The third novel in Balzac’s trilogy against unmarried people, La Rabouilleuse (1842), contains one of his most complex genealogies, so complex that one cannot read the book without establishing its genealogical facts. René Guise devoted more than two dense pages of editorial material in the Folio edition to a concise accounting of all the characters, generation by generation (382–84). For my part, I drew several family trees. The complexity of the genealogy arises from the defects of love within the family, and those defects radiate from a symbolic core noxious in its effects: celibacy. Balzac minced no words in declaring his position on this class of human beings. He began the preface to the first edition of Pierrette, which illustrates a similar topos, with these words: “L’état du Célibataire est un état contraire à la société” [The condition of Bachelor is a condition harmful to society] and identified the principle behind this assertion as “la haine profonde de l’auteur contre tout être improductif, contre les célibataires, les vieilles filles et les vieux garçons, ces bourdons de la ruche!” [the author’s deep hatred against all unproductive beings, against bachelors, old maids, and old unmarried men, those bumblebee workers of the hive!] (4: 21). When the social regulation afforded by family is lacking, celibates, those useless unproductive beings who consume without producing, whose jealousy and hatred arise from their false position against society, have a monstrous effect. The harm caused by the unmarried proliferates in this story of domination and submission, of con-
trollers and the controlled, and Money, seen in the symbolic structures of the novel, takes the balance of power over Love. Where one character wastes love on her profligate son, who wastes money, characters maneuver around a misappropriated fortune in Issoudun. “Only money matters,” Pasco observes, in placing the inheritance at the “essential nucleus” of the novel (“Process Structure” 23, 25). Love is corrupted by the manipulations around Money.

Schematically, the genealogy reveals these failures. Extending over four generations, the family tree includes an amazing array of problems: illegitimate births and suspicions thereof; repudiated children, grandchildren, mothers, brothers, and spouses; missing fathers; complicated remarriages; extramarital affairs; concubinage arrangements; phony relationships; and so on. Households of families constituted by error, passion, evil, or untimely deaths are the rule; healthy families simply do not exist. Pasco stresses the significance for this novel of the missing fathers: “Balzac was convinced that nothing but families governed regularly by fathers had the power to control self-centered individuals” (“Process Structure” 24). While across La Comédie humaine, bonds formed by love in the family remain an often unrealized ideal, no novel illustrates this pessimistic condition better than La Rabouilleuse. The genealogy contains and explains the symbolic structures of domination and submission and gain and loss that constitute the central conflict, and the family structure propels the story, built on the twin axes of Love and Money.

Figure 10.1 illustrates the handwritten draft of a genealogy I established while reading the novel, and figure 10.2 a computer-generated version of it, whose clean lines and clear presentation belie the elaborate, messy reality we are expected to follow in reading La Rabouilleuse. The computer’s purpose is to make order out of confusion, which masks the complexity of Balzac’s invention (but makes it easier to follow the story); Balzac on the contrary requires of his reader a willingness to build chaotic facts into structures that must be and remain irregular. The very interesting manuscript draft of the novel’s opening pages (4: 1219–21) shows the extreme haste with which Balzac first couched the family tree on paper. The characters appeared in rapid succession in short phrases, as if to serve as placeholders for the entire set of family relations, fully formed in Balzac’s mind with their genealogical relations. Reading like an outline to be fleshed out with further details, the draft reveals that the intention to build complexity into the family structures was present from the outset, just as it shows the “facilité déconcertante” [disconcerting facility] (Bodin 94) with which Balzac was able to set it down on paper without getting lost himself. One can say that Balzac’s first draft and my hand-written genealogy are analogous; Balzac’s rewriting and the
computer software have the function of making the relations, the lines of filiation or absence thereof, more readily apparent.

The defects in the family tree of *La Rabouilleuse* concern Family, Maternity, and Love.

**Family**

All the families are incomplete. Widowed, Agathe Bridau raises her two sons without their father; she will not consider finding a second husband, which would conflict with her love for her sons and indeed for her dead husband (Agathe, like an Andromaque, “ne pouvait plus exister que pour ses enfants” [no longer had an existence except for her sons] [4: 285]), and she has what Balzac calls the contradictory obligations of motherhood and the exercise of paternal authority (4: 282). Mme Bridau is also frequently called “the widow” instead of by her name. Mme Descoings, twice a widow, is living with her niece, has lost her only son in battle, pretends out of vanity that her grandson Bixiou is her stepson, and is childless by her second marriage. The Hochon couple at Issoudun have lost all three of their children and have reconstituted a sort of family with three grandchildren from different families. Jean-Jacques Rouget marries only to die within months. And marriage to Philippe is a death sentence for Flore Brazier.

