REPRESENTATIONS OF “LE TRAVAIL” UNDER THE JULY MONARCHY (1830-1848)

by
Rebecca Terese Powers

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ABSTRACT

This project traces the definition of a social reality of labor under the July Monarchy. More specifically, it investigates how the ubiquitous but elusive term travail – understood as manual, non-agricultural work – operates at different levels of discourse in the 1830s and 1840s. To underline this specific cultural context, I employ the French travail rather than the English “work” or “labor.” French workers expected improved social conditions after their contribution to the 1830 Revolution, but were promptly denied this by the new Constitutional Monarchy. Their frustration came to a head in 1848, when they again revolted, demanding the right to work – le droit au travail. This moment is often considered the dawn of the French labor movement, but I contend that it is in the years leading up to 1848 that travail undergoes its most dramatic definition and consecration as a modern value.

In order to better understand how the term took on such significance, I examine a variety of cultural documents, both literary and what we would today consider paraliterary. The corpus includes novels by Honoré de Balzac and George Sand; moralist inquiries by René Villermé and Honoré-Antoine Frégier; Jules Michelet’s historiography of the French people; and writings by the workers themselves, whose first-hand accounts of physical labor were becoming increasingly influential. In considering this multiplicity of voices as part of a more-or-less society-wide conversation, I am indebted to Michel Foucault’s theory of discourse formation as well as Marc Angenot’s social discourse theory which allows me to analyze interactions between discourses.

I found two general trends in the way July Monarchy authors talked about work: one which changed over time, the other remaining stable. Chronologically, I found a
progression in the modalities of representation: *le travail* shifts from an object of observation in Balzac, to an object of discourse in Sand and the moralists, and finally to a political imperative in the workers’ press. Throughout the period, however, and even as authors strove to represent labor as an observed reality, the use of the imaginary types and tropes of literature remained constant, highlighting the centrality of literature in the formation of a social conscience.

The dissertation was completed under the direction of Professor Jacques Neefs of Johns Hopkins University. Professor Dominique Kalifa, Professeur d'histoire contemporaine at Université Paris 1 Panthéon, was the second reader. It was successfully defended on May 5, 2015 to a committee including Professors Jacques Neefs, Dominique Kalifa, Elena Russo, Derek Schilling, and Michael Kwass at Johns Hopkins University.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT .................................................................................................................. ii

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ....................................................................................... vi

IMAGES ..................................................................................................................... viii

INTRODUCTION ......................................................................................................... 1

I. CRYSTALLIZATION OF A PARADIGM: BALZAC’S
ALEGORIES OF LE TRAVAIL .................................................................................. 10
   Why Allegory? .......................................................................................................... 12
   A “Social Zero” ...................................................................................................... 14
   Allegory as Literary Labor ..................................................................................... 20
   Three Allegories of le travail in Balzac ................................................................. 21
      “Physionomies Parisiennes” ................................................................................ 22
   Tales of Work as Active Prayer ............................................................................ 38
      Le Médecin de campagne ................................................................................... 40
      Le Curé de village ............................................................................................. 49
   “Le Travail” According to Balzac ......................................................................... 61

II. REPRESENTING A NEW REALITY: OBSERVATIONS AND
REVELATIONS ........................................................................................................... 69
   Different Types of Vision ....................................................................................... 69
      The Social Enquêtes: Moralists, Industrialists, Postivists ............................... 71
      Sand’s utopian gaze .......................................................................................... 79
   Shared Vision ........................................................................................................ 89
      Sand’s Real Utopias ........................................................................................... 89
      Enquêteurs, Idealisms ....................................................................................... 95
      A Common Imperative ...................................................................................... 95
III. READING THE WORKING BODY: ALIENATION AND SOCIAL IDENTITY ...............................108

Signs of work on the body .................................................................110

Physical and Moral Corruption ..................................................110

Physical and Moral Embellishment ............................................115

Physical Destruction and Moral Construction ..........................119

Alienation and identity .................................................................123

Alienation through Representation ...........................................123

Alienation of the Worker Within the Narrative .......................124

Commodification of the Worker by the Author .........................127

Creation of a Social Identity .........................................................129

A Special Case: The Working Woman .........................................131

An Immoral Character .................................................................132

Moral Ambiguity of the Working Woman .................................139

La grisette ....................................................................................144

Spectacle .....................................................................................156

IV. REALIZATION OF THE PARADIGM: THE WORKER-INTELLECTUAL DEFINES “LE TRAVAIL” .....................................................161

Authority, Authenticity, and Experience ...................................162

Authority ....................................................................................164

Representative Authority ...........................................................166

Authenticity or Morality .............................................................172

Sentiment and Sensation of Le Travail .......................................177

A New Definition of le travail .......................................................181

Differentiation of Le Travail .........................................................182

Formation of a Working-Class Morality .....................................184

Reading the Bible to Read the Worker ......................................185

A New Reading of the Worker’s Body ........................................196

Michelet’s Definition through Differentiation ...........................199

Abstraction of Le Travail .............................................................203

V.CONCLUSION .............................................................................212

VI.WORKS CITED ........................................................................217

VI.CURRICULUM VITAE ...............................................................228
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Representations of *le travail* under the July Monarchy

**IMAGE 2**

Representations of *le travail* under the July Monarchy

IMAGE 3

INTRODUCTION

Là je vis, un matin, à l’heure où sous les cieux
Froids et clairs le Travail s’éveille, où la voirie
Pousse un sombre ouragan dans l’air silencieux

Un cygne qui s’était évadé de sa cage[.]
--Baudelaire, 1859.¹

In this dissertation, I aim to trace the evolution of a name, le travail, which came to signify a new social reality under the July Monarchy. The term finds itself at the intersection of a variety of discourses – most notably moral, social, economic, political, scientific and even artistic in nature. It is therefore not one idea, but rather a point of reference for many different ideas. As such, there are numerous possibilities of how this project might have been conducted. In the trajectory I have mapped out, Balzac sets in place a paradigm for representing le travail which goes beyond the traditional depictions of work as a religious or moral concept, beyond its Enlightenment significance as an economic foundation of rights, in order to establish labor as a social force, and one that is both physical and metaphysical in nature. Although he witnessed the growing importance of manual labor and the laboring classes in society (which he observed quite closely), Balzac nonetheless chose not to represent them fully in his texts, and instead presented his paradigm of labor figuratively. His work-allegories leave themselves open to multiple interpretations, of which I investigate two. On the one hand, George Sand uses the paradigm of a metaphysical-physical conception of labor to support her vision of the working class as the new nobility of France. At precisely the same time, the moral enquêteurs of the Académie des sciences morales et politiques were thinking about the moral and material importance of an efficient working class to the progress of the nation.

¹ “Le Cygne.” Baudelaire, 137
That these two voices could observe the same social reality and come up with such different political and poetical representations was a sign that travail, although ubiquitous, was not clearly defined. Balzac’s allegories had endowed labor with a certain visibility, but they had not provided it with a clear reading. It was the worker-intellectuals of the 1840s, with Michelet as their loudest voice, who would make le travail the object of a discourse, claiming that their experience in the workshop endowed them with an authority that other social observers lacked. I chose this heterogeneous group of authors because, although they come from diverse professional and aesthetic angles, they seem to share a common language and, as such, are able to enter into dialogue with one another, either directly or indirectly.

In order to isolate the noun from its general use, to underscore that this is a specific name circulating in a specific cultural context, I have decided not to use the English “work” or “labor,” but the French travail. This is above all important because the English terms are more ambiguous. Not only can they be used as both nouns and verbs, but, even when “work” and “labor” are considered in their substantive forms exclusively, their significance is not fixed. They may refer both to the effort put into a certain activity (“she put a lot of work into this project”), and to the finished product (“your painting is a work of art”). The French travail only applies to the first sentence; the second would be translated as oeuvre. As a result, there is a stronger sense of pain and fatigue in the French than in the English. What’s more, the noun travail underwent a significant consecration that distinguished it from other ways of designating work in France during the July Monarchy. The term would take on its full significance in March 1848, when the workers were granted the right to work by the provisional government of the Second Republic,
which guaranteed not only the right to perform work (le droit de travailler), but the right to be given work by the government (le droit au travail). Michel Chevalier recognized the significance of the name when he declared in March 1848, “Je dis travailleurs au lieu d’ouvriers pour parler la langue du jour.” [I say travailleurs instead of ouvriers to speak the language of the day]. Indeed, by the February revolution, le travail had taken on a significance that went far beyond its etymology and its dictionary definition.

I define travail as manual, non-agricultural work, a somewhat artificial methodological move, but one that makes the project possible, setting limits on the type of labor that will be examined. Throughout the Restoration and the July Monarchy, le travailleur could be placed among a cluster of handles which all designated the manual laborer. Saint-Simon favored le producteur, others preferred l’artisan, le prolétaire, l’ouvrier, or le compagnon, Michelet spoke of le peuple and even les barbares, but they all referred to a broad category which we would translate as laborer or worker. Although, at this time, the majority of Frenchmen were working in the fields and not in factories, I chose to focus on non-agricultural work, as this is the area where the greatest changes were taking place, both physically (i.e. the beginnings of industrialization) and on a discursive level.

The authors of the texts examined in this dissertation all share a common desire to create a representation of work that corresponds to what they are observing and experiencing; they seek a language of labor that corresponds with its reality. In the creation of this language, this definition of travail, the concept seems to be moving in two different directions. On the one hand, it is being abstracted so that it can include

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2 Chevalier, Michel, 1. (ALL TRANSLATIONS ARE MY OWN UNLESS FOLLOWED BY A PAGE NUMBER, IN WHICH CASE THE REFERENCE WILL BE FOUND IN THE BIBLIOGRAPHY).
intellectual labor. On the other, it is also becoming more physical, a traceable sign on the body that allows for social identification. These contradictions are what make le travail such a rich object of contemplation: in spite of its physicality and its baseness, it nonetheless possesses an undeniable metaphysical quality that escapes definition. I investigate how the texts deal with these ambiguities, in function of their poetic and political commitments.

The methodological premise for this project – that it is possible to study a social reality not only through statistics and archival documents, but via the images and stories created around that reality – is greatly influenced by Dominique Kalifa’s approach to a history of the social imaginary. In particular, I find similarities between his recent object of inquiry, that real-yet-fictional space, les bas-fonds (the underworld) and my own, the omnipresent yet undefinable reality that will be called le travail. Drawing from foundational works by Pierre Popovic, Bronislaw Baczko and Cornelius Castoriadis, Kalifa defines the social imaginary as a network of interweaving, interacting representations of the social world, which a society creates for itself in order to foster common language. These representations cannot appeal only to the intellect, but must also speak to the imagination: Kalifa argues that “ils ont besoin pour cela de s’incarner dans des intrigues, de raconter des histoires, de les donner à lire ou à voir” [to do that, they need to come to life in intrigues, they need to tell stories, they must allow themselves to be read or seen]. In the social imaginary, the allegory, the story, and the image are just as important as the real-world events, even in non-literary texts.

Additionally, I have found inspiration in the methodology of Charles Bernheimer’s investigation of representations of prostitution, which, like le travail, and

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3 Les Bas-Fonds, 20-21
like *les bas-fonds*, turns out to be a category whose imaginary configurations seem to surpass its already important presence in material reality. To go beyond the statistical and physical facts of prostitution in order to gain a greater understanding of the social and psychological attitudes towards it, Bernheimer “privileges the image over the real, the word over its referent, symbol over event.” This more psychological reading of *le travail* becomes especially important in the fourth chapter of the dissertation, when descriptions of work become internal discourses of work, where, in order to claim representational authority, one must experience manual labor personally.

A latent but important question in the dissertation is one of linguistics. I contend that *travail* becomes the name for a new reality that emerges during the July Monarchy, and that this name comes to signify a moral, social, and political value which had once been merely religious in nature. Like Roman Jakobson, I believe that signs are not arbitrary; if *travail* emerges as the name for a new work reality, there is a reason for this, which may be found in the culture of the period. In my search for a definition of *travail*, I have been influenced by foundational works by Raymond Williams, who removed keywords from their mundane significance in order to understand their wider cultural significance, and William Sewell, who traced the language of labor as a dynamic force of social change in the Post-Revolutionary period.

Finally, this project relies heavily on Michel Foucault’s theory of discourse formation, whereby each discursive act serves to reinforce or otherwise contribute in some way to an authoritative discourse on a given idea. I agree with Foucault that texts – literary and non-literary alike – can often be read as loci of power relations. Additionally, I draw from Marc Angenot’s theory of a social discourse, by which different discourses

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4 Bernheimer, 3
across society are seen as interacting with one another. Today, one would be hard-pressed to find any sort of writing on labor that does not participate in a particular discourse on *le travail*, be it Marxist, Capitalist, or otherwise. This was not, however, the case in 1839, when Balzac wrote his *Curé de village*. My dissertation traces, in a way, how *le travail* emerges as the object of a discourse.

It was perhaps Barthes who first thought of placing Balzac and Michelet side-by-side, finding in both “la construction d'un univers autarcique, fabriquant lui-même ses dimensions et ses limites, et y disposant son Temps, son Espace, sa population, sa collection d'objets et ses mythes.” It was in this spirit that I decided to look at these two giants’ conceptions of *le travail*, and while I do find, like Barthes, that they share common practices – both sketch an all-encompassing tableau of society, both allegorize work, both insist on the close relationship between manual and intellectual work – the images they paint contain important differences, which reveal a change in attitudes towards *le travail*. I hope that by including other voices – less well-known ones such as the worker-writers and the enquêteurs – I can contribute to a greater understanding of exactly what sort of shifts are taking place. In the construction of my corpus, I draw from what Marc Angenot calls social discourse, or “tout ce qui se dit et s’écrit dans un état de société […] Tout ce qui narre et argumente” [everything that is said and written in a state of society … everything that is narrated and argued]. The category is enormous, and unlike Angenot, I do not mean to take into account all of social discourse. However, the inclusion of different genres and different registers allows for a wide-ranging investigation of the term *le travail*.

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5 Barthes, 24
6 Angenot
In 1819, Saint-Simon summarized the complete reversal in society’s relationship to work in an article which is now known as *La Parabole de Saint-Simon*. In the text, the philosopher asks the reader what would happen if France lost her top fifty doctors, masons, carpenters, scientists, et cetera. The answer, he says, would be the implosion of the entire society. Next, he posits what would happen if all of the royal family were to die; the response, is nothing. In this dissertation, I look at texts written in this same spirit. Most of them appear during the July Monarchy, coming after the *Encyclopédie*’s effort to enumerate every type of work possible, but before the Productivist turn of the 1850s, sparked by Hermann von Helmholtz’s discovery of the first law of thermodynamics, the conservation of energy. Anson Rabinbach characterized the 1850s and beyond as being dominated by “the belief that human society and nature are linked by the primacy and identity of all productive activity.” The July Monarchy must be seen as a liminal period. Its inhabitants are caught between two conceptions of work. There is above all a theoretical commitment to the Enlightenment concept of work as the rational and moral basis for society and perhaps even humanity. However, simultaneously there is the modern dehumanization or abstraction of work that will speed up as industrialization takes off. For instance, the *Encyclopédie* defines travail as:

> Occupation journalière à laquelle l’homme est condamné par son besoin & à laquelle il doit en même temps sa santé, sa subsistance, sa sérénité, son bon sens & sa vertu peut-être.

> [Daily occupation to which man is condemned by his need and to which he owes at the same time his health, his subsistence, his serenity, his good

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7 Rabinbach, 3
Admitting that *le travail* is punishing, the writers of the *Encyclopédie* also intended to bring into focus its rewarding and salutary attributes. With a great many entries devoted to individual crafts, the project hoped to establish manual labor as the basis for a functioning society and therefore its most valuable asset. But even as the Revolution attempted to rid modern society of its Catholic ties, *le travail* retained its religious and spiritual attributes, for France in the nineteenth-century was still a deeply religious society. It was not that the people were particularly pious, but rather simply that it was difficult to imagine a reality without religion. Even Auguste Comte, who meant to push France out of the age of metaphysics, made his positivism into something of a religion.

By the dawn of the July Monarchy, substantial political and social shifts had taken place, and the *Philosophes*’ goal to elevate work to its rightful status as the focus of society seemed to be on course. Michael Marrinan has explored how the iconography of the days just after the July Revolution tended to emphasize the harmony among different social classes working together in the name of freedom, working as “a pictorial metaphor for the success of the July Revolution.”¹⁹ In his collection *Les enfants de Paris* (1830), Alexis Eymery depicts a trio of children composed of a worker, a bourgeois, and a Polytechnician (see image 1), embodying the type of equality that the working-class were supposed to be enjoying. They would be recognized, assured the new government, for the role they had played in the Revolution.

And yet, even as *le travail* was being lauded from every angle, those performing the work (*les travailleurs*) were disenfranchised. In reality, what had happened was that

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¹⁸ *Encyclopédie*...
¹⁹ Marrinan, 37
Representations of *le travail* under the July Monarchy

work-as-ideal and not work-as-practice had captured the social imagination. Still in the early stages of industrialization, and still attached to the Enlightenment practices of classification and enumeration, publications such as the *Physiologies* and the *manuels Roret* continued the Encyclopedic task of defining all the métiers, but in these works, the worker is abstracted or typified. By the 1850s, discoveries in thermodynamics (notably, the conservation of energy) allowed both scientific and social thinkers to conceive of work as an abstract force. This abstraction can be perceived, as Anson Rabinbach has shown, in Marx’s shift in terms from *Arbeit* (labor) to *Arbeitskraft* (labor power), or work understood as the quantifiable expenditure of energy, rather than the quality/particularity of the activity. This is a moment of transition, of working things out, and it is through literary forms that new ways of conceiving society are established. I contend that it is by way of the allegories created by Balzac that *le travail* is able to take its place in the social imaginary and eventually turn into the object of political discourse leading to the famous reclamation of the *le droit au travail.*
I. CRystallization of a paradigm: Balzac’s allegories of le travail

In this chapter, I will look at three texts written by Balzac which feature allegories of work, whereby le travail is attributed qualities that render it somewhat ambiguous: too metaphysical to be defined as a mere economic means to an end, but more concrete than a spiritual or social value. Within the logic of the author’s rich extended metaphors, a variety of activities, such as making bricks (in Le Médecin de Campagne), irrigating fields (in Le Curé de village), and performing menial tasks in a factory (in “Physionomies Parisiennes”) become poetic representations of a material and social reality that Balzac has identified in his world. Imagined by the author as both an unseeable force and embodied energy, the image of le travail is one of both moral and physical importance.

