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## Balzac on the BBC: Serial Breaks and Adaptive Returns in *Père Goriot* (1968)<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract:** This article examines the relationship between adaptation and the television serial through an analysis of the BBC version of Honoré de Balzac's *Le Père Goriot*. First broadcast in May 1968, *Père Goriot* remains the only adaptation of Balzac's novel produced for British television. The episodic format of serial drama provides a natural context for Balzac's work by revealing the author's sensitivity to narrative breaks and pauses as devices for generating suspense. More importantly, seriality represents a valuable conceptual framework through which to reflect on the adaptive process. As a serial returns to the screen in successive episodes, so adaptation is predicated on the return of its source material in a form that is both distinct from, and intrinsically connected to, what has come before. At the hands of director Paddy Russell and scriptwriter David Turner, *Père Goriot* contemplates its own returns to an array of earlier sources - visual illustration, theatrical melodrama, and even the vampire horror film - and in so doing invites us to consider adaptation in a more positive light, as an organic, open-ended process in which the source is perpetually nourished and reinvigorated by new artistic undertakings.

**Keywords:** Honoré de Balzac, BBC, *Le Père Goriot*, television, serial drama, illustration, melodrama, vampirism, Pilkington Report, Paddy Russell

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Television keeps coming back to *Le Père Goriot*. Since 1957, when Jean Vertex recreated passages from the novel in his three-part series, *Vautrin*, for TF1, there have been at least six television adaptations of Honoré de Balzac's celebrated work. In France, Jean-Louis Bory's 1972 television film was long regarded as the most faithful reinterpretation of *Le Père Goriot* for the small screen, a factor which perhaps explains why French broadcasters did not revisit the novel for almost thirty years. In 2001, the loosely-inspired mini-series *Rastignac ou les ambitieux*, directed by Alain Tasma, appeared on France 2, drawing on elements of *Le Père Goriot*, *Illusions perdues*, and *Splendeurs et misères des courtisanes*. Two years later, in 2004, the same channel recruited Jean-Daniel Verhaeghe to direct a heritage adaptation of *Le Père Goriot* in which Charles Aznavour starred as the father destroyed by his obsessive love for his daughters. Outside France, broadcasters have reworked the novel for their own national audiences. In 1971, Spanish television commissioned a five-part mini-series, *Papá Goriot*, paving the way for a more ambitious twenty-part serial, broadcast under the same title, in 1976.<sup>2</sup> While television has produced numerous versions of *Le Père Goriot*, this assortment of adaptations has garnered little interest among scholars. According to Sylvie Boulard Bezat, critics have mostly ignored television adaptations of the novel out of a sense of disappointment that none can ever truly capture the realism of Balzac's text. 'Le trait commun de ces adaptations du *Père Goriot*', she writes, including cinema and theatre in her assessment, 'semble donc être la médiocrité. [...] Certaines sont fort bien écrites, d'autres très divertissantes, d'autres encore délicieusement démodées, mais elles souffrent toutes de la comparaison avec l'original' (1987: 177).

Such lukewarm appraisals nevertheless fail to engage with the specificity of television as a medium, or the reasons for which *Le Père Goriot* continues to be

adapted for the small screen. Focussing on the BBC's 1968 version of the novel, *Père Goriot*, the present article seeks to address this critical lacuna by exploring the ways in which Balzac's text proves inherently suited to adaptation as a television serial. This four-part mini-series appears as an intriguing case study through which to consider the re-imagining of *Le Père Goriot*, not least because it illustrates the artistic flexibility and narrative possibilities of the serial format. As a starting point for my analysis, I want to begin by situating *Père Goriot* within the broader context of BBC serial drama and the vogue for documentary realism that swept through British television during the 1960s. The second part of my discussion proceeds to demonstrate that the concept of seriality, with its connotations of fracture, repetition, and return, presents a valuable framework through which to re-read *Le Père Goriot*. Adaptation, as Jørgen Bruhn, Anne Gjelsvik, and Henriette Thune argue, is a two-way process in which a novel 'alters appearance and may be interpreted in new ways, in light of the adaptation' (2011: 9). The episodic structure of the BBC serial calls attention to Balzac's sensitivity to narrative breaks and pauses, and reveals in particular the author's unconventional – and rarely acknowledged – use of these techniques to generate suspense. Finally, and most importantly, I argue that seriality can help to further our understanding of the adaptive process itself by pointing to ways in which adaptors can play on our expectations and knowledge of earlier works of art. As a serial returns to the screen in successive episodes, so adaptation is predicated on the return of its source material in a form that is both distinct from, and intrinsically connected to, what has come before. At the hands of scriptwriter David Turner and director Paddy Russell, *Père Goriot* contemplates its own returns to an array of sources – visual illustration, theatrical melodrama, even the vampire horror film – and in so doing invites us to conceive of adaptation as an organic process in

which the source is perpetually nourished and reinvigorated by new artistic undertakings.