Agathe Bridau’s mother’s brother Descoings leaves Issoudun for Paris to make his fortune; in his absence, his brother-in-law, the doctor Rouget, takes control of the Descoings family fortune, which has gone entirely to Descoings’s sister. The brother, having become a grocer, marries the widow of his employer, Bixiou, who has also lost her only son; beheaded during the Terror, Descoings leaves his widow bereft of family except her grandson, the journalist Bixiou.

Agathe Rouget Bridau, daughter of her mother and her father but resembling neither, though loved by her mother and her godmother Mme Hochon, is presumed illegitimate and repudiated by her father, sent away at seventeen to Paris, and disinherited. Her father, Rouget the doctor, maneuvers to give Agathe’s share of her inheritance to her imbecilic bachelor brother Jean-Jacques Rouget. The doctor suspects his wife of sleeping with his former friend Lousteau (which would have made Agathe the half-sister of Maxence Gilet, according to popular belief), and until his death he persists in “sa haine contre sa fille Agathe” [his hatred of his daughter Agathe] (4: 391).

Maxence Gilet, perpetrator of vicious practical jokes in Issoudun, is appropriately enough the joker or wild card in this genealogy. Although
Figure 10.1 Handwritten *La Rabouilleuse* genealogy
Figure 10.2 Computer-generated genealogy
illegitimate, he has an overabundance of putative fathers, so that placing Max on the family tree requires graphic ingenuity and a special kind of dotted line indicating “presumed son of” (see figure 10.1). People take him for the son of Rouget, the doctor (father of Jean-Jacques the bachelor and of Agathe, a man known for his vices), or the son of the doctor’s accomplice in debauchery, the subdélégué Lousteau, Mme Hochon’s brother. In fact, neither one is Max’s father, nor is it old M. Gilet, who was his mother’s husband (both Gilets die miserably, leaving Max an orphan); rather, Max owes his existence to “un charmant officier de dragons en garnison à Bourges” [a charming officer of the dragoons stationed at Bourges] (4: 367), who was a nobleman. The beautiful but unfaithful Mme Gilet financially exploits both of the presumed illegitimate fathers as well as her husband: “Pour procurer des protecteurs à son fils, la Gilet se garda bien d’éclairer les pères postiches” [To obtain protectors for her son, la Gilet took care not to illuminate the spurious fathers] (4: 367). Because people think the doctor fathered Max, Balzac calls him Jean-Jacques’s “soi-disant frère naturel” [so-called bastard brother] (4: 407), putting a double doubt on the fraternal relation—not only illegitimate, but dubiously so. Flore takes advantage of this belief that Max is the son of old Rouget; she lies that Rouget told her Max was his son and claims that Joseph Bridau tried to kill Max to inherit from Jean-Jacques (4: 457). She calls Max “son parent par nature” [her natural relative] (4: 473) and accuses Jean-Jacques of fratricide, because Max is “un garçon que votre père a toujours pris pour son fils! . . .” [a boy that your father always took for his son! . . . ] (4: 405).

Of course the lack of a father is often the intimate cause of disasters, in Balzac. Both Maxence Gilet and Philippe Bridau distinguished themselves in the Grande Armée but get into trouble in their lives because of the loss of their symbolic father, Napoleon (4: 369–70). As Mozet remarks, the unbalanced couple of the old man and the young girl is the exact negative of the couple in Ursule Mirouët, where the doctor Minoret exercises a “maternité scientifique et toute bénéfique” [a scientific and entirely beneficent maternity] (Ville de province 237, 238). Quite like that novel, three old gentlemen, Claparon, du Breul, and Desroches (ancient fathers of three notable actors of La Comédie humaine), constitute the regular society of the two widows Bridau and Descoings in their Parisian solitude, visiting every evening for a card game; but their factitious fatherhood is all that takes the place of the dead husbands, and it cannot prevent the disasters of the Bridau family. When Maxence moves into the Rouget household, Flore behaves like an orphan happy to make a family for herself (4: 401), and Rouget comments that the two of them constitute his family (4: 417): these families are constituted by compensating for what they lack.
Fraternal relations in the family do nothing to overcome the celibate core. “Les frères ennemis” would not quite do for the title of the first part, called “Les deux frères,” but that is only because Joseph Bridau does not return his brother Philippe’s enmity. Philippe rejects fraternal sentiment, in spite of Joseph’s loyalty and care. Similarly, the fraternal relation between Agathe and Jean-Jacques is altogether severed by their physical separation when Agathe is seventeen: “il y avait, pour un frère, quelque chose d’un peu trop extraordinaire à rester trente ans sans donner signe de vie à sa sœur” [for a brother, there was something a little too extraordinary about not giving any sign of life to his sister for thirty years] (4: 358). Balzac blames their emotional separation on la Rabouilleuse. The only fraternal association that functions well is the “permanent conspiracy” of the Chevaliers de la Désœuvrance in Issoudun, whose evil actions define the association as the contrary of the nuclear family that for Balzac was always the foundation of a good society.