In the first section, I investigate the allegory as a literary device. It is an efficient form to represent work for two principal reasons. First, because of historical, political, and aesthetic limitations, the workers cannot represent themselves, nor the transcendent value that le travail has become. The figurative allegory of le travail allows for an understanding that goes beyond the banality of literal work. Second, the finely-crafted allegory is textual proof of the author’s literary labor, leaving its trace in the very structure of the narrative. By calling attention to the difficulty of his creative effort, Balzac claims for himself the title of travailleur and takes a first step in bringing the two types of labor – intellectual and physical – closer together.

In the second section of the chapter, I take a closer look at three of Balzac’s allegories of work and how they establish le travail as the poetic and physical motor of
society. For each text, I seek to understand, first, what the allegories say about the nature and value of labor and, second, how they bring to focus Balzac’s own work. In the first place, I ask how the allegorical system fulfills its function as a parabolic lesson concerning the physical and metaphysical value of *le travail*; in the second, I investigate how the craftsmanship of the allegory demonstrates the literary labor performed by the author upon the text, thereby setting up a *de facto* alliance between physical and intellectual labor.

In order to express his complex understanding of *le travail*, Balzac makes use of two very different modes of representation: the *Physiologie*, which associates itself with science and taxonomy, and the fictional narrative, which belongs to a type of writing that is figurative and poetic. We can see that, for the author of the *Comédie Humaine*, *le travail* is at once a physical, observable reality that must be described precisely, and an abstract idea that can only be expressed obliquely in images and allusions. Rather than causing uncertainty or confusion, the different modes of representation complement each other in painting a complete picture of labor.

In the third section, I attempt to construct a synthesis of Balzac’s conception of *travail*, based on these allegories, which depict work as the lifeblood of society and as a form of active prayer. I contend that Balzac offers an image of society composed *of* and composed *by* work, which expresses itself in both organic material (*vis humana*) and a more ineffable energy (*mouvement*). The paradigm that emerges from Balzac’s allegories is a powerful crystallization of different perceptions of *le travail*. The force of the image comes from this dynamism, which, however, makes it an unstable paradigm, and allows for different interpretations, which I will discuss in chapters 2 and 3.
Why Allegory?

Allegory is, in the broadest of definitions, the personification or some other type of figuration of an abstract idea into an image or a system of images. Delacroix most famously represented the complex notion of “freedom” in *La Liberté guidant le peuple* (1830), where close attention to the physicality of the female body, careful placement of secondary figures, and other semiotic cues were used to express a complex set of ideas contained within the signifier *la Liberté*. Puvis de Chavanne would later represent in 1863 an allegory of *Travail* that included a wide variety of types of work and seemed to “vise à l’ampleur,” [strive for amplitude], but such an abstraction did not yet exist in the 1830s. Because allegories rely heavily on images and symbols and less on discursive elaboration, the reader is expected to perform a great deal of interpretation, and the author is expected to be as transparent as possible in the signs he uses.

In order for an abstract concept to bear narrative allegorization, it must possess a moral significance that allows for a richness of representation. Freedom, Justice, Wisdom, and Greed: these are all ideas that lend themselves to figurative representation. A concept that is too simple or morally neutral is poorly allegorized, for there is a difficulty in assigning it a significance that goes beyond its literal meaning. If work is nothing more than an economic activity, then it cannot be allegorized. To place work at the heart of allegory is to see it as something more than its banal existence in the workshop or on the fields. An allegory of *Travail* is a sign that labor has taken on a new complexity and a heightened moral importance in the observers’ eyes.

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10 Larousse, 438
In 1836, for example, Théodore Chassériau released a small oil-painting entitled *Une Forge au Creusot* (See Image 2). The painting depicts a decisive moment in the industrialization of metalworking in France. Le Creusot had been an industrial center since the Middle Ages, when it was mined for coal. In 1771, it became a forge for metalworking, but went bankrupt several times. Then, in 1836, it was purchased by Adolphe and Eugène Schneider, who were able to accumulate enough capital to modernize the factory and benefit from the new demand for iron and steel from the railroad industry. The company soon became one of the largest in France, and its owners were powerful in not just the industrial sector, but also in business, finance, and politics. By 1875, Eugène Schneider had consolidated his power to such an extent that he had founded schools, banks, hospitals, in short, entire cities where his employees worked and lived.\(^{11}\)

Chassériau could not predict in 1836 the future financial success nor the extent of technological advances that would come to Le Creusot, but he did seem to have a visionary understanding of where factory work was heading, a future he laid out in allegorical images. His painting is therefore both representative of its own present and strikingly prophetic of a coming age where the individualized worker of 1836 will become nothing more than a ghost. In the image, at the time when the factory is at the very beginning of its progression towards modern automation, the men are still quite prominent in relation to the machines. There is a great deal of emphasis on their muscles and on the power of the work exerted by their bodies, bringing focus to the corporality of the workers. However, there are already decisive signs of the coming de-humanization: the large wheel looming in the background is a reminder of the silent but powerful force.

\(^{11}\) Verley, 219-223
of technology, and the protective visors worn by the some of the workers cover their faces, stripping these characters of any individuality or personality. There is only one figure whose face can be seen clearly as a human being, but he is the one character who is not at work. Man at rest, then, is still human, but the other characters at work have become dis-individualized and partially dehumanized cogs in the machine. This painting captures a liminal moment in history between Arbeit (work as a specific act performed by a specific body) and Arbeitskraft (work as an abstract force that may be extracted from any body).¹²

There are other unmasked men: a Harlequin-like figure in the left foreground, a bare-chested boy in the painting’s center, and several other workers in the background, but these figures are out of focus. They are pale and indistinct. And in fact, they seem to be performing work (in the spectacular sense) rather than really working, an interpretation which is reinforced by the man to the left; he is no doubt supposed to be wearing a traditional blouse of the workingman, but in the shadows he bears a striking resemblance to Polichinelle, the Commedia dell’arte character. Compared with the bold strokes of the three principle workers, it becomes evident that the individualized, non-masked men are ghosts, inhabitants of a past reality who have not yet discovered that their era is gone. These phantasmagoria continue to inhabit the factory, but they are quite literally in the process of disappearing. The shirtless young man in the center seems especially ghostly, as he appears to float in some indeterminate space, impervious to the heat of the melted metal and barely casting a shadow. Chassériau’s allegorical depiction of the human worker as a ghost of his disappearing past allows his public to witness a reality of work

¹² Rabinbach, 5
that is at once consuming its current performers and creating a new species of de-humanized cyborgs.

The ambiguities represented in Chassériau’s painting show that le travail is ripe for allegorization. It is through this system of images – of ghostly individuals walking among anonymous modern man-machines – that the painter is able to capture the problem of le travail in all of its richness. It is no longer a simple question of using one’s bodily force to create something, nor of punishment, nor of endowing man with a sense of moral satisfaction, but rather, all of those things and more. Work has become intricately linked to what it means to be human. The painting is at once a testament to man’s heroic ability to labor and a foreshadowing of the dehumanization that will accompany modern man-machine cooperation.

The very literariness of the allegory – its reliance on symbolism, its ancient roots, and its representation of complex ideas – can endow it with a sense of timelessness, much like a fable or psalm. However, I agree with Cindy Weinstein’s assertion that allegory in the nineteenth century, far from being a purely textual and ahistorical literary construction, was highly contextual; it bears the marks of both the moment in time in which it was created and of the author’s labor of creation, as he forms the coherent allegory. In her investigation of American literature of the mid-nineteenth century, Weinstein argues:

[A]llegory, as understood, practiced, and received during this period, was the literary mode that foregrounded its relation to labor, whether through allegorical characters who signified the nature or cost of being a laboring
being or through authorial signs which made visible the author’s work of representation.\textsuperscript{13}

In other words, the allegory is the literary form that is doubly connected to the concept of work. First, as the preferred way to represent the working classes, usually taking the form of a cautionary tale or a personification of some moral value; second, as the mark of the literary labor inscribed onto the text by the author. The allegory calls attention to itself as the result of the author’s effort – his work. Without performing an in-depth comparison of the two nations, it is safe to say that, in the early- to mid-nineteenth century, France and the United States shared many cultural points, including political uncertainty, industrialization, and literary trends.\textsuperscript{14} I contend, therefore, that Weinstein’s doubled reading of allegory as a way to represent both physical labor and intellectual labor is helpful in understanding Balzac’s figuration of \textit{le travail}. His allegories reveal two realities of work: first, that the laboring classes cannot themselves represent the concept of \textit{le travail}, and, second, that writing itself is a form labor, equal in effort to physical work.

\section*{A “Social Zero”}

The world of Balzac, as Pierre Barbéris has most famously proposed, is dominated by a “lutte” between the aristocracy and the rising bourgeoisie. Members of the working class, the \textit{peuple}, despite their omnipresence, are therefore given only ancillary parts; they

\footnotesize
\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{13} Weinstein, 5
\textsuperscript{14} Not only did French Romanticism influence American literature, but the French were great fans of E.A. Poe and James Fenimore Cooper.
\end{flushleft}
are only interesting, asserts Barbéris, in that they form a background to the principal intrigues of the dominant classes:

Quant au peuple, qui n’est pas encore le prolétariat, il ne joue qu’un rôle modeste, plus pittoresque dans la vie de tous les jours qu’efficace dans l’élaboration de l’Histoire. […] C’est pourquoi aucune des grandes figures de la Comédie humaine n’est du peuple. Tous les personnages populaires sont de second ordre, comme chez Molière. Pourtant le peuple est partout.

[As for the peuple, which is not yet the proletariat, it plays merely a modest role, more a picturesque element of daily life than an important element of elaborating history… This is why none of the great figures of the Comédie Humaine are common people. All of the popular characters are of second order, like in Molière. And yet, le peuple is everywhere.]

Whether or not we agree with Barbéris’s conclusion – that this peuple is a sort of dormant proletariat, waiting to be called by History to rise up and claim its rightful place in society – it is true that Balzac did indeed place them everywhere (partout) all while denying them any sort of agency or subjectivity in the plot (they are not efficaces).

By 1830, Balzac had already theorized a society divided into a tripartite structure of workers, artists, and oisifs, in Le Traité de la vie élégante. The first group, the one that is composed of workers who live a busy or occupied life is depicted as a homogenous mass of bodies where the individual man does not yet have personhood:

Semblables aux machines à vapeur, les hommes enrégimentés par le travail se produisent tous sous la même forme et n’ont rien d’individuel. L’homme—

15 Barbéris, 327
instrument est une sorte de zéro social, dont le plus grand nombre possible ne composera jamais une somme, s’il n’est précédé par quelques chiffres.

[Like steam machines, these men composed of work are all produced in the same shape, they have no individuality. The man-instrument is a kind of social zero, of which the greatest possible quantity will never compose any sum unless it is preceded by another number.]\(^{16}\)

This passage demonstrates a dehumanization of the worker, or, rather, a refusal on Balzac’s part to grant humanity to the worker. He cannot dehumanize the working class, because literature has never given them a voice, or individuality, as George Sand and later Zola will do. This refusal of humanity or individuality is apparent in the way Balzac situates the workers in relation to their tools, to each other, and to the rest of society. From the very first phrase (“Semblables aux machines”), the narrator implies that there is no distinction between the worker and the means of production. Effectively an object (“L’homme-instrument”), he does not exist as a bearer of human characteristics and is recognized only for his capacity for labor. “Il devient un moyen… ces ouvriers ne sont plus que des espèces de treuils et restent confondus avec les brouettes, les pelles et les pioches.”\(^ {17}\) In addition to the blurring of lines between worker and machine, there is a lack of difference between worker and worker. The working class is represented as a product of some sort of machine-run manufacturing process, where each product is uniform (“sous la même forme”) and presumably quality-assured by the precision of the machine. These men are made into workers by the work they perform (“enrégimentés par

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\(^{16}\) Le Traité de la vie élégante, 212 \\
\(^{17}\) Ibid.
le travail”), and this “travail” is so perfectly regular that it confects a single model of man, indistinguishable from his neighbor and easily replaceable.

Perhaps most importantly, and in a way that explains the refusal to distinguish the worker from his machine and from his tools, Balzac characterizes the worker as a non-entity, “une sorte de zéro social.” A completely inconsequential category of people, he explains, even their sum adds up to nothing. The point is reiterated in the first chapter of *La Fille aux yeux d’or*, published four years later, when as Henri Mitterand points out, Balzac fails to include the proletariat as one of his sphères of Parisian society, starting his enumeration of the classes not with the proletariat, but with the “ouvrier économe”18 who has managed to buy a small business. It is only after Balzac has spent several pages describing the working class that he appears to begin his narrative: “Et, d'abord, saluez ce roi du mouvement parisien, qui s'est soumis le temps et l'espace” [First, greet this king of Parisian movement, who has conquered time and space].19 As Mitterand remarks, this mathematical nullity paints the worker as “l’exclu, le paria, l’intouchable, ce dont on se détourne, ce qu’on ne reconnaît pas, ce dont on ne parlera pas” [the excluded, the pariah, the untouchable, that from which we turn away, which we do not recognize, that of which we do not speak].20 This exclusion of the popular class is more than evidence of a simple aesthetic or moral repulsion, but rather a remark upon the placeless-ness of the purely working class. They do not reside in a specific sphere, because they are everywhere and nowhere at once. They are, as we shall see further on, the energy which moves all of society.

18 *La Fille aux yeux d’or*, 1042
19 Ibid.
20 Mitterand, 41
According to Balzac, because of its nullity, its placelessness, and (if we are to take a Marxist point of view) its absence from the progression of history, the working class in the 1820s and 1830s is incapable of representing not only itself but also *le travail* as an idea. The worker is banal, prosaic, and uninteresting; *le travail*, on the other hand, is complex and rich.

**Allegory as Literary Labor**

The allegory was the ideal way to represent work because it allowed authors to represent a social reality that was becoming increasingly apparent while disguising it within symbolic or poetic language. In her study of the use of allegory in mid-nineteenth century American literature, Cindy Weinstein calls attention to the ambiguous relationship between allegory and the American work ethic. Because the United States prided itself on being a classless society where labor, not social status, determined one’s identity, the promotion of a good work ethic was crucial to maintaining social order. However, like France, the United States was in an early stage of industrialization, and traditional attitudes of work as a salutary and satisfying activity were being contradicted by realities in the workshops. The promises of liberal capitalism extolled by industrialists – progress, equality, and individual freedom – were, in many cases, broken and replaced with alienation and exploitation of the workers. American social discourse was concerned with *maintaining* a narrative of work that had already been established, while writers in France were tasked with *creating* a narrative, but both the United States and France experienced a similar disconnect between work-as-ideal and work-as-reality.
On both sides of the Atlantic, literature was seen as a place where the problems of labor could be resolved, either through exposition or concealment. The author could most effectively hope to address the problem of labor by focusing on the type of work he knew best: literary labor. This type of effort – the kind that goes into creating an entirely new world, populating it with characters or images, and crafting a narrative that captures the reader’s attention – was becoming increasingly valued. The laboring writer could conceal his travail, as artists had been doing for centuries, preferring to give the impression of an effortless, seamless creative process; or he could feature this work as an integral part of the finished product. Allegory, with its system of metaphors, was one way to do the latter.

By the mid-nineteenth century, writers in France had more or less accepted their status as part of the working classes and often boasted of their mental toils. Zola’s meticulous notebooks attest to his rigorous work ethic, while Flaubert’s manuscripts and correspondence reveal a compulsion to craft the perfect sentence. But it is perhaps Balzac who first established the act of writing as a laborious activity, both in his fiction and in his correspondence. “Il est sept heures du matin, voilà 3 heures que je pioche mes épreuves. C’est bien ardu” [It seven o’clock in the morning, that makes three hours that I’ve been digging at my proofs. It is truly arduous],21 writes Balzac in July 1846, presumably tired, but clearly proud of his struggles. In his personal habits, the author’s excessive coffee consumption and long hours at the writing desk were famous; on the published page, his depiction of the plight of the proletarianized journalist in Un grand homme de province à Paris (Part II of Illusions Perdues) critiques industrial literature (the term was coined by Sainte-Beuve), a phenomenon in which economic interests are placed above artistic ones. The term itself, littérature industrielle, establishes a clear parallel between the alienated

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factory worker and the journalist, implying that both work for money and not for any sort of attachment or pride in their work.

But even beyond the dramatization of his relationship to work that the author of *La Comédie Humaine* carried out – both through self-fashioning in his letters and on the pages of his novels – there was another, more subtle, way in which Balzac established a parity between his own intellectual labor and the physical labor of the proletariat. The proof of his literary toils can be found in the very text of his novels: in the development of complex characters, in the construction of an intricate plot, or, as we shall see, the crafting of a rich allegory. In addition to performing work *for* the author, these literary devices are the *proof of* the author’s effort. In general, the allegory is one of the most labor-intensive types of literary forms available to a novelist. The translation of concepts or ideals into readable concrete images requires poetic genius and prosaic clarity. The allegory implies a great deal of intellectual and imaginative effort, and the unnaturalness that comes with the form calls attention to its own status as a crafted object. Because of its labor-heavy implications, Weinstein notes that, in early- and mid-nineteenth century America, “allegory became the discursive locus around which the controversy surrounding authorial labor played itself out.”22 For a culture where, due to anxieties about industrialization, the dominant discourse seemed to have adopted an “aesthetic of erasure”23 of labor, the allegory was too strikingly laborious.