First broadcast in the UK in May 1968 – a scheduling that appears to have been unrelated to the social and political turmoil which spread across France during that month – *Père Goriot* coincided with a period of unprecedented interest in Balzac's work within BBC Television Drama. Between 1965 and 1971, no fewer than three Balzac adaptations featured on the BBC. At Christmas 1965, a three-part recreation of *Eugénie Grandet* aired on BBC2. After *Père Goriot* in 1968, *La Cousine Bette* also became a five-part mini-series in 1971, starring Helen Mirren as Valérie Marneffe.<sup>3</sup> Balzac's prominence on television during this six-year period begs the question as to why the BBC turned – and returned – to *La Comédie humaine*, making it a staple of its serial drama output. Part of the answer lies, first, with the changes that were transforming both British society and the television industry during the 1960s. As John Caughie observes, the 1960s 'have the reputation of being a decade in which [...] Britain became a little more experimental in its forms' (2000: 78). Against the backdrop of growing economic affluence and an end to the post-war austerity of the 1950s, a young generation challenged the traditional values espoused by its parents, while British culture became increasingly receptive to new artistic movements from Europe, not least the French *nouvelle vague*. This mood of social change and cultural ferment was felt at the BBC, where the appointment of Hugh Carleton Greene as Director-General in 1960 encouraged a further shift towards 'testing boundaries and giving creativity its head' (Caughie, 2000: 78). Far from representing a safe, nostalgic choice, a charge often levelled at heritage drama, the adaptation of Balzac for television echoed the Corporation's newfound openness to artistic experiment. As BBC Television Drama extended its range beyond the reassuring familiarity of

authors from the domestic canon, Balzac, whose work had never before been adapted for British television, appeared as a fresh, innovative choice of subject matter.

The BBC's frequent returns to the Balzacian corpus also occurred within the wider context of the increased demand for television during the 1960s. As Rob Turnock points out, the number of television licences held in the UK rose from a little over three million in 1954 to almost thirteen million ten years later (2007: 2). This exponential growth in the viewing audience was key to the development of British television drama, and helped to stimulate what critics have readily identified as its Golden Age. As the BBC competed with ITV for a share of what by 1962 was 'effectively a national audience' (Burns, 1979: 53), the Corporation sought to attract and, crucially, retain viewers by expanding its serial drama portfolio – a strategy that quickly paid dividends with series such as *Z Cars* (1962-78), *Dr Finlay's Casebook* (1962-71) and *Doctor Who* (1963-present). The appointment of Sydney Newman as Head of BBC Drama in 1963 gave further impetus to the BBC's growing enthusiasm for the series/serial format and, indeed, its subsequent recourse to Balzac. Recruited from ABC Television, where he had been responsible for the single-play series *Armchair Theatre* (1956-74), Newman maintained that the BBC should cultivate its strength in quality programming. While he has been derided as a philistine who lacked any real appreciation of literature (Caughie, 2000: 75-77), Newman oversaw the creation of some of the most watched dramas of the day, most notably a sweeping 26-part adaptation of John Galsworthy's *Forsyte Saga*, which in 1969 attracted a peak audience of more than eighteen million viewers (Giddings and Selby, 2001: 27). Moreover, he insisted that BBC dramatizations of canonical literature should broach both mature themes and complex socio-political issues. As the self-appointed historian of nineteenth-century French society, Balzac fitted perfectly with Newman's

vision, which gained further momentum with the launch of BBC2 in April 1964. As Robert Giddings and Keith Selby explain, the availability of a new Saturday evening slot ‘allowed for a more sophisticated and sometimes daring choice of novel, and a more adult treatment in longer episodes’ (2001: 26). All three Balzac adaptations aired in this slot, as did serials based on other nineteenth-century French novels including Flaubert’s *Madame Bovary* (1964 and 1975) and *L’Éducation sentimentale* (1970), and Zola’s *Nana* (1968) and *Germinal* (1970).

Having identified Balzac’s work as a rich adaptive resource in the 1960s, British television provided a natural context for the novelist’s well-known fascination with private life. This was a decade in which both the BBC and ITV showed a growing interest in the domestic and quotidian. Determined to secure the licence to operate the UK’s third television channel, the BBC underlined its capacity for producing ‘serious’ drama by focussing increasingly on contemporary social issues and documentary realism. A new emphasis on the supposedly ordinary lives of British people became apparent across a variety of genres, and intensified following the publication of the Pilkington Report on Broadcasting, which in 1962 warned against the ‘trivialization’ of television entertainment. Beginning in January of that year, *Z Cars* presented a much grittier – and more controversial – image of the out-of-uniform lives of police officers than had been seen on British television before.<sup>4</sup> In 1966, the ground-breaking television play *Cathy Come Home* also portrayed a young woman’s struggle to save her home and marriage. ITV, meanwhile, capitalized on the popularity of ‘kitchen sink’ drama, a genre concerned primarily with the depiction of working-class life in northern England, as *Coronation Street* (1960-present) took viewers inside the homes of a fictional town on the outskirts of Manchester.<sup>5</sup> In their exploration of the domestic realm, these single plays and long-running series echoed

Balzac's earlier enthusiasm for creating drama and spectacle from the raw material of everyday life. The author of *La Comédie humaine* was widely celebrated during the nineteenth century as the *romancier de la vie privée par excellence*. In the preface to *Eugénie Grandet* in 1833, Balzac credited himself with exposing stories of private distress that, but for his intervention, would have remained hidden from view. Two years later, the novelist's secretary, Félix Davin, lauded the dexterity with which Balzac peeled away the secrets of French society. 'Ce drame avec ses passions et ses types,' wrote Davin, 'il [M. de Balzac] est allé le chercher dans la famille, autour du foyer; [...] fouillant sous [des] enveloppes en apparence si uniformes et si calmes' (1976-81, 1: 1153-54). As British television during the 1960s probed ever deeper into the private sphere, Balzac's own artistic concerns were clearly well matched to this trend.

The BBC version of *Le Père Goriot* places special emphasis on Balzac's interest in the private and the domestic. In the opening scene of episode 1, the novelist's own stated wish to penetrate behind closed doors is reflected in Madame Vauquer's eavesdropping outside Goriot's room as she attempts to confirm her suspicion that he is a 'whore-monger'. Having ascertained that her lodger is indeed with a woman, the landlady then disturbs another of her boarders, this time by waking Rastignac. This invasion of privacy is reinforced by the intimate, close-up shots used in this sequence. After homing in on the attic room of the boarding house in the painted image shown at the beginning of each episode, the camera then cuts to a close-up of Goriot cradling a woman's hand, followed by a further close-up of Madame Vauquer as she strains to hear what is happening on the other side of the door, and then, finally, another close shot of Rastignac's face as he lies in bed asleep. The studio-based nature of the production further accentuates this intrusion on private



life. In keeping with the smaller budgets available to television dramas compared to their cinematic counterparts, the action in *Père Goriot* takes place almost exclusively indoors. With the exception of the final sequence of episode 4, in which Goriot is buried at Père-Lachaise, the serial is centred mainly on interiors: the Pension Vauquer, the Hôtel de Beauséant, and the homes of Goriot's daughters. However, while this preference for interior settings appears to have been motivated partly by financial necessity, it is entirely consistent with the source text, in which privacy is a key theme. As Balzac takes pains to point out, 'les secrètes infortunes du Père Goriot' (1976-81, 3: 50) are the central concern of a domestic drama with which the novelist encourages his readers to identify: 'il est si véritable, que chacun peut en reconnaître les éléments chez soi' (50). In the individual stories of the fictional boarders, Balzac's own text further testifies to a breaking-down of familial relationships: Rastignac separated from his mother and sisters in the Midi; Goriot repudiated by his daughters, except when they want money; and Victorine disinherited by her father. The upheavals of private life underpin both the dramatic interest of *Le Père Goriot*, and the novel's subsequent affinity with television.

If Balzac's artistic fascination with privacy resonated strongly with British television in the 1960s, the structure of *Le Père Goriot* proved highly – albeit problematically – suited to adaptation as a serial. Balzac's text first appeared in four instalments in the *Revue de Paris* between December 1834 and February 1835. In the original serialization, part 1 of the novel, 'Une pension bourgeoise', gives an overview of the situation in the boarding house at the end of November 1819, before the second instalment recounts Rastignac's first clumsy forays into Parisian society ('L'Entrée dans le monde'). Part 3 then details the events that culminate in Vautrin's arrest ('Trompe-la-mort'), and in the final instalment, the reader is witness to Goriot's

decline and eventual death ('Les Deux Filles').<sup>6</sup> This episodic structure appears to lend itself easily to serial drama, a format which, as John Ellis explains, 'multiplies incident along the way' and 'implies a certain knowledge accumulated over the span of its broadcasting' (1982: 123). However, the task of recreating *Le Père Goriot* as a mini-series is complicated by Balzac's rejection of many of the techniques on which serial fiction, prompted by the explosion in popularity of the *roman-feuilleton* after 1836, would later come to depend. The novel eschews in particular the facility of the cliffhanger, a convention harnessed to thrilling effect by Alexandre Dumas *père* and Eugène Sue in the 1840s, in favour of a dramatic structure of exposition, rising drama, climax, and dénouement. The conclusion to part 1, for example, ends on a dry note which barely tantalizes the reader with the prospect of a mystery still to unfold: 'Ici se termine l'exposition de cette obscure, mais effroyable tragédie parisienne' (126). By a similar token, Balzac refuses to present an over-abundance of dramatic incident for fear that this would undermine his realist aesthetic. Whereas the *roman-feuilleton*, as Bradley Stephens reminds us in his reading of *Les Trois mousquetaires* (2014), sought to provide readers with a daily infusion of excitement, *Le Père Goriot* uses moments of high drama – such as Vautrin's exposure as an escaped convict – only sparingly, situating them within a much broader exploration of the moral, social, and historical dimensions of the narrative.

The dearth of cliffhangers in *Le Père Goriot* poses a creative difficulty for serial television, which often relies on such conventions to sustain the curiosity of viewers. Turner's script responds to this concern by adapting the novel in four weekly episodes ('Gilded Youth', 'The Mandarin', 'Vautrin', and 'Father') whose endings depart from the chapter structure laid down by Balzac's manuscript. Episode 1, for example, concludes with Rastignac leaving the Restaud house, perplexed at his

apparent error in mentioning the name of Goriot. Episode 2 then begins *in medias res*, as Madame de Beauséant's questioning of Eugène plunges the viewer back into the enigma left unresolved by the previous week's episode: 'Goriot? But how do you know Goriot?'. Turner's decision not to follow Balzac's original chapter divisions is perhaps unsurprising given that these are usually suppressed in modern editions of the novel. However, by framing two episodes around this moment of suspense, the television serial calls attention to the key importance of narrative breaks, pauses, and interruptions in driving Balzac's plot. Such moments of fracture abound in *Le Père Goriot*, not least in the passage describing the blunder that leads to Rastignac's exclusion from the Hôtel de Restaud. Withholding any immediate explanation of the young man's social *faux pas*, Balzac repeatedly interrupts the progress of the narrative. Before Eugène can ask why Goriot was leaving via the back stairs, Anastasie interjects with a question of her own: 'Aimez-vous la musique, monsieur?' (101). Only after travelling across Paris – a journey itself interrupted by Rastignac's failure to realize that there is more than one Hôtel de Beauséant – does Eugène discover the private shame behind Goriot's relationship with his daughters. By highlighting these fissures in its source text, the television serial enables us to glimpse a novelist who was able to create suspense in unexpected ways, and whose capacity for doing so was by no means limited to the cliffhangers and breathless action that would later become stock features of the serial novel.

In addition to their key role in generating suspense in *Le Père Goriot*, breaks and pauses form part of Balzac's wider interest in the theme of fragmentation. The novel portrays a world that, both literally and figuratively, is falling apart. In the famed opening description of the boarding house, the crumbling statue of Venus in Madame Vauquer's garden foreshadows the dilapidated state of the furniture inside.

‘Si elle n’a ni trous ni haillons’, the narrator observes of the pitiful collection of rickety chairs and patched-up cushions, ‘elle va tomber en pourriture’ (54). Balzac gives further expression to the theme of fragmentation in evoking Rastignac’s pursuit of social advancement. As Eugène attempts to master the ruthless code of behaviour required by Paris, he realizes that his provincial values of hard work and patient endeavour are being progressively undermined, and his identity fractured: ‘Aussi [...] se voyait-il si loin du Rastignac venu l’année dernière à Paris, qu’en le lorgnant par un effet d’optique morale, il se demandait s’il se ressemblait en ce moment à lui-même’ (237). Beyond the confines of the plot, fracturing and fragmentation are also likely to characterize the experience of reading *Le Père Goriot*. With its dense vocabulary and protracted biographies of individual characters, the text makes significant demands of the reader. ‘Anyone who was forced to decipher the long description of the Pension Vauquer word by word in a classroom’, suggests Graham Robb, ‘might remember it as a small novel in itself’ (1995: 257). Balzac’s realist aesthetic, underpinned by his ambition to construct an exhaustive vision of the physical world, invites the reader to engage in detailed observation as a means of understanding better the complexities of nineteenth-century society. However, such exhaustiveness may actually foster a selective approach to consuming the text. As Roland Barthes claimed of the works of Balzac and Zola, in terms which resonate with the specific challenge of reading *Le Père Goriot*,

nous ne lisons pas tout avec la même intensité de lecture; un rythme s’établit, désinvolte, peu respectueux à l’égard de l’intégrité du texte; l’avidité même de la connaissance nous entraîne à survoler ou à enjamber certains passages (pressentis “ennuyeux”) pour retrouver au plus vite les lieux brûlants de l’anecdote (1973: 18-19).

In its narrative and thematic concerns, and in the kind of readerly behaviour that its author inadvertently encourages, *Le Père Goriot* appears as a fractured, fragmented text.

Serial drama proves well equipped to reveal motifs of fracturing and fragmentation at work in its source texts, as Kate Griffiths has shown in relation to television adaptations of Maupassant (2013: 146-48). The serial is itself a fractured format predicated on the broadcast of distinct but interlocking episodes over a period of days, weeks, or months. Prior to the advent of domestic video recorders, the act of watching a serial also brought with it a risk of fracture and discontinuity for viewers and broadcasters alike. In the absence of such equipment, 'it is quite conceivable', notes Ellis, 'that a large proportion of the audience will miss one or other episode' (1982: 123), and that, consequently, viewers will lose interest in the serial as a whole. *Père Goriot* redeploys Balzac's interest in the aesthetics of fragmentation while also exploiting the conventions of the serial format. The boarding house set designed by Michael Young captures in particular the run-down state of the Pension Vauquer. In the attic rooms inhabited by Goriot and Rastignac, swathes of plaster are shown to be missing from the walls, exposing the bare wooden frame beneath, while the holed coat worn by Goriot metaphorizes the gradual erosion of the character's fortune. More importantly, fragmentation characterizes the narrative methods that Turner and Russell choose to adopt. The opening titles to episode 1 delight in creating a partial, fractured perspective by restricting the viewer's understanding of what is happening on screen. Occluded by the image of the boarding house which prefaces each episode, a fragment of conversation between two of the protagonists, at this point unseen by the viewer, suggests an illicit romance. 'Do you love me?', asks the male voice. 'Do you still love me? Please say it.' Even after the voice is identified as that of an old

man we assume to be Goriot, the close-up denies us a complete view of the woman he is fawning over by cropping her arm with the edge of the shot. In addition to mobilising the narrative breaks and pauses inherent in the novel, *Père Goriot* thus uses the established formula of the opening titles to engage in its own acts of narrative fracturing, and in so doing, asserts its status as a uniquely televisual adaptation of the source text.

As the BBC serial throws into relief Balzac's artistic interest in fragmentation, so it also highlights the patterns of repetition and return at the heart of the novelist's creative praxis.<sup>7</sup> Serial drama is by definition a format centred on the regularity of its own returns to the screen. Television scheduling, observes Ellis, 'provides a regular, week by week, slot in which the repetition of particular series formats can take place' (1982: 116). Moreover, the series or serial revolves around the convention of revisiting characters and settings with which viewers become more familiar with each successive episode. *Père Goriot* engages with the repetitions and returns of its own format, and integrates them fully into its retelling of the source material. In Turner and Russell's version, Goriot appears as a man condemned to live backwards, as he revisits the same people and places, and formulates the same complaints in repetitive language. In the opening credits of episode 3, the old man claims that 'money buys everything, even your own children', a phrase he repeats bitterly, and almost verbatim, on his deathbed in episode 4. Goriot remains trapped in a cycle of returns even within individual episodes. In two scenes from episode 1, the tormented father refuses to sell his silver to the usurer Gobseck, only to have to swallow his pride and go back to the pawn shop once his financial resources have again been depleted. While underscoring the obsessive nature of Goriot's relationship with his daughters, repetition also functions as a driver of Turner and Russell's adaptive method. Specific

shots and camera angles come back persistently, not least the close-ups that are in keeping with the technical and budgetary constraints under which television operated during this period. A sequence of close shots expresses, in particular, Delphine's entrapment in a loveless marriage, and the desire for personal and financial independence that had also become one of the key tenets of the 1960s feminist movement. As Delphine attempts to justify her affair with de Marsay, the camera focusses in on actress June Ritchie's anguished face, culminating in an extreme close-up as she declares 'I couldn't manage on the allowance my husband gave me'. In addition to underscoring the intimacy of the scene, this recourse to close shots returns the audience to debates over gender relations contemporaneous with the time of the adaptation – debates that would have carried particular meaning for Paddy Russell, who turned to directing after becoming disillusioned with the low pay offered to actresses compared to their male counterparts.<sup>8</sup>

Balzac's text foreshadows the BBC serial by structuring its plot around instances of repetition and return. Such returns are exemplified by the trips that Anastasie and Delphine make to the Pension Vauquer in order to assail their father with requests for money, visits whose frequency provides Madame Vauquer with another excuse to mock Goriot: 'Vous en avez donc trente-six, des filles? dit aigrement Madame Vauquer' (71). The old man is revitalized by seeing his daughters and lavishing gifts upon them, and Balzac's description of the character as 'ce Christ de la Paternité' (231) evokes an image of resurrection and renewal as well as one of self-sacrifice. The sight of his beloved daughters is sufficient to return Goriot to happiness, a fact of which he reminds Delphine when he presents her with a new apartment: 'Si tu savais, mon enfant, [...] combien tu peux me rendre heureux à bon marché! viens me voir quelquefois' (232). As well as helping to shape the plot of *Le*

*Père Goriot*, notions of repetition and return underpin the narrative on a textual level. Balzac's own artistic returns to works including Chateaubriand's *Génie du christianisme* and Shakespeare's *King Lear* are well attested.<sup>9</sup> However, as David Bellos points out, the novel also 'draws for its material on stories and themes worked out differently in other Balzacian texts' (Bellos, 1987: 36). Through his celebrated system of reappearing characters – a device that has since been appropriated by television soap operas – Balzac sought to add depth to *Le Père Goriot* by linking the novel to the wider narrative of *La Comédie humaine*. Madame de Beauséant, for example, had already featured in *La Femme abandonnée* (1832), in which we witness the collapse of another of her romantic relationships following her withdrawal from Parisian life. Similarly, the reappearance of Frédéric Taillefer recalls the 1831 tale *L'Auberge rouge*, in which Taillefer is suspected of having murdered a wealthy merchant in order to steal his precious cargo of gold and diamonds – a fortune that later becomes the object of Vautrin's own malevolent plan to have Taillefer's son killed in *Le Père Goriot*. Without undermining the reader's ability to comprehend the novel at hand, Balzac revels in these textual returns as he playfully exposes the connections between *Le Père Goriot* and a host of sources including his own work.<sup>10</sup>

In their reinterpretation of the text, Turner and Russell make no direct reference to other stories from *La Comédie humaine*, and do not assume that the viewer possesses a wider knowledge of Balzac's fiction. Like its source text, however, the BBC serial returns to earlier works of art in order to enrich its own creative process. Foremost among these sources is visual illustration. In its costumes, and in key gestures performed by the actors on screen, *Père Goriot* evokes illustrations from nineteenth-century editions of the novel. With her frilly bonnet and voluminous dress, Pat Nye's appearance as Madame Vauquer, for example, echoes



Bertall's 1843 illustration of the character for the Furne edition of *La Comédie humaine*. More subtly, in a scene from episode 1, Andrew Keir stands with thumbs tucked into his pockets in an angled pose reminiscent of Laisné's 1851 engraving of Vautrin.<sup>11</sup> While confirming that illustrations served as reference points for the television serial, actor David Weston, who played Bianchon in *Père Goriot*, nevertheless warns against over-stating their importance to the production. Of greater concern to Russell and the BBC team, claims Weston, was how best to exploit the new artistic opportunities afforded by colour television (2013). Aired less than six months after the BBC broadcast its first colour costume drama, *Vanity Fair*, in 1967, *Père Goriot* displays an acute sensitivity to the use of colour from the outset. In the opening scene of episode 1, Anastasie wears a bonnet topped with red feathers, reflecting both her quick temperament and the debts that bring her back repeatedly to her father. The serial also showcases its attentiveness to colour in the evolution of Rastignac's wardrobe. In episode 1, the young student, played by David Dundas, wears a simple brown coat in keeping with his provincial background.<sup>12</sup> By episode 3, however, he dresses in an elegant yellow overcoat, a reference, perhaps, to the yellow that Balzac often associates with moral corruption, but also a garment whose brightness invites the viewer to admire the new experience of colour television.<sup>13</sup> As *Père Goriot* returns to the first visual depictions of Balzac's characters, so this serial delights in the colours that enable it to explore artistic possibilities not open to earlier black-and-white versions of the novelist's work.

Turner and Russell find a similar catalyst for their own originality in stage drama. References to the theatre abound in the television serial, from the heavy drapes shown hanging at the windows of Madame Vauquer's dining room, to the positioning of Goriot's deathbed, which in the final episode is moved to face the camera as if

displaying the tragic *dénouement* to a theatre audience. In tandem with these broad references to the stage, *Père Goriot* borrows in a more sustained manner from the conventions of melodrama. The closing scenes of episode 3, in particular, bring together the *coups de théâtre* and sudden reversals of fortune that Peter Brooks identifies as recurrent features of the genre (1976: 39). As the police descend on the Pension Vauquer to arrest Vautrin, Baron de Nucingen (renamed von Nucingen by the BBC serial and played with suitable menace by German-born actor Walter Gotell) bursts into Delphine's apartment to dissuade his wife from withdrawing her dowry from their marriage. Writing in *The Guardian* on 20 May 1968, television critic Stanley Reynolds claimed that this sequence was merely one illustration of 'the inescapable basic awfulness of melodrama'. Episode 3, he continued, 'shattered belief, with a poisoning, a sudden entry of the gendarmes, Old Goriot collapsing with shock, a swooning female, and even a wicked German baron breaking in to say: "Ah, ah!"' (1968: 6). The key factor that Reynolds ignores in his derisive critique, however, is that the BBC serial refits the melodrama already present in Balzac's text for a new cultural context. In the novel, Delphine describes Nucingen's visit to her apartment in terms which emphasize the overwrought emotion of the scene. 'Je n'ai jamais vu d'homme en pareil état,' she claims of the Baron's desperate pleas to avoid bankruptcy at the hands of his wife. 'Il avait perdu la tête, il parlait de se tuer, il délirait' (241). Turner seizes upon this melodramatic moment, but instead paints Nucingen as a more overt villain who accuses his wife of turning to prostitution before threatening to implicate her in a property swindle. In further deference to the melodramatic convention of pitting good against evil, the final close-up of this episode proceeds then to cast Delphine and Goriot as innocent victims of the Baron's cunning, as Delphine cradles her father's ashen face in her white-gloved hands. The

melodrama of the source text thus returns, but in a new form which plays on stereotypes of German cruelty and oppression likely to resonate with a post-war British audience.

If Turner and Russell rearticulate the devices and strategies of melodrama, their mini-series also harks back to the more unusual source of the vampire horror film through the casting of Andrew Keir as Vautrin. In the 1960s, Keir established himself as a key actor in the Hammer Horror series, with roles in *Pirates of Blood River* (1962), *Dracula: Prince of Darkness* (1966), and *Quatermass and the Pit* (1967). The actor's involvement in these films often saw him cast as strong, physically imposing characters, while his association with Hammer invested his screen persona with a sinister edge that he carried forward into a succession of film and television productions including *Père Goriot*. Keir's role as the monk Father Sandor, in *Dracula: Prince of Darkness*, provides a striking example of the development of this persona. Opposite Christopher Lee's vampire, Keir plays a 'large, earthy, powerful man of faith who most willingly confronts Dracula' (Holte, 1997: 60). The first appearance of Father Sandor in the film presents the character as an authoritarian figure bent on eradicating the superstition that vampirism has survived in a remote corner of Eastern Europe. In this opening sequence, a group of villagers carries the body of a dead woman to a clearing in the forest with the intention of driving a stake through her heart. However, just as one of the men prepares to strike the decisive blow, he is interrupted by the sound of a rifle bullet and the entrance on horseback of Father Sandor. A series of high-angle shots, in which Sandor looks down on the assembled gathering, reflects the abbot's disgust at the ignorance and superstition of the villagers, as he orders that the woman be buried in consecrated ground.<sup>14</sup> *Père Goriot* echoes Keir's earlier role in this horror production. While the

first appearance of Vautrin in the BBC serial lacks the drama of Sandor's arrival through the forest in *Dracula: Prince of Darkness*, Turner and Russell use the character's introduction on screen to underscore the mixture of fear and respect that Vautrin commands. Seated at one end of Madame Vauquer's dining table, the master-criminal does not even look up from his newspaper as he reminds Sylvie the maid to bring his morning glass of brandy: 'Sylvie, forgotten something, have you?'. Subsequent episodes call attention to the satanic influence wielded by Vautrin, an aspect of the character consonant both with Balzac's text and Keir's association with the Hammer Horror studio. Episode 2, most notably, ends with a close shot of Vautrin whispering into Rastignac's ear as he attempts to embroil the young student in the Faustian pact that will lead to the death of Taillefer's son. Like the undead vampire pursued by Sandor in *Dracula: Prince of Darkness*, Keir's screen persona has the potential to be revived in future artistic productions, a fact that Turner and Russell readily exploit in their adaptation of Balzac's novel.

The figure of the vampire, so integral to Andrew Keir's film and television career as well as his casting in *Père Goriot*, returns us, finally, to the question of what this television serial reveals about the adaptive process. As vampires feed off their human victims, so adaptations are commonly dismissed as 'parasitical on their source texts and on the A-list prestige of literature' (Stam, 2005: 3). When applied to the BBC version of *Le Père Goriot*, such accusations are not entirely unfounded. In the 1960s, the Corporation turned to Balzac and nineteenth-century French literature to bolster its claims to produce serious drama, and to counter the growing competition provided by ITV. However, while the BBC, under the influence of Head of Drama Sydney Newman, used *La Comédie humaine* to nourish its particular vision of British broadcasting, the novelist's work benefited, in turn, from its recreation for television.

As Thomas Leitch points out in his own study of the parallels between adaptation and vampirism, source texts ‘themselves assume the defining characteristics of vampires – the status of undead spirits whose unnaturally prolonged life depends on the sustenance they derive from younger, fresher blood – through the process of adaptation’ (2011: 6). In *Père Goriot*, Turner and Russell expose the unusual patterns of suspense generated by Balzac’s text, and through their self-consciously fragmented camera work and use of close-up, offer an inherently televisual recreation of the story. Moreover, through its own adaptive returns, *Père Goriot* illustrates that adaptation is an open-ended, recurring process which can enrich earlier works of art rather than lock them in a cycle of repetition and artistic mediocrity. Viewed from the compelling vantage point of this BBC serial, television does not ultimately drain the lifeblood from Balzac, but helps the novelist to live on in a new form through the small screen.

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## Notes

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<sup>2</sup> On the adaptation and reception of *Le Père Goriot* in Spain, see Lúdia Anoll, 'Le Père Goriot en Espagne', *L'Année balzacienne* (1987), 179-84.

<sup>3</sup> Of the three Balzac adaptations produced for BBC television, only *La Cousine Bette* is available on DVD, having been released in 2006 under the title *Cousin Bette*.

<sup>4</sup> For further discussion of the documentary realism of *Z Cars*, see John Caughie, *Television Drama: Realism, Modernism, and British Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 92-93, and Lez Cooke, *British Television Drama: A History* (London: BFI, 2003), pp. 56-59.

<sup>5</sup> On *Coronation Street* and its place within the evolution of British 'kitchen sink' drama, see Cooke, *British Television Drama*, pp. 33-36.

<sup>6</sup> In the original serialization for the *Revue de Paris*, part 1 of *Le Père Goriot* comprised two chapters ('Une pension bourgeoise' and 'Les Deux Visites'), as did part 4 ('Les Deux Filles' and 'La Mort du père').

<sup>7</sup> Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* would later redeploy Balzac's artistic interest in the theme of fragmentation, as I show in my chapter 'Fragmented Fictions: Time, Textual Memory, and the (Re)Writing of *Madame Bovary*', in Kate Griffiths and Andrew Watts, *Adapting Nineteenth-Century France: Literature in Film, Theatre, Television, Radio, and Print* (Cardiff: UWP, 2013), pp. 80-113.

<sup>8</sup> Russell would go on to direct other literary adaptations for the BBC, including *Little Women* (1970) and *The Moonstone* (1972). She would also work as a director on *Doctor Who*. The DVD release of *Doctor Who: Horror of Fang Rock* (2005) contains a short interview in which Russell looks back over her career ('Paddy Russell: A Life in Television').

<sup>9</sup> David Bellos traces Balzac's borrowings from *Génie du christianisme*, most notably the parable of the mandarin, in *Honoré de Balzac: 'Old Goriot'* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), pp. 36-39. For a discussion of Balzac's artistic debt to Shakespeare, see for example P.-J. Tremewan, 'Balzac et Shakespeare', *L'Année balzacienne* (1967), 259-303.

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<sup>10</sup> The most comprehensive discussion of Balzac's system of reappearing characters remains Anthony R. Pugh's *Balzac's Recurring Characters* (London: Duckworth, 1975).

<sup>11</sup> On the use of illustrations in *La Comédie humaine*, see Keri Yousif, *Balzac, Grandville, and the Rise of Book Illustration* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012).

<sup>12</sup> Echoing the noble origins of the character he played in *Père Goriot*, Dundas is an hereditary aristocrat and a member of the British House of Lords.

<sup>13</sup> On the sinister associations of the colour yellow in Balzac's work, see André Vanoncini, 'Balzac et les couleurs', *L'Année balzacienne* (2004), 355-66 (pp. 359-60).

<sup>14</sup> For further brief analysis of Keir's performance as Father Sandor, see Peter Hutchings, *Hammer and Beyond: The British Horror Film* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1993), pp. 121-22, and Alain Silver and James Ursini, *The Vampire Film: From Nosferatu to Interview with the Vampire*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn (New York: Limelight, 1997), pp. 83-84.