

The Myth of Social Mobility: Napoleon's Legacy in Stendhal's *The Red and the Black* and Balzac's *Lost Illusions*

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### Introduction

You will hear plenty of other things said about the Emperor, but they are all monstrous nonsense. Because, look you, to no man of woman born would God have given the power to write his name in red, as he did, across the earth, where he will be remembered for ever...Long live “Napoleon, the father of the soldier, the father of the people!”<sup>1</sup>

Honoré de Balzac

In Honoré de Balzac’s *The Country Doctor*, a former French soldier of the Napoleonic Wars expounds upon the immortal legacy of Napoleon Bonaparte. In his praises, the soldier points to God as having ordained Napoleon’s power and success, thus elevating the former emperor above ordinary men to a hero of Biblical proportions. More importantly, he stresses how Napoleon has left an indelible mark on the world. He implies that history, society, and culture have been forever changed by his life and influence.

Although taken from a work of fiction, this passage underscores a crucial historical fact: Napoleon’s influence was potent and widespread across the continent. The accuracy of the soldier’s portrayal, however, is subject to debate. Napoleon did introduce a period of relative political stability to France following the tumultuous events of the Revolution. However, the reality of his regime must be considered separately from his legacy and the memory of his reign. Napoleon’s legend is also influenced by a romantic idealization of his empire, informed by memory, history, and literature in varying degrees. A romanticized notion of Napoleon as the brilliant but tragic hero dominated the rhetoric surrounding his image throughout the nineteenth century. This thesis explores the implications of his influence on young men during the Bourbon Restoration (1815-1830).

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<sup>1</sup> Honoré de Balzac, “Napoleon of the People,” trans. by Ellen Marriage, in *The Country Doctor: The Quest of the Absolute and Other Stories* (Philadelphia: Gebbie, 1899), 196-197; “Toutes les autres choses que vous entendrez dire sur l’empereur sont des bêtises qui n’ont pas forme humaine. Parce que, voyez-vous, ce n’est pas à l’enfant d’une femme que Dieu aurait donné le droit de tracer son nom en rouge comme il a écrit le sien sur la terre, qui s’en souviendra toujours ! Vive Napoléon, le père du peuple et du soldat !” (Honoré de Balzac, *Le médecine de campagne* (Lausanne: Éditions Rencontre, 1968), 329.)

Following the tumultuous events of the French Revolution (1789-1799), Napoleon Bonaparte came to power and built upon the new form of social hierarchy that had begun during the Revolution, one in which the aristocracy was no longer the ruling class. Young men of all socio-economic classes could be promoted in public service on the basis of merit and capability, rather than because of their high birth or wealth. The figure of the talented and ambitious young man was further emphasized by Napoleon's own life. Even though he was the third son of a minor nobleman, he rose through the ranks of the French military to become emperor of France. Although this degree of social mobility was unprecedented and extraordinary for its time, it seduced a generation of young men to see the future as possessing a wealth of possibilities.

This future ended with Napoleon's abdication and the return of King Louis XVIII in 1815, which began a period known as the Bourbon Restoration. The Restoration not only marked the reinstatement of the monarchy and aristocracy to power, but also greatly reduced the opportunities available to poor young men. Social mobility was no longer the norm but rather the exception, as the government, civil service, and even military positions previously accessible to most young men were now obtainable by only the very few. Moreover, young men born during the Napoleonic reign were never able to participate in its wars, thus unable to reap its glory or benefit from military service as a means of social mobility. We can deduce from the soldier's description in Balzac's "Napoleon of the People," how central the wars and its soldiers were to the period, as well as to the legacy of Napoleon. Much of the Napoleonic legend was based on jingoistic language describing military glory, yet for the poor young men who came along later during the Restoration, military opportunities were scarce. Therefore while military glory was still sought after, poor young men also attempted to find alternative paths to success.

The implications of Napoleon's legacy are revealed by an analysis of the main characters of two novels, *The Red and the Black* by Stendhal and *Lost Illusions* by Honoré de Balzac. In *The Red and the Black*, the young Julien Sorel develops a passionate admiration for Napoleon and wants to become soldier as a result. Although he later renounces a career in the military to become a priest, Julien admires and internalizes Napoleon's social ambition, choosing to pursue his extraordinary example at all costs. *Lost Illusions'* Lucien Chardon similarly wants to emulate Napoleon's fame and meteoric trajectory, but in the literary world as a writer. Both protagonists exemplify poor young men with Napoleonic ambitions, born in a post-Napoleonic world. Examining their narratives illustrates the ways in which this ambition is inherently at odds with a Restoration society in which they lived. Moreover, it shows how this opposition creates major consequences for not only these characters, but for the generation of young men they represent.

Chapter One investigates the potent narrative of the Napoleonic legend and its formative influence on masculine ambition. In the first part of the chapter, I give a brief explanation of the Napoleonic legend and its creation during the Restoration era. I argue that the legend encourages an intoxicating but unrealistic future of extreme social mobility for young men. Focusing on the characteristics of Julien and Lucien, the Chapter Two explores the development and maturation of ambition through education. In the second part of the chapter, I argue that education is key to social advancement and suggest that the untraditional methods of education in the novels lead to Julien and Lucien's social advancement. The third chapter examines the limits of ambition and success in French high society. In the last part of Chapter Three, I demonstrate that these characters can never transcend the social hierarchy of the Bourbon Restoration, thus highlighting the social limits of Napoleonic ambition.

Napoleon's legacy offered young men an example of social mobility and influenced them to try to achieve the same. However, the belief that they could achieve the same level of success as Napoleon was unrealistic. Their limits were not in their lack of ambition or even in an unwillingness to do whatever it took to achieve their goals. Instead, these young men lacked social legitimacy in a culture where it was essential to political and occupational success. Napoleon was able to create his own, exceptional path toward legitimacy, but it became a path unavailable to the poor young men of the Bourbon Restoration. Belief in his legend and example sets his ideological descendants up for social and personal failure.

### Historiography

Despite its relatively brief 15-year period, the Bourbon Restoration has accumulated a great deal of secondary literature. It is important to note, however, that the majority of the literature was produced during the long nineteenth century, during which time the question of royal legitimacy and Orléanists' claims remained a relevant topic. Legitimacy during the Restoration thus became a heavily researched topic. For survey works on Restoration history, this essay relies primarily on Guillaume de Bertier de Sauvigny, *La Restauration* (1977) to provide political context and brief social history. Other survey literatures examined for this thesis include John Hall's political history survey, *The Bourbon Restoration* (1809), and Emmanuel de Waresquiel and Benoît Yvert's *Histoire de la Restauration: naissance de la France moderne* (1996).

Literature on Napoleon is immense. The treatment of Napoleon's legacy in this thesis is heavily reliant upon Émile Kern's presentation of the subject in *Napoleon: deux cents ans de légende* (2016). Kern explores the social and literary processes that contributed to the creation of Napoleon's legacy, with a particular focus on contemporary literary and political writings.

Sudhir Hazareesingh's *The Legend of Napoleon* (2004) approaches the subject with a clearer sociological stance, suggesting it was a product of French collective memory.<sup>2</sup> This thesis also employed Thierry Lentz's work *Napoléon, une ambition française: idées recues sur une grande figure de l'Histoire* (2013), which outlines the multiplicity of interpretations surrounding Napoleon as a man, soldier, politician, and emperor.

The most crucial works for this thesis explore social mobility during the Restoration. The broadest examination of this was taken from Hartmut Kaelble's *Social Mobility in the 19th and 20th Centuries: Europe and America in Comparative Perspective* (1985), which explores various paths toward social mobility, including education and origin. Further concrete methods for social advancement are explored in William H. Sewell's *Structure and Mobility: The Men and Women of Marseille, 1820-1870* (1985), which examines a far more geographically-specific type of social mobility, but provides informative examples of the social mobility of peasants.

A subsection of this genre is the exploration of the individual's mobility in the context of society. Carol Harrison's *Bourgeois Citizen in Nineteenth-century France: Gender, Sociability, and the Uses of Emulation* (1999), is particularly influential for this thesis. It analyzes the construction of post-revolutionary identity, particularly as it relates to the bourgeois man and the development of his own class consciousness in an increasingly industrial world. A more specific examination of masculine identity can be found in William Reddy's *The Invisible Code: Honor and Sentiment in Post Revolutionary France, 1814-1848* (1997), as it explores the post-revolutionary concept of honor and its implications on the behavior of young men during the nineteenth century.

Beyond the purely historical literature, this thesis also depends on essential works of literary criticism that explore not only the novels but also the characters themselves. Sarah

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<sup>2</sup> Sudhir Hazareesingh, *The Legend of Napoleon* (London: Granta Books, 2004), 15.

Sasson's *Longing to Belong: The Parvenu in Nineteenth-century French and German Literature* (2012) is particularly crucial to the socio-psychological conceptualization of the novels' main characters. After establishing characters like Julien and Lucien as *parvenu*, Sasson argues that these men constantly attempt to parody or emulate members of the class above them. The question of emulation and assimilation is also fundamental to the understanding of the characters' fall. Several other works intertwine literary criticism with a biographical examination of the novels' authors. There is a large body of literature on Napoleon's influence on Stendhal, particularly as seen in *The Red and the Black*. Kathleen Kete's "Stendhal and the Trials of Ambition" and Robert Morrissey's "Stendhal: Julien Sorel in the footsteps of Napoleon," view Stendhal's experience as a soldier in the Napoleonic wars as deeply influential to the aspirations and ambition of his characters. Secondary literature surrounding Napoleon's influence on *Lost Illusions* is scarce, even more so for studies regarding Napoleon's influence on Honoré de Balzac himself. Émile Kern is one of the few historians to explore Napoleon's legacy in Balzac's writings, as we can see in the passage from *The Country Doctor*.

*Lost Illusions* and *The Red and the Black* provide the two central primary source texts for the thesis. Although functionally fiction, the novels are essential pieces of historical evidence that reveal a cultural preoccupation with ambitious young men in a reactionary society. Moreover, they come from a period in history that was deeply influenced by the Napoleonic myth. The novels' treatment of this myth and its consequences are crucial to the representation of social mobility during the Bourbon Restoration.

### Chapter One: The Cult of Napoleon: His Influence on Young Men of Ambition

On June 22, 1815, Napoleon Bonaparte abdicated the French throne for the second and final time. In spite of his ultimate defeat, his reign as First Consul Bonaparte and then Emperor Napoleon I of France rendered him a legend and historical icon. As Thierry Lentz argues, “Napoleon modeled the European face by his realizations and his intuitions, his success and failures, lasting institutions and ephemeral conquests.”<sup>3</sup> Napoleon’s influence cannot be reduced to a single dimension, but Lentz succeeds in conveying the breadth of his lasting legacy over European history, politics, and culture. Napoleon’s pervasive impact on the nineteenth century was recognized in his own time, thus cementing his status as a future legend.

What defines a legend? It is often associated with a story, which, while regarded as historical, is not necessarily authenticated. Why, then, do we refer to the life and exploits of Napoleon, a very real and influential historical figure, as legend? Sudhir Hazareesingh attempts to resolve the origins of Napoleon’s legend, which he traces to French society’s collective memory of the former emperor’s reign.<sup>4</sup> He allows, however, that the legend constitutes a complex mélange of fact and myth. Furthermore, historians tend to emphasize Napoleon’s personality and temperament, which, while well documented by his contemporaries, is largely

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<sup>3</sup> Thierry Lentz, *Napoléon, une ambition française: idées reçues sur une grande figure de l’Histoire* (Paris: Le Cavakuer Bleu, 2013), 15.

<sup>4</sup> Hazareesingh, *The Legend of Napoleon*, 15.

subjective.<sup>5</sup> These compounding factors – fact, myth, and personality – have overwhelmingly shaped what Napoleon’s contemporaries and scholars today consider as his legend.

In the nineteenth century, the myth of Napoleon was largely a lived experience, particularly for the authors of the period. The influence of Napoleon’s memory and legend is particularly evident in novels of the period, including *The Red and the Black: A Chronicle of 1830* (1830) by Stendhal and *Lost Illusions* (1843) by Honoré de Balzac. Both authors lived under his empire, endured its downfall, and documented post-Napoleonic society under the Bourbon monarchy. These experiences mold the main characters of their respective novels. In *The Red and the Black*, the fiercely ambitious and brilliant Julien Sorel claws his way from the status of peasant to that of an aristocrat, all while under the illusion he is the next Napoleon. In *Lost Illusions*, the impoverished but poetic Lucien Chardon finds fortune and fame as a journalist in Restoration France’s literary scene. Both of these young men strive to rise and conquer high French society because of the lasting influence of the former emperor. For these characters, Napoleon becomes the model for social mobility and ambition. Nevertheless, the authors make it clear that this is a post-Napoleonic world, where young and ambitious men can no longer succeed to the same extent as their idol, if they ever could. Yet, it remains a society in which the dangers of corruption and failure are a very real possibility.

### **The Making of the Man: Legacy of Napoleon**

Even before Napoleon Bonaparte’s death in 1821, his life had become stuff of legend: a man of minor nobility who rose, through military prowess and political drive, to become the first

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<sup>5</sup> See works such as *Le Mémoire de Sainte-Hélène* (1823) by Emmanuel, comte de Las Cases, *Servitude et grandeur militaire* (1835) by Alfred de Vigny, and “Vie de Napoléon” in *Mémoires d’outre-tombe* (1840) by François-René de Chateaubriand.

Emperor of France.<sup>6</sup> He was able to extend French influence to over 70 million people across Europe and to dominate countries like Germany, Italy, and Spain. Napoleon's ambitious but ill-fated decision to invade Russia in the hope of safeguarding the French empire ultimately led to his loss of power and exile from France. He died, persecuted and alone, on the remote island of St. Helena in 1821.<sup>7</sup>

Despite his tragic ending, Napoleon's legend portrays him as the archetype of the ambitious hero rather than as a failure. He was a "normal" man able to rise to extraordinary and unprecedented heights, all by the strength of his own determination and intelligence. However, ambition becomes a double-edged sword when viewed through Napoleon's own lie and trajectory. He was rewarded, personally and professionally, for exerting his ambition and in the execution of his goals. At the same time,



Figure 1: Adolph Northen, *Napoleon's Retreat from Russia*, 1851.

his story warns us that we should not aspire to rise too far above our station in society. We can point to Napoleon's own downfall as exemplifying the dangers of such hubris. By 1815, Napoleon had conquered the majority of Europe, but had also been constantly challenged by the Great Powers of Europe who opposed his rule and policies. While his defeat at the Battle of Waterloo was the last straw in the long list of other military, political, and economic mistakes, it serves as a reminder that ambition and success have their limits. This conception of the

<sup>6</sup> Émile Kern, *Napoléon: deux cents ans de légende* (Paris: Éditions Soteca, 2016), 18.

<sup>7</sup> Émile Kern, *Napoléon*, 52.

importance of ambition and the dangers of its excesses is the premise underlying the two novels, *The Red and the Black* and *Lost Illusions*.

Napoleon's legacy and legend deeply influenced nineteenth century French writers, including Stendhal and Balzac, throughout the nineteenth century. Born in 1783, Marie-Henri Beyle, known as Stendhal, spent his youth under Napoleon's reign and took an active role in the military, as both soldier and administrator.<sup>8</sup> Joanna Richardson argues that Napoleon came to embody ambition and glory for the author because Stendhal's own successes took place during that period.<sup>9</sup> Her argument is reflected by the trajectory and beliefs of the protagonist of *The Red and the Black*, who maintains a hero worship of Napoleon, a devotion to serving in the military, and a debilitating frustration at the missed opportunity for greatness. Stendhal gained a first-hand experience of pure ambition, both Napoleon's and his own, which is reflected in *The Red and the Black* and his later novels.<sup>10</sup>

Honoré de Balzac, by contrast, was born in 1799, and was thus too young to take part in the Napoleonic Wars. Napoleon's legacy and influence, however, is still evident in Balzac's work. Novels such as *Le Colonel Chabert* (1832) and *Le Médecin de campagne* (1833) wax nostalgic about the First Empire; both feature veterans of the Napoleonic Wars who reminisce about their roles in Napoleon's military triumphs.<sup>11</sup> In *Lost Illusions*, Balzac paints a portrait of post-Napoleonic life from the point of the literary – rather than strictly political or military – world. Nevertheless, Napoleon is still held up as an example of raw ambition, and how far it can take one man, particularly as it applies to the main character, Lucien Chardon.

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<sup>8</sup> His military commissions included aide-de camp to General Michaud, provisional assistant to the Commissaries of War, and auditor with the Conseil d'État. (Johanna Richardson, "Stendhal and Napoleon," *History Today* 23, 1, Jan 1, 1973, 5.)

<sup>9</sup> Richardson, "Stendhal and Napoleon," 6.

<sup>10</sup> See *Mémoires sur Napoléon* (1837-8), *Mémoires d'une Touriste* (1838), and *La Chartreuse de Parme* (1839).

<sup>11</sup> Kern, *Napoléon*, 65.

Moreover, simply by virtue of living in France during the early nineteenth century, both Balzac and Stendhal were profoundly influenced by Napoleon's legacy. They, like other writers of the Realism Movement, saw the former emperor as the epitome of the Romantic hero: a brilliant but misunderstood genius. At the same time, they criticized this idealized, Romantic illusion of the former emperor by highlighting the limits of his success and his failures. This archetype and the authors' criticisms are reflected in the main characters of both novels in their ambition, their social ascension, and eventually decline from French society under the Bourbon monarchy.

### ***The Red and the Black: Napoleonic Ambition***

The historical memory of Napoleon is a critical motif in *The Red and the Black*. Julien, fiercely intelligent and bookish despite his origins as the son of the local saw mill owner, reads three crucial works that inform how he understands himself and society: Rousseau's *Confessions*, the military reports of Napoleon's army, and *The Memorial of Saint Helena*. The latter, published in 1823 in eight volumes and written by Napoleon's *de facto* secretary, Emmanuel, comte de Las Cases, was a journal documenting everything that the ex-emperor did and said during the first eighteen months of his second exile, between June 20, 1815 and November 25, 1816.<sup>12</sup> Émile Kern points to the historical significance of *The Memorial* for the former emperor's memory; the work not only immortalized his exile but presented a potent vision of Napoleon as he saw himself: "the founder of Europe, a liberal, the champion of ideas of the French Revolution."<sup>13</sup> It was based on this inherently biased and fantastic representation of Napoleon – the work that "he valued most of all" – that Julien Sorel educates and judges himself

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<sup>12</sup> Kern, *Napoleon*, 55.

<sup>13</sup> Kern, *Napoleon*, 56.

throughout *The Red and the Black*.<sup>14</sup> His first education in the ways of Napoleon determines the trajectory of his life.

Julien's reading leads to his veneration for Napoleon: he "praised Napoleon with great vehemence" as a boy and secretly possesses "the portrait of Napoleon" while working for his ultra-royalist employer, Monsieur de Rênal.<sup>15</sup> As Julien matures, however, he begins identifying with the character of Napoleon rather than merely admiring him as historical figure. Julien examines each element of his own life – his love affairs, his occupation, and even his personality – through the lens of the ex-emperor. In other words, he develops a language and thought process that is inherently reflective of Napoleon. This reflection is particularly evident in the way Julien perceives his professional life. During the negotiations for a raise from his employer, M. de Rênal, Julien re-reads his favorite book, *The Memorial*. The narrator points out, "Thinking about Napoleon's victories had given him a new insight into his own. Yes, I've won a battle, he said to himself, but I must take advantage of it, I must crush the pride of this proud gentleman while he is in retreat. That is Napoleon all over."<sup>16</sup> Julien's identification with Napoleon casts this basic business negotiation as a type of battle rather than as a dialogue between himself and his employer. The narrator shows that in Julien's mind, the young man becomes the hero in every situation, battling the fights worthy of his ambition – politics, business, and love.

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<sup>14</sup> Stendhal, *The Red and the Black: A Chronicle of 1830*, trans. Catherine Slater (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 19.

<sup>15</sup> Stendhal, *The Red and the Black*, 27; 63; "Il lui arriva de louer Napoléon avec fureur," "Le portrait de Napoléon, se disait-il en hochant la tête, trouvé caché chez un homme qui fait profession d'une telle haine pour l'usurpateur! trouvé par M. de Rênal, tellement ultra et tellement irrité!" (Stendhal, *Le rouge et le noir*, 44; 104.)

<sup>16</sup> Stendhal, *The Red and the Black*, 70-71; "A force de songer aux victoires de Napoléon, il avait vu quelque chose de nouveau dans la sienne. Oui, j'ai gagné une bataille, se dit-il, mais il faut en profiter, il faut écraser l'orgueil de se fier gentilhomme pendant qu'il est en retraite. C'est là Napoléon tout pur." (Stendhal, *Le rouge et le noir*, vol. 1 (Paris: E. Champion, 1923), 117.)

While Julien's identification with Napoleon provides a measure of self-realization for the young character, Robert Morrissey points out that the disproportion between his situation and that of the former emperor's largely undermines the importance of Julien's actions.<sup>17</sup> This fact, and the narrator's own sarcastic tone on the subject, throws the possibility of success into question.<sup>18</sup> The legend of Napoleon imbues Julien with an insatiable sense of ambition and destiny that determines nearly all of his decisions throughout the novel. However, he is also "projecting the ideal of glory onto the level of everyman."<sup>19</sup> Thus, there is a great possibility failure if Julien does not realize the vast disproportion between his potential and Napoleon's life. Julien will never be able to achieve what Napoleon did, but his ambition may lead to an equally great downfall.

### ***Lost Illusions: "Men of Genius"***

In *Lost Illusions*, Balzac confronts the issue of ambition through the concept of "men of genius," highlighting Napoleon in particular.<sup>20</sup> Balzac shows that the former emperor has entered into the canon of consequential men – intelligent, influential, and legendary. At first glance, Napoleon is cast in a favorable light but this characterization is far more ambiguous than it initially appears. Casting Napoleon as a "man of genius" cannot invalidate the reality of his

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<sup>17</sup> Robert Morrissey, "Stendhal: Julien Sorel in the footsteps of Napoleon," in *Exemplarity and Singularity: Thinking through Particulars in Philosophy, Literature, and Law*, ed. Michele Lowrie, Susanne Lüdemann (New York: Routledge, 2015), 187.

<sup>18</sup> Stendhal does not hesitate to speak directly to the reader, particularly about Julien's shortcomings. He writes, "I confess that the weakness shown by Julien in this monologue gives me a very poor opinion of him. He would be a worthy colleague for those yellow-gloved conspirators who set out to change the entire way of life of a great country, and do not wish to have to reproach themselves with the slightest scratch." (Stendhal, *The Red and the Black*, 147.); "J'avoue que la faiblesse, dont Julien fait preuve dans ce monologue, me donne une pauvre opinion de lui. Il serait digne d'être le collègue de ces conspirateurs en gants jaunes, qui prétendent changer toute la manière d'être d'un grand pays, et ne veulent pas avoir à se reprocher la plus petite égratignure." (Stendhal, *Le rouge et le noir*, 242.)

<sup>19</sup> Morrissey, "Stendhal: Julien Sorel in the footsteps of Napoleon," 187.

<sup>20</sup> Honoré de Balzac, *Lost Illusions*, trans. by Herbert James Hunt (London: Penguin, 2005), 41.

failures, his fall from power, or the excess of ambition that led him there. While Lucien Chardon is encouraged to think of himself as a man of genius, we can see that label is not inherently positive.

While still in his native region of Angoulême, Lucien Chardon is taught that men of genius are born with a certain responsibility to nurture their “gift” by any means necessary, including sacrificing time with family and friends. Balzac introduces this idea through Lucien’s lover, Madame de Bargeton, whose vision of men of genius, or natural ability, deeply influences the protagonist’s ideals and eventually his personality. However, Balzac reveals the relationship between genius and ambition:

Genius was accountable only to itself; it alone knew what ends were to be attained and it alone could justify the means. Therefore it had to put itself above the laws which it was its mission to reshape; moreover, he who intends to dominate the times he lives in is entitled to take all and risk all, for all that is belongs to him.<sup>21</sup>

By this logic, men of genius by virtue of their abilities should have free range to achieve their goals. Moreover, we can understand that the idea that the world is for them and can be re-made by them might engender a dangerous sense of entitlement, one that might easily lead to unrealistic expectations about one’s future.

In Lucien’s mind, the example of “men of genius,” allows him to equivocate and rationalize his unadulterated ambition; the very possibility of achievement outweighs all. However, the narrator highlights: “[Madame de Bargeton’s] arguments responded to Lucien’s secret failings and encouraged the progress of corruption in his heart; so ardent were his desires

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<sup>21</sup> Balzac, *Lost Illusions*, 59-60; “Le génie ne relevait que de lui-même; il était seul juge de ses moyens, car lui seul connaissait la fin: il devait donc se mettre au-dessus des lois, appelé qu’il était à les refaire; d’ailleurs, qui s’empare de son siècle peut tout prendre, tout risquer, car tout est à lui.” (Honoré de Balzac, *Illusions perdues* (Paris: Levy, 1884), 62.)

that he gave *a priori* assent to any means of advancement.”<sup>22</sup> The mention of “corruption” highlights two crucial ideas: first, ambition can be dangerous. It can encourage one to strive toward his goal with no consideration of anything but himself and his objective. This heedless determination leaves no room for considering the repercussions of one’s actions or potential success. Secondly, Lucien is susceptible to the rhetoric of the “men of genius” and ambition. This argument is particularly crucial to Lucien’s character development because it opens his future to the endless, and potentially destructive, consequences of unimpeded ambition.

The narrator questions the moral problem of ambition:

The example of Napoleon, so baleful for the nineteenth century through the pretensions it inspires in mediocre people, came to Lucien's mind: he repented of his calculations and jettisoned them. Of such stuff was Lucien made: he veered as easily from bad to good as from good to bad.<sup>23</sup>

It is implied here that Napoleon is the “extra-ordinary” example of ambition; in other words, he is the exception to the rule of “ordinary.” Lucien has fallen into the trap of believing that he is of the same mold as Napoleon and consequently conflated beliefs about his own potential as a “man of genius” leads to an excess of ambition. This excess of ambition, and the deterioration of the protagonist’s morals as a result, is presented as type of evil that will be explored in future chapters. At this point in the novel, however, Lucien still has the capacity for good, even while the looming threat of moral and personal failure remains. Lucien can never succeed to the extent that Napoleon did, and he is thus not only likely to fail but perhaps more importantly, will sacrifice his goodness in the process.

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<sup>22</sup> Balzac, *Lost Illusions*, 60; “Ces raisonnements abondaient dans les vices secrets de Lucien et avançaient la corruption de son coeur; car, dans l’ardeur de ses désirs, il admettait les moyens *a priori*.” (Balzac, *Illusions perdues*, 62.)

<sup>23</sup> Balzac, *Lost Illusions*, 63; “L’exemple de Napoléon, si fatal au dix-neuvième siècle par les prétentions qu’il inspire à tant de gens médiocres, apparut à Lucien qui jeta ses calculs au vent en se les reprochant. Ainsi était fait Lucien, il allait du mal au bien, du bien au mal avec une égale facilité.” (Balzac, *Illusions perdues*, 65.)

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Although the memory of Napoleon encouraged ambitious pursuits and opened up a path to social mobility, it is important to remember that the exiled emperor was an exceptional model. Both Balzac and Stendhal overlay the Napoleonic ideal onto the life of the young everyman. As we will see, the everyman's eventual social success demonstrates that mobility can occur, with the potent combination of Napoleonic ambition and circumstance. However, both authors foreshadow conflict as their protagonists begin aspiring to the same achievements as Napoleon. The former emperor is and remains uniquely extraordinary yet these young men use his life as a template in an attempt to elevate themselves to match this ideal. These Realist authors hint at the potential incompatibility of venturing too far outside of the established social order by alluding to Napoleon's failures. If even for the exceptional man, ambition and success were eventually ruined, what chance was there for the everyman?

## Chapter Two: Education: Acquiring Tools for Social Status

In post-revolutionary France, a whole generation of young men had educational and occupational opportunities not available to them before. They were permitted to join universities and other higher education institutions in France, such as the *école normale supérieure* and the *école polytechnique*. Successful completion of their studies allowed them to enter into government administration, law, and other social science professions. Both the Revolution and Napoleon's empire had made government jobs available to almost everyone, "even to the sons of workmen and peasants."<sup>24</sup> However, the return of the noble elite to both political and social dominance during the Restoration made the education system far more discriminating. Hartmut Kaelble highlights this reversal of educational opportunity across Europe, and in France in particular: "Higher education was dominated by the children of landed aristocrats, professionals, merchants and higher civil servants" and lower-middle class students were rare.<sup>25</sup> Thus, poor young men of the Bourbon Restoration lacked opportunities for social mobility in ways that had

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<sup>24</sup> Guillaume Bertier de Sauvigny, *The Bourbon Restoration*, trans. Lynn M. Case (Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1966), 239.

<sup>25</sup> Hartmut Kaelble, *Social Mobility in the 19th and 20th centuries: Europe and America in Comparative Perspective* (Dover, NH: Berg, 1985), 48.

been available to them previously, including higher education, the military, and government positions.

What options remained for young men of lower birth in post-Napoleonic France? Arguably the most obvious solution was to join the Church, which served as teacher, employer, and patron to young men of all social classes. *The Red and the Black's* Julien Sorel joins the seminary with the belief that a clerical educational and occupation will provide him the quickest and easiest way to an elevated social status. He was educated to believe that one's appearance and reputation were of primary importance. Balzac, on the other hand, provides an alternative path for his readers: he proposes social mobility through writing and literature. Moreover, he introduces the literary *salon* as the setting for protagonist's educational backdrop. Both men learned more from their social interactions at the salon or seminary than they did from any curriculum or structured study. That being said, entrance into these environments required the acquisition of basic but crucial educational tools. The process began, at its most rudimentary, with literacy.

### **The Basics: Tools for Social Mobility**

Literacy was the most crucial determinant in social mobility in early nineteenth-century France. Guillaume Bertier de Sauvigny points out that by 1829, only forty-one percent of young men knew how to read and write while fifty-one percent were completely illiterate.<sup>26</sup> Although he does not provide an age range, William Sewell supports this claim. Using the city of Marseille and its surrounding rural regions as example, Sewell contends that the rates of literacy were even lower for peasants' sons. However, studies of social mobility relating to literacy reveal that it is

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<sup>26</sup> Bertier de Sauvigny, *The Bourbon Restoration*, 242.

one of the prime determinants in occupational placement.<sup>27</sup> Sewell suggests that even traditional bourgeois professions, such as small business and the clergy, were virtually closed to those who had not at least learned to “read, write, and calculate.”<sup>28</sup> Therefore, literacy was the first step on the slow climb to social mobility; first, as a step toward education, and second, toward a profession that would allow a young man to rise above his station in life.

Both Stendhal and Balzac highlight the availability of primary and secondary education for their main characters. In *Lost Illusions*, Lucien’s secondary education shapes his future ambitions. Although his father was a pharmacist, and thus of a bourgeois milieu, the Chardon family was desperately impoverished. The narrator describes their financial situation:

Anticipating prosperous times, the pharmacist had spared no expense for the education of his son and daughter, so that budgeting for the family constantly ate away the income from his chemist's shop. Consequently, he not only left his children in poverty but also, unfortunately for them, he had brought them up in the expectation of a brilliant future, which his death extinguished.<sup>29</sup>

The passage presents three important concepts: first, Lucien is not only literate, but also more well educated than one might expect for his family’s financial situation. (In fact, he is cited as “one of the most brilliant pupils at the grammar school of Angoulême.”<sup>30</sup>) Secondly, the author implies that learning naturally leads to a desire for upward mobility. Lastly, the passage suggests that one’s social and occupational prospects were inherently tied in with the state of the family

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<sup>27</sup> William H. Sewell, *Structure and Mobility: The Men and Women of Marseille, 1820-1870* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 251.

<sup>28</sup> Sewell, *Structure and Mobility*, 253.

<sup>29</sup> Balzac, *Lost Illusions*, 21; “Pressentant sa fortune, le pharmacien ne négligeait rien pour l’éducation de son fils et de sa fille, en sorte que l’entretien de sa famille avait constamment dévoré les produits de sa pharmacie. Ainsi, non seulement il laissa ses enfants dans la misère, mais encore, pour leur malheur, il les avait élevés dans l’espérance de destinées brillantes qui s’éteignirent avec lui.” (Honoré de Balzac, *Illusions perdues*, 21.)

<sup>30</sup> Balzac, *Lost Illusions*, 22; “Lucien fut un des plus brillants élèves du collège d’Angoulême...” (Balzac, *Illusions perdues*, 22.)

finances. Though educated, Lucien Chardon lacks the initial financial advantages in life that might allow him to reach the same professional milieu as his father.

Julien's early education, similarly, is the most important factor with respect to his social mobility. Although ridiculed as a weakling and beaten by his father for being bookish, Julien is allowed to be tutored in Latin by M. Chélan, the priest of the town of Verrières.<sup>31</sup> Because of his level of education, Julien is hired as a live-in tutor by the town's mayor, M. de Renâ. His employer describes him: "He's made of stern stuff, according to Father Chélan.... young Sorel has been studying theology for three years, with the intention of going to the seminary. So he isn't a Liberal, and he does know Latin."<sup>32</sup> Therefore, Julien demonstrates he has the necessary requirements for occupational opportunities and wider social advancement.

*Lost Illusions'* Angoulême is described as having more educational opportunities for young men of Lucien's social class: "Angoulême enjoys a great reputation in the adjacent provinces for the education young people receive there. Neighbouring towns send their daughters to its boarding-schools and convents."<sup>33</sup> The Bourbon monarchy attempted to regulate primary education with the royal ordinance of February 29, 1816, which established a cantonal committee for the supervision of schools and teachers.<sup>34</sup> Pierre Pierrard, however, notes that opportunities to be educated depended on the limited resources available to both schools and

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<sup>31</sup> Stendhal, *The Red and the Black*, 22.

<sup>32</sup> Stendhal, *The Red and the Black*, 13-14; "Il a un caractère ferme, dit le curé... ce Sorel étudie la théologie depuis trois ans, avec le projet d'entrer au séminaire; il n'est donc pas libéral, et il est latiniste." (Stendhal, *Le rouge et le noir*, 21.)

<sup>33</sup> Balzac, *Lost Illusions*, 33; "Angoulême jouit cependant d'une grande réputation dans les provinces adjacentes pour l'éducation qu'on y reçoit. Les villes voisines y envoient leurs filles dans les pensions et dans les couvents." (Balzac, *Illusions perdues*, 34.)

<sup>34</sup> Daniel Tröhler, Ragnhild Barbu, *Education Systems in Historical, Cultural, and Sociological Perspectives* (New York: Springer Science & Business Media, 2012), 13.

educators.<sup>35</sup> In the study of Lille, a major city with nearly 30,000 boys of the peasant classes, public and private schools could only accept ten to twelve students whose families would be unable to pay.<sup>36</sup> That being said, the peasant and laboring classes were largely excluded from higher education opportunities. Kaelble shows that young men of lower classes – laborers, farmers, and proletariats – did attend the *grands écoles* in France between 1815-1830, but always as the smallest minority.<sup>37</sup> However, Carol Harrison argues that not only were educational opportunities expanding throughout the nineteenth century but also that the increasing urbanization resulted in jobs that required “school-taught” skills, such as bookkeeping.<sup>38</sup> As we can see, the value and accessibility of higher education was increasing, but universal access to education had not yet become a widespread reality across France.

Nevertheless, it is clear that neither Julien nor Lucien had the opportunity to acquire traditional forms of higher education. Balzac never even hints at the possibility of Lucien attending university, simply ending description of his education with secondary school.<sup>39</sup> Julien, similarly has no access to higher education but recognizes that his path to success is through the Church. Therefore, he determines to move beyond tutoring to attend seminary. Historically, as Sewell maintains, attending seminary gave peasants’ and workers’ sons a level of social mobility

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<sup>35</sup> Pierre Pierrard, “L’enseignement primaire à Lille sous la Restauration,” *Revue du Nord* 55, no. 217 (1973): 123.

<sup>36</sup> Pierrard, “L’enseignement primaire à Lille sous la Restauration,” 123.

<sup>37</sup> Hartmut Kaelble, *Social Mobility in the 19th and 20th Centuries*, 48.

<sup>38</sup> Carol Harrison, *Bourgeois Citizen in Nineteenth-century France: Gender, Sociability, and the Uses of Emulation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 197.

<sup>39</sup> Balzac’s description of Lucien’s formal education ends with the following: “Lucien was one of the most brilliant pupils in the College of Angoulême; he had reached a senior class at the time [Daniel] Séchard was finishing his studies there. When chance brought these two school friends together again Lucien, tired of drinking from the rudely-fashioned cup of poverty, was on the verge of making one of those drastic decisions which young men of twenty are apt to make.” (Balzac, *Lost Illusions*, 22.); “Lucien fut un des plus brillants élèves du collège d’Angoulême, où il se trouvait en troisième lorsque Séchard y finissait ses études. Quand le hasard fit rencontrer les deux camarades de collège, Lucien, fatigué de boire à la grossière coupe de la misère, était sur le point de prendre un de ces parties extrêmes auxquels on se décide à vingt ans.” (Balzac, *Illusions perdues*, 22).

that they virtually never would have achieved within other elite occupation categories, such as businessman or rentier.<sup>40</sup> Trends show that young men were hired for clerical positions at surging rates, rising from 4 percent in 1821 to 21 percent in 1869.<sup>41</sup> Like so many of his historical contemporaries, Julien Sorel enters into the seminary on the belief that a clerical education will lead to his social mobility. More important, however, is the veiled education on contemporary society he receives. The lessons he learns will allow him to succeed in Paris' high society.

### The World of the Church: Seminary in Restoration France

Julien Sorel's choice to join the seminary is always in conflict with his desire to join the military. This tension is reflected in the title of the novel, *The Red and the Black*. The "red" refers to the color of the military uniforms during the period while the "black" refers to the color of clerical robes of the church.<sup>42</sup> As we have previously seen, Julien's determination to join the military stems from his admiration for Napoleon and the belief that it would provide him



Figure 2: Charles Vernier, *Uniforms of french army : Military Administration, 18-19th century, c. 1800*. Engraving.

the glory he so desperately seeks.<sup>43</sup> Nevertheless, he maintains the pretense of wanting to join the seminary during his stay with the Rênals because his attachment to Napoleonic military life would be looked down on as too liberal. It is only his brief encounter with a minor character, the

<sup>40</sup> Sewell, *Structure and Mobility*, 252.

<sup>41</sup> Sewell, *Structure and Mobility*, 252.

<sup>42</sup> Charles Vernier, *Uniforms of french army : Military Administration, 18-19th century, c. 1800*. Engraving.

<sup>43</sup> Stendhal, *The Red and the Black*, 22.

Bishop of Agde, which makes him receptive to the idea of rising through the Church rather than the military. The narrator recounts, “[Julien] had no thoughts for Napoleon and military glory. So young, he thought, and bishop of Agde! Where is Agde anyway? And how much is the income? Maybe two or three hundred thousand francs.”<sup>44</sup> For Julien, it is clear that the Bishop of Agde exemplifies youthful clerical ambition, just as Napoleon did for military ambition. In the Bishop, Julien recognizes the enormous economic and social possibilities in joining the clergy. Thus, his newfound aspiration compounded with the discovery of his affair with Madame de Rênal, his employer’s wife, Julien decides to leave Verrières for the seminary in Besançon where he begins his formative education.

From Julien’s entry into the seminary, it is clear that clerical learning itself is rather trivial and superficial. Stendhal never spends more than a phrase or two on the religious practices or scriptural lessons that Julien learns. Instead, his true education is one in the utility of hypocrisy. Pointing to the alarming ignorance of the seminary students, the narrator elaborates:

The remainder of the three hundred and twenty-one seminarists were nothing but boorish individuals who could not be relied on to understand the Latin words they repeated days in day out. Almost all of them were peasants’ sons who preferred to earn their living by reciting a handful of Latin words than by tilling the soil.<sup>45</sup>

The derisive tone in this passage underscores the hypocrisy of seminary education: it is one that attracts the poor who wish to avoid a life of poverty and manual labor rather than those who want to devote themselves to religious life. Moreover, despite its inherently sacred and spiritual nature, the religious education loses all meaning for those who do not truly wish to learn. Above

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<sup>44</sup> Stendhal, *The Red and the Black*, 112; “Il ne songeait plus à Napoléon et à la gloire militaire. Si jeune, pensait-il, être évêque d'Agde! mais où est Agde? et combien cela rapporte-t-il? deux ou trois cent mille francs peut-être.” (Stendhal, *Le rouge et le noir*, 183.)

<sup>45</sup> Stendhal, *The Red and the Black*, 186; “Le reste des trois cent vingt et un séminaristes ne se composait que d'êtres grossiers qui n'étaient pas bien sûrs de comprendre les mots latins qu'ils répétaient tout le long de la journée. Presque tous étaient des fils de paysans, et ils aimaient mieux gagner leur pain en récitant quelques mots latins qu'en piochant la terre.” (Stendhal, *Le rouge et le noir*, vol. 1, Paris: E. Champion, 1923, 303.)

all, becoming a priest is considered a means to an easy life for these peasants' sons. The irony of the novel, however, is that Julien is ultimately no better than these seminarists. He also chose the seminary, not out of religious devotion, but because he saw it as the quickest and easiest way to rise in society.

Julien realizes that the key to his success at the seminary lies in the false impression of his piety rather than his intellect or ecclesiastical knowledge. He wholly devotes himself to playing the part of the devout seminarist without ever truly developing a desire for the religious life. Julien himself remarks on the importance of appearances in his ecclesiastical education:

Learning counts for nothing here! he reflected in disgust; progress in dogma, in sacred history, etc., only receives lip-service. Everything that is said on this matter is designed to ensnare crazy idiots like me. Alas! my only merit lay in my rapid progress, in the way I grasped this rubbish.<sup>46</sup>

Julien understands that his success at the seminary is contingent upon his ability to act the part of the diligent pupil and devout Catholic. He never needs to understand ecclesiastical matters as long as he can perform the “ascetic” actions with convincing piety, “such as the Rosary five times weekly, the hymns to the Sacred Heart, etc., etc.”<sup>47</sup> From this moment, Julien internalizes the benefit of appearances. He employs his skills in using appearance and hypocrisy to rise through the ranks of high Parisian society later in the novel.

We can attribute a great deal of Julien's future social success to the tools he develops at the seminary, which range from his false piety to his gait. It manifests in his “way of walking, moving his arms, eyes, etc.,” which, Stendhal remarks, “do not, it is true, indicate anything

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<sup>46</sup> Stendhal, *The Red and the Black*, 190; “La science n'est donc rien ici! se disait-il avec dépit; les progrès dans le dogme, dans l'histoire sacrée, etc., ne comptent qu'en apparence. Tout ce qu'on dit à ce sujet est destiné à faire tomber dans le piège les fous tels que moi. Hélas! mon seul mérite consistait dans mes progrès rapides, dans ma façon de saisir ces balivernes.” (Stendhal, *Le rouge et le noir*, 309.)

<sup>47</sup> Stendhal, *The Red and the Black*, 190; “Du moment que Julien fut détrompé, les longs exercices de piété ascétique, tels que le chapelet cinq fois la semaine, les cantiques au Sacré-Coeur, etc., etc.” (Stendhal, *Le rouge et le noir*, 310.)

worldly, but do not yet reveal a being absorbed by the idea of the other world and the *pure nothingness* of this one.”<sup>48</sup> The description shows how much outward appearances allow one to judge the internal. Moreover, Stendhal reveals the sheer hypocrisy of a culture and education that allows such superficial beliefs and actions to lead to success. As we will see, the culture of hypocrisy at the seminary mirrors that of aristocratic society, in that both environments value appearances over knowledge or even morality.

Finally, Julien’s hypocrisy is eventually rewarded, thereby cementing his belief in its endless value to his success. His campaign of hypocritical piety is victorious among his superiors, who eventually promote him to the position of tutor. This, along with the belief that Julien comes from a wealthy bourgeois family, sparks jealousy among his fellow seminarists. In an effort to save him from “persecution” by his fellow pupils, and also out of fondness for Julien, l’abbé Picard, sympathetic to Julien’s situation, implores the Marquis de la Mole to hire Julian as his personal secretary.<sup>49</sup> This opportunity leads Julien to rise to a higher social class and live among the aristocracy. It is clear that the practical applications of a seminary education are completely lost on Julian but he gains an arguably more important education on the importance of hypocrisy and appearances. His education at the seminary thus not only serve as another rung on the proverbial social ladder, but it also provides him with the practical tools for self-fashioning, which will allow him to adapt to the high society of Restoration Paris.

### **World of Literature: Struggling Writers in of the Bourbon Restoration**

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<sup>48</sup> Stendhal, *The Red and the Black*, 191; “C’est l’état du jeune séminariste dont la démarche dont la façon de mouvoir les bras, les yeux, etc., n’indiquent à la vérité rien de mondain, mais ne montrent pas encore l’être absorbé par l’idée de l’autre vie et le *pur néant* de celle-ci.” (Stendhal, *Le rouge et le noir*, 310-311.)

<sup>49</sup> Stendhal, *The Red and the Black*, 223.

In *Lost Illusions*, Lucien Chardon's ambition is of a purely artistic nature. Balzac plainly states his character's intention: "Lucien had an ardent thirst for literary glory."<sup>50</sup> Fueled by the Napoleonic fervor of the former emperor and his own literary hopes, Lucien pursues a remarkably different education than his Stendhalian counterpart. Lucien's formative education takes place primarily within the context of the salon. Salons – *salon littéraire* ou *salon de conversation* – were regular gatherings of men and women of high social class, during which they discussed politics, literature, art, fashion, and business.<sup>51</sup> For Lucien, the salon of his mistress, Mme. de Bargeton, is the first step towards his education in the literary world of the Bourbon Restoration. Lauded as outshining "that of the new constellations that were rising in Paris" and "a budding genius" of literature by his school's headmaster, Lucien is invited to the salon, which was the "holy of holies in a society that kept itself unspotted from the world."<sup>52</sup> He enters as a poor but intellectual student, the complete opposite of the wealthy bourgeois and nobility who traditionally attend. Balzac portrays the salon as a microcosm of society in which the wealthy, upper-class determine the rules and the players. In order to participate, Lucien does not learn how to become a writer, but learns the tools for his success in the world beyond the provincial Angoulême.

Lucien's education is based on his participation in the upper-class world of the salon. Nevertheless, rumors of Lucien's low birth soon begin to circulate among the high society of Angoulême. In order to avoid further embarrassment, Mme. de Bargeton uses the opportunity to

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<sup>50</sup> Balzac, *Lost Illusions*, 23; "Lucien se portait avec ardeur vers la gloire littéraire." (Balzac, *Illusions perdues*, 23.)

<sup>51</sup> Steven Kale, *French Salons: High Society and Political Sociability from the Old Regime to the Revolution of 1848* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), 2; 6.

<sup>52</sup> Balzac, *Lost Illusions*, 48; "M. du Châtelet crut alors faire merveille en lui apprenant qu'il existait à Angoulême *une autre enfant sublime*, un jeune poète qui, sans le savoir, surpassait en éclat le lever sidéral des constellations parisiennes. Un grand homme futur était né dans l'Houmeau !" (Balzac, *Illusions perdues*, 49.)

remake Lucien in the image of a young nobleman, beginning Lucien's informal but crucial education in the novel. The first lesson deals with the importance of lineage. Mme. de Bargeton "advised him boldly to repudiate his own father by assuming the noble name of Rubempré," his mother's maiden name.<sup>53</sup> It is an important lesson in reputation, in which the name of an individual can reflect his socio-economic status, regardless of the truth behind it. The narration explicitly states that "this step would raise him many rungs higher in the ladder."<sup>54</sup> The second lesson is in the politics of the period. Mme. de Bargeton reorients Lucien's position completely:

[Mme. de Bargeton] induced Lucien to abjure his low-class ideas about the chimerical equality preached in 1793, reawakened in him the fever for social distinction which David's cool reasoning had calmed, and proved to him that high society was the only stage on which he could play his part. The resentful Liberal became a monarchist *in petto*. He tasted the apple of aristocratic luxury and glory.<sup>55</sup>

In short order, Lucien's beliefs are completely overturned: he is convinced to reject the liberal ideals of the Revolution in favor of monarchical hierarchy and to reject the revolutionary commitment to equality. Most importantly, Lucien internalizes the idea that this hierarchical, high society is the only proper venue for his artistic talents. We will see the reality and disappointments of this advice when Lucien enters Parisian high society. Above all, Mme. de Bargeton is able to tap into his deepest ambitions, leading him to forego his social ideology for the sake of personal gain. In doing so, Lucien works to legitimize both himself and his writing in society.

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<sup>53</sup> Balzac, *Lost Illusions*, 58; "Elle lui conseilla de répudier audacieusement son père en prenant le noble nom de Rubempré..." (Balzac, *Illusions perdues*, 60.)

<sup>54</sup> Balzac, *Lost Illusions*, 58; "Elle souleva l'une après l'autre les couches successives de l'état social, et fit compter au poète les échelons qu'il franchissait soudain par cette habile détermination." (Balzac, *Illusions perdues*, 61.)

<sup>55</sup> Balzac, *Lost Illusions*, 59; "En un instant, elle fit abjurer à Lucien ses idées populacières sur la chimérique égalité de 1793, elle réveilla chez lui la soif des distinctions que la froide raison de David avait calmée, elle lui montra la haute société comme le seul théâtre sur lequel il devait se tenir. Le haineux libéral devint monarchique *in petto*. Lucien mordit à la pomme du luxe aristocratique et de la gloire." (Balzac, *Illusions perdues*, 61.)

Justification of his artistic endeavors becomes one of Lucien's fundamental character traits. Martyn Lyons suggests that working-class authors of the early nineteenth century endeavored to justify their writing efforts by imitating literary figures from the world of high culture.<sup>56</sup> Lucien conforms to this historical pattern, first through the adoption of a more aristocratic name and second, through accepting the conservative politics that dominated high culture during the Bourbon Restoration. While Balzac warns against the evils of changing morals for the sake of ambition, the author also makes it clear that these are the keys, at least momentarily, to success in high society. Lucien's education affirms the notion that he must remake himself into the hypocritical and largely false version of himself in order to gain social mobility. However, Balzac also allows the reader to sense that this is dangerous ground and that an unstable code of ethics is a path toward failure, if not outright evil.

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The seminary and salon are spaces of learning, the former being the more obvious educational milieu of the two. A comparison provides an interesting dynamic between lower and upper class forms of education. The seminary, as depicted by Stendhal, supplies vocational training to poor young men looking to avoid an agrarian life. Conversely, the salon is traditionally inhabited by the upper classes and for the intellectual pursuit of conversation. The narrators present both spaces as sharply at odds with the appearances they project while providing unforeseen educational opportunities for the ambitious young man. These educations also overwhelmingly emphasize the importance of self-fashioning and the self-made man. Julien largely uses hypocrisy and appearances to create a personality at the seminary that wins him minor triumphs. Lucien, on the other, explicitly learns the value of appearances – political and personal – as a

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<sup>56</sup> Martyn Lyons, *Ordinary Writings, Personal Narratives: Writing Practices in 19<sup>th</sup> and Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century Europe* (New York: Peter Lang, 2007), 40.

method to succeed in high society. These lessons will allow the protagonists to ascend, with even greater rapidity, into a higher social class. As we will see, these young men attempt to utilize their newfound cultural knowledge as they enter high Parisian society for the first time. However, their respective successes are already precarious: fueled by ambition and promoted by hypocrisy; as Balzac hints, their willingness to do and say anything to succeed may be their downfall.

### Chapter Three: Excess of Ambition in the Bourbon Restoration

Armed with their Napoleonic ambition and an evolving knowledge of the conditions for success in Restoration France, Lucien and Julien, respectively, arrive in Paris. While education gives these young men a foundational understanding of society, it does not prepare them for the realities of life in Paris. Underneath its promises of wealth and fame, Balzac and Stendhal also show that this society is built on appearances and its own hypocrisy. Lucien and Julien are able to thrive in this environment but it comes at further cost of their integrity. The possibility of success, illustrated by Napoleon's extraordinary example, leads both young men to their ideological corruption and social ruin.

Both authors suggest that their characters' ruin is a result of the intrinsic tension between who they are and the society in which they are attempting to achieve upward mobility. These protagonists are poor young men from the provinces who seek social mobility in whatever ways they can. These involve participating in a culture that is inherently unfamiliar to them, in which they are perpetual outsiders and must work to imitate the insiders. More crucially, the promise of social and occupational success requires that they completely compromise their own integrity. While these protagonists do find fleeting success in these hostile environments, the erosion of their political and personal morals leads to their eventual downfall.

### **Dominating the Social Scene: Aristocratic Notions of Politics, Economics, and Journalism**

During the Bourbon Restoration, the fabric of high society was interwoven with French political life. Politics became an accessible subject for more members of society, thanks to increased coverage in the press during the Revolution and an expansion of voting rights under Napoleon. Nevertheless, political, social, and economic power largely returned to the hands of the aristocracy following Louis XVIII's return to the throne, though to a lesser degree than before the Revolution.<sup>57</sup> With respect to politics, the aristocracy was almost universally royalist, given that the Restoration led to the return of their former titles.<sup>58</sup> More conservative royalists called themselves ultra-royalist, or "ultras" and remained aggressively nostalgic for the pure aristocratic dominance of pre-Revolution France.<sup>59</sup> Politics had become a dominant part of French aristocratic life due to the liberal legacy of Napoleon's empire. From 1815 onwards, the monarchy and royalists were forced to combat lingering, and in some cases, very potent, discontent with the Restoration. These dissenters were comprised of liberals and independents, which included Bonapartists, former Republicans, and those inherently hostile toward the monarchy. As we have seen, both Lucien and Julien, poor young men from the provinces, began as Bonapartists with Napoleonic ambitions. Their evolutions from liberal to conservative is both a sign of their attempts at aristocratic imitation and the beginning of their respective downfalls.

The return of the monarchy to power also re-introduced the notion of aristocratic wealth and luxury to France. The aristocracy was not universally wealthier than the bourgeoisie; in fact, given that they did not experience the economic exclusion that the nobility did between the

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<sup>57</sup> Bertier de Sauvigny, *Bourbon Restoration*, 249.

<sup>58</sup> Article 71, Charter of 1814: "The old nobility will resume its titles; the new will keep its own."

<sup>59</sup> Roger Magraw, *France 1815 1915: The Bourgeois Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), 35.

Revolution and Restoration, the bourgeoisie was by far the dominant economic class.<sup>60</sup> Nevertheless, negative cultural stereotypes continued to influence the reputation and self-image of the bourgeoisie, thus rendering the aristocracy the dominant social class once more. Even our young heroes with no wealth or reputation to speak of learn to disdain the bourgeoisie for their greedy capitalist morals. Therefore, Julien and Lucien still attempt to emulate the aristocracy, despite having an objectively easier path toward becoming bourgeois. The luxury of the aristocratic lifestyle, such as that in the Parisian Hôtel de la Mole in *The Red and the Black*, and in Mme. de Bargeton's elite salon in *Lost Illusions*, has a deep and lasting influence on the economic and political ambitions of the protagonists.

Furthermore, aristocratic dominance remained evident in journalism and the literary world during this period. This is particularly salient in the fierce opposition between the liberal and royalist newspapers.<sup>61</sup> Christine Haynes argues that these political divisions were also crucial to the commodification of literature and journalism, which Balzac explores in *Lost Illusions*. She points to the rising desire for economic freedom from the liberals, who are both politically and economically opposed to the state-regulated book trade, which was supported by the conservatives and royalists.<sup>62</sup> Although neither the liberal nor conservative press is portrayed in a positive light, it is clear that Balzac detests the commercialization of literature, which includes “the rampant speculation on literary work,” “the introduction of immoral marketing tactics,” and “the profusion of advertisements and reviews of books.”<sup>63</sup> The question of commodification of the book trade and the political divisions in journalism deeply affect

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<sup>60</sup> Adeline Daumard, *Bourgeois et la bourgeoisie en France depuis 1815* (Paris: Aubier: 1987), 75.

<sup>61</sup> Guillaume Bertier de Sauvigny, *Bourbon Restoration*, 23.

<sup>62</sup> Christine Haynes, *Lost Illusions: The Politics of Publishing in Nineteenth-Century France* (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2010), 49.

<sup>63</sup> Christine Haynes, *Lost Illusions*, 49.

Lucien's literary ambitions, success, and eventual downfall. He ultimately betrays his beliefs for the promise of total integration into aristocratic society.

This process of class assimilation is crucial to the future of both Julien and Lucien. If we follow Sarah Sasson's argument concerning the *parvenu*, both protagonists can be characterized as such. Their ambitions inspire them to assimilate into this aristocratic, conservative culture believing it be the quickest way to achieve the highest degree of social mobility.<sup>64</sup> However, both Sasson and Carol Harrison argue that this assimilation revolves primarily around the act of imitation, or emulation.<sup>65</sup> It can only be a parody or emulation, argues Sasson, because poor young men like the heroes of these novels lack the legitimacy of noble birth, both in lineage and upbringing; in the act of parodying or emulating the aristocracy, true birth and education are revealed, forever marking them as outsiders. Therefore, the trajectory toward gaining aristocratic legitimacy is fundamentally flawed. Not only do Julien and Lucien's attempts at winning this legitimacy mark them as fundamentally alien, but they are also striving toward an inherently unrealistic, and thus doomed, goal. Balzac and Stendhal suggest that ambition to gain legitimacy and noble birth is unachievable: the *parvenu* can change his manners and appearance, but never his lineage. That is not to say that these heroes do not try to rise above the limitations of their birth and circumstance. Their attempts, however, come at a higher moral cost to the individual.

### **The Perils of High Society: Aristocratic Hypocrisy**

As we have seen from his time in Angoulême, Lucien is willing to renounce his political convictions for the potential of personal advancement. His capacity to reverse his beliefs is to the

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<sup>64</sup> For the sake of clarity, a *parvenu* is defined as “a person of humble origin who has gained wealth, influence, or celebrity” by the *Oxford English Dictionary*.

<sup>65</sup> Sarah Sasson, *Longing to Belong: The Parvenu in Nineteenth-Century French and German Literature* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012), 17; Carol Harrison, *Bourgeois Citizen in Nineteenth-century France: Gender, Sociability, and the Uses of Emulation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 3.

detriment of his honor and foreshadows his downfall. Upon his entrance into Paris with his wealthy and aristocratic mistress, Mme. de Bargeton, she quickly deserts him and Lucien is left destitute. He writes to his sister, Eve, about his situation, “She has turned away at the sight of me; and I, in order to follow her into the society in which she had proposed to launch me, had spent seventeen hundred and sixty of the two thousand francs, so difficult to lay, hands on, which I brought away from Angoulême.”<sup>66</sup> Nevertheless, Lucien remains optimistic about selling his novel, working in the Bibliothèque Sainte-Genevieve and dining at Flicoteaux, a cheap restaurant for impoverished students, writers, and artists.<sup>67</sup> There he meets two important characters: Etienne Lousteau, a journalist and critic from a local newspaper, and Daniel d'Arthez, a brilliant, aspiring writer destined for greatness. These two men symbolize the diverging paths facing Lucien: one in which he chooses to sell himself to the newspapers for the promise of wealth and one in which he continues with the more noble pursuit of publishing his artistic work. D'Arthez tells him as much soon after they meet: “It costs a lot...to become a great man. The works of genius are watered with its tears...Whoever wishes to rise above the common level must be prepared for a great struggle and recoil before no obstacle. A great writer is just simply a martyr whom the stake cannot kill.”<sup>68</sup> D'Arthez is remorseless in describing the hardships of being a struggling author; he essentially declares that becoming a great author is an endless, miserable,

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<sup>66</sup> Balzac, *Lost Illusions*, 190; “En me voyant, elle a détourné la tête, et moi, pour la suivre dans le monde où elle voulait me lancer, j’avais dépensé dix-sept cent soixante francs sur les deux mille emportés d’Angoulême et si péniblement trouvés.” (Balzac, *Illusions perdues*, 201.)

<sup>67</sup> “Flicoteaux is a name inscribed in many memories. Few are the students who, having lived in the Latin quarter during the first twelve years of the Restoration, did not frequent this shrine of hunger and poverty.” from Balzac, *Lost Illusions*, 192; “Flicoteaux est un nom inscrit dans bien des mémoires. Il est peu d’étudiants logés au quartier latin pendant les douze premières années de la Restauration qui n’aient fréquenté ce temple de la faim et de la misère.” (Balzac, *Illusions perdues*, 203-204.)

<sup>68</sup> Balzac, *Lost Illusions*, 211; “On ne peut pas être grand homme à bon marché, lui dit Daniel de sa voix douce. Le génie arrose ses œuvres de ses larmes. Le talent est une créature morale qui a, comme tous les êtres, une enfance sujette à des maladies. La société repousse les talents incomplets comme la nature emporte les créatures faibles ou mal conformées. Qui veut s’élever au-dessus des hommes doit se préparer à une lutte, ne reculer devant aucune difficulté. Un grand écrivain est un martyr qui ne mourra pas, voilà tout.” (Balzac, *Illusions perdues*, 223.)

and demoralizing process. Moreover, he suggests that writers are not able to achieve true greatness, and possible literary immortality, without undergoing these difficulties. The moment draws a poignant comparison to the type of genius that Madame de Bargeton described in her salon, wherein men of genius are men who make their own way and conquerors of the world, like Napoleon.<sup>69</sup> Instead, D'Arthez argues that literary genius is the polar opposite: a process of struggle and chance.

Balzac also draws a comparison between the literary greatness of struggling authors and the “cheapness” of journalism, as represented by Etienne Lousteau. Lousteau is a recurring character in Balzac's *Comédie humaine*, who worked at “a small newspaper, and wrote reviews of books and dramatic criticism of pieces played at the Ambigu-Comique, the Gaité, and the Panorama-Dramatique.”<sup>70</sup> Although he is initially part of the poor artist community that must eat at Flicoteaux, Etienne's fortunes improve enough that he no longer needs to dine there. In Lousteau, Lucien has a very present example of journalism's economic potential. Unlike the life that D'Arthez has set out for him, Lucien can see the ease, wealth, and fame that can come with entering into journalism.

Although Lousteau exemplifies success, he warns Lucien against becoming a journalist. Several weeks after he disappears from Flicoteaux, when Lucien has settled into his life as a poor but enlightened author, Lousteau reappears. Lucien quickly abandons D'Arthez for the more connected and wealthier Lousteau. Nevertheless, the latter advocates against Lucien entering into journalism, saying:

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<sup>69</sup> Balzac, *Lost Illusions*, 59. (See Chapter 1 for a further discussion on the idea of genius.)

<sup>70</sup> Such as *Muse du département*, *Splendeurs et misères des courtisanes*; Honoré de Balzac, *Lost Illusions*, 117; “[Lousteau] était rédacteur d'un petit journal, où il faisait des articles sur les livres nouveaux, et rendait compte des pièces jouées à l'Ambigu-Comique, à la Gaieté, au Panorama-Dramatique.” (Balzac, *Illusions perdues*, 208.)

You will find out as I did that underneath your beautiful dream-world is the turmoil of men, passions and needs. You'll find yourself inevitably involved in the fearful struggles between one work and another, one man and another, one faction and another, and you'll have to wage systematic warfare to avoid being abandoned even by your own allies. These ignoble conflicts bring disenchantment to the soul, corruption to the heart and the weariness born of vain effort: for such effort often results in conferring glory on a man you hate, a man of second-rate talent put forward as a genius in spite of you....There's still time to abdicate before you set foot on the bottom step towards the throne for which so many people are fighting. Don't throw honour away, as I do, in order to live.<sup>71</sup>

Like the now abandoned D'Arthez, Lousteau does not attempt to conceal or mitigate the hard truth about being a journalist. The surprise, however, is that entering into journalism is not as easy as Lucien previously thought. In fact, it is not a personal struggle with greatness, but a battle against the political factions and economic anxieties of the period. Moreover, Lousteau warns that it is a fight which will force Lucien to choose between his ambition and his honor. Thus, D'Arthez and Lousteau ultimately present Lucien with the opposing sides of a literary future: one offers greatness in exchange for hardship, while the other offers luxury for the loss of intellectual and literary integrity. Lucien is on the precipice of a great decision, and he chooses wrongly. The narrator says as much: "He did not know he had to choose between two different paths, two systems for which the Cénacle and journalism respectively stood."<sup>72</sup> Though he was warned against the consequences of journalism, his ambition motivates Lucien to accept the position of literary critic at a liberal newspaper, thus further eroding his honor and securing his future ruin.

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<sup>71</sup> Balzac, *Lost Illusions*, 245; "Comme moi, vous allez savoir que, sous toutes ces belles choses rêvées, s'agitent des hommes, des passions et des nécessités. Vous vous mêlerez forcément à d'horribles luttes, d'œuvre à œuvre, d'homme à homme, de parti à parti, où il faut se battre systématiquement pour ne pas être abandonné par les siens. Ces combats ignobles désenchantent l'âme, dépravent le cœur et fatiguent en pure perte, car vos efforts servent souvent à faire couronner un homme que vous haïssez...abdiquez avant de mettre un pied sur la première marche du trône que se disputent tant d'ambitions, et ne vous déshonorez pas comme je le fais pour vivre." (Balzac, *Illusions perdues*, 260.)

<sup>72</sup> Balzac, *Lost Illusions*, 252; "Il ne se savait pas placer entre deux voies distinctes, entre deux systèmes représentés par le cénacle et par le journalisme..." (Balzac, *Illusions perdues*, 267.)

Julien is similarly warned about the aristocratic society that he is about to enter. Although more economically and political hegemonic than the literary world of *Lost Illusions*, upper-class society is no less treacherous, nor is Julien less in danger of destroying his integrity. L'abbé Picard, Julien's mentor from the seminary, warns him in a way that fundamentally lacks the urgency or dark foreboding of the warning that Lucien receives. Instead he focuses on the importance of Julien's manners and conduct. On their way to meeting Julien's new employer, the Marquis de la Mole, l'abbé Picard informs him:

Anyone else would watch over you as if you were a girl during these first moments of your sojourn in this new Babylon. Go and sin right away, if sin is to be your fate, and I shall be deliver from the weakness that makes me concerned about you...And by the way, don't let these Parisians come to know the sound of your voice. If you say a word, they'll discover the secret of making fun of you. They have a way of it.<sup>73</sup>

L'abbé's language is imbued with a moralistic description, calling Paris a "modern Babylon." That moniker creates an important depiction of the city and its aristocratic world as treacherous, luxurious, and sinful. Moreover, l'abbé Picard paints the elite aristocratic world as one of appearances, conversation, and reputation. It is important to note that Picard does not warn Julien against taking up his secretarial post at the Hôtel de la Mole or against the potential dangers of doing so. Instead, he merely informs him of the correct way to act in this situation. This advice reinforces the superficial importance of appearance, as well as the hypocrisy that he learned while at the seminary.

### **Perfecting Hypocrisy but Destroying Honor**

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<sup>73</sup> Stendhal, *The Red and the Black*, 251, "Un autre vous garderait comme une jeune fille en ces premiers moments de votre séjour dans cette nouvelle Babylone. Perdez-vous tout de suite si vous avez à vous perdre, et je serai délivré de la faiblesse que j'ai de penser à vous...Du reste, ne faites pas connaître le son de votre voix à ces Parisiens-là. Si vous dites un mot, ils trouveront le secret de se moquer de vous. C'est leur talent." (Stendhal, *Le rouge et le noir*, vol. 2, 23.)

Both men enter into their respective high society environments—the literary scene and the aristocracy—with a broad understanding of what it means to be ambitious and successful. In the seminary, Julien understood that his success is directly tied his capacity to act in ways that are expected of him. Similarly, Lucien must conform to Mme. de Bargeton’s rules of high society to find his own success. We can see that in both characters, their original sense of Napoleonic ambition is conflated with society’s unrealistic expectations, which they consistently attempt to meet in an effort to conform and find the success they so desperately seek.

Julien perfects this elevated form of hypocrisy, which allows him to advance within the aristocratic world of the Hôtel de la Mole. While his hypocrisy allows him to become a close confidant of the Marquis and eventually the lover of his daughter, Mathilde, it also comes at the cost of the degradation of his honor. Earlier in the novel, Julien internally shamed the bourgeois of Verrières for their wealth and gross ignorance of the society beyond themselves.<sup>74</sup> However, when he enters the aristocratic world, it suddenly becomes natural for him to try to be like them and to adopt their mannerisms. Julien’s attempts at adopting the practices of the aristocracy are depicted with irony:

All his pleasures were calculated ones; he practised with his pistol shooting every day, he was one of the good pupils of the most famous fencing masters. As soon as he had a moment to himself, instead of spending it reading as he used to do, he dashed to the riding school and asked for the most vicious horses. When he went out with the riding master he was almost invariably thrown off his horse.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> “So there you see the stinking riches you will acquire, and you will only enjoy them under these conditions and in like company! You may well get a post worth twenty thousand francs, but you will obliged, while gorging yourself on meat, to prevent the poor prisoner from singing; you will host dinners on money stolen from his wretched pittance, and throughout your dinner he will be even more unhappy!” (Stendhal, *The Red and Black*, 147.); “Voilà donc, se disait la conscience de Julien, la sale fortune à laquelle tu parviendras, et tu n'en jouiras qu'à cette condition et en pareille compagnie! Tu auras peut-être une place de vingt mille francs, mais il faudra que, pendant que tu te gorges de viandes, tu empêches de chanter le pauvre prisonnier; tu donneras à dîner avec l'argent que tu auras volé sur sa misérable pitance, et pendant ton dîner il sera encore plus malheureux!” (Stendhal, *Le rouge et le noir*, 242.)

<sup>75</sup> Stendhal, *The Red and Black*, 276-277; “Tous ses plaisirs étaient de précaution: il tirait le pistolet tous les jours, il était un des bons élèves des plus fameux maîtres d'armes. Dès qu'il pouvait disposer d'un

Thus he adopts the habits and mannerisms of the aristocracy, all for the sake of his own success. It should not come as a surprise that Julien so readily adopts the trappings of the aristocratic life. Just as he had done in the seminary, he takes on the exercises of high society to cement his own success in the new environment. It allows him to fit more easily into this world, despite his low birth, and ends up benefiting him the long run. Sarah Sasson argues that Julien, in his position as the *parvenu*, seeks to rise through imitating the aristocracy, because he lacks the noble birth or higher education, which would more naturally lead to his social mobility. Moreover, his imitation, as illustrated through “external aspects” of his character, also acts as an attack on his humble origins. The *parvenu* states his pretension to become a copy of this world.<sup>76</sup> Thus, his falsely humble imitation constitutes a disturbing intrusion into the old order of things.<sup>77</sup> Both Julien and Lucien make successful attempts at intruding on this “old order,” but progressively more at the cost of their own integrity.

Lucien’s attraction for and eventual entrance into the journalism world marks the true betrayal of any noble or honorable pursuit. At first, he is intrigued by journalism’s possibilities and then comes to “[enjoy] this witty company to the point of intoxication.”<sup>78</sup> He soon approaches journalism like a soldier at battle, seeing it as a “weapon” that “he felt that he could wield...so he wished to take it.”<sup>79</sup> He throws himself into his new profession, which consists primarily of writing critiques of novels, plays, and poetry. Although his fame and wealth grows

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instant, au lieu de l'employer à lire comme autrefois, il courait au manège et demandait les chevaux les plus vicieux. Dans les promenades avec le maître du manège, il était presque régulièrement jeté par terre.” (Stendhal, *Le rouge et le noir*, vol. 2, 64.)

<sup>76</sup> Sasson, *Longing to Belong*, 21.

<sup>77</sup> Sarah Sasson, *Longing to Belong*, 21.

<sup>78</sup> Balzac, *Lost Illusions*, 317; “Il jouissait avec ivresse de cette société spirituelle.” (Balzac, *Illusions perdues*, 338.)

<sup>79</sup> Balzac, *Lost Illusions*, 252; “Cet esprit mobile aperçut dans le journal une arme à sa portée, il se sentait habile à la manier, il la voulut prendre.” (Balzac, *Illusions perdues*, 252.)

rapidly, it comes at the cost of hypocrisy and the commercialization of literature. Lucien works with Émile Blondet, another recurring character in Balzac's *Comédie humaine*, whose advice on writing critiques portrays a great deal about the practice. Blondet urges Lucien:

By attempting to prove that poetry consists wholly of imagery, you'll complain that our tongue gives little scope for poetry, you'll talk of the reproaches foreigners make to us about the *positivism* of our style...Demolish your previous argument by showing that we're in advance on the eighteenth century. Invent *Progress* - a delightful hoax to play on the bourgeois! The new literature goes in for tableaux in which all the genres are concentrated, comedy as well as drama, description, character-drawing and dialogue for which the brilliant complexities of an interesting plot provide a setting.<sup>80</sup>

Blondet's advice, which promises Lucien the financial and occupational success that he desires, portrays a deeper hypocrisy within the literary practices in journalism. It becomes clear that writing critiques is not a matter of truly appraising the work, but of creating a seductive, faux-intellectual analysis of culture. Thus, Lucien has completely abandoned any semblance of truth at the cost of his own intellectual and literary integrity. As he rises farther in this hypocritical environment, he moves farther away from the "acceptable," noble forms of literature as presented in the novel and thus his own honor as an authentic writer.

It is interesting at this point to consider the malleability of both Lucien and Julien as characters. It is clear that even from his initial formation in Angoulême, Lucien was more easily persuaded to portray his convictions, both political and ideological. Julien, on the other hand, displayed a more resilient, though largely secret, dedication to his liberal and Napoleonic beliefs and ideologies. Nevertheless, Stendhal shows that in Julien's ambition, there even comes a time

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<sup>80</sup> Balzac, *Lost Illusions*, 374; "En essayant de prouver que l'image est toute la poésie, tu te plaindras du peu de poésie que comporte notre langue, tu parleras des reproches que nous font les étrangers sur le positivisme de notre style...Accable ta précédente argumentation en faisant voir que nous sommes en progrès sur le dix-huitième siècle. Invente le progrès (une adorable mystification à faire aux bourgeois) ! Notre jeune littérature procède par tableaux où se concentrent tous les genres, la comédie et le drame, les descriptions, les caractères, le dialogue, sertis par les nœuds brillants d'une intrigue intéressante." (Balzac, *Illusions perdues*, 254.)

when he willingly disposes of his beloved Napoleonic and liberal dogmas. This moment comes when Julien participates in a mission to help organize a conspiracy that aims to strengthen the power of the clergy in France. He gets sent to the east, to which his only comment is, “At last the great name had been uttered, thought Julien; I shall be galloping off toward the — tonight.”<sup>81</sup> Julien is finally taking part in the higher echelons of political life, which he had desired as a Napoleon admirer in Verrières, but for the wrong side. He has become completely hypocritical, betraying everything that he once held so closely for the sake of opportunity and position among a conservative household. Reddy suggests that this is a habitual narrative for the time period, wherein “ambition and the shame of present poverty outweigh” any qualms he might have for betraying his beliefs.<sup>82</sup> This is certainly true for Julian, who expresses no hesitation at helping a conservative conspiracy. Julien’s mission has no effect on him or the rest of novel but the very fact that he so willingly betrayed his original convictions speaks to Reddy’s argument: “Once the poor young man has committed himself, opportunistically, to whatever cause is willing to pay him, he conceals only with difficulty the superficiality of his thoughts and ideals.”<sup>83</sup> Both Lucien and Julien willingly and opportunistically adopt a new way of thinking and acting for the sake of their own social advancement. However, it comes at the cost of integrity and the Napoleonic honor that now only seems like a distant memory.

### **What’s in a Name: Legitimacy in Restoration France**

The final step in their downfall for both protagonists is their overwhelming and impossible desire to become aristocrats; in other words, they hope to be able to completely

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<sup>81</sup> Stendhal, *The Red and the Black*, 396; “Voilà enfin le grand mot prononcé, pensa Julien, c’est vers le... que je galoperai cette nuit.” (Stendhal, *Le rouge et le noir*, 267.)

<sup>82</sup> William Reddy, *The Invisible Code: Honor and Sentiment in Post Revolutionary France, 1814-1848* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 223.

<sup>83</sup> Reddy, *The Invisible Code*, 223-224.

assimilate into high society. As we have previously established, neither Lucien nor Julien have direct noble lineage nor opportunities that are traditionally open to wealthy young men. Despite all of the success they have found, both fundamentally lack that key to legitimacy: noble birth. For Lucien, the connection is more obvious: his noble lineage on his mother's side. As we have seen, his lover in Angoulême, Madame de Bargeton, encourages Lucien to take his mother's aristocratic last name, de Rubempré. She is intensely aware of the power and influence behind the aristocratic name, and thus prompts him to claim possession of a superficial yet important part of his identity. In Paris, and thus far away from any ties to his poor upbringing and common lineage, Lucien adopts the aristocratic name completely and uses it in all of his writing.

Lucien's desire to obtain the true legitimacy that he lacks provides the final death knell to his success and mirrors the ultimate hypocrisy. In Lucien's final days in Paris, he is briefly introduced to the Duc de Rhétoré at the theatre who provides the final temptation leading toward Lucien's ruin. Lucien casually mentions his name as "de Rubempré" to which the Duke, knowing that he is not truly noble, replies:

You ought...to become a royalist. You have proved you are a man of wit: now prove you're a man of good sense. The only way to get a royal ordinance restoring the title and name of your maternal ancestors is to ask for it as a reward for services rendered to the Chateau. The Liberals will never make you a count!...Take advantage of its last moments of freedom to show you're a man to be reckoned with. In a few years' time a name and a title will be a more stable form of wealth than talent. So you can have everything: intelligence, noble rank and good looks, and the world will be at your feet. At present therefore be a Liberal only in order to put a better price on your royalism<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Balzac, *Lost Illusions*, 380, "Vous devriez, lui dit le duc vous faire royaliste. Vous vous êtes montré un homme d'esprit, soyez maintenant homme de bon sens. La seule manière d'obtenir une ordonnance du roi qui vous rende le titre et le nom de vos ancêtres maternels, est de la demander en récompense des services que vous rendrez au Château. Les libéraux ne vous feront jamais comte !...Profitez de ses derniers moments de liberté pour vous rendre redoutable. Dans quelques années, un nom et un titre seront en France des richesses plus sûres que le talent. Vous pouvez ainsi tout avoir : esprit, noblesse et beauté, vous arriverez à tout. Ne soyez donc en ce moment libéral que pour vendre avec avantage votre royalisme." (Balzac, *Illusions perdues*, 31.)

Balzac combines the press with politics, and politics with one's legitimacy. To begin, the duke suggests that if Lucien serviced the royalist press, the monarchy would endow him with a title. It suggests that not only are the newspapers inherently political and biased, but that nobility can be obtained as a reward rather than by birth. While the French monarchy has a long history of selling titles to the wealthy bourgeoisie, known as *la noblesse de robe*, they are always secondary to the true born aristocracy, *la noblesse de sang*.<sup>85</sup> Nevertheless, adopting the noble name of his mother as his own is the epitome of Lucien's social advancement. In the end, his desire to become an aristocrat convinces Lucien to betray his liberal friends, like Daniel D'Arthez, and forgo his political convictions by going over to the conservative press. The force of his ambition compels Lucien to betray both his ideals and friends for the prospect of reaching the epitome of social mobility.

More traditionally, in *The Red and the Black*, Julien attempts to achieve social mobility through marriage. As we have previously mentioned, he manages to integrate himself into the de la Mole household, and eventually becomes Mathilde's lover. After returning from his mission, Mathilde reveals that she is pregnant and wants Julien to become her husband. Moreover, she immediately confesses everything to her father, who is enraged but will not have him killed. With the threat of their secret elopement, and Mathilde becoming a Sorel, the Marquis de la Mole decides to ennoble Julien with Sorel de La Vernaye, and gives him a military commission as Lieutenant of Hussars. Although Mathilde seemingly was ready to elope and live as a peasant with her husband, she thanks her father "for having saved me from the name of Sorel."<sup>86</sup> Through these machinations, Stendhal shows the aristocracy's preoccupation with a noble line

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<sup>85</sup> Franklin L. Ford, *Robe and Sword: The Regrouping of the French Aristocracy After Louis XIV* (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1953), 50.

<sup>86</sup> Stendhal, *The Red and the Black*, 462; "Que je vous remercie, cher papa, de m'avoir sauvée de ce nom de Sorel, etc., etc." (Stendhal, *Le rouge et le noir*, 375.)

and name. What is more, the author explicitly shows Julien's own preoccupation with noble lineage:

That evening, when she informed Julien that he was a lieutenant in the Hussars, his joy knew no bounds. To picture it, just consider his lifelong ambition and the passion he now felt for his son. The change of name filled him with astonishment. When you come to think about it, he reflected, my story's ended, and all the credit goes to me alone. I've succeed in making this month of pride fall in love with me, he added, glancing at Mathilde; her father can't live without her, nor she without me.<sup>87</sup>

The intrigues and maneuvers of Julien's ambition have finally come to fruition, far beyond his initial desire to join the clergy. Moreover, Julien's conception of his own success is inherently rooted in the aristocratic hierarchy that he had previously rejected.

For both men, these final acts push them past the point of no return: both betray their former codes of honor for the chance to achieve that once unreachable goal of becoming a member of the aristocracy. Lucien begins to work for the royalist press for which he is vilified by his former literary friends, as well as by the liberal press. When he falls into poverty due to outstanding debts, he has no friends or literary community to rely on. His betrayal thus costs Lucien dearly: when he can no longer pay his debts, his lover dies, and he has no one left to turn to. He flees Paris, ruined and heart-broken.

Julien's ambition costs him even more: his life. The perfect life he has constructed is destroyed when Julien's former lover, Madame de Rênal, sends a letter to the Marquis which describes Julien as an overly ambitious man who tries to make his fortune on seducing

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<sup>87</sup> Stendhal, *The Red and the Black*, 462-463; "Le soir, lorsqu'elle apprit à Julien qu'il était lieutenant de hussards, sa joie fut sans bornes. On peut se la figurer par l'ambition de toute sa vie, et par la passion qu'il avait maintenant pour son fils. Le changement de nom le frappait d'étonnement. 'Après tout, pensait-il, mon roman est fini, et à moi seul tout le mérite. J'ai su me faire aimer de ce monstre d'orgueil, ajoutait-il en regardant Mathilde; son père ne peut vivre sans elle, et elle sans moi.'" (Stendhal, *Le rouge et le noir*, vol. 2, 379.)

aristocratic women.<sup>88</sup> As a result, the Marquis retracts his support for Julien and his marriage to Mathilde. In shock and anger, Julien rushes back to Verrières and shoots Madame de Rênal in retaliation for her letter. Although she survives the attack, Julien is captured, imprisoned, and eventually executed.

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Lucien and Julien's respective downfalls are crucial in considering the intersection of ambition, honor, and society. As they are introduced into high society, and attempt to emulate its characteristics, they begin to desire legitimacy in the eyes of this reactionary society. The pursuit of this legitimacy causes an erosion of their morals and integrity. They become increasingly willing to renounce their beliefs, friends, and morals in order to have a better chance of obtaining the unattainable noble life. However, therein lies the irony: despite their machinations, sacrifices, and the force of their ambition, Julien and Lucien are endeavoring to obtain something that is simply out of their reach. By virtue of their low birth, they remain alien to the high culture into which they attempt to assimilate. They are fighting a battle they have already lost from the beginning of their "adventures."

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<sup>88</sup> "I am obliged to think that one of his means of getting on in a household is to try to seduce the woman who wields the most influence." (Stendhal, *The Red and the Black*, 467.); "Pauvre et avide, c'est à l'aide de l'hypocrisie la plus consommée, et par la séduction d'une femme faible et malheureuse, que cet homme a cherché à se faire un état et à devenir quelque chose." (Stendhal, *Le rouge et le noir*, 383.)

### Conclusion

Although the Bourbon Restoration marked the end of Napoleon's reign, the dissemination and solidification of his legacy lasted throughout the nineteenth century. It had its most resounding effect on poor young men born during his reign but still too late to take part in the political and military glory of the First Empire. Instead, they were raised on the collective memory of his ambition and lived in a society pervaded by his influence. Most importantly, they came to idolize Napoleon, who in their eyes became less man and more a character of his own myth.

Napoleon's shadow certainly loomed over French political and social life throughout the century, but his legacy manifested itself in different ways. Most obviously, the collapse of the French empire left behind devoted Bonapartists and Republicans who awaited, if not Napoleon's return to power, then an heir presumptive to his political and ideological legacy. Socially speaking, he left behind the memory of unprecedented social mobility for literate men of all social classes. The Bourbon Restoration presented a harsh reality in comparison.

The Restoration was reactionary not only politically, but socially as well. The constitutional monarchy re-instated a hierarchy that echoed that of the *Ancien Régime*. The nobility, who had regained their titles and land on Louis XVIII's return, notoriously dominated the social and political landscape throughout the Restoration. Moreover, its reactionary social system meant that the Restoration's poor young men, well aware of Napoleon's policies of social mobility, were left with little more than hero worship and echoes of his ambition. Therefore, this generation was inherently at odds with the reactionary social system into which they had to make their way as adults.

My study has shown, through literary analysis of two important novels of the period, how Napoleon's legacy affected the archetype of the "poor young man". In particular, I have shown that ambition and the desire for social mobility were the prominent components of the post-Napoleonic narrative. Lucien's ambition prompted him to use his literary talent to gain fame and fortune rather than writing for its own sake. Julien took the Napoleonic ambition more literally by aiming to become a soldier in Napoleon's image. These characters had completely different occupational goals, but Napoleon's legacy remained ever present. The divergent manifestations of Napoleonic ambition – writer, soldier, priest, and secretary – underscore the breadth of the former emperor's influence during the Restoration years.

Julien and Lucien were both able to find success, but at the cost of their integrity and beliefs. Lucien renounced writing "noble" literature in favor of selling his talents to the artificial and impersonal world of journalism. Julien, initially a devoted Bonapartist, stifled his liberal convictions in order to integrate into the ultra-royalist aristocracy. These actions proved fruitful as they moved closer to their goals of wealth, power, and fame. Yet just as they appeared on the verge of achieving these objectives, Lucien and Julien aimed still higher, toward total

assimilation into the French aristocracy. In a society where social mobility for the poorer classes was no longer an option, the aristocratic hierarchy became the system in which these men hoped to rise. Balzac and Stendhal reveal the impossibility of their attempts at the climax of both novels. Julien and Lucien were able to find success within the confines of Restoration society, achieving wealth and even fame. However, as soon as they attempted to transcend that final class barrier and assimilate into the aristocracy, they failed. Napoleonic ambition propelled these characters beyond their class and social status, but naturally came in conflict with the reactionary aristocratic hierarchy of the era.

Therein lies the tragic irony of these novels: Bourbon Restoration society inherently and actively rejected poor young men like Julien and Lucien from its elite circle. Thus, the young men's attempts at achieving social mobility were already made impossible by the environment into which they were attempting to rise. The Napoleonic legend created the seductive vision of success for young men of all social classes. The reactionary reality of the Bourbon Restoration showed this only to be a cruel illusion.

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