In France at the same period, however, the anxieties were different. As Claire White has demonstrated, Zola was among the first writers in France to imagine leisure time as a way to erase or “unwork” work. In the 1830s and 1840s, however, this erasure is

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22 Weinstein, 33
23 Ibid., 14
not evident. Indeed, during the July Monarchy, the French were still figuring out how to construct a work ethic, distinct from its specific Biblical and Encyclopedic connotations, and one that could apply to the whole fractured nation. Certainly, social observers were aware of the problems that could come with the upheavals of industrial societies, but, eager to catch up with their neighbors across the channel, there was a general agreement to promote work as a modern moral and social value, especially among the poorer classes.

Specifically, within the literary world, there was a move to establish the writer as a kind of craftsman. When, Balzac formed the Société de Gens de Lettres in 1838, for example, he modeled the program precisely on cooperatives that already existed among manual workers. And even Sainte-Beuve – who mourned the disappearance of literary genius in favor of a type of writing which was valued not for its artistic merit but for its profit-making potential – noted in 1839 that la littérature industrielle had become the norm. A labor-intensive literary device such as the allegory was therefore useful for Balzac, allowing him to offer himself as an example of the type of work ethic he was helping to promote.

**Three Allegories of Le Travail in Balzac**

In this next section, we will look at three of Balzac’s allegories of le travail: “Physionomies Parisiennes” in La Fille aux yeux d’or (1834), Le Médecin de Campagne (1833) and Le Curé de village (1839). In each case I will show how the text functions both as a parable of le travail and as a demonstration of the author’s literary labor, by calling attention to the craftsmanship of the allegory. In the first text, “Physionomies

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24 Work and Leisure..., 70
Parisiennes”, Balzac’s allegory of *le travail* as the lifeblood of society depends upon an analogy between the human body and the social body. To execute this allegory, the author engages in the exhaustive scientific/literary form of the physiologie. In the two tales from *Scènes de la vie de Campagne*, Balzac crafts two allegories of work as active prayer.

Although the texts take the form of novels, their real interest lies less in the stories they recount than in the efficiency with which they teach their lessons. Balzac himself affirms that his aim was not so much to tell a story but to “répandre des vérités neuves et utiles” [to spread new and useful truths],\(^{25}\) and to instruct his readers.

“Physionomies Parisiennes”

In the first chapter of *La Fille aux yeux d’or*, before introducing the characters who will figure in the tale, Balzac lays out a description of Paris that he calls “Physionomies Parisiennes.”\(^{26}\) In this tableau of all of working Parisian society, *le travail* is allegorized as a liquid fuel, flowing through the different social classes in the form of libidinal desire and economic greed. It is not, as one might expect, personified in the figure of the *travailleur*, who is unrepresentable.\(^{27}\) Indistinguishable from his tools and from his neighbor, the “worker” was just as much of an imprecise idea as “work” itself. These social zeros were too vague, too unformed to carry out the symbolic work that Balzac needed from his allegory. Instead, the long-standing metaphor already established between society and the body provided a system in which Balzac could insert his own metaphor of work as lifeblood in order to expose the modern status of *le travail* as the very energy with moves society through time and space.

\(^{25}\)“Préface de la première édition.” *Le Curé de village*, 637
\(^{26}\) Fortassier, Rose. *Histoire du texte of La Fille aux yeux d’or*, 1528
\(^{27}\) See footnote 15
The use of the term *physionomie* indicates that Balzac will be conducting a study of the physical traits of Parisians in order to make a precise assessment of their inner selves. Along with the *physiologie*, the *physionomie* was a literary practice inspired by a scientific discipline of the same name which sought to establish a rational way of understanding the body-soul relationship. These para-scientific methods of examining a person’s appearance to reveal his or her moral make-up had been in vogue since the late eighteenth century and would remain popular throughout the modern period. In the early- and mid-nineteenth century, efforts to create a link between outward appearance and inner-self were especially bountiful, as Parisians sought a way to a “read” a world which was undergoing dramatic changes. Armed with Enlightenment ideals of classification and organization such as the *Encyclopédie*, but confronted real-life disorder caused by wide variety of social and political factors, post-Revolution Parisians hoped that science would help them find some sort of logic in the social landscape.

The era saw debates as to how best perform this task, especially focused on what role the soul or the metaphysical could take in this analysis. In his 1820 edition of Johann Kaspar Lavater’s *Essai sur la physiognomie: Destiné à faire connaître l’homme et à le faire aimer*, academician and medical doctor Moreau de la Sarthe compared the methods of Lavater (1741 - 1801) and Franz Joseph Gall (1758-1828). Lavater, a self-described *physionomiste*, limited his conclusions to general statements based on observed physical features. For example, he could determine from a certain curvature of the

28 See Stierle.
29 This multi-volume work was first published in Germany in 1775-1778, under the name *Physiognomische Fragmente zur Beförderung der Menschenkenntnis und Menschenliebe*. The French translation first came out in 1781. In 1806, a new edition came out with corrections and comments by Louis-Jacques Moreau de la Sarthe and etchings by M. Vincent.
30 Gall’s multivolume *Anatomie et physiologie du système nerveux en général, et du cerveau en particulier : avec des observations sur la possibilité de reconnaître plusieurs dispositions intellectuelles et morales de l’homme et des animaux, par la configuration de leurs têtes* was first published in Paris in 1810.
eyebrows that their bearer most likely possessed particular moral qualities. This
deductive reasoning is where Lavater’s pretension to knowledge ends, a quality
appreciated by his French editors:

[Il] rapporte tout à la physionomie, et ne mêle à ses recherches aucunes
données d’anatomie et de physiologie . . . [Il] n’essaie point, physiologiste ou
anatomiste téméraire, de trouver la cause matérielle et organique de cette
disposition. Il se borne à reconnaître un signe et des effets.

[He relates everything to physionomie, and does not mix his research with
any physiological or anatomical data … No foolhardy anatomist or
physiologist, he does not try to find the material or organic cause of the
disposition. He limits himself to recognizing a sign and its effects.] 31

Moreau de la Sarthe insisted upon this distinction between the physiognomist and the
physiologist, praising the limits that the former places on his capacity for understanding
as an indication of his sense of humility before a divine power. Lavater, he contends,
“aurait été alarmé de la seule idée d’une doctrine qui tend à rendre à la physique des
phénomènes et des événements que les croyances religieuses attribuent à d’autres lois et à
d’autre causes” [would have been alarmed by the mere idea of a doctrine which tried to
make physical those phenomena and events that religious belief attributes to other laws
and other causes]. 32 The pious Lavater observes the “signs” and the “effects,” but not the
causes, for the cause of everything is God, and to search beyond that is imprudent.

Franz Joseph Gall was one of the so-called foolhardy (“téméraire”) physiologists
mentioned in the above citation who did seek the causes, thereby stripping the

31 Moreau de la Sarthe, 49-50
32 Ibid., 51
metaphysical soul of its mystery. Gall believed that by dissecting human brains he could use inductive reasoning to draw moral and spiritual truths from observation of physical body parts. Moreau de la Sarthe characterized Gall’s career as an atheistic quest for God-like knowledge, trying to understand “les secrets de l’âme humaine” by studying organic material.

The astute Balzacien will right away remark that the author of La Comédie Humaine resembles in many ways the clinically-inclined Dr. Gall more than the pious Lavater. Balzac has been depicted as the wielder of a “ruthless scalpel,” and he himself speaks of “l’avide scalpel du dix-neuvième siècle” whose job it is to “fouiller les coins les plus obscurs du cœur” [the ruthless scalpel of the nineteenth century [which] searches the darkest corners of the heart]. Indeed, Balzac had no qualms about cutting into the “darkest corners of the heart” in order to “find something new” and went about this in a very clinical way, as the “Avant-Propos” to the Comédie Humaine tries to convey.

What’s more, while Lavater limited himself to a study of signs and effects – leaving the final Cause as an unknowable mystery, proof of God – Balzac states very clearly in a famous letter to Madame Hanska that he means to search for effects, causes, and even principles:

Je vous aurai peint dans les Études de moeurs les sentiments et leur jeu, la vie et son allure. Dans les Études philosophiques, je dirai pourquoi les sentiments, sur quoi la vie ; […] après les effets et les causes doivent se

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33 Moreau de la Sarthe, 50
35 *La muse du département*, 649.
rechercher les *principes*. Les *moeurs* sont le spectacle, les *causes* sont les coulisses et les machines. Les *principes*, c'est l'auteur.\(^{37}\)

[I will have painted for you, in the *Etudes de moeurs* the sentiments and their game, life and its ---. In *Etudes philosophiques*, I will say why these sentiments, and about what this life; after the *effects* and the *causes*, I must search for the principles. The *moeurs* are the spectacle, the *causes* are the backstage and the machines. The *principles* are the author.]

Thus, even if Balzac calls his text a *physionomie*, it is really more of a *Physiologie*. Unlike Lavater and Gall, Balzac means to focus not only on the individual but also on the entire society. Here, his work is clearly influenced by Henri Saint-Simon, who was among the first to propose a complete transposition of physiological investigation from the human body to the social body. “La physiologie,” he asserts, “est donc la science, non seulement de la vie individuelle, mais encore de la vie générale, dont les vies des individus ne sont que les rouages” [Physiologie is therefore the science, not only of individual life, but even more of general life, of which individual lives are nothing more than cogs].\(^{38}\) Speaking at once to a scientific and political audience,\(^{39}\) Saint-Simon argued that the methods that had been developed for understanding the physical human body (la physiologie spéciale) could and should be directly transposed to a moral study of the social body. Developing the body-society analogy further, he notes that a dysfunctional society should be considered sick, requiring “medical” attention to bring it back to a state of health. Saint Simon’s measure of health is based on the body’s propensity for work. “Le désœuvrement constitue l’homme dans un état de maladie,” he writes, and a

\(^{37}\) 26 octobre 1834. *Lettres à Madame Hanska*, Vol. 1. 204

\(^{38}\) Cited in Stienon, 28.

\(^{39}\) Introduction in Saint-Simon. *Œuvres Complètes*. Vol. 2. 1058
Representations of *le travail* under the July Monarchy

Society that promotes idleness is also sick and must be cured, both on a physical and a moral level. Saint-Simon’s observations - that we accord the most political power to the least industrious members of society (aristocrats and the haute-bourgeoisie), while disenfranchising the most industrious (the workers) - take on a greater acuity when articulated in medical terms. When the author argues for an upheaval in the system, he is doing so not only in the interest of morality, but also physical health.

Already in 1813, a decade before *Le Nouveau Christianisme*, Saint-Simon believes that by combining the moral and spiritual concerns of the politician and the methodology of scientist, he has found a place where physical and metaphysical concerns coincide. The soul, he says, is “le point matériel où toutes nos forces vitales vont converger et d’où elles divergent. [the material point where all of our vital forces will converge and diverge].” He conceives of the soul as a simultaneously metaphysical and physical locus where organic phenomena (*actions vitales*) converge and diverge, causing man to have both physical (*a posteriori*) and spiritual (*a priori*) experiences. That these organic phenomena are not static but seemingly constantly in motion (they are, after all, *actions*) is indicative of a general focus on energy, movement, and progress that will only become stronger as the century progresses, and which Balzac recognizes and portrays in his works.

First appearing in 1834, the “Physionomies Parisiennes” was written before the wildly successful “*Physiologies*” format took off in the early 1840s, but it was not the first example of a literary *physiologie*. In 1826, Brillat-Savarin published his *Physiologie du goût*, and three years later, Balzac released a long treatise on the state of domestic life,

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40 Saint-Simon. *Œuvres complètes*. Vol. 2. 1185
41 For more on this literary form, see Preiss, Sieburth, and Stiénon.
entitled *La Physiologie du mariage* (1829), although he would claim that the text was actually written nine years earlier.\footnote{Préambule to *Traité des excitants modernes*, 303} Despite the irony used in his treatment of the institution of marriage, Balzac is, for the first time, asserting quite clearly literature’s ability and duty to represent reality.\footnote{Michel, 870} Already in this text as well as in others such as *Le Traité de la vie élégante* (1830) and *La Théorie de la demarche* (1833), Balzac is claiming for himself the role of the social scientist.

The “Physionomie” begins with a scientific invitation to observe. “Voyez,” he invokes us. “Examinez d’abord le monde qui n’a rien.” The examination begins with the manual laborer, who is not a single, unified man, but an assembly of moving parts. “L’ouvrier, le prolétaire, l’homme qui remue ses pieds, ses mains, sa langue, son dos, son seul bras, ses cinq doigts pour vivre” [The worker, the proletarian, the man who moves his feet, his hands, his tongue, his back, his one arm, his five fingers to live]. These individual parts are independent, and, as the paratactic sentence structure indicates, they are moving all at once. The inventory of animated body parts offers no information as to the chronological or causal relationships between the different movements, and the resulting image is one of frenzied agitation, a simultaneous expenditure of energy from all of the body’s members.

This enumeration of moving parts listed one by one – feet, hands, tongue, back, arm and fingers – also highlights that the proletarian is defined not by who he is (remember, he is a social zero), but by what he does. His identity is determined by his activity; he is defined as the man who moves, who expends his energy to live (“pour\footnote{La Fille aux yeux d’or, 1041}
vivre”). His very existence, then, depends on this constant movement, inventoried as follows:

[C]e peuple qui, de ses mains sales, tourne et dore les porcelaines, coud les habits et les robes, amincit le fer, amenue le bois, tisse l’acier, solidifie le chanvre et le fil, satin le bronzes, festonne le cristal, imite les fleurs, brode la laine, dresse les chevaux, tresse les harmais et les galons, découpe le cuivre, peint les voitures, arrondit les vieux ormeaux, vaporise le coton, souffle les tulles, corrode le diamant, polit les métaux, transforme en feuilles le marbre, lèche les cailloux, toilette la pensée, colore, blanchit et noircit tout. [emphasis added]

This peuple, who, with its dirty hands, rolls and gilds porcelain, sews frocks and dresses, shaves iron, whittles the wood, forges steel, hardens hemp and string, smoothes bronze, braids harness and ribbon, cuts copper, paints cars, softens old elms, vaporizes cotton, breathes tulle, corrodes diamonds, shines metal, transforms marble to leaves, polishes stones, grooms thought, whitens and darkens everything.]

The effect of this listed description is to create an image of the worker’s movements as a chaotic and monstrous dance. Not only does the excessive enumeration of activities performed by the worker’s “dirty hands” paint a picture of simultaneous and unending agitation, but the asyndetic rhythm of the prose conveys a lack of coherence to these multiplied movements. Their connection to one another remains unclear, and their placement one after the other is jarring. In this way, Parisian work is just as monstrous as Paris herself, characterized not without admiration as “le plus délicieux des monstres . . . Monstre complet d’ailleurs!” [the most delicious of monsters … a complete monster, in

45 La Fille aux yeux d’or, 1041
The entire city, in these opening pages of Ferragus, is a combination of beauty and horror, monstrous because of the way its disparate elements are thrown together in some unnatural way, just as the hodgepodge of tasks in the above paragraph are dumped on the reader in list form, defying all rules of natural harmony.

Still, the activities described in these pages are not a useless expenditure of energy: this is work. For each verb on the list, there is a direct object receiving its action. These various objects – porcelain, dresses, iron, steel, horses, copper, cars, cotton – seemingly disparate, share a common attribute; they are all subject to the force of their corresponding actions and will become something different as a result. This energy exerted upon an object is work.

Balzac’s *physiologie* of Paris society insists upon both the creative materiality of the work that is performed by the worker, and how this constant exertion of energy leaves its painful mark upon the very body it has created. And, as the following sentence indicates, the two processes seem to take place simultaneously. “Elle [la partie agissante de Paris] se livre à des mouvements qui la font se gauchir, se grossir, maigrir, pâlir, jaillir en mille jets de volonté créatrice” [Working Paris submits to movements which make it warp, fatten, vanish, become pale, and gush forth in a thousand bursts of creative passion]. On the one hand, the excessive movement of the body is harmful and damaging; but with only a comma separating the verbs “pâlir” and “jaillir,” we must imagine the two actions of deformation and formation as one. The proletarian’s social identity and physical being – his very existence – are defined by his constant expense of energy. But this is not a disembodied energy. The worker is his work, but he is also quite

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46 Ferragus, 794-5
47 La Fille aux yeux d’or, 1041
clearly his body, or at least his body parts. He is the “dirty hand” mentioned above or any of the other moving parts that agitate and exert force.

Work, then, is both that which defines the proletarian (“l’homme qui remue ses pieds”), and that which destroys him (“se gauchir, se grossir, maigrir”), even as it simultaneously causes him to spring to life in an abundance of creative energy (“jaillir en mille jets de volonté créatrice”). The synchronicity of these contradictory operations implied by the paratactic list-making contributes to the image of Paris as a monstrous combination of heterogeneous forces, but it also hints at a more general conception of the economic and physical laws ruling Balzacian society. Like money, according to Balzac, energy is not lost but transferred from one container to another.

The purpose of the physionomie at the beginning of La Fille aux yeux d’or is to establish an extended metaphor in which work is the lifeblood of the society. He must be thinking of Lavater’s holistic conception of all living bodies, where “Chaque partie d’un tout organique est semblable à l’ensemble et en porte le caractère,” and “tout est animé d’un même esprit” [Each part on an organic whole is similar to that whole that possesses its same character… it is animated by the same spirit]. This is the dominant allegory running through the opening pages of La Fille aux yeux d’or – the presence of a single force that pulses uniformly through all of society’s levels. Like Saint-Simon, Balzac believes he can transpose the scientific paradigm onto his literary creations. For Balzac, a physiologie applied to social behavior searches not only for signs of a stable or reliable

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48 Lavater. Vol 2. p.2
Representations of *le travail* under the July Monarchy

character, but the motivations behind the signs – the causes. This motivation is the life blood that runs through all of society and is in fact work.

In the “Physionomies Parisiennes” Balzac describes each social category one by one, using a somewhat frenetic mixture of metaphors and following a path that resembles a body’s circulatory system. As we shall see, the energetic whole that is created by the different elements of the *physionomie* serves as a parable for a sort of fundamental equality among all the working classes in that they are all driven by the two passions of money and sex. By representing *le travail* as a life force that is everywhere, but it limited quantities, it can act as a currency. Although the groups in the description occupy wildly different social places, they all exchange the same currency that is *le travail* in order to obtain these ends.

At times, the dynamic of the description seems to be taking the form of an ascent: beginning with the lowly earth-bound “prolétaire” and working his way up to the highest ranks of society who, in this metaphor, reside on the highest level of a multi-use Parisian building. This climb to the top of an urban edifice reflects Balzac’s general belief that all of society’s libidinal and economic energy also follows this upward movement: “Chaque sphère jette ainsi tout son frai dans sa sphère supérieure,” he explains, “et tout stimule le mouvement ascensionnel de l’argent” [Each sphere flings its spawn into the sphere above … and everything stimulates].\(^50\) Paradoxically, Balzac also likens the trajectory of his descriptions to a descent into the circles of hell. The higher one climbs the social ladder, it seems, the more his or her environment resembles Dante’s inferno. But whether this journey is imagined as a climbing of stairs to reach the best light and freshest air in the building, or as an epic journey into the depths of hell, Balzac’s descriptive journey is just

\(^{50}\) *La Fille aux yeux d’or*, 1046.
that: a flowing movement from one space to another. This is indicative of the fluidity of the social structure according to *La Comédie Humaine*. Social classes are meant to be traversed, for society itself is dynamic. Just as money flows from one hand to another, people flow from one class to the next, propelled by *le travail*.

When Balzac compares Paris to Hell, he takes this designation seriously, in both an allegorical and a physical sense. Not only is it a place for sinners and suffering, as the reference to Dante implies, but it is a locus of real heat, a furnace of consumption and production:

[C]e n’est pas seulement par plaisanterie que Paris a été nommé un enfer.
Tenez ce mot pour vrai. Là, tout fume, tout brûle, tout brille, tout bouillonne, tout flambe, s’évapore, s’éteint, se rallume, étincelle, pétille et se consume. Jamais vie en aucun pays ne fut plus ardente, ni plus cuisante.

[It’s not just a joke if we call Paris a hell. Take this word for truth. There, everything smokes, burns, shines, boils, everything enflames evaporates, extinguishes, relights, sparkles, bubbles and consumes. Never has life in any land been so intense, so stinging.]51

The focus here is not on morality but on the physical properties of heat and energy exchange. Indeed, this is a space that resembles more the laboratory of a mad physicist than the allegorical land of damned souls. One cannot help but think of Balthazar whose search for *l’Absolu* involves these same physical processes. “Toute vie” he affirms, “implique une combustion.”52 Like Balthazar, Balzac believes that there is a single

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51 *La Fille aux yeux d’or*, 1039-40
52 *La Recherche de l’absolu*, 719
energetic substance that flows through all life, and that it is both physical and metaphysical in nature.

Next, Balzac provides a sketch of all of the active social classes, that is, everyone except for the oisifs. Proletariat, petit bourgeois, haut bourgeois, and even the artist is scrutinized by the author’s scalpel-like pen. Their differences are announced and examined, but in the end, these distinctions are superficial, for when it comes to their deeper motivations (their passions), there are only two choices: “Du plaisir ou de l’or.”

This half of the monster that is Paris operates in a closed system of either/or: either they want sensorial pleasure or they want wealth. There is no third possibility. This paradigm of either/or sets up a closed system in which all actions must be pointed towards a finality of creation or procreation. Pleasure – the satisfaction of libidinal desire and the first step in the reproductive process – and gold – the material manifestation of economic effort – are the laws of this system, and they determine the actions of each of the characters within it. As a result, the expenditure-consumption energy exchange between producer and product is the basis for all social interaction. No human exchange can be imagined without this economy of energy, and the source of this energy is the desire for gold and pleasure.

There seems to be one exception to the rule, which is habitude, but habitude is merely a passive version of drive. For instance, in a passage following Balzac’s depiction of the worker who takes his “Holy Monday” and spends all of his money on cabarets (a trope that would figure prominently in the social enquêtes of Villermé and Frégier), the narrator makes a surprising claim about the workers’ motivations:

53 La Fille aux yeux d’or, 1041
Heureusement, le mardi, ce peuple est engourdi, cuve son plaisir, n’a plus le sou, et retourne au travail, au pain sec, stimulé par un besoin de procréation matérielle qui, pour lui, devient une habitude.

Luckily, Tuesday, the people are numbed, recover from their pleasure, have not a penny, and return to work, to dry bread, stimulated by a need for material procreation, which for him becomes a habit.][54

In this statement, Balzac provides a summary of his method for understanding the moeurs of society. First, the familiar terms stimulé and besoin imply that there is a passionate drive behind man’s tendency to work. These lines suggest the worker motivated by a sexual passion, if we are to take the term procréation seriously. The conclusion that work has become a “habitude” is surprising in that it appears to escape the plaisir/or system. It implies that workers perform work passively, simply because it is their identity. Balzac is suggesting that sometimes the worker works simply because it has become his habit (or habitus, to borrow from Bourdieu) he has internalized so completely the social or moral rules surrounding le travail that he is no longer aware of them.55 If the “procréation matérielle” has become a habit, this means the manual laborer can no longer make the distinction between human procreation and industrial creation. Man works because it is his passion and he works because it is his identity. The drive – whether conscious or not, active or passive – is evidence of the immense dynamic energy that is le travail.

In both instances, the case of working for pleasure and that of working for ‘gold’, the remuneration of the worker happens within a logic of commerce; it is a business transaction performed with energy. It is striking that, already in 1834, Balzac is

54 Ibid., 1042
55 See Bourdieu.
conceiving of work as energy, a sort of currency that maintains its value and may be exchanged for/changed into many different forms. Unable to imagine fully the level of abstraction of work/energy that will result from Hermann von Helmholtz’s discovery of the law of the conservation of energy, his conception of le travail walks a delicate line. It is both material and intangible, both identifiable and abstract, physical and metaphysical. It is the modern understanding that work could be an energy flowing through all levels of society that lies at the heart of Balzac’s allegory. The lesson to be drawn here is one of equality, at least on a material level. Work touches every level of society (except by definition the idle class). It is an organic material force that is the motor of society.

** Tales of Work as Active Prayer**

I will consider *Le Médecin de Campagne* (1833) and *Le Curé de village* (1839) together because that is the way Balzac intended them to be read, designating the second as a “pendant” of the first. Although the first is a tale of philanthropy, while the second is more explicitly Catholic, both texts promote le travail (meaning physical, intellectual, and spiritual work) as a form of active prayer. More overtly moralizing than “Physionomies Parisiennes,” the narratives that unfold in these texts take the form of parables, in which physical labor is shown to be just as efficient as contemplative prayer for the atoning of sins. Both tales focus on a moral “crime” committed by the protagonist and the redemption that is found in difficult labor.

*Le Médecin de Campagne* is a tale of active penitence through physical and social improvement of a remote village. Its hero, the doctor Bennassis had spent his youth in Paris where he mistreated an innocent woman, was spurned for this by his true love, and

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56 Préface de la première édition. *Le Curé de village*, 637
finally lost his illegitimate son. After these tragedies, he flees the city and vows to live the rest of his life according to the monastic motto “fuge, late, tace”\(^{57}\) (run, hide, hush). However, instead of locking himself in a monastery, he dedicates himself to the development of a backward town. In this way, Doctor Benassis transmutes his penitent energy into a more productive work energy which improves an entire society.

The plot of *Le Curé de village* features an affair between the well-off Véronique Graslin and a young manual laborer named Tascheron, a mysterious crime of passion, and a suspenseful courtroom drama leading to Tascheron’s execution. The novel ends with an astounding act of penitence by the heroine, who transposes all of her material force – both her physical health and her economic wealth – onto the homeland of her deceased lover. As the plot unfolds, Balzac instructs his readers of the importance of both moral and physical satisfaction, and of the inextricability of the physical and metaphysical realms of *le travail*.

As Balzac himself admitted, the tales in his *Scènes de la vie de campagne* were not page-turners, but were intended instead to be instructional. He underscores the difficulty of this kind of writing because of his political and cultural environment:

\[\text{Toute œuvre, quelque grande et poétique que vous l’imaginiez, est facile à exécuter, en comparaison d’un ouvrage religieux à jeter au milieu d’un peuple ou indiffèrent ou incrédule, et convié par des gens illustres à de nouvelles révolutions.}\]

\[\text{[All work, however grand and poetic you might imagine it, is easy to execute compared to a religious work that you mean to throw out among an indifferent or incredulous people, urged by learned men to participate}\]\n
\(^{57}\) *Le Médecin de campagne*, 573
in new revolutions.

As usual, Balzac does not shy away from bringing attention to the arduousness of his undertaking. Additionally, the toil that he puts into his parables can be seen in his writing. In the power of his images and in the efficiency by which author’s words can glide between expansive metaphors and detailed descriptions in order to state a general truth about society, the enormous literary labor of the writer is observable in the texts.

*Le Médecin de campagne*

The primary mark of Balzac’s literary labor in *Le Médecin de Campagne* is his allegorization of work as active prayer, which takes the form of a mutable force that runs through the individual and society. It is most remarkable in the way the narrator and the protagonist are able to shift between singular details and sweeping syntheses, and between the banalities of physical reality and the mystical nature of existence. The change of focus between generality and detail, between whole and part, the zooming and panning, represents the metaphysical nature of *le travail* which runs through society, just as it moves across the pages of the narrative.

The tale begins with a description of the countryside as viewed by the traveling soldier who is discovering the landscape for the first time. His preliminary gaze offers the reader a summary in miniature of the town’s make-up. Beginning with an impressionistic view, he soon begins to notice details. From these very first glimpses, Genestas can already see traces of the laboriousness of the town:

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58 Préface de la première édition. *Le Curé de village*, 638
Ça et là, des chaumières entourées de jardins pleins d’arbres fruitiers couverts de fleurs réveillent les idées qu’inspire une misère laborieuse. Plus loin, des maisons à toitures rouges, composées de tuiles plates et rondes semblables à des écaill es de poisson, annoncent l’aisance due à de longs travaux. Enfin au-dessus de chaque porte se voit le panier suspendu dans lequel sèchent les fromages.

[Here and there, the shacks surrounded by gardens full of fruit trees covered in flowers evoked the kinds of ideas that a laborious poverty inspires. Further on, houses with red roofs, composed of flat and round tiles, similar to the scales on a fish, revealed wealth earned by lengthy labor. Finally, above each door a basket for drying cheeses was suspended]59

The viewer’s eye shifts from a sweeping digestion of the entire landscape and the various social classes which inhabit it, to a more focused identification of the detail that renders these homes equal. Most remarkably, it is a population of workers, from its lower classes (“une misère laborieuse”) to its wealthier citizens (“l’aisance due à de longs travaux”). Each level of society – from the poor in their “chaumières” to the more well-off households “à toitures rouges” – participates in the industry of the town, and each residence bears the mark of le travail, the cheese basket, the village’s first proper industry.60

Coming closer to the center of the town, but still observing as an outsider, Genestas remarks that the village is composed of an old town and a new town. While the former is sleepy, in the latter, he hears the sounds of active and joyous production, “les

59 Le Médecin de campagne, 386
60 Later in the tale (p. 415) the reader will discover that it was the fabrication of these “clayons à fromages” that Benassis’s town began its road to self-sufficiency.
chants particuliers aux ouvriers occupés, le murmure de quelques ateliers, un grognement de limes, le bruit des marteaux, les cris confus de plusieurs industries” [those particular songs of occupied workers, the murmur of workshops, the groaning of files, the sound of hammers, the confused cries of many industries] and he sees the signs of a self-sufficient town with many different types of economic and material productivity, including several forges and farms of varied sizes. Benassis’s town appears to be in the early stages of industrialization, where the majority of production is still performed by skilled laborers and where the well-being of the individual is closely tied to the prosperity of the community. With these colorful descriptions and detailed enumeration of different activities, the narrator paints a town that is at once coherent and chaotic, not unlike Paris in its constant agitation.

The continuous activity of the new town contrasts with the stillness of the old one. This animation can even be detected in its youngest inhabitants. For instance, the little boy who shows Genestas the way to the doctor’s house does not perform this service for economic gain (he is shocked when the soldier offers him a tip), but is simply obeying “l’impérieux besoin de mouvement qui gouverne à cet âge l’esprit et le corps” [that imperious need for movement that governs the mind and the body at that age]. In contrast to the lively and youthful boy, the old town is inhabited by decrepit crétins. Genestas first meets Benassis at the deathbed of one these old-town residents “au terme d’une carrière qui n’était point la vie,” and who is described as having “[une] face morte et ces yeux sans lumière,” lacking all signs of life even before he has passed away. For Balzac, movement is life. Indeed, mouvement both as social agitation and a physical

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61 Le Médecin de campagne, 396-7
62 Ibid., 396
displacement of a body in space, play a critical role in distinguishing the old town from the new. While, as we saw above, the new part of town is described as industrious, the old town is by contrast “dehors du mouvement social” [outside of social movement] where movement can be understood as a sort of modern dynamism. Benassis uses the expression several times to describe the stagnancy of the region before his arrival. The importance of “mouvement” is apparent elsewhere in Balzac’s writing and I will further explore its relation to a more general definition of le travail at the end of this chapter.

Like the workers and the children of the new town, the protagonists also seem to be driven by a constant need for movement. Benassis leads his visitor across fields and mountains in order to show him the marks he has left throughout the land. The novel becomes a series of vignettes, and a parade of characters, each one testifying to the benefits that industrialization has brought to the region. As they ride through the countryside, Genestas and Benassis come across an ancient day-laborer named Moreau and his wife. The scene provides a miniature version of the movement from general to specific that takes place throughout the novel. From afar, the horseback riders make out the silhouette of the worker’s disfigured body: “Ses jambes semblaient déjetées. Son dos, voûté par les habitudes du travail, le forçait à marcher tout ployé.” Even from afar, it is clear from the crooked legs and the broken back that this worker has sacrificed all of his bodily force to the larger force that is le travail. The narrator then zooms in on the workers’ face:

63 Ibid.
64 “Aucun événement politique, aucune révolution n’était arrivée dans ce pays inaccessible, et complètement en dehors du mouvement social” [No political event, no revolution had arrived in this inaccessible country completely outside of the social movement]. Le Médecin de campagne, 414
65 Ibid., 461
les traits étaient effacés par les rides, la peau noircie par le soleil et endurcie par les intempéries de l’air, [ils] faisaient peine à voir. L’histoire de leur vie n’eût pas été gravée sur leurs physionomies, leur attitude l’aurait fait deviner. Tous deux, ils avaient travaillé sans cesse, et sans cesse souffert ensemble.

[Their traits had been erased by wrinkles, their skin blackened by the sun and hardened by the harsh air, they were painful to see. Even if the history of their lives had not been engraved on their physionomies, their attitudes would have led you to guess. Both of them had worked incessantly, and incessantly they had suffered together.]

Thus, both far away and up close, the workers’ bodies and faces are open books, telling the story of their constant labors. And then, as if the narrator is taking a second look ("En les examinant bien"), the two old workers are said to be happy with their painful alienated situation:

Leur visage ne manquait pas d’une sorte de gaie franchise. En les examinant bien, leur vie monotone, le lot de tant de pauvres êtres, semblait presque enviable. Il y avait bien chez eux trace de douleur, mais absence de chagrins.

[Their faces possessed a sort of gay frankness. By looking at them closely, their monotonous life, the lot of so many poor beings, seemed almost enviable. There was of course a trace of pain, but also an absence of grief.]

In this description, *le travail* takes the form of a two-headed monster: it is both that which destroys the body and that which brings moral happiness ("trace de douleur, mais absence

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Representations of *le travail* under the July Monarchy

de chagrins”). To notice its physical traces, the casual observer has only to take a glance, but to capture the moral benefits of *le travail* takes a careful eye. Benassis possesses such an eye and praises Père Moreau and those like him in the following way:

[I]l veut mourir la pioche en main, en plein champ, sous le soleil. Ma foi, il a un fier courage! A force de travailler, le travail est devenu sa vie ; mais aussi, ne craint-il pas la mort! Il est profondément philosophe sans s’en douter.

[He wants to die, shovel in hand, in the middle of a field, under the sun. My goodness, he has a proud courage! By working, work has become his life, and so he does not fear death! He is deeply philosophical without even knowing it.]

This passage depicts Père Moreau as a heroic worker; he has so completely assumed his role as an agricultural laborer that it has become his life (“le travail est devenu sa vie”). It has become a “habitude” below the level of consciousness. And yet, in the midst of this praise resides a certain amount of nostalgia, a realization that this type of “honorable” worker doesn’t exist anymore. This type of self-sacrificing worker, Balzac affirms in the end, is “une sorte de ruine humaine à laquelle ne manquait aucun des caractères qui rendent les ruines si touchantes.”

He has remained on this earth past his time, and seems to invite his observer to long for an era that no longer exists, a time when work was moral and even somewhat sacred.

As much as he appreciates the ruin of the honorable worker, Balzac’s hero does not wallow in nostalgia. In fact, it is progress, movement towards the future which is the

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67 Ibid., 462
68 Ibid., 461
driver of the story. The story of the tile-maker Vigneau exemplifies the sort of grit that characterizes the village’s progress. Starting with nothing the poor man has to work day and night and convinces his family to do the same. “[I]l déploya secrètement une énergie sans bornes […] en mangeant du pain chèrement payé par ses sueurs” [He deployed a secret energy with no limits, eating his bread paid dearly for by his sweat], 69 observes the doctor, making explicit the moral nature of this difficult work. But finally, after several years of struggle, Vigneau succeeds, and Benassis declares this a sign of a greater progress taking place under his rule of industriousness:

Vraiment, ce ménage est pour moi la vivante histoire de ma commune, comme celle de ma commune est celle des jeunes États commerçants. Cette tuilerie, que je voyais jadis morne, vide, malpropre, improductive, est maintenant en plein rapport, bien habitée, animée, riche et approvisionnée.

