

not invalidate Balzac's psychology. His beauty and gentleness would naturally appeal to Esther, just as his pliant will made him a fit subject for Vautrin's great experiment. Nor is this experiment an unnatural one, since a similar one is made whenever a child is adopted (*Cf.* also "*Père Goriot*" and "*Les Marana*."). As for the claim that "*Splendeurs et Misères*" suffers because Lucien is so weak a hero, it may be answered that he is no more the true hero of the book than Adam is of "*Paradise Lost*." Vautrin is Balzac's Satan and Esther is his Eve, and, when criticism has had its say, we fall back upon the incontrovertible fact that Balzac has made these two characters central figures in intrigues that are intensely interesting—perhaps as interesting as are to be found in the whole range of prose fiction. He has also displayed remarkable skill in utilizing as subordinate personages a very large number of characters drawn from the most important groups of the "*Comedy*." Through Lucien we are brought into relations with the Grandlieus and their exclusive set, with the dandies, and with the journalists. Through Jacques Collin we make acquaintance with Prudence Servien, Paillard and other criminals only less strong and astute than their remarkable chief. Through Nucingen and his senile passion we become interested in the three great detectives and their methods. We hold our breath as "*the combat deepens*." We shudder at the fate that befalls Lydie and Esther, Peyrade and Contenson. We confess at the end of the second part that no author has done more than Balzac to prove that evil ways lead to the retribution described in the third part.

It is needless to comment at length upon the merit of special scenes and passages. From the opening pages descriptive of the Opera we feel that we are in the master's hands and that he can do with us what he will—that he can take us to the convent where Esther tries vainly to overcome the effects of heredity and environment; that he can lead us