

leaves him "abandoned by God, shunned by society" (144), his talent crushed by ponderous indifference and vulgar profit seeking. "The Piazza" and "Encantadas" exemplify the failed quest, and *Clarel's* quest for spiritual meaning forces Christianity to the point of historical closure. Even *Billy Budd* is about how much we do not know and the impossibility of remedying that state.

Recognizing the critical debate and the political controversy swirling around Melville's last work, Grenberg sees "the narrator's irresolvable ambivalence" (199) as the source of the debate. He is a confidence man who does not merit our confidence. He cannot get inside what the author has called "an inside narrative" (194) and leaves us "to drown in a sea of endless self-confounding possibilities" (205) as we ponder the fate of innocence, the mystery of iniquity, and the quality of merciless justice.

After examining "the assumptions of romantic idealism, democratic optimism, national enthusiasm, and Christian assurance" (213), Melville could ascertain only the insubstantiality of each. The earnestness of his early quests grew nostalgic or embittered as his questers grew more constricted, disillusioned, and disoriented; in the end only his skepticism endured.

Frances Schlamowitz Grodzinsky
*THE GOLDEN SCAPEGOAT: PORTRAIT OF THE JEW
IN THE NOVELS OF BALZAC*
Troy: NY: Whitston, 1989. Pp. 91
Reviewed by Anthony R. Pugh

Frances Grodzinsky informs us that "few Balzacian scholars have acknowledged, let alone analyzed, the significance of Jews in Balzac's work" (11), and in this monograph, beautifully produced though not completely free of misprints, Ms. Grodzinsky sets out to fill this gap in our understanding of Balzac. After a historical survey of the fortunes of the literary Jew, much of the space is taken up with thorough analyses, divided among seven chapters, of a handful of major Jewish characters.

It emerges from this that Balzac came to see the strength of the Jew, who by his position as outsider in Christian society, has to develop certain character traits if he is to survive, and particularly if he is to conquer. The successful Jews have will, intelligence, and self-discipline; they are "authentic" in Sartre's sense of the word. The unsuccessful Jews are "inauthentic," and can be compared to the playboys who are not Jewish. Stated thus, the thesis could appear as a simple extension of views already well developed and well studied on the artist/genius or on the role of willpower in Balzac's writings. But by concentrating on Jews, Ms. Grodzinsky brings out very well the coherence of Balzac's concept of the Jewish people, to whom their status as outsiders create special challenges.

The strong Jewish characters, who triumph through their "power, wealth and skill" (63), finally attain tranquillity. They do so in defiance of normal standards and values (though, as Grodzinsky interestingly shows, they have mo-

ments of unselfish generosity), and must overcome the hostility of society, while remaining true to their personal ideals (chapter V). She calls them "mundane geniuses" (I would have preferred the word "worldly"). She argues that Balzac saw himself as an outsider, and identified his position with that of the Jew, whom he increasingly portrayed as a Promethean figure (the last chapter, on Prometheus, is particularly interesting).

By pairing Gobseck and Grandet, Magus and Pons, Ms. Grodzinsky is able to suggest that Gentile characters with similar interests tend to be weak by comparison with their counterparts (chapter III). Not that there are no weak Jews in Balzac (IV). Nathan is the prime example, and the courtesans, even Esther, come close. Ms. Grodzinsky notes interestingly that the weak Jew tends to be of Oriental background, while the strong ones are firmly of the West (25).

There are other interesting observations, e.g., on the growth and decline of anti-Semitism. Grodzinsky argues that at the time of Balzac, the stereotyped characteristics of the literary Jew were fairly harmless, and the character was not much used, but that Balzac reinstated him, a natural consequence of his desire to represent the whole of contemporary French society. She maintains that Balzac quickly shed the conventional attributes, or better, integrated them into a wider vision. Thus, "because the Jew obtains his power from the acquisition of gold, money assumes a critical role in his life. But this was not mere avarice; rather, in Balzac's portrayals, the search for gold is synonymous with the need to control one's own life and forge one's future" (8).

The overall argument is sensible and convincing. But the book is not without flaws. Not all the discussions of non-Jewish characters are illuminating, and they often blur the Jewish focus (especially 56-58, 66-68); Gentile characters include strong and weak too. The chapter on gold (VI) suffers likewise. She is very unreliable on matters of dating, which is unfortunate, because she tries to indicate an evolution in Balzac's attitude towards the Jews, dividing the novels into those written before 1837-38 and those written after. Ms. Grodzinsky contends that Balzac abused the word Jew to indicate avarice, greed, shrewdness in the early years, and that generalized references to Jews tended to disappear after that, when Balzac created individual Jews who increasingly escaped the Jewish stereotype. She fails to prove her point, however, as thanks to a mixture of carelessness and misinformation, two-thirds of her "early" examples are late, and two-thirds of her "late" ones are in fact early. Further, her constant reference to Gobseck (1830, and fully in place by 1835; the quotation from Dedinsky on p. 18 is a very red herring) as the archetypal Balzacian Jew shows that the individualized Jew was not altogether a later development.

There is nothing in the text to indicate the origins of this book (not even a page of acknowledgments), but I would be surprised if it is not an adapted thesis or memoir. It appears to have been composed from a series of fiches noting every reference to Jews, which have been arranged in an order which sometimes proceeds more in a zigzag pattern than by advancing (chapter V is particularly poorly organized), and the text is extremely repetitive. The bibliography, which has some surprising lacunae, seems to suggest that the study was completed by 1979. The new *Pléiade* edition (1976-79) did not make it even so; Ms. Grodzinsky uses the old *Pléiade*, which the new one superseded.