Flore Brazier, la Rabouilleuse, is, like Max, an orphan, or quasi-orphan: her mother is dead and her father is in an institution for the insane; her guardian, an uncle Brazier of disreputable aspect, sells her to old Rouget when she is twelve and he seventy, soon after Mme Rouget dies. The uncle sarcastically calls Rouget “digne père des indigents” [worthy father of the indigent] (4: 390)—meaning exactly the opposite, another defective symbolic fatherhood. For six years Flore lives with the doctor, some believe as his mistress. In April 1806, she becomes Jean-Jacques’s mistress; in April 1823, forced by Philippe, she marries Jean-Jacques and is widowed the same year. Her next husband is the powerful dominator and manipulator Philippe Bridau, who repudiates her as soon as he has married her and drives her to her death within four years (after boasting that he has three ways to make a woman die [4: 499]).

Philippe also denies his birth family: “J’ai bien vu que ni vous ni mon frère vous ne m’aimez plus. Je suis maintenant seul au monde: j’aime mieux cela!” [I can clearly see that neither you nor my brother loves me anymore. I am alone in the world now—and I prefer it!] cries Philippe early on (4: 343), unfairly rejecting both his mother and his brother, who continue to love him in spite of his bad behavior toward them. And much later, when Philippe is aiming for power and rank: “Moins j’aurai de famille, meilleure sera ma position” [The less I have of a family, the better will my position be] (4: 531). Having obtained the title of comte de Brambourg, he attempts to bury his family name of Bridau. But when Philippe tries to buy his way into a noble family and status, by marrying Amélie de Soulanges, daughter of a count, Bixiou sees to it that he is exposed. Philippe will die in 1839 an unmarried man.
Maternity

Maternal relationships, always a very important part of the family in *La Comédie humaine*, are defective or distorted. This bad situation radiates throughout the genealogy, underscoring its persistence across the generations. The beautiful Mme Rouget, wife of the doctor, suffers in her motherhood of Jean-Jacques and Agathe; her son, “stupide en tout point, n’avait ni les attentions ni le respect qu’un fils doit à sa mère” [stupid in every way, gave neither the attentiveness nor the respect that a son owes to his mother] (4: 274). Agathe Bridau is similarly unhappy as the mother of Philippe and Joseph. Descoings the son of the Issoudun family is disinherited, like Agathe; the author of both financial repudiations is the doctor Rouget, father of Agathe and brother-in-law of the grocer Descoings: withdrawing love, he retains their money. Agathe perpetuates the withdrawal of love to the next generation: preferring Philippe, she “disinherits” Joseph of her love; her maternity is stupid, erroneous.

In particular, Agathe Bridau’s unjust preference for Philippe seesaws through several crises. Her maternity is falsified by this unfairness to her younger son, the one who deserves maternal affection, and the reiterated horrors Philippe perpetrates destroy her maternal feeling. “Comment s’altère le sentiment maternel!” [How the Maternal Sentiment Decays] was the title of the eighth chapter in part I. During one crisis, Agathe calls Philippe “monsieur,” and he sarcastically accuses her of playing *Le fils banni*, a melodrama, to which she replies, “Vous êtes un monstre” [You are a monster] (4: 340). Philippe retaliates by accusing his mother of a mysterious crime, the cause of her own banishment from the paternal home: “Qu’aviez-vous fait à grand-papa Rouget, à votre père, pour qu’il vous chassât et vous déshéritât?” [What did you do to grandfather Rouget, your father, for him to banish you and disinherit you?] (4: 341). Thereupon Agathe “abdiqua sa pesante maternité” [abdicated her burdensome maternity] (4: 343). After Philippe steals a painting from his brother, Agathe sighs, “Je n’ai donc plus qu’un fils” [So I have only one son left] (4: 350). But Joseph observes that she is “mère comme Raphaël était peintre!” [a mother the way Raphael was a painter!] (4: 357), and so, with a passion comparable to an artistic genius, she continues to lavish love and money on Philippe, who wastes both and returns neither. When Philippe survives the duel in which he kills Max, “Cette pauvre mère . . . retrouva pour son fils maudit toute sa maternité” [The poor mother . . . found herself a mother again for her accursed son] (4: 512). When Philippe becomes a count and is employed by the royal family, “Agathe ne se sentait mère que pour l’audacieux aide de camp de S. A. R. Monseigneur
le Dauphin!” [Agathe felt herself a mother only for the audacious aide de camp of His Royal Highness Monsignor the Dauphin] (4: 526), whereas for Joseph, still the unrecognized painter, she is only “une espèce de sœur grise dévouée” [a sort of devoted sister of charity].

The maternity of Mme Descoings is defective as well. Balzac’s explanation is that her guilt in depriving Agathe’s children of some of their money makes her love them: “Elle aimait les deux petits Bridau plus que son petit-fils Bixiou, tant elle avait le sentiment de ses torts envers eux” [She loved the two Bridau boys more than her grandson Bixiou, so great was her guilt about the harm she had done them] (4: 286). It is striking how love is determined by money, to bad effect. “Depuis onze ans, la Descoings, en donnant mille écus chaque année, avait payé presque deux fois sa dette [à Agathe], et continuait à immoler les intérêts de son petit-fils à ceux de la famille Bridau” [In eleven years, la Descoings had paid her debt [to Agathe] almost twice over, by giving a thousand écus each year, and she continued to sacrifice the interests of her grandson to those of the Bridau family] (4: 322). The alienation of funds from the direct line to the lateral line—la Descoings is Agathe’s aunt not by blood but by marriage—works to Bixiou’s detriment. Like money, maternal love is diverted from the direct to the lateral: until 1819, Mme Descoings refuses to admit that Bixiou is her grandson, son of her son the colonel who died on the Dresden battlefield in August 1813, and claims he is instead the son of her first husband Bixiou by his first marriage. But Bixiou senior did not have a first wife, so his widow is inventing not only a false relationship—another odd dotted line in the family tree—but a phantom family. On the other hand, Joseph Bridau, her grandnephew, is called “son enfant d’adoption” [her child by adoption] (4: 335). She is paradoxically much closer to Agathe, her niece by marriage, than to her grandson. Family relationships and financial interest both turn away from the straight, simple, and direct to the devious, complex, and detoured.

At the core of the genealogy are the distorted maternal relationships radiating from the celibacy of Jean-Jacques Rouget. Flore, eighteen years younger than the bachelor, becomes like a mother to him. Balzac pointedly describes this motherhood as vicious and dominating: “Ce grand enfant [Jean-Jacques] alla de lui-même au-devant de cette domination, en se laissant rendre tant de soins, que Flore fut avec lui comme une mère est avec son fils. Aussi Jean-Jacques finit-il par avoir pour Flore le sentiment qui rend nécessaire à un enfant la protection maternelle” [This grown child [Jean-Jacques] went after this domination himself, letting himself be looked after so much that Flore behaved toward him like a mother with her son. And so Jean-Jacques ended up having for Flore the feelings that make maternal protection necessary to a
child] (4: 402–3). An interesting semantic effect stems from the constant use of the word “garçon”—and not just “vieux garçon”—for the bachelor; unmarried, he cannot reach the maturity of manhood and must have a mother, who frequently calls him “petit.” This factitious maternity of la Rabouilleuse can be contrasted ironically to the “maternité factice” (4: 423) that Mme Hochon has always had for the disinherited, unloved Agathe Bridau. Balzac’s use of the expression “factitious maternity” for Mme Hochon is remarkably ironic; it would apply to Flore in her relationship to the celibate Rouget, not to Mme Hochon, whose maternal feeling is about the only consistently positive such sentiment in the novel. If her maternity is factitious, not real, it is because it takes an indirect path: she is only Agathe’s godmother; what is worse, she has outlived her own three children.

**Love**

Love is vitiated and cannot overcome the harm people do to one another. It is linked instead with vice, avarice, and death. Philippe reduces his mother and brother to poverty by spending their money on his love affair with the demimondaine Mariette. Agathe buries her conjugal life after Bridau’s death. She is thunderstruck when Philippe rejects her request for money for Joseph in a letter “dont la concise brutalité venait de briser le cœur délicat de cette pauvre mère” [whose concise brutality had just broken the delicate heart of this poor mother] (4: 527), and she will die because he refuses to see her. Rouget’s premarital relationship with Flore is sadomasochistic, leading directly to his death. Everywhere Money contaminates Love: greed destroys all the possible family bonds that love might make.

Joseph loves his mother Agathe, who loves Philippe: in such a schema, love is literally not returned, for Philippe loves only himself: “Joseph adorait sa mère, tandis que Philippe se laissait adorer par elle” [Joseph adored his mother, while Philippe let himself be adored by her] (4: 298); “Hélas! L’officier n’aimait plus qu’une seule personne au monde, et cette personne était le colonel Philippe” [Alas! The officer loved only one person in the world, and that person was colonel Philippe] (4: 303). In such a way, the energy of love dies, buried in the egoism of its self-circulation, a circle of vice if not a vicious circle. When Maxence Gilet arrives in Issoudun, Flore Brazier, object of Jean-Jacques’s passion, falls in love with Max. Rouget’s passion for Flore and her passion for Max, however vicious, are easy to represent with one-way arrows. But turn the arrows the other way, and they are labeled money. Max is attached to Flore because, as Balzac says emphatically: “D’abord, et
avant tout, les quarante mille livres de rente en fonds de terre que possédait le père Rouget constituaient la passion de Gilet pour Flore Brazier, croyez-le bien” [To begin with, and above all, the forty thousand pounds of income in landed funds that old Rouget owned constituted Gilet’s passion for Flore Brazier, better believe it!] (4: 384–85). He also says that Gilet “ne voulait pas Flore sans la fortune du père Rouget” [did not want Flore without old Rouget’s fortune] (4: 501).

As for Flore, money is the only attraction Rouget possesses for her, not love. Among the melodramatic events during Philippe’s reign in Issoudun is the flight of la Rabouilleuse, which leaves Rouget totally distraught and rushing off to bring her back. But Philippe brings him home and makes him write a simple letter to Flore: “Si vous ne partez pas . . . pour revenir chez moi, . . . je révoquerai le testament fait en votre faveur” [If you do not leave there . . . to return home to me . . . I will revoke the testament made in your favor] (4: 496). Money brings her back in four hours. Her two marriages also come about because of money. On his wife’s death, Philippe keeps the money she inherited at Rouget’s death, repeating in his generation the dishonest maneuver by which his grandfather disinherited his mother. Philippe Bridau is also, incidentally, the cause of all the deaths: Mme Descoings, Agathe, Max, Rouget, and Flore.

In the place of love, the celibate’s passion is, as I said, noxious. When Flore talks to Rouget, he says: “elle me remue l’âme à me faire perdre la raison. Tiens, quand elle me regarde d’une certaine façon, ses yeux bleus me semblent le paradis, et je ne suis plus mon maître, surtout quand il y a quelques jours qu’elle me tient rigueur” [she stirs my soul so as to make me lose my mind. You see, when she looks at me in a certain way, her blue eyes seem like paradise to me and I am no longer my own master, especially when she has held me off for several days] (4: 488). The antidote to such loss of reason would be love within the functional family. Balzac gives the wit Bixiou the task of summarizing the examples of bad passions that cause deaths: “Ma grand-mère aimait la loterie et Philippe l’a tuée par la loterie! Le père Rouget aimait la gaudriole et Lolotte l’a tué! Madame Bridau, pauvre femme, aimait Philippe, elle a péri par lui! . . . Le Vice! le Vice! mes amis! . . . ” [My grandmother loved the lottery and Philippe killed her by the lottery! Old Rouget loved debauchery and Lolotte killed him! Madame Bridau, poor woman, loved Philippe, through him she perished! . . . It’s Vice! Vice, my friends! . . . ] (4: 535).

But instead of love, it is money, principally the inheritance, that appears as the only positive value. Philippe’s rotten character, destructive of love, is just what is needed to overthrow the domination of Maxence Gilet and Flore
Brazier over the holder of the fortune, Jean-Jacques Rouget. Not that Philippe undergoes a conversion, but all the qualities that were negative before have powerful positive effects once he is in Issoudun and regaining the family fortune is the chief objective: clever, devious, hateful, single-minded, deceitful, Philippe Bridau inspires fear in those to whom he threatens harm, and that is precisely what is needed to regain the fortune. At moments, he resembles the mythological character whose renunciation of love grants him power—in this case, power to obtain the fortune. The bourgeois of Issoudun go so far as to consider him “le digne colonel Bridau” [the worthy Colonel Bridau] (4: 503), and he achieves a kind of grandeur of the type Balzac granted to the corsaire, as for instance at the moment of the duel with Max (4: 509). This success of the money strain stands in ironic juxtaposition to the multiple failures of love.

In the end, the debris of Philippe’s fortune will finally come to the one character who deserves it, Joseph Bridau (it is true that he is also the only one left alive), but only after the genealogy is almost completely voided by deaths. It is as if outliving this pernicious family structure is the only way to arrive at a happy ending. The novel achieves this gratification at the price of an extra effort: paragraphs Balzac added at the end, covering several years, bring Philippe to a horrible death in the Algerian war in 1839, only two years before the novel was composed. Emptied, the genealogy no longer contains any celibates, except on the fringes: Bixiou and Lousteau, both journalists. At about the same time, Joseph is married with the protection of the comte de Sérisy to a rich heiress, achieves the fabulous figure of sixty thousand pounds of income, and inherits Philippe’s title. We can consider this the just reward that the gods of novel-writing grant to genius, when genius is so well seconded by tenacity.

The root cause of all these disasters of family, maternity, and love can be found in the changing political atmosphere so ripe with dramatic power for La Comédie humaine. The events of 1812, 1814, 1815, and 1816 bring confusion, sudden change, uncertainty, and errors (people believe they are following a good course, only to find that they are mistaken): thus is delineated the world in which the Bridau family functions (4: 296–301). It is a confused situation whose direct influence on the family takes it from bad to worse; Philippe is its victim and then its perpetrator. The Bridaus rant about the Bourbons whom they call “the foreigners” (4: 300, 313), and Balzac rants about the liberals (4: 304–5). Politics change Philippe Bridau’s life.
by giving him a position on the newspaper (4: 314–15); conspiring with other Bonapartists against the Restoration government, Philippe is twice arrested or threatened with incarceration (4: 299, 353). As an image of the hazards and chances brought about by the political changes, gambling plays a large role in this novel. On one page, Philippe’s luck at gambling reverses itself several times, mirroring the ups and downs of his fortunes linked to Bonaparte’s (4: 320–21).

In Issoudun as well, the different political evolutions since 1787 are evoked in their relation to the characters’ fates. The irregularity of the scandalous relations between Rouget and Flore is underscored in a newspaper article which finds the cause of this effect in the absence of religion under the effects of the Revolution (4: 515), and Napoleon’s difficulty in reestablishing the church, due to the shortage of priests, is also mentioned (4: 392). The public and publicized dramas, the changing face of France, especially the fall of Napoleon (always a grandiose figure in Balzac) are the public reflections of the private events through which Balzac drags his characters, always keen to be the one who reveals the unknown, secret, hidden realities of human existence. As reflections of external events, these secret dramas are brought under the microscope, analyzed, dissected, augmented. Such is the story of Mme Hochon, for instance (4: 431).

La Rabouilleuse illustrates a theme found in several other texts of La Comédie humaine: after 1830, mediocrity reigns and artistic genius goes unrecognized, even scorned. Once again, that theme comes home to Balzac himself, primarily. Not only does the defective mother with the unbalanced love-hatred for the two sons recapitulate the family romance Balzac saw himself in, between his adulterous mother and his better loved half-brother Henri, but, more importantly, he portrayed in Joseph Bridau’s character and destiny the role of the man of genius in saving France from bourgeois mediocrity.¹

1. Anne-Marie Baron comments that the story of the Blondet family in Le Cabinet des Antiques shows “comment procède le romancier: il brouille les cartes, déforme une situation réellement vécue, punissant la mère adultère dans ce qu’elle a de plus cher et échangeant les destins de son frère Henry et de lui-même de manière à ce que l’enfant de l’amour soit évincé à sa place du paradis familial” [how the novelist proceeds: he shuffles the cards and deforms an actual lived experience, punishing the adulterous mother through what she holds the most dear and exchanging the destinies of his brother Henry and himself so that the love-child is evicted from his place in the family paradise] (L’auguste mensonge 148–49). The same can be said of the relations among Agathe Bridau and her two sons.