, but not as its simple opposite. Indeed, the hybridity which Kadish sees in Paquita’s character can be extended to the manner in which she elicits a complex combination of desires for and styles of knowledge. The text is suggestive on this point; for example, an explicit reference to the Girl With the Golden Eyes is followed immediately by a reminder of the important “union so bizarre of the mysterious and the real, of shadows and light, of the horrible and the beautiful, of pleasure and danger, of Heaven and Hell” central to the story (5.1091). The play of extremes here highlights the manner in which Paquita’s character will later be said simultaneously to arouse several different varieties of knowledge: “Paquita responded to this mysterious passion so dramatically expressed in Faust, so poetically translated through Manfred, and that pushed Don Juan to excavate [fouiller] the heart of women, hoping to find there this boundless thought which so many ghost-hunters seek, which the learned [les savants] believe they see in science, and which mystics find in God alone” (5.1101). The tension between romance and empiricism in the above passage is palpable. Goethe’s Faust and Byron’s Manfred both play with the sort of extremes that Balzac hints at earlier in La Fille aux yeux d’or, and both texts are equally concerned with the limits and costs of knowledge. However, even the romantic Don Juan here is conjoined with science, as he is said to excavate, in a very archaeological sense—fouiller—the hearts of women. Paquita awakens, according to the narrator, a desire for extremities that sees religious mysticism (Balzac’s word) on a par with rational science. Recall Massol-Bedoin’s judgment of the paradoxical hôtel San-Réal, which is simultaneously a site “en plein mystère” and “one of the most situable places in the narrative, the most anchored in a ‘realist’ topology” (38). Paquita is problematic for the world of La Fille aux yeux d’or, because she confounds disparate types of knowledge within a text that is already attempting to negotiate between them. The confusion is amplified by Henri’s conflicting longing for romance (obstacles in his way) and attempts to methodically displace romance (his analytic efforts and attempts to divine the location of the San-Réal). A return to the novel’s introduction, with its anthropological gestures, underscores the same ambivalence at work there.

Akin to the opposing energies—empirical and romantic—at play in the narrated portion of La Fille aux yeux d’or, the introduction vacillates between textual strategies easily categorizable as those of science and those

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6. Its inspiration from Goethe readily acknowledged, Byron’s play even structures Manfred’s quest as an epistemological duel: Act I begins with the summoning of spirits in Scene I, and ends with the real-life conversation with the Chamois Hunter; Act II begins with the Chamois Hunter, moves toward the conversation with the Witch in Scene II, and ends with the summoning of the Destinies in Scene III. There are constant, clearly foregrounded shifts between this-worldly and other-worldly knowledges in Manfred’s quest for information on mortality.
of the wholly unscientific. The careful division of Paris into manageable, describable social parts organizes the introduction, with its turn-by-turn elaboration of the proletariat, the world of business, and the world of leisure, as well as the later addition of the world of Paris’s youth. The approach is almost Aristotelian in its depiction, and Linnaean in its classification, of visibly separate categories of being. Yet alongside this scientific, explanatory impulse is a vocabulary inherited from the supernatural, and above all from Dante’s *Divine Comedy*; the classifications that Balzac’s narrator offers are structured as hierarchized circles of the inferno that is Paris. A moment very early in *La Fille* even conjures the atmosphere of Victor Hugo’s poem, “Les Djinns,” published just a few years prior in *Les Orientales* (1829): Balzac’s “all smokes, all burns, all shines” [tout fume, tout brûle, tout brille] recalls the “All flees/All passes” [Tout fuit, Tout passe] that concludes Hugo’s poem, which is simultaneously charged with supernaturalism and orientalism. Prendergast has noted the stylistic discomfort of Balzac’s opening phrasings in *La Fille aux yeux d’or*, claiming that “the fires which consume [Paris] are not just the hell-fires of Dante; the drift of the metaphor is as much secular as theological” (58–59). Prendergast’s analysis ultimately situates the secularization of Paris more prominently, in Balzac’s Paris, than the very public fretting over that secularization, and Prendergast turns toward an important closing image from the introduction—that of a steamboat—to drive his point home. The image is more complex than his reading allows, and it binds together not just the secularization of the city, but also the energies of exploration that contribute to it and that may, paradoxically, offer possible respite from it.

The image of Paris as a steamboat is the final movement of the introduction before the anthropological summation of sorts that combines the worlds of proletariats, bourgeois, and aristocrats.

Thus this city can no more be moral, or cordial, or clean, than the engine of those proud leviathans you admire when they cleave the waves! Is not Paris a sublime vessel freighted with intelligence? . . . The barque may roll and pitch; but she cleaves the world, illuminates it [y fait feu] through the hundred mouths of her tribunes, works [laboure] the scientific seas, rides with full sail, cries from the height of her tops, with the voice of her scientists [savants] and artists: “Onward, advance! Follow me!” (5.1052)

The picture here is an undecided one, and the narrator emphasizes, one page later, that “Paris is essentially the land of contrasts” (5.1053). However, Prendergast argues that Balzac here comes

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7. Like Balzac’s novel, Hugo’s poem also ends with an erasure: “L’espace/Efface/Le Bruit.”
out of the sphere of the organic, the natural, into that of the mechanical and the man-made. At this closing moment, the writing will change metaphorical tack once again. In one of Balzac’s more baroque imaginings, the text places us on the high seas: Paris is elaborately compared to a ship and, in the initial moment of the figure, to its engine... The city as vessel repeats the familiar allegorical motif of the journey, the idea of Paris and its history as an adventurous, discovery-laden voyage. The city as engine, however, has more interesting implications. The engine (‘la chaudière motrice’) is, of course, a steam-engine, and it is an image that Balzac will use on more than one occasion in the Comédie humaine as an analogy for modern society. Science thus returns in the form of technology. (58)

The reading makes its allegiances clear, if the engine motif is “more interesting” than the voyage motif that ought to be inseparable from it. Prendergast goes on to tease the theme of entropy out of the passage, linking it—though not in name—to the disenchantment that Balzac’s critique of Parisian culture elevates as a central problem.

The dual nature of Balzac’s passage is crucial, however. The steamboat certainly embodies the onslaught of science and progress, but it does so within an almost nostalgic allusion to the romance of exploration and within a more troubling glance at the historical outcomes of this romance: the soldiers on deck are described as “novateurs ou ambitieux” and will finally seek a glory that has been degraded to pleasure (“de la gloire qui est un plaisir”) and a love that is only for gold (“des amours qui veulent de l’or”). Pleasure and gold, the two things that La Fille aux yeux d’or loathes the most as the symptoms of Parisian malaise, lurk in even the romanticized aspects of the steamboat motif. This appears to signal, at the same time, a progression in Balzac’s depiction of the possibilities of enchantment and the imagination—or, more properly put, an increased pessimism towards these possibilities—because it recalls the finale of La Peau de chagrin, where Pauline resists the upriver penetration of a steamboat, which the narrator labels an “invasion moderne” (10.294). Even the romantic potential of exploration is coded here, in the steamboat of La Fille aux yeux d’or, as a step toward disenchantment, toward the market-driven leanings mentioned earlier when the narrator situates Paris at the heart of global commerce. The introduction thus prepares us for the novel’s cold, conclusive dismissal of Paquita and any romantic potential she represents. In a manner redolent of the scientists’ dismissal of the Magic Skin in La Peau de chagrin, Paul de Manerville’s enquiry as to the fate of Paquita after her murder is met by a rejoinder from Henri that brusquely reduces the disturbing and almost inexplicable crime scene in the San-Réal to a vague but clearly physical explanation:
“So, whatever became of our lovely Girl With the Golden Eyes, you great scoundrel [scélérat]?”
“Of what.”
“Of the chest.” [De la poitrine.] (5.1109)

Before this, Henri’s exchange with Ferragus has already assured him that “the traces of this fantasy” will be removed. *La Fille aux yeux d’or’s* prolonged ambivalence between the contingencies of enchantment and the necessities of disenchanted Paris appears, at the end, to be at an end.

The removal of The Girl With the Golden Eyes from *The Girl With the Golden Eyes* shares something else with *La Peau de chagrin’s* upriver-bound steamboat: the invasion of the modern as an evisceration of the primitive is depicted in terms of violence against the feminine. The penetrative, invasive steamboat of *La Peau de chagrin* finds its counterpart in Henri’s attempts to chart the course he blindly and repeatedly takes toward Paquita’s hidden dwelling. If Henri and the city of Paris are painted, in general, with the colors of disenchanting science, technology and calculation (for, like Vautrin, Henri is said to “calculate” [5.1094]), women are offered up in the novel as their opposite. This chapter has attempted to weigh the foreign elements brought into the story via Paquita and her entourage, and their significance within and final banishment from the novel. Janke Drent has disclosed Balzac’s likely source for the character and story of Paquita, and it is important that Balzac’s sole addition to the events Drent mentions is the lesbianism of Paquita. However, despite Henri’s immediate, visceral reaction to the sudden and unforeshadowed revelation of lesbianism, the narrative is not content to soil his hands with the blood of Paquita, even though he intends to and attempts to kill her. De Marsay’s half-sister Euphémie removes Paquita from the text without making it necessary for de Marsay to involve himself in such a crime of passion. Henri is permitted to remain the spectator. Predictably, Euphémie is portrayed during this scene as outside reason and empirical knowledge, deprived of sight. She “did not see Henri” [ne vit pas Henri] and is too impassioned “to see [apercevoir] all of Paris, were Paris to form a circus around her” (5.1107; emphases mine).

*La Fille aux yeux d’or* plays a significant role in the overall dynamic of the duel between disenchantment and its interruption. By beginning to think about this dynamic in terms of the burgeoning global market, Balzac
both explicitly registers the advancement of imperialism from exploration to full-blown marketization and implicitly reproduces the process in novelistic form. The results were already hinted at in the discussion of *La Peau de chagrin*, but the thought will bear expansion here. The moral dilemmas inspired by global commerce reappear in Balzac’s later works, but the manner in which these dilemmas arise is transformed as the century progresses. Consider the Alhambra or the “Turkish” woman in Flaubert’s *Éducation sentimentale* (1869). Paquita’s divan is a forebear of these locales, but the mysterious presence of a hidden, oriental chamber in the middle of Paris dissolves into commodity in two ways in Flaubert’s novel: on the one hand, orientalist kitsch recast as a cheesy nightclub (the Alhambra), which Frédéric Moreau derides as cheap and stupid; on the other hand, orientalist eroticism recast as a brothel on the outskirts of town run by a woman named Zoraïde Turc, whose actual Turkishness is seriously doubted by the narrator. Still later, in Zola’s *Au Bonheur des Dames* (1882), the same geographical divisions—between Europe and the outside world—that underwrite Paquita’s potential to enchant are reduced to merchandising selling points in department stores. Balzac’s *La Peau de chagrin*, *Le Père Goriot*, and *La Fille aux yeux d’or* anticipate these developments. They map the moment of a crisis of knowledge and narrative, yielding Balzac’s mode of realism as a negotiation between the extremes of empirical and romantic epistemologies and between the poles of empirical and romantic narrative modes. More importantly, these three novels demonstrate that this crisis is finally unthinkable—at least to Balzac—apart from the concerns of a wide, mysterious world becoming inevitably smaller and increasingly less mysterious.