[Truly, this household is for me the living history of my community, just as my community is the story of those commercial states. This tile factory, which I once saw gloomy, empty, and unproductive is now fully functional, well-inhabited, animated, rich, and stocked.] 70

Benassis generalizes the successes of the individuals in his town so that they serve as a marker of the functionality of the town and even of the nation. This anecdote is one of rapid progress, of economic growth and material betterment, through difficult but salutary work. And it is easy for Benassis to generalize this type of progress, because of the

69 Ibid., 471
70 Ibid., 472
ephemeral nature of *le travail* which can flow seamlessly from individual to society and back again.

The plot’s fluid movement through time (the “ruin” of the ancient worker who remains as he always was juxtaposed with the speedy development of the town’s various economic sectors), and through social and physical space (Genestas’s gaze as it zooms and pans the village homes) is itself an allegory for the physical and transmutable energy of *le travail*, which pulses through time, space, and all levels of society. The efficiency with which Balzac is able to accomplish this shifting of focus between individual and society is the proof of his literary labor. “Toujours des travaux!” he complains to Madame Hanska while composing *Le Médecin de campagne*. “Mais le temps de ma délivrance n’est pas éloignée ; alors je pourrai achever lentement mon œuvre” [Always more work! … But the time of my deliverance is not far away ; so, I will be able to finish slowly my book].

One cannot help but think of the work carried out on the village by doctor Benestas as a reflection of the author’s own prayerful literary labor. Both the content and the form of Balzac’s allegory of *le travail* rely upon a belief in the mutability of work energy. The parabolic lesson of the tale is that the industriousness of one man can set off the industriousness of an entire society, and that work is a form of active prayer that is beneficial to both the worker and the object of his work.

*Le Fuge, late, tace* du chartreux est ici ma devise, mon travail est une prière active, mon suicide moral est la vie de ce canton, sur lequel j’aime, en étendant la main, à semer le bonheur et la joie, à donner ce que je n’ai pas. L’habitude de vivre avec des paysans, mon éloignement du monde,

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m’ont réellement transformé.

[The *Fuge, late, tace* of the Carthusian monks is now my motto, my work is active prayer, my moral suicide is the life of this Canton, upon which I take joy in sowing good fortune and joy, by giving what I don’t have. The habit of living with countryfolk and my separation from the world have truly transformed me.]

This form of active prayer depends upon a belief in the mutability of work; spiritual, intellectual, or physical, each of these different types of labor belongs to the same category of *le travail*. Benassis believes that work is equal, no matter what form it takes, whether it is spiritual, intellectual, and physical, and this equality is attested to in his grouping of the three *robes noires* (the priest, the judge and the medical doctor):

[L’]un panse les plaies de l’âme, l’autre celles de la bourse, le dernier celles du corps ; ils représentent la société dans ses trois principaux termes d’existence : la conscience, le domaine, la santé.

[One of them bandages the wounds of the soul, the other, the wounds of the pocketbook, the last, those of the body; they represent society in its three principal terms of existence: conscience, property, and health.]

This tripartite leadership structure resembles closely the Saint-Simonian trinity that Balzac will explore more explicitly at the head of society in the *Curé de village*. An artist/priest receives inspiration; an intellectual organizes or interprets rationally the ideas of the artist/priest; and a physical worker or industrialist implements the plan laid out by

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72 *Le Médecin de campagne*, 574
73 Ibid., 433
the intellectual. All while insisting upon the specificity of each task, Benassis affirms that each of these professions works towards the same end: convincing the masses that their individual good depends on the general well-being. Thus both Balzac and Benassis imagine a society that is driven forward in time through the power of *le travail* as a sort of secular type of prayer that benefits the individual and society. Like in the allegory of the body in the “physionomie” work here is the physical and metaphysical lifeblood of society.

*Le Curé de village*

The allegory of work as active prayer takes place in *Le Curé de village* through the remarkably powerful metaphor that Balzac sets up between a woman’s soul and the product of her labor. Balzac’s constant attention to the parallels between spiritual and physical labor set up a system of metaphors that culminate in a sublimation of one into the other. Véronique’s (albeit indirect) working of the land through physical means is the outward manifestation of the penance that she performs on her soul. The metaphor by which Véronique’s soul is represented by the landscape is so effective that she actually *becomes* the landscape, in a move that Jacques Neefs calls *une métaphore “accomplie,”*\(^\text{74}\) in which the analogy between the soul and the landscape is so strong that these separate entities become one. “Le passage du paysage-analogie au paysage-incarnation”\(^\text{75}\) is a testament to the efficiency of Balzac’s metaphor, proof of the work that went into its construction. Balzac’s literary labor is laid bare when the analogy falls in on itself and the

\(^{74}\) Neefs, 48  
\(^{75}\) Ibid.
Representations of le travail under the July Monarchy

The heroine is swallowed by her own figurative representation. The discursive act of delineating a metaphor between Véronique and Montégnac is present throughout the text. The narrative is dominated by the dynamic force that leaves its mark simultaneously on the human body, on the land, and on the text. This force – this travail – takes the form alternately of a concentrated passion and a formative habitus, or second nature, that is not innate but that has been so fully ingrained that it has become almost instinctual. The allegory of le travail as active prayer is played out in the alternation between these two types of dynamic force – habitus and passion – and in the work that Balzac performs in creating the allegory.

Allegory relies upon concrete images in order to bring to life an abstract idea. One reason that the allegory of work as active prayer is so efficient in Le Curé de village is that the novel’s characters are easily readable – their appearances reveal their inner moralities. As is the case throughout Balzac’s oeuvre, the narrator uses physiological and physiognomic observation in order to give information about the natural inclinations of his characters. Both habits and passions can have a determinative influence upon appearance. For instance, Véronique’s husband Pierre Graslin incarnates the work-crazed bourgeois laid out in the earlier “Physionomies Parisiennes.” He is constantly moving, motivated by some liquid energy which also seems to be destructive:

[S]on visage [était] rouge comme celui d’un ivrogne émérite, et couvert de boutons âcres, saignants ou près de percer. Sans être ni la lèpre ni la dartre, ces fruits d’un sang échauffé par un travail continu, par les inquiétudes, par la rage du commerce, par les veilles, par la sobriété, par une vie sage, semblaient tenir de ces deux maladies.
[His face was red like that of a life-long drunk, covered with acrid pimples, bloody or ready to pop. These were the fruits of a blood that has been heated by continuous work, by worries, by the madness of commerce, by all-night vigils, which, although they seemed to indicate leprosy and tetter, were neither.]\textsuperscript{76}

Even though he resembles a drunkard ("un ivrogne émérite"), Pierre Graslin is victim of a different form of excess: too much energy. Due to his constant economic activity ("un travail continu"), Graslin’s blood becomes so hot that it boils up in the form of acrid pimples on his face. This blood seems to be made of the very same substance that flows through all of Paris, impelling her to constant movement. The banker’s passion and habitus are one and the same: the ardent drive to work ("la rage du commerce") is both a concentrated frenzy of energy and a sustained and constant habit. The two forms of determinative forces combine to create a flat character who is doubly determined by his drive to work and who will eventually die of this excess.

However, sometimes the work of habitus and the work of passion are in conflict. As a young girl, Véronique is quite easy to decipher, but her readability becomes complicated by a childhood illness. From her birth, there is an insistence upon the physical appearance of Véronique: a beautiful face attesting to her excellent moral character. The townspeople even nickname her the Little Virgin, referring both to her physical radiance and to her serene goodness. However, when she comes down with smallpox at the age of eleven, the body-soul correlation becomes problematic. Even though she remains “une sainte et bonne fille, occupée, travailleuse, sédentaire” [a saintly

\textsuperscript{76} Le Curé de village, 660
Representations of *le travail* under the July Monarchy

good girl, occupied, hard-working, and sedentary],\(^{77}\) her once flawless skin is now covered with scars. It is only in moments of religious transcendence that her former beauty shines through briefly. For instance, at her First Communion:

[L]a petite Vierge apparaissait et disparaissait comme une céleste apparition. La prunelle de ses yeux, douée d’une grande contractilité, semblait alors s’épanouir, et repoussait le bleu de l’iris, qui ne formait plus qu’un léger cercle.

[The Little Virgin appeared and disappeared like a celestial apparition. Her pupils, endowed with a great contractibility, seemed to blossom, pushing back the blue of her iris which now formed nothing but a slight circle.]\(^{78}\)

The dramatic alteration on Véronique’s face and her eyes exemplifies the power of the passionate inner self to modify one’s outer appearance, if only for a few moments. This inner force first takes control of the pupils, which overtake (“repoussait”) the other parts of the eyes, and finally the entire face is completely changed, erasing the smallpox scars. Because of outward factors – smallpox strips her of her natural beauty, social position sets her apart from the other children of the town, and a novel (Bernardin de Saint-Pierre’s 1789 romance, *Paul et Virginie*) inspires her with dreams of romantic love which conflict with her realistic expectations – Véronique has taken on the habits of introspection, sagacity, and resignation. However, in this moment of religious fervor, the passion of spiritual and moral goodness breaks through the exterior.

The expressiveness of Véronique’s face contrasts with her mother’s unreadable countenance. For instance, when Véronique says goodbye to M. de Grandville, the man

\(^{77}\) *Ibid.*, 649
\(^{78}\) *Ibid.*, 652
who sentenced Francis Tascheron to death, her pupils again dilate to the point that they become almost completely black, \(^7^9\) a sign that her inner sentiments have overtaken her physical appearance. An observer of the scene, Bishop Dutheil, notices this change on her face, and is at that moment able to guess the truth about her relationship with the executed criminal. An instant later, however, when Véronique whispers in her mother’s ear how happy she is to never see the prosecutor again, “[Elle] reçut cette confidence sans que son vieux visage révélât le moindre sentiment” [She heard this confidence without allowing her face to reveal the slightest sentiment]. \(^8^0\) The elderly woman’s expression is inscrutable; the Bishop cannot read her.

As she grows older, Véronique cultivates an attitude of stoic resignation. At her deathbed, her admirers are shocked to find that in spite of her serene demeanor, she has been wearing an extremely painful hair shirt underneath her clothing for years. She never allowed her face to reveal the physical torture that her body must have been experiencing. It is not until the end of her life that Mme Graslin’s face undergoes the astonishing transformation that took place at her first communion. This time the metamorphosis takes place at a moment of painful ecstasy when the doctor declares that her death is imminent:

> En ce moment un sourire où se peignait le bonheur que lui causait la pensée d’une expiation complète rendit à sa figure l’air d’innocence qu’elle eut à dix-huit ans. Toutes les agitations inscrites en rides effrayantes, les couleurs sombres, les marques livides, tous les détails qui rendaient cette tête si horriblement belle naguère, quand elle exprimait seulement la douleur, enfin les altérations de tout genre disparurent.

\(^7^9\) Ibid., 748  
\(^8^0\) Ibid.
[At this moment, a smile with expressed all of the happiness she experienced by the thought of complete expiation restored to her face its air of innocence she had had at eighteen years. All the agitations, inscribed in terrifying lines, dark colors, livid marks, all these details which rendered her face once so horrifically beautiful when she expressed only pain, now these alterations disappeared.] 81

At this final moment, all of the marks that Véronique’s life has left on her body are erased. These “agitations” and “altérations”, expressed in wrinkles, spots, and sickly coloring can be seen as the result of her habitus. In the end, however, passion may erase, or unwork, these signs, making them disappear as if they were merely a mask. “[I]l semblait à tous que jusqu’alors Véronique avait porté un masque, et que ce masque tombait” [It seemed to everyone that until now, Véronique had been wearing a mask and that this mask was falling off]. 82 The idea that the evidence of the physical and moral suffering Véronique underwent during her life was only a mask is an integral part of Balzac’s complex understanding of the readability of the body; although habitudes and agitations (work) may affect the way the body appears, they cannot change the nature of the soul within the body.

In both cases, Véronique’s transformation is sudden and fleeting, lasting only “quelques instants.” It is the result of a burning passion, so strong that it must show itself immediately, but it will then disappear just as quickly. There is an opposition set up between the gradual but permanent effects of habits and the instant but fleeting force of the passion, two types of le travail which leave their marks on the material world. This

81 Ibid., 862
82 Ibid., 863
ability to change aspect so quickly distinguishes her from the sketched characters featured in the “Physionomies Parisiennes” at the beginning of La Fille aux yeux d’or. Véronique is a complex character, capable of sudden metamorphoses, whereas the “Physionomies” aim to describe entire social classes. The two examples represent two ways of reading the face and the body: The brief appearance of “la Petite Vierge” is the manifestation of a natural goodness that breaks through the suffering body, whereas the warped body of the proletarian is the result of years of being chained to a machine. Balzac’s distinction between passion and habit and his ability to pass from one to the other represents the mutability of work energy and exposes the work Balzac put into the creation of his complex allegories.

Work does not leave its mark only on the body. There is an impulsion to release one’s energy out into the world. Even before Véronique’s Christlike transfiguration from human body to pure soul at the novel’s climax, the narrative has already pointed to a close relationship between physical and spiritual labor, as forces that appear both on the body and in the world around it. During the saddest moments of her marriage, before her affair with Tascheron, Véronique realizes that the reason she is unhappy is that she has no way to occupy her body. An avid reader and a fervent Catholic, she has found numerous ways to occupy her mind and her soul, engaging in intelligent conversations with the most respected citizens of Limoges and performing charitable acts even against the wishes of her husband. However, in spite of these worthy pursuits, Véronique realizes she is not satisfied physically. “Chez moi, n’est-ce pas au contraire le corps qui s’ennuie, si je puis employer cette expression ?” [For me, isn’t it rather the body which langors?].

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83 Ibid., 671
looks to her friend, Grossetête, for help. Grossetête is an older man who has found satisfaction in retirement by taking up gardening. She begs him to help her find a passion:

Vous mon vieil ami, vous avez une passion, vous êtes horticulteur. À votre retour en ville, communiquez-moi votre goût, faites que j’aille à ma serre, d’un pied agile comme vous allez à la vôtre, contempler les développements des plantes, vous épanouir et fleurir avec elles, admirer ce que vous avez créé, voir des couleurs nouvelle, inespérées qui s’étalent et croissent sous vos yeux par la vertu de vos soins.

[You, my old friend, you have a passion, you are a gardener. When you come back to town, communicate to me your taste, make me go to my greenhouse with a lively step, like you go to yours, to contemplate the development of your plants, to blossom and bloom with them, to admire what you have created, to see new and unexpected colors which display themselves and grow beneath your eyes and by the grace of your care.]

Grossetête’s greenhouse foreshadows the agriculture development of Montégnac, but it is also evident that Véronique is not just speaking about gardening. Horticulture is more than a hobby; it is the creation and caring for another living being, like motherhood. Véronique stresses the parallels between the two roles by speaking of the “développements” and the growth (“croissent”) of the plants in the same breath that she imagines how he, Grossetête, must bloom and blossom (“vous épanouir et fleurir”) with them. Before meeting Tascheron, then, there are hints that the heroine of the novel is longing for maternal labor.

84 Ibid.
But her desire for a child must be understood as a sign of a more general need. Véronique is not asking Grossetête for her own greenhouse, nor for horticulture lessons. Her plea, “Faites que j’aille à ma serre,” translates as: *Make me go to my greenhouse.* But what she is really asking for is the desire to go to the greenhouse. What she wants from him is his drive ("communiquez-moi votre gout"), the passion he has for gardening. It is her affair with Tascheron that will cure her of her moral and corporal ennui. Through her relationship with the young man, she will fulfill her need for physical affection and her desire for motherhood – acting as a mother to both Tascheron and the child they conceive. The parallel between motherhood and physical labor becomes clear to Véronique when she becomes a mother herself. She alludes to this maternity-as-work paradigm when she muses ironically about the identity of Tascheron’s lover, declaring that she must have been a woman with no children.

L’inconnue aura porté dans sa passion le génie auquel nous devons les belles œuvres des artistes, des poètes, et qui chez la femme existe, mais sous une autre forme, elle est destinée à créer des hommes et non des choses. Nos œuvres, à nous, c’est nos enfants ! Nos enfants sont nos tableaux, nos livres, nos statues.

[The mysterious woman will have carried within her passion the same genius to which we owe the great works of artists and poets, and which exists in the woman under another form. She is destined to create men and not things. Our works of art are our children. They are our paintings, our books, our statues.]^85

^85 *Ibid.*, 692
Interestingly, Véronique’s statement that men make things and women make people is more generally true than she might know, for her drive to useful creation does not end with motherhood. What’s more, her comparison of motherhood to the work of an artist is incomplete, for motherhood also implies a very physical type of labor. The word travail refers to the more painful part of the reproductive process - birth. Because it is composed of these different types of labor – artistic, intellectual, and physical – motherhood could be the embodiment of a Saint-Simonian society, which must include all three. The creative inspiration of the priest/artist, the logistical organization of the engineer, and the physical activity of the industrialist were the three elements necessary to a society as imagined by Saint-Simon, in order to create a rational society in which the poorest members’ lives would be improved. In Montégnc, these roles are filled respectively by the Abbé Bonnet, the Polytechnician Gérard, and the enthusiastic Ferrabesche; but Véronique embodies all three of these capacities in her role of mother.

The progression of the plot depends upon the exchange between the metaphysical and physical realms. For example, upon her arrival to the village of Montégnc, Véronique is in the throes of a chronic illness, the ostensible reason for her retreat to the countryside. Soon, the curé Bonnet recognizes that her sickness is mental (“des méditations funestes”), and not caused by any bodily problem. Véronique has decided to deny her corporality, the site of her adultery, and she hopes to adopt a monastic life to atone for her sins. However, the curé is determined not to let this happen. He warns her: “S’il est un degré de souffrance physique où la pudeur expire, il est aussi un degré de

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86 Littré, 2322.  
87 Ibid., 754
souffrance morale où l’énergie de l’âme disparaît, je le sais." By making the analogy between the earlier physical needs which led her to commit adultery ("souffrance physique où la pudeur expire") and the present moral pain she is in now, the curé is affirming her corporality. At the same time, he is calling on her not to give in to this spiritual suffering, the result of which would be a literal demoralization ("où l’énergie de l’âme disparaît"). Knowing that, for Balzac, energy is the most basic force of existence, this would mean the death of Véronique’s moral life. Instead, the Abbé suggests that she should channel her mental anguish into physical activity.

Bonnet’s call to action is surprisingly lacking in religious language. He alludes to the biblical figure of the Madeleine as more of a cultural reference than a spiritual one in order to show that religious fervor without work(s) is insufficient. Instead he uses a combination of arguments based on pragmatism and social stewardship as well as a physical demonstration of the efficiency of economic power to convince Véronique to devote herself to the renovation of the town.

Pleurer, madame, gémir comme la Madeleine dans le désert, n’est que le commencement, agir est la fin… Vos prières doivent être des travaux. De votre travail doit découler le bonheur de ceux au-dessus desquels vous ont mis votre fortune, votre esprit, tout, jusqu’à cette position naturelle, image de votre situation sociale.

[To weep, Madame, to howl like the Madeleine in the desert, is only the beginning, to act is the end… Your prayers must be works. From your work must flow the joy of those above whom you have placed your fortune, your spirit, you everything, up to this natural position, the image

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Ibid.
of your social situation.]\textsuperscript{89}

This passage performs two types of work. First, it establishes a parallel between spiritual and physical labor. The priest’s logic assumes that all work – all energy spent – is equal. Whether she is wailing in the desert or building a society, Véronique is exerting force, she is working. Why not, then, put this effort towards helping others? “Ces travaux n’occuperont-ils pas votre oisiveté mieux que les pensées de mélancolie ?” [Wouldn’t these works occupy your leisure better than thoughts of melancholy?]\textsuperscript{90} In a second movement, the priest’s words are accompanied by a visual illustration of the importance of the social value of labor. As he utters the final words of his speech, the curé motions towards the enormous château (“image de votre situation sociale”) in the distance, which dwarfs the humble village at the bottom of the hill, a metaphor for the outsized economic power she has over the struggling townspeople. In his argumentation, then, the priest uses both theoretical and physical arguments to convince Véronique to channel her spiritual work to physical transformation.

In all three allegories, le travail takes the form of a liquid energy that flows through people and things. In both Le Curé de village and Le Médecin de Campagne, the metaphysical aspect of work is emphasized as it has the power to effect not only physical change but also social and spiritual mutations. Balzac insists on both of these aspects of le travail, both its materiality and its ineffability.

\textsuperscript{89} Ibid., 756-7
\textsuperscript{90} Ibid., 759


**Le Travail According to Balzac**

Each of the allegories discussed in the previous section creates a powerful image of the social value of *le travail*: in “Physionomies Parisiennes,” work appears as an organic life force which pumps through the social body, driving it, agitating, sometimes leaving a path of destruction as it pulses through; in *Le Médecin de Campagne*, work takes the form of philanthropic good will which leads to moral and industrial progress, whereas in *Le Curé de village*, work is embodied by the penitent, Christ-like martyr. Secular and Catholic, physical and metaphysical, scientific and allegorical, these texts seem to defy synthesis, providing instead a matrix of images of *le travail* from which to choose. Indeed, for Balzac, the definition of work was not an either/or process but, instead necessitated inclusion of different understandings of *le travail* as both an embodied material substance and an ephemeral otherworldly force. In his vision of a rapidly changing society, work was the driving force behind that progress which expressed itself in both organic material fluid and intangible movement, embodied and abstract, changing form, flowing from one object to the next and representing a moral value that was fundamental to modern social order.

In *Le Traité de la vie élégante* (1830), Balzac had made clear the distinction between the man who works and the man who thinks, placing them in separate classes. In fact, he divides society into three types. “L’homme qui travaille; L’homme qui pense; [et] L’homme qui ne fait rien” [The man who works, the man who thinks, and the man who does nothing], he argues, will inevitably lead three separate types of lives: “La vie occupée, La vie d’artiste, [et] La vie élégante” [The occupied life, the artist’s life, and the
These different types of lives, he adds, are so dissimilar that “L’homme habitué au travail ne peut comprendre la vie élégante” [the man who has the habit of work cannot understand the elegant life].\(^\text{91}\) The one-to-one relationship between activity and identity is direct and unmistakable. While the intellectual/artist seems to play an intermediary role between the oisif and the travailleur,\(^\text{93}\) he is also the complete opposite of both, as he upsets the normal relationship between work and rest: “son oisiveté est un travail, et son travail un repos” [his leisure is work, and his work is a rest].\(^\text{94}\) The artist is clearly a singular character, and, in this way, Balzac underscores the very important difference between intellectual and manual labor.

However, three years later, in \textit{La Théorie de la démarche} (1833) he seemed to consider work in a more nuanced manner. The three types of men who led completely different lives were becoming difficult to tell apart. For instance, when observing a sickly-looking passerby, the amateur physiologist is unable to tell whether this illness is due to too much work or too much vice:

\begin{quote}
Qui avait amolli ses jambes ? D’où provenaient sa goutte, son embonpoint? Étaient-ce les vices ou le travail qui l’avaient déformé ? Triste réflexion! le travail qui édifie et le vice qui détruit produisent en l’homme les mêmes résultats.
\end{quote}

[What had wasted his legs? From did his gout come, his portliness? Were these the vices of work which had deformed him? Sad thought! Work, which edifies, and vice, which destroys, produce the same results.]\(^\text{95}\)

\(^{91}\) \textit{Le Traité de la vie élégante}, 211-212
\(^{92}\) \textit{Ibid.}
\(^{93}\) \textit{Ibid.}, 215
\(^{94}\) \textit{Ibid.}
\(^{95}\) \textit{Théorie de la démarche}, 286
Work here has a more ambiguous status; it is both physically destructive (as indicated by the verbs *amollir* and *déformer*), and morally constructive (*le travail qui édifie*). In this way, work takes on two characteristics: it is both tangible and intangible. In a sense, Balzac has complexified his reading of the working body. In 1830, he had called all manual laborers, no matter what their profession, “les fragments uniformes d’une même masse […] le même outil dont le manche est different” [uniform fragments of a single mass, the same tool whose handle is different], but here, the correspondence of signifier to signified has been disrupted, so much that it is impossible to tell the difference between an *oisif* and a *travailleur*. Indeed, work has become something more than a mere physical phenomenon.

Further on, Balzac even seems to be ready to place intellectual and manual labor into the same category, whereas in *Le Traité de la vie élégante*, the two are fundamentally different. He claims that his *Théorie de la démarche* will consist in studying:

> les lois précises qui régissent, et notre appareil intellectuel, et notre appareil moteur, afin de connaître le point précis auquel le mouvement est bienfaisant, et celui où il est fatal.

> [the precise laws which regulate both our intellectual faculty and our motor faculty, in order to understand the exact point at which movement is beneficial, and where it is fatal]^{97}

The structure of the sentence indicates that Balzac considers intellectual work and manual labor in the same light, for even if they use different *appareil*, they may be ruled by the

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^{96} *Le Traité de la vie élégante*, 212
^{97} *Théorie de la démarche*, 300-301
same “laws.” Interestingly, when Balzac establishes this approximation between physical and intellectual work, he does not use the term *le travail*, but refers, instead, to *le vis humana, le mouvement, la force*, and *l’énergie*, ambiguous, almost mysterious terms which allow for multiple readings:

> Si le *vis humana* ne peut pas être à la fois dans la tête, dans les poumons, dans le cœur, dans le ventre, dans les jambes ;
> Si la prédominance du mouvement dans une portion quelconque de notre machine exclut le mouvement dans les autres […]
> Eh bien, si le défaut de mouvement affaiblit la force intellectuelle, si tout repos la tue, pourquoi l’homme qui veut de l’énergie va-t-il la demander au repos, au silence et à la solitude?

> [If the *vis humana* cannot be at once in the head, in the lungs, in the heart, in the stomach, in the legs ;
> If the predominance of movement in one part of the body excludes movement in the others…
> And, well, if the lack of movement enfeebles intellectual force, if repose kills it, why does the man looking for energy seek it in rest, in silence and in solitude?]^{98}

Without using the signifier that he nonetheless seems to be indicating quite clearly, *le travail*, Balzac is raising a serious question about the nature of work. If it is an organic substance that obeys the laws of physics, why is it also a mysterious entity which can be found in its very opposite (*le repos*). How can it be both physical and metaphysical? A helpful clue is the term *mouvement*, a reappearing concept in Balzac’s analytical texts which denotes, not just physical displacement, but something more spiritual:

> ^{98} Ibid., 301
Le MOUVEMENT comprend la Pensée, action la plus pure de l’être humain ; le Verbe, traduction de ses pensées ; puis la Démarche et le Geste, accomplissement plus ou moins passionné du Verbe. [...] il me parut impossible de faire mentir le mouvement.

[MOVEMENT includes Thought, the purest action of the human being; the Word is translation of his thoughts; next, the Gait and the Gesture, effects more or less impassioned of the Word…. It seems to me impossible for movement to lie.]^99

For Balzac, le mouvement is both intellectual and physical, and it takes on a certain moral purity that prevents dissimulation. It is a combination of inspiration (la Pensée), logic (le Verbe), and action (la Demarche and le Geste). As such, it contains all three elements of understanding that Balzac seeks to investigate; it is a sign, a cause, and an effect of le travail. Movement occupies a special place in Balzac’s philosophical and analytical works such as Louis Lambert, La Recherche de l’absolu, and La Peau de chagrin.

According to what Rose Fortassier calls “l’énergétique balzacienne,”^100 energy is the unifying force which brings all of the world of the Comédie Humaine into the same system. Within this universe, each character is endowed with a limited amount of energy which he must conserve or spend as he sees fit. Such a limit on energy explains the longevity of such “avares de l’énergie” [energy misers] as Gobseck, or the early death of the too-exhuberant Raphaël de Valentin.^101 Mouvement, because it is composed of both

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^99 Théorie de la démarche, 270
^100 Fortassier, “Introduction to Pathologie de la vie sociale.” 197
^101 Ambrière, 47
volonté and energy, is a complete form of energy and therefore occupies the first place in Creation.\textsuperscript{102} It is therefore metaphysical and even spiritual.

But even while \textit{le mouvement} possesses such sublime and even spiritual characteristics, Balzac also insists upon its very realness and its ability to affect the physical world. Man’s energy does not remain within the individual but is transferred into the world around him through movement:

Je décidai que l’homme pouvait projeter en dehors de lui-même, par tous les actes dus à son mouvement, une quantité de force qui devait produire un effet quelconque dans sa sphère d’activité.

[I decided that, through all of the acts resulting from his movement, man could project outside of himself a quantity of force which would produce some sort of effect within his sphere of activity.]\textsuperscript{103}

Balzac emphasizes the close relationship between the natural tangible traces of work and the intangible, ineffable power behind them, using a mixture of mystical and organic images. “Les mouvements de l’homme,” he asserts, “font dégager un fluide animique. Sa transpiration est la fumée d’une flamme inconnue” [The movements of man… set loose an animic fluid. His sweat is the smoke of an unknown flame].\textsuperscript{104} Indeed, the physical character of work is often expressed in the form of a bodily fluid: sweat, blood, or, more generally, \textit{le vis humana}, the vital fluid of the social body. Man’s natural force,
“l’invisible fluide dont il dispose à son insu, comme la seiche du nuage d’encre”\textsuperscript{105} is also detectible as a tangible physical liquid that flows through society.

An avid reader of both spiritist and scientific texts, Balzac’s depictions of the social and human bodies walked the line between mainstream medical science and more occult belief systems. As Moïse Le Yaouanc has demonstrated, the scientific texts that Balzac was reading could generally be divided into two camps, both of which believed that there was a common force pulsing through the physical world. Greatly influenced by Mesmer, a group of thinks calling themselves \textit{Vitalistes} asserted that there existed one life principle (principe vital) which was common to all living things. In the other camp, \textit{Organicistes} like Nacquart and Broussais believed that different organs were composed of different materials but that they created a new whole when placed together. Balzac incorporated certain aspects of each school, but most of all, he adopted the idea of the vital fluid flowing through the individual and society. Like his scientific influences, he also believed that this fluid could be both destructive and constructive:

\begin{quote}
Aussi ne doit-on pas s’étonner si le jeune Balzac spéculant sur l’activité de la \textit{vis humana} et n’ignorant pas les grandes tendances de la médecine de son époque, s’est fermement attaché à l’opinion que l’être intérieur ou fluidique est capable de blesser, de tuer l’être extérieur ou charnel.
\end{quote}

[Thus, we should not be surprised if the young Balzac speculated about the activity of the \textit{vis humana}, and, aware of the great trends in medicine of his époque, he was firmly attached to the opinion that the inner or fluid

\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}, 270}
Representations of *le travail* under the July Monarchy

being is capable of harming, of killing the exterior or carnal being.]¹⁰⁶

This understanding of the *vis humana* as a physical force which drives all activity and is the literal force of human life is integral to reading Balzac’s allegories of work, and to understanding his definition of *le travail*, for it is emblematic of the alienating power of labor in Balzac’s system.

The resulting paradigm of work established by Balzac is one of contradictions. Represented in the allegories and the analytic texts as both organic material (*vis humana*) and a more ineffable energy (*mouvement*) the Balzacian paradigm for understanding *le travail* seems to span two levels of meaning. Although the working classes are not able to represent the moral value of *le travail*, which must instead be allegorized, Balzac insists in a paradoxical move that he is a worker *because of his very act of allegorization*. The images painted are both reflections of the author’s perception of the world around him as well as influential contributions to social discourse. As such, I consider these images to constitute a sort of cultural paradigm which other writers of the July Monarchy used to explore the tricky question of *le travail*.

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¹⁰⁶ Le Yaouanc, 165
II. REPRESENTING A NEW REALITY: OBSERVATIONS AND REVELATIONS

Different Types of Vision

The allegories of *le travail* offered by Balzac were extremely powerful, precisely because they were able to capture a variety of different voices and images across discourse. From these dynamic representations, one could pull diverse interpretations, and the understanding that *le travail* was emerging as a new moral and physical reality was a worldview shared by a variety of writers across social discourse. In this chapter I investigate two “voices” which were greatly influenced by Balzac’s representations of work even though they may be seen as political and poetic opposites in the spectrum of social discourse. In the studies performed by a group of enquêteurs (Frégier, Buret, Villermé, and Béraud\(^1\)), the authors try to look at their ragged subjects, the workers, with the eyes of scientists. In the utopian socialist novels of George Sand, work embellishes and reveals a greater truth about *le travail* as a moral value. If the textual creations that result from this observation are so dissimilar, this is because the enquêteurs and George Sand are using different types of vision. The enquêteurs claim a positivist method, or a subjective perception of facts, whereas George Sand seems to see the world in mystical, absolute terms. I contend that, by passing from the position of observer to interpreter to writer/creator, both Sand and the enquêteurs undertake the same trajectory as Balzac, becoming authors of a reality that was invisible before their intervention.

Of all the ways a person might apprehend the world, vision was the sense that was most valued in the nineteenth century. From its very conception, Balzac envisioned *La

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\(^1\) I have chosen to examine Béraud rather than the more well-known expert on prostitution, Parent du Châtelet, because Béraud is more overtly moralist, bringing him closer to the other authors in my corpus.
Comédie humaine not as an invention of his imagination, but as testimony of what he observed in daily life. “Ce ne seront pas des faits imaginaires: ce sera ce qui se passe partout” [they won’t be imaginary facts, they will be what happens everywhere],\(^2\) insists the novelist in 1834. This drive to observe and to interpret and to show others what one had seen was not unique to Balzac, but rather a cultural trend throughout the nineteenth century. This trend coincides with the rise of the narrator and the realist novel, and with other forms of testimonial writing, such as journalistic reportage and the social enquête. However, as Andrea Goulet has shown, the sense of vision was not a stable concept. Vision was seen as both a mystical and scientific phenomenon, looking both “toward the ephemeral details of the visible world as well as toward the eternal truths that subtend them.”\(^3\) Even the realist novel, far from being the simple recounting of events, was a constant compromise between two competing systems of perception which differed in the way they conceived of the roles of the object and subject. This can be characterized as a back-and-forth between an established Cartesian understanding of the world by which there existed an objectively true reality that could be immediately apprehended by the observer, and a growing Lockean worldview that stressed the importance of the subject, and how his experience would be a factor in perception. Thus, when Balzac described his characters, he not only depicted them as real, historically situated people (using his subjective-empirical gaze), but also wrote them as readable signs of their own moral interiority (using his objective-idealist gaze). This tension – between a mystical understanding of the world as a unified whole and an inductive method of perceiving reality – was present not only in the Balzacian gaze, but across social discourse. The type

\(^2\) 26 octobre 1834. Lettres à Madame Hanska, Vol. 1. 204
\(^3\) Goulet, 20
of vision preferred by a writer would determine how they represented reality. Sand relied more heavily on an objective-idealistic gaze, whereas the enquêteurs claimed a subjective-realist one.

**The Social Enquêtes: Moralists, Industrialists, Positivists**

The enquêtes were written at the emergence of a new type of professional observation, what Foucault calls the medical gaze. While, in the classical age, the doctor’s job was one of objective *a priori* deduction, now it was shifting to one of subjective induction:

Un regard qui écoute et un regard qui parle : l’expérience clinique représente un moment d’équilibre entre la parole et le spectacle. Equilibre précaire car il repose sur un formidable postulat : que tout le visible est énonçable et qu’il est tout entier visible parce que tout entier énonçable.

[A gaze which listens and a gaze which speaks: the clinical experiment represents a moment of equilibrium between the work and the spectacle. A precarious equilibrium, for it depends upon a formidable postulate: that all that is seeable is sayable, and that it is entirely visible because it is entirely sayable.]

Whereas, in the classical age, the doctor was a passive onlooker, a kind of mystic who magically “understood” the patient’s illness and used the symptoms to explain this illness, the modern nineteenth-century doctor must be an active participant in the diagnosis, interpreting the symptoms in order to put together a full picture of the patient. In the medical gaze, there is no *a priori* truth, no facts outside of observable reality; the gaze is

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*Naissance de la clinique*, 116
therefore the source of all language available for use in the writing stage, and it should follow that interpretation and representation can only take place “dans le vocabulaire et à l’intérieur du langage qui lui a été proposé par les choses observées” [in the vocabulary, and within the interior of the language which is proposed by the observed facts].\(^5\) In other words, there can be no “langage antérieur.”\(^6\) What is important is that, according to the medical gaze, if something is not observed, it does not, in a sense, exist. It is a type of apprehension that relies completely on observation and excludes all imagination.

Not all the enquêteurs were medical doctors (Buret was a publicist, Béraud and Frégier were police administrators), but it makes sense that they would use a medical gaze. Because these groups were identified by the Academy as problem populations that must be “fixed” in some way, the enquêteur approached them as such, much as a medical doctor would try to cure a disease. Indeed, the enquêteurs built their research around the assumption that the very existence of certain populations was itself problematic, a sign of what Louis Chevalier calls the “caractère pathologique de l’existence urbaine” [the pathological nature of urban living].\(^7\) The enquêteurs shared the belief that there is something innately unhealthy and unnatural about living in such close quarters and in such damp and dirty conditions as those that exist in the capital. They believed that the social problems they were studying were actually various manifestations of a more generalized sickness, of which le travail seemed to be an integral part. Each of these studies targeted a sector of the population that was somehow marginal, that hasn’t fully internalized dominant bourgeois morals and is therefore potentially subversive. Indeed, looking at the types of social problems addressed by the enquêteurs – misère, poverty,

\(^5\) *Ibid.*, 108  
\(^6\) *Ibid.*  
\(^7\) Chevalier, Louis, xiv
Representations of le travail under the July Monarchy

vice – the inclusion of le travail in that list seems out of place to a modern reader. However, at this moment in the dominant discourse, work was inseparable from the other problems. It would be the task of Michelet and the worker-writers of the 1840s to isolate le travail from the other issues.

The importance of work upon the morality of the worker is painted as a fairly straightforward causal relationship in the moralist enquêtes where the threat of lower-class revolt could be mitigated by moralization of these workers through steady honest work and constant supervision by their employers. There was also a drive to promote industrialist ideals, upon which the progress of the nation depended.

The moralists’ primary institutional location was the Académie des sciences morales et politiques. The Academy had been re instituted by an ordonnance du roi and by Guizot (at the time secretary of instruction publique) in 1832 after 30 years of inactivity, and quickly began to promote research leading to solutions to social problems. Like the other sections of the Institut de France, most of the Academy’s work consisted in soliciting scholarly reports, including enquêtes, reviewing said reports, and awarding prizes. It specialized in the five areas of philosophie; morale; législation, droit public et jurisprudence; économie politique et statistique; and histoire générale et philosophique.8 Among its members were the well-respected Abbé Sieyès (who, on the eve of the Revolution, had first articulated the social value of the working classes in Qu’est-ce que le tiers-état?), the eclectic philosopher Victor Cousin, and Doctor Villermé himself. Its members thus represented a variety of different professions, but all were more or less Doctrinaires, or liberals in the vein of the juste milieu. The “moral sciences” which figure in the Academy’s name are essentially social values, a code of behavior in society that is

8 Institut Royal de France.
not connected to the Church, but which nonetheless evokes something more spiritual than pure pragmatism.

The *Doctrinaires*, with Guizot at their head, envisioned a governing body that would be both a *pouvoir spirituel laïc* [a spiritual-secular power] and a new ruling class composed of *capacités*, or men of intellectual or industrial merit. It was important for Guizot that the ruling class be composed of an “alliance de l’activité intellectuelle et de l’habileté pratique […] dépassant l’antagonisme de l’action et de la réflexion” [an alliance between intellectual activity and practical skill … moving beyond the antagonism between action and reflection]. The moral system espoused by the Doctrinaires reflected their political beliefs that the governing power should be both secular and spiritual, and, simultaneously, both theoretically and pragmatically sound. The social enquêtes performed in the 1830s and 1840s, at the height of Guizot’s power, reflected these concerns. Their representation of work as a form of active prayer and a modern moral value comes at the intersections of moralist and industrialist discourses.

Because they assumed that le travail was closely related to moral disorder, the members of the Académie sought new ways to fulfill their modern objective of promoting industriousness among the working classes. Because they considered le travail to be something that was both physical and metaphysical, they would have to go beyond the material classifications of the Enlightenment. In his 1827 work entitled *Forces productives*, Arts et Métiers professor Charles Dupin championed the development of a “mentalité industrielle.” To do so, he set out implementing a system of classification

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9 The term is Benichou’s. Cited in Rosanvallon, 163
10 Rosanvallon, 105-140
11 Ibid., 162
12 Perrot. *Enquêtes sur la condition ouvrière en France au 19e siècle*, 25
Representations of *le travail* under the July Monarchy

Based on profession or industry, what he calls “le recensement relatif au travail.” Dupin insisted on the very multiplicity of the many different kinds of work forces: intellectual and physical, animal and human, et cetera. This concern for the specificity of different types of labor reveals an Encyclopedic interest in classification and enumeration and is evident in the structure of his book, which includes chapters entitled “dénombrements de l’espèce humaine” and “Recensement des forces industrielles.” And yet, Dupin also recognized the protean nature of work and the fact that it existed not only in the individual worker but throughout society and nature:

> Enfin, si l’on veut, autant que possible, rendre complète l’énumération des forces employées aux travaux utiles à la société, il faut y joindre l’énumération et l’évaluation des forces motrices fournies aux machines, par l’eau, le vent, et la vapeur de l’eau.

[Finally, if we want to complete the enumeration of forces used in works that are useful to society, we need to include the enumeration and the evaluation of those forces supplied to machines, by water, air, and steam.]^15

Although the structure of his report was inspired by Enlightenment practices of taxonomy, Dupin’s broad conception of work forces also implied a sort of abstraction of *le travail* that went beyond the *Encyclopédie*. Work is not yet Marx’s *Arbeitskraft*, which understood work as the quantifiable but anonymous expenditure of energy, but it was something more spiritual than the list of métiers depicted in the *Cris de Paris* of the

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^13 Dupin, 11
^14 Ibid., table of contents
^15 Ibid., 12
eighteenth century. Dupin’s desire to promote a more modern and abstract understanding of work in order to promote morality among the lower classes was emblematic of the enquêteurs’ project.

At about the same time that Dupin was calling for an enumeration of different work forces, Auguste Comte was calling for a “positive” study of society based on observation, analogous to the type of scientific investigation performed on the physical world. According to Comte, society is like nature in that it is ruled by fundamental laws that have only to be observed to be uncovered. Sixty years before Emile Durkheim established the first sociology department in France, Comte had already coined the term sociologie, a synonym for la physique sociale: “cette partie complémentaire de la philosophie naturelle qui se rapporte à l’étude positive de l’ensemble des lois fondamentales propres aux phénomènes sociaux” [the compliment to natural philosophy which concerns the positive study of the whole of fundamental laws unique to social phenomena].

While this philosophical understanding of the term is not sufficient for the modern discipline of sociology, its appearance is indicative of the importance that is being placed upon society as an object of intellectual inquiry before and during the July Monarchy. In this first phase of positivism, Comte calls for a clear and “positive” science of society, to be expressed in plain language, free from the “flowery rhetoric of the age of theology and metaphysics.” The clarity of language was, for Comte, of utmost importance: the scientist must write in simple, even sentences, paragraphs of a certain size, and divide his work into prescribed numbers of chapters and sections, in order to express most clearly his ideas. His writing must be uncontaminated by poetic tricks that

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16 Comte, 252f
17 Lepenies, 24
may render his words in any way ambiguous. This early positivism is what the
*enquêteurs* try to adhere to and what Durkheim’s sociology based on social facts will also
embrace. The early Comte mistrusted figurative language and therefore abstained for the
most part from reading literature in order to maintain an elevated level of what he called
mental hygiene. According to this idea, the mere exposure to complicated literary style
could contaminate the scientist’s own thoughts and writing.

The enquêteurs of the Academy strove to adopt a “positivist” style of writing,
heeding Comte’s insistence upon the negative effects of literary language upon scientific
writing, but this plain language did not come easily. It was almost a sort of requirement
that the moralist enquêteurs apologize profusely for what they perceived as a lack of
style. Dr. Villermé, for example, who wrote the famous report on the working conditions
of factory workers in the north of France, regrets having to repeat himself so many times,
first in sonority, because so many terms pertaining to factory work end in –age
(*encollage, tissage, dévidage*, and *bobinage*, et cetera), and also in content because,
having investigated several locations which are quite similar, he must reiterate the same
descriptions, which results in “des répétitions qui nuisent encore à l’ouvrage; mais je
devais subordonner mon plan a mon but, et tout sacrifier à celui-ci” [repetitions which do
harm to the final publication; but I had to subordinate the project to my objective, and
sacrifice everything else to this end].

Indeed, the claim to truth seems to depend upon a
categorical rejection of anything that could be considered literary or imaginative. Frégier
also feels obligated to explain his writing. The administrator declares in the opening
pages of his *Classes dangereuses* …, that the union of facts and morals that result from
his research is so convincing (*si naturelle et si féconde*), that “j’ai jugé convenable de

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18 Villermé, Vol. 1, vii
m’interdire toute espece d’artifice oratoire” [that I judged it appropriate to forbid myself the use of any kind of oratory artifice]. 19 Buret assures his readers, “nous ne publierons que les faits qu’il nous serait possible de prouver en justice par de suffisants témoignages” [we will publish only those facts which would be possible to prove in court with sufficient witnesses]. 20 In these examples, among others, we can see a scientific community that is torn between the two imperatives of writing pleasingly and writing “positively”.

When Béraud declares that his study of the prostitutes of Paris is legitimate because “ce travail repose sur des faits positifs, irréprochables” [This work is based on positive, irreproachable facts], 21 he is making a similar claim to truth. More than any other enquêteur discussed here, Béraud’s study is full of literary forms such as dramatized dialogues between fictional characters and fictive tales of moral degradation. As such, he is obligated to insist that the source of his stories is not his own imagination, but the real observable world. To solidify his claims to truth, Béraud raises erroneous beliefs of prostitution in order to refute them. For example, contrary to what many observers see as a multiplication of the numbers of prostitutes on the street, the former police chief has a perfectly logical explanation:

On est d’abord porté à croire à un grand nombre de filles publique par le fait d’une espèce de fantasmagorie que produisent les allées et venues de ces filles toujours sur les mêmes points, ce qui semble les multiplier à l’infini, et peut facilement fausser les calculs de l’homme qui, pressé en

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19 Frégier, Vol 1, viii
20 Buret, Vol. 1, 314
21 Béraud, 230
quelque sorte par ces malheureuses, ne s’aperçoit pas sur-le-champ que ce sont presque toujours les mêmes figures qui s’offrent à lui.

[One is at first led to believe that there are a great many public women, due to a kind of phantasmagoria produced by the comings and goings of these girls, always in the same spots; they seem to multiply infinitely, and this can easily befuddle (fausser) the calculations of a man who, hurried in a way by these unfortunate women, does not realize in the moment that it is almost always the same faces offering themselves to him.]

This citation is evidence of Béraud’s desire to distinguish his writing from imaginary or literary forms. Acting as a detective, Béraud demystifies the seemingly supernatural phenomenon (fantasmagorie) of infinitely multiplying prostitutes. From his privileged seat of observation, which differs from that of the casual passerby, the police chief can determine that the problem of prostitution is, in part at least, a problem of perception. By emphasizing the illusory element of the prostitutes, Béraud not only assuages bourgeois anxiety, but he is also able to present himself as a scientist, a specialist who is not fooled by deceptive appearances.

**Sand’s utopian gaze**

Unlike the enquêteurs, who associated work with pathology, for Sand, *le travail* was a noble attribute, the mark of the new elite of society. However, like the enquêteurs, she felt that her vision of the reality of *le travail* was not being recognized by her contemporaries. As such, she was compelled to represent the nobility of *le travail* in allegorical and poetic forms, and push its recognition as such into a utopian future. We

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22 *Ibid.*, 51
can observe the importance of utopian ideas in the 1840s romantic-socialist writings of George Sand, where she represents a different reality of work. Dissatisfied with what she has observed to be the reality of work as merely a way to amass money, and lacking any spiritual or moral substance, Sand creates an alternate possible reality where work is the source of all physical beauty and moral greatness.

In this section, we will focus on Sand’s groundbreaking *Compagnon du Tour de France*, the first mainstream French novel to feature a working-class protagonist, as well as two other works (*Le Péché de Monsieur Antoine* and *Le Meunier d’Angibault*) which belong to what Isabelle Hoog Naginski calls Sand's “Periode Blanche” of the 1840s. These novels contrast sharply with Sand's more pessimistic works of the previous decade, such as *Indiana* or *Lélia*, characterized by heartbreak, disappointment, and a final conclusion that the individual is more or less helpless in the face of a larger social force. The heroes and heroines of these utopian novels, on the other hand, have full agency and will use their capabilities to effect change upon a society that has been identified as imperfect. This shift in theoretical framework, which Naginski paints as a move from *mal du siècle* to *guérison du siècle*, also implies a change in writing practices. If she is to write a work of construction rather than deconstructing what is already there, the author must offer solutions, use her imagination to create possibilities that do not yet exist. She will have to create what Susan Suleiman calls an “exemplary” narrative. To do this, Sand often writes in allegories. *Le Compagnon du Tour de France*, for example, is a finely-crafted political allegory in which each character corresponds to one of the major

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23 Naginski, 5
24 *Ibid.*, 169
25 The use of the term “utopian” will be explained further on.
26 Suleiman, 25
social or political categories of the time. Jean-Louis Cabanès has shown how the person of the Count embodies the illusion and trickery of the 1830 Orléanist liberal movement, and the hero’s pleas for worker unity are quite transparently intended for what Sand hoped would be a working-class public. The creation of idealized characters, each of which represent a platonic ideal of a particular political or social point of view, and therefore act out an easily interpretable story or fable in order to impart her readers with a moral, is George Sand’s literary labor.

As another example, *Le Péché de M. Antoine* is a sort of political bildungsroman, where the sentimental education of the central character is much less interesting than the social education he receives. The story is experienced primarily through the eyes of the young Émile Cardonnet, who finds himself torn between two fathers who each represent a political type: his real father, the rational capitalist, and his adopted spiritual father, a romantic communist. The first is represented by Victor Cardonnet, the rigid industrialist who has come from afar to establish a factory along the banks of an irascible river, prone to flooding. The second is represented by the Marquis de Boisguilbault who places romantic love above all other values. In spite of their many differences, these types agree on the importance of le travail. Through the course of the story, it becomes clear that what distinguishes the two men, and what makes the communist better, is his ability to feel love.

Cardonnet is a firm believer in the power of reason and science to subjugate nature’s unpredictability, and in the ability of money and hard work to solve all problems. This love of reason, however, leads him to devalue all that is affective. This can be seen especially in the way he treats his wife, whose every material desire is fulfilled but

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27 Cabanès, 31-40
towards whom he exhibits emotional coldness. When his son questions him about the morality of his coming to a strange land and taking over their economy, Cardonnet replies that he has rendered society a great service by building his factory because it has created so many jobs. The working class have especially benefited from his arrival, even if his large outfit put their smaller ones out of business, for they now have a discipline that was not there before:

Le bon ouvrier a l'esprit de famille, le respect de la propriété, la soumission aux lois, l'économie, l'habitude et les trésors de l'épargne. C'est l'oisiveté de tous les mauvais raisonnements qu'elle engendre qui le perdent. Occupez-le, écrasez-le de besogne ; il est robuste, il le deviendra davantage ; il ne rêvera plus le bouleversement de la société. . . . Sa richesse devient sacrée, puisqu'elle est destinée à s'accroître, afin d'accroître le travail et le salaire. Que la société concoure donc, par tous les moyens, à asseoir la puissance de l'homme capable ! Sa capacité est un bienfait public; et que lui-même s'efforce d'augmenter sans cesse son activité : c'est son devoir personnel, sa religion, sa philosophie.

[The good worker has family values, respect for property, obedience to the law, thrift, the habit and the benefits of saving; he is robust, and he will become even more so; he will no longer dream of upending society …. His wealth becomes sacred, because it is destined to grow in order to increase work and increase salaries. Let society compete, then, by any means, to place power in the hands of the capable man! His ability is a public good; and let he himself force himself to augment incessantly his activity: this is his personal duty, his religion, his philosophy.]²⁸

²⁸ Le Pêché de Monsieur Antoine, 147
These words could be taken directly from a speech at the Académie des sciences morales et politiques and constitutes more or less the dominant discourse on the relationship between work and morality of the time: that steady and constant labor creates good citizens. Sand, by placing these words in the mouth of the villain Cardonnet, reveals their emptiness. Émile, the hero of the novel, sees through his father's platitudes and disagrees strongly with them. He is torn between his sense of filial piety and his political ideals.

When the Marquis de Boisguilbault reveals himself to be a staunch communist, this provides Émile with a good counter-example to his father's extreme beliefs. While Cardonnet seeks to squeeze as much work out of each worker for the lowest wages possible, the Marquis tries to profit as little as possible from his tenants by renting his lands to the local farmers for a nominal fee. Boisguilbault's ideals are problematic, however, as, unlike the factory owner, he has not tried to put them in action. In fact, all he knows about communism comes from reading Saint-Simonian and other communitarian brochures and papers. The hero Émile finds himself at the center of a conflict that Sand has created between a too-rational, too-practical industrial liberalism represented by his father and an impractical, idealistic communism, in the form of his friend the Marquis.

The solution will come in the future, in the form of the utopia enabled by Boisguilbault's fortune, and, most importantly, it will be based on work that is both physical-practical and spiritual-intellectual.

However, as a writer of fiction, Sand cannot use argument and logic, as is the purview of her mentor, the philosopher Pierre Leroux, to tell her readers how to live a better life. Instead, notes Naginski, she must “find literary devices enabling the
undidactic inclusion of ideological topics into the marrow of her fiction.”29 It is often tempting to see Sand's critique of the current system as a desire to move back in time, but Sand's utopian novels are defined by the fact they turn hopefully towards the future. This stance distinguishes them from her pastoral novels written in the nostalgic mode looking back to an idealized past. In Nanon (1871), for example, Sand’s heroes survive the Terreur of 1793, tucked away safely in a simple but happy existence in the author’s native rural Berry. This nostalgic turn towards a past that never existed which characterizes her post-1848 novels is not yet present in the 1840s, where her characters’ problems will be resolved in a hopeful utopian future.

The only utopia that is actually represented in the text comes in the form of a dream. The others, we assume, will be realized after the end of the novel. In this dream, the hero is commanded to “love, believe, and work,” and in which all of Pierre’s problems have disappeared, the utopia seems to exist far from all reality. Pierre’s dream-utopia comes to him while lying on a pile of wood shavings in the workshop, surrounded by the sounds of carpentry:

Le rabot et les ciseaux se promenèrent victorieusement comme de coutume sur le bois rebelle et plaintif. Les ouvriers mirent en sueur leurs bras nerveux, et la consolante chanson circula, réglant par le rythme l'action du travail, évoquant la poésie au milieu de la fatigue et de la contention de l'esprit.

[The plane and the chisel glided victoriously as usual across the rebellious and plaintive wood. The workers’ nervous arms were covered in sweat, and the consoling song circulated, punctuating with its rhythm the action

29 Naginski, 176.
of the, conjuring a kind of poetry from the fatigue and the intellectual restraint.\textsuperscript{30}

The juxtaposition of aesthetic beauty and physical pain is in perfect harmony with Pierre's (and Sand's) conception of manual labor. The rebellious protests of the “plaintif” wood are soothed over by the humming of the carpenters' tools, victoriously sanding and shaping the material to their will. Like the wood, the workers too seem like they might like to complain about their nervous arms “en sueur,” their “fatigue” and their “contention de l'esprit” but the \textit{chanson de compagnonnage} brings a comforting rhythm to their pain.

For Pierre, the idealized worker, this buzzing of productivity is soothing and no doubt provides the soundtrack to his dream. The smell of Yseult's flowers, which Pierre had tucked into his shirt, provide the atmosphere for the ideal world of the dream in which everything is both beautiful and real. Real, in that there is nothing truly fantastic about the dream; reality is not invented but taken to its ideal extreme. It is a world where nature is just like our nature but “avec plus de variété, plus de richesse et de grandeur.” It contains an architecture that is composed of myriad chefs d'oeuvre, and is populated by beings which are basically human, but “plus beaux et plus purs que la race humaine” [more beautiful and more pure than humanity].\textsuperscript{31} In keeping with Sand's vision, this ideal world is just like our world, but perfected. In fact, within the logic of the dream, it soon becomes clear that this perfect landscape is none other than the parc de Villepreux, and the beings within the parc are Pierre's own friends, reconciled from all earthly animosities.

To call Sand utopian is to place her into a particular lineage of social thinkers of

\textsuperscript{30} \textit{Le Compagnon du Tour de France}, 255
\textsuperscript{31} \textit{Ibid.}, 256
Representations of *le travail* under the July Monarchy

the early- to mid-nineteenth century. In particular, Sand was greatly influenced by the ideas of Saint-Simon via the former Saint-Simonian, Pierre Leroux. By the time Sand would encounter it, Saint-Simonianism would undergo many changes. However, his calls for better working conditions for the working classes, and for the establishment of a new social system that would value industriousness and science remained central. The group’s values could be summed up in the following two sentences:

\[
\text{Au milieu de cette société qui tombe en ruines, une autre société s’élève pleine de jeunesse. Chacun est placé selon ses capacités et récompensé selon ses œuvres.}
\]

[At the center of this society fallen in ruins, another society emerges, full of youth. Each is placed according to his capacities and rewarded according to his work.]^32

Written a year before the famous schism of November 1831, these two simple sentences encapsulate neatly the central principles which bound the early Saint-Simonians together, imagining the destruction of an old social order all while simultaneously organizing a new one. First, there is the image of the society in ruins, ruins being a powerful romantic concept representing both presence and absence, and evoking strong feelings of loss and pleasure. As was the case in the moralist enquétes, the appeal to the passions was an important function of the utopia, a fact that would be exploited fully by Enfantin at Ménilmontant.^33 The present/absent society fallen in ruins is of course that of the Ancien Regime, which, as a political system, has been destroyed, but whose structures still

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^32 *L’Organisateur*, 27 août 1830 cited in “L’affirmation d’une doctrine….” 44
^33 For more on this, see Picon.
dominate the social landscape. The image of the new society sprouting from among these decayed remnants (“Au milieu . . . s’élève”) indicates a certain coexistence of the two systems, but also implies that the vigorous new society will soon overtake the old. George Sand uses the same symbolism in *Le Péché de Monsieur Antoine* and *Le Meunier d’Angibault*, where, in both cases, a crumbling feudal structure represents not only the loss of a former time, but also the persistence of some of its foundational values.

In the second sentence, whose directness juxtaposes with the poeticism of the first, details are given as to how this new society, “pleine de jeunesse” will be organized. Quite simply, each person will work according to his abilities and each will be rewarded for the work that he performs. At first glance, the formula closely resembles Marx’s famous phrase “From each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs.” While similar in structure to the Saint-Simonian formula, it does not convey the same idea. Marx’s version provides for a group of people who may lack abilities and still have needs, but according to *L’Organisateur* in 1830, only those who work will receive compensation (“récompensé selon ses œuvres”) in 1830, only those who work will receive compensation (“récompensé selon ses œuvres”)5. In 1840, the worker-run newspaper *L’Atelier*, will express the same sentiment in more clear-cut terms. On the first page of the paper, printed in normal-sized font, but strikingly surrounded on all sides by an inch of white space, one finds the following maxim: “Celui qui ne veut pas travailler ne doit pas manger” [He who does not want to work must not eat]. From its conception, and throughout its various mutations, Saint-Simonianism champions “le travail” as the central component of modernity. Symbolized by the crumbling ruins, the privileges of the Ancien Regime are

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34 “Critique of the Gotha Programme,” 214-15
35 This may be seen as an adaptation of a line in one of Saint Paul’s letters: “Celui qui plante et celui qui arrose sont égaux, et chacun recevra sa propre récompense selon son propre travail.” 1 Corinthians 3:8.
36 *L’Atelier*, 1840
Representations of *le travail* under the July Monarchy

giving way; a modern society is being constructed - literally - by the work of its very members.

But if we talk about modernity here, we must stress that this is not the modernity experienced by Baudelaire, whose allegorical *Travail* fills the dirty Paris streets in “Le Cygne.” Unlike the flâneur’s immediate interaction with the reality of work as soon as he steps outside, Saint-Simon’s modern version of le travail looms on the horizon, an objective to aim for in the future. In October 1814, he writes:

L’âge d’or du genre humain n’est point derrière nous. Il est au-devant, il est dans la perfection de l’ordre social. Nos pères ne l’ont point vu, nos enfants y arriveront un jour. C’est à nous de leur en frayer la route. . .

C’est là que nous tendons sans cesse, c’est là que le cours de l’esprit humain nous emporte !

[The golden age of humanity is not behind us. It is in front, it is in the perfection of the social order. Our fathers did not see it, our children will attain it some day. It is our duty to clear the path for them… It is towards this that we reach incessantly, it is here that the course of humanity carries us.]

Placing himself in opposition to the classical idealization of an Edenic past, Saint-Simon sets his sights on the future, towards which, he urges, society should run, not walk. While this optimism is inspiring, it also relegates the golden age to the future, which leaves his system open to criticisms of being utopian and unrealizable. This is why Sand is accused of being idealist.

37 Saint-Simon. Vol. 2. 1297
**Shared Vision**

Although they start from different points I contend that these two voices of social discourse both use multiple types of vision and, what’s more, that they share a belief that their representations of *le travail* are based on their special abilities to see its traces in reality. Although the enquêteurs strive for a positive type of gaze, they rely heavily on their imaginations, on ideals and on literary devices. George Sand, who claims to see a truth about *le travail* that goes beyond earthly vision and banal reality, bases her allegories in historically-situated real places.

**Sand’s Real Utopias**

I contend that Sand shares with the enquêteurs the realist trajectory from observation, to interpretation and writing, to the demiurgic act of creation. Like the moralists, Sand claims that she is *unveiling* a reality of work that is merely hidden from view. Unlike the moralists, instead of revealing the physical devastation of work, she unmasks the hidden nobility of the worker in order to *create* a new understanding of worker identity. Just as the moralist enquêteurs dramatized their observations to assert that physical labor can make the immoral proletariat more moral, Sand would recount her utopian dream into readable graspable images that would present them as possible. Although the works are often described as utopian for their idealism, they are nonetheless realist novels as well, situated firmly in a specific physical and historical setting.

The term “utopia” has very specific connotations the 1840s. We will use Bénichou’s definition of “utopia,” referring specifically to the works of Saint-Simon, Fourier, and their followers in the early nineteenth century. Unlike their predecessors, these utopias did not adhere to the typical etymological meaning of the term stemming
from “no (U-) place (topos),” or non-existent in the real world:

L’Utopie, telle qu’on peut l’observer dans la première moitié du XIXe siècle, ne consiste pas essentiellement dans l’échafaudage d’un plan irréel de perfection pour la société humaine ; elle réside surtout dans l’intuition arbitraire par laquelle l’ordre des choses qui fait l’objet de la science positive est censé impliquer l’accomplissement de l’humanité tel que l’imagine le philosophe.

[The Utopia, as it exists in the nineteenth century, does not consist in the construction of an unrealistic level of social perfection; it exists above all in the level of arbitrary intuition, according to which the positive philosopher imagines an ordering of things which will be the completion of humanity.]38

The nineteenth-century utopias were in fact, quite possible in the imaginations of their writers, and based on their observations. What made them purely imaginary at the time of conception was the lack of values or societal norms necessary for their fruition. The “no place” was not a physical space but a lack of “lieu logique.”39 The utopia of the early nineteenth-century was impossible only in the present state of ideology, but this did not rule out a shift in attitudes which would make the impossible possible. Unlike Thomas More’s Utopia or Voltaire’s El Dorado, then, these utopias are calls to action: they incite their readers to take the necessary steps to make the utopia into a reality.

In the course of his writing career, from 1802 to 1825, Saint-Simon’s ideas underwent considerable changes, but by the end of his life, one principle had emerged as dominant: society needed to be re-organized on the basis of work or industriousness. One

38 Bénichou, 327
39 Ibid., 327
of the most common misconceptions about him, both by his contemporaries and by scholars today, is that he was a philanthropist, seeking only “l’amélioration de la classe la plus pauvre,” as he said in *Le Nouveau Christianisme*. And yet, Saint-Simon’s concern for these poor did not stem from altruistic concerns, but was rather what he considered rational and healthy. Indeed, “the poorest class” to which he refers is not all of the poor, but the working poor, or at least those who are willing to work; and their “amélioration” will come about not by charity but by inciting them to work through better remuneration and even more political participation. In this sense, Saint-Simon’s “utopian” society did not run counter to moralist or Doctrinaire values. It was both highly rational and firmly bedded in physical reality and promoted the industrialist’s interests.

During the 1840s, critics of the workers’ movements who were inspired by Saint-Simonian ideology would use the “utopian” label to rid their theories of political sense and thereby ensure their dominance in the current social and political order. By that time, the idea of progress so dear to Saint-Simon – that humanity is heading towards a more perfect future – had become mainstream, and yet many of philosopher’s own ideas were being used against his followers. In order to more easily refute the demands that were being made by different workers’ groups, the forces of order designated their ideas as utopian, meaning fantastic and unrealizable. Both liberal and republican thinkers – the former designating those who believed above all in individual liberty and therefore the free market, and the latter referring to partisans of a more popular form of government that will intervene on behalf of *le peuple* – participated in this discrediting of workers’ calls for better working conditions and more regulation.
As she writes her utopian works in the 1840s, George Sand is inserting herself specifically into the public discussion about le travail. She is a believer in the type of human-propelled progress espoused by Saint-Simon and her mentor, Pierre Leroux. Simultaneously, she is a strong voice for working class interests, both physical and moral. To do this, she insists on the very reality and possibility of her narratives. Indeed, her 1840s novels are utopian precisely because they propose solutions to political and economic problems.

George Sand’s adoption of a utopian mode of writing must be attributed in large part to her close friendship with Pierre Leroux, a former Saint-Simonian who introduced her to the journeyman Agricol Perdiguier. In his recently published *Livre du Compagnonnage*, Perdiguier recounted the details of the secretive societies of French journeymen, or *compagnons*. While rich in facts, the work also had an edifying goal to promote worker solidarity, and the book would have a great influence on Sand who found in it “un écho direct”\(^{40}\) of her own concerns, notably the destructive results of the segregation of social classes and the desire to establish a dialogue of love among all of humanity. In 1840 she met Perdiguier and soon after began writing *Le Compagnon du Tour de France*, a novel portraying and promoting the values of the organization of skilled artisans known by that name. In spite of its utopian elements, the novel is quite historically accurate. As the correspondence tells us, Sand worked closely with Perdiguier, striving to represent as faithfully as possible the details in the novel referring to Compagnonnage practices. In a famous moment in *Histoire de Ma Vie*, as Sand expounds upon her theory of the novel, she asserts, “Il y faudrait des situations vraies et

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\(^{40}\) Bourgeois, 6

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Throughout the novel, names, chansons, descriptions, and even entire scenes are transcribed nearly word-for-word from Perdiguier’s *Le Livre du Compagnonnage*, contributing to the realism of the work, ensuring that the circumstances surrounding her hero are “real and true.”

In the foreword to the 1851 republication of her *Compagnon du Tour de France*, George Sand recounts a conversation between herself and Balzac, during which they discuss their different ways of depicting reality. During the conversation, she suggests that, instead of calling his work the *Comédie humaine*, Balzac could have just as easily entitled it the *drame* or *tragédie humaine*, underlining the gravity of the truths represented in its pages. He responds by suggesting that she could entitle her collection of works the *épopée humaine*, a compliment to which she replies:

> [L]e titre serait trop relevé. Mais je voulais faire l’églogue humaine, le poème, le roman humain. En somme, vous voulez et savez peindre l’homme tel qu’il est sous vos yeux, soit ! Moi, je me sens porté à le peindre tel que je souhaite qu’il soit, tel que je crois qu’il doit être.

> [The title would be too lofty. But I wanted to make the pastoral of humanity, the poem, the human novel. In short, you want to and know how to paint man as he appears before your eyes, so be it! I feel myself pulled to paint him as I wish that he would be, how he should be.]

Within this short exchange between two of the great novelists of the July Monarchy we can observe a crucial disagreement as to the purpose of fiction. While both authors are

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41 Oeuvres autobiographiques
42 Le Compagnon du Tour de France, 32
committed to representing the *vrai*, they have different understandings of what that is. While Balzac’s world allows for moral ambiguity and psychological evolution, Sand’s reality is one in which the confusing contradictions of life are lifted away to reveal the real truth in its purest form.

Although the hero of the novel – a worker-intellectual who embodies a fraternal love for all mankind – has been idealized, he is easily recognizable as having been modeled greatly after Perdiguier as well as Pierre Leroux. What’s more, although Sand puts off the solution to the central problem to an unspecified future, she does situate the action of her plot within the realm of the possible and the real.

Throughout the novel, Sand took great pains to depict, with as many details as possible, the pleasures and pains of the skilled artisan, in order to dramatize the central problems of class divisions and of the double nature of physical labor as both salutary and torturous. But what is the point of all of this realism if the solution to the problem is found only in an impossible utopia? The answer will be, of course, that in the tradition of Saint-Simon, George Sand believes her utopia to be possible. If she depends on such fanciful tropes as the dream or the idealized hero, these are literary devices meant to evoke the passions of her readers, and do not indicate impossibility on the part of Sand. At the end of the dream, Yseult commands Pierre to “aime, crois, travaille, et tu seras ange dans ce monde des anges” [love, believe, work, and you will be an angel in a world of angels].\(^{43}\) Love, faith and work are indeed the components of a perfect Sandian society, not only in the utopia but in reality.

\[^{43}\text{Ibid.}, 256\]
Enquêteurs, Idealisms

Although the enquêteurs strove to adopt a medical gaze, with no preconceptions, no a priori, Michelle Perrot has rightly argued that these social studies are at times more ideological than scientific. The more they insist that they are telling the truth, the more the truth of their words should be mistrusted:


[Their attitudes show the power of preconceived ideas, the weight of ideology. There is no evidence. One can investigate and see nothing. The enquête results therefore in nothing but an additional misunderstanding; instead of unveiling, it masks reality. It serves to reassure and to justify.]\textsuperscript{44}

In fact, the more we examine the authors’ own writing, the more it becomes clear that these reports are just as much an invention of the moralist’s imagination as they are a record of empirical observation. These social groups are then just as much products of the social imaginary as they are actual demographic groups.

Like many of Balzac’s narrative works, these enquêtes appear on the fold between proto-sociological studies and realist literature. The enquêteur, as Dominique Kalifa has shown, undertook his mission in three steps.\textsuperscript{45} First, he had to establish direct contact with the problem, be it poverty, prostitution, or immorality; he must see and even touch the objects of his study in order to make a solid diagnosis. Next, he would undertake the

\textsuperscript{44} Perrot. Enquêtes sur la condition ouvrière ..., 35
\textsuperscript{45} This three-step process is outlined in Kalifa. “Enquête et « culture de l’enquête » ” 10-11
intellectual interpretation of the facts witnessed. This sort of hermeneutics was the special
talent of the enquêteur, and what made him an expert in his profession. To complete the
investigation fully, however, there was a third step, in which the enquêteur must
reconstruct the narrative by which reality came to be what it is. The enlightened public
demanded proof of the inductive reasoning that went into the scientist’s observation, “un
récit rétrospectif dont les enