

parents break out. Even Ye Si's amusing "Transcendence and the Fax Machine" a Chinese academic falls in love with the device that keeps him in touch with European intellectuals, never appreciating his own situation. Likewise, in Su Tong's "Running Wild" his young protagonist has unexplained headaches and witnesses death and seduction without understanding what he sees. In fact, the reader, too, is puzzled by this moody and suspenseful piece.

In many of these stories the reader may understand more than the characters, but ironic distance is seldom employed—there are no simple villains or heroes here. In fact, the reader is never allowed simply to read these works without reflection. Novelist Mo Yan's hero in "Divine Debauchery" is eccentric, but apparently harmless, in his extravagant sexual behavior; Zhu Tianwen's old folk healer in "Master Chai" is not castigated, even when he conflates erotic fantasies for a girl patient with nostalgia for his lost home on the mainland. But while these authors do not provide any simplistic explanations of human behavior, the true horror of the recent Chinese experience is readily present in their stories. A case in point is Yü Hua's coldly dispassionate narration of a family feud that leaves so many dead ("One Kind of Reality"). Another is the profoundly disturbing narrative of an abortion in Tang Min's "I Am Not a Cat." The ennui of exile appears in several. Gone from these stories is the ostensibly autobiographical basis of so much of the fiction from previous decades; in its place is unleashed imagination, free to explore the dark recesses of the human mind as it has confronted the social realities of modern China. This fiction is challenging to the reader. These stories express the serious engagement of their authors with life, art, and meaning in new and exciting ways. While not every piece here is necessarily great literature, some are amusing, many are disturbing, and all will cause the reader to ponder their meanings, to read them again. Like the films of the outstanding Chinese directors—whether residents of the PRC, Hong Kong, Taiwan, or other countries—the works of these new Chinese writers reveal a level of creativity hitherto not generally perceived by the rest of the world. Surely Chinese fiction is passing into a new, more cosmopolitan stage, and this anthology has captured the transition period masterfully.

Stéphane Vachon

*Les Travaux et les Jours d'Honoré de Balzac*

Paris: Presses Universitaires de Vincennes, 1993. Pp. 336

Roger Pierrot

*Honoré de Balzac*

Paris: Fayard, 1994. Pp. x + 552

Reviewed by Anthony R. Pugh

It is not every day that one can hail a book as exhaustive, definitive, the answer to a dream, wholly admirable in conception and irreproachable in execution, but Stéphane Vachon's bibliography of all Balzac's publications (including the posthumous ones, as far as *Les Petits Bourgeois* in 1857) is all of those things. Lovenjoul's classic *Histoire des Oeuvres*, remarkable though it was, has been com-

pletely superseded by the research of the last hundred years, particularly by the intense activity of the sixties and seventies, culminating in the Pléiade edition of 1976-1981, and it was time for a summation of all we now know. But the task was a daunting one; Balzac's works were published piecemeal, they appeared in different editions, sometimes simultaneously, and if one wishes to include some indication of their often laborious genesis, and of the uncompleted works (some of which did not progress beyond the title), one has a mass of material seemingly endless in its quantity and its complexity.

Vachon has combed all the known sources, letters, catalogues, publisher's registrations, and barring some unexpected surprises, one can confidently say that it is all here, for us and for posterity. But the real problems only start once the facts are assembled. How can they be presented in a way which people can actually make use of them and learn them? Here, Vachon has come up with a solution as brilliant as it is original. Employing a typeface which though minuscule is perfectly clear, he has established for each year of Balzac's productive life, a table in three columns. The columns distinguish works in book form published for the first time, works published in book form which had been published before, and works published in journals and reviews. Volumes containing a mixture of old and new are spread across two columns, with the individual components listed in the relevant column. Within each entry the use of different fonts (bold, italic, etc.) and a scrupulous use of vocabulary makes distinctions clear. If a work, or even part of it, has appeared previously, this is succinctly noted, as are all future publications. Peculiarities are noted, again very succinctly but very clearly.

As if that is not enough, each year is reviewed in a short essay which gives a masterly overview of Balzac's activity, including titles of projects he was working on, but which he did not publish during that year. Every statement is justified by a citation of the source. What must be emphasized is that not only is the amount of material present in this book quite staggering, everything is presented with the maximum elegance. There is no false rhetoric to get in the way; nor is the presentation scrappy. If, as La Rochefoucauld held, "la véritable éloquence consiste à dire tout ce qu'il faut, et à ne dire que ce qu'il faut," this book is the perfect illustration of true eloquence.

Its importance goes beyond the fact that Balzac scholars now have a reference work they can use with ease and trust completely. Everyone who becomes involved with the creation of a bibliography should look at Vachon's book and adopt (or adapt) the system he has devised. A book like this could change the face of bibliography, if it were known outside the circle of specialists for whom it is primarily designed.

As well as delivering the bibliographical goods, Vachon has written a twenty-five page preface outlining Balzac's career as a creator and architect, drawing out the significance of the facts marshalled so magisterially in the main part of the book. Again, the mastery of detail is deeply impressive. It requires a fine mind to rise above the minutiae and present an overall view as convincing and compelling as this. I know no presentation of Balzac the creative writer as dense and as pertinent.

Is there no criticism one could make? I would venture just two very modest remarks. The first is a single detail. Although Vachon usually gives us all the information we need, it is surprising that he should mention the "rédaction des premières pages de *César Birotteau*" in April 1834 (142), without giving the reference to the Pléiade edition which would enable us to see how far Balzac progressed before he set it aside for three years.

More important than this, one notices that if a book proceeds smoothly from conception to publication, it receives understandably much less space than one which was on the go for longer. A particularly interesting case is *Le Père Goriot*, the significance of which is precisely that it erupted, unexpectedly, when an exhausted Balzac took a few days holiday in Touraine, and it gave a completely new direction to his writing, resolving in aesthetic terms a problem that had been on his mind for several months, that of how to give unity to a work so multifarious and diverse. The link of *Goriot* and *Saché* is not mentioned by Vachon. Other than these two slight omissions. I have found nothing at all. This is indeed a definitive bibliography.

One is less ready to use words like "definitive" of a biography. Even if it is wholly reliable (as this new one is), there are so many possible approaches to the writing of a biography, that no one attempt can possibly embrace them all. Roger Pierrot crowns a very distinguished career as librarian, bibliographer, editor of the correspondence of Balzac, Musset and Vigny, with a biography of Balzac which sets Balzac in the context of his family, his friends, his colleagues, never embroidering unnecessarily, but always sensitive to the reality behind the documents, and drawing on an unrivalled knowledge of the world in which Balzac lived. There are no legends perpetuated here, no racy but dubious anecdotes, although the writing is crisp and tempered by an engaging irony; the book is, indeed, eminently readable, and with its short chapters, easy to pick up and read in short spurts. Nor is there any suspect psychoanalysis; even Balzac's many affairs are handled with the utmost discretion.

That need not be regretted. One might perhaps have some regret that the *Comédie humaine* is never really discussed. If we did not know, we would never discover from this biography, just why Balzac is (as Pierrot frequently assures us) one of the greatest writers of all time. The publications of the year are listed, naturally, but the narrative rather takes all that for granted. Connections between fact and fiction tend to be made at the level of the tangible, with little probing of deeper connections between creative choices, and inner structures, and the lived experience of Balzac. One could imagine a difference of emphasis, where the real life of Balzac, the life he lived in his creation, was brought more into focus.

How, then, does Pierrot handle the birth of *Le Père Goriot*? Apart from saying (242) that he began to write it at *Saché*, no conclusions are drawn, though the preoccupation with unifying his work is amply documented in this biography. We are not even told that Balzac was exhausted when he left Paris. For a reader interested in seeing how Balzac the writer evolved, then, it will be necessary to read between the lines. But make no mistake, these are the right lines to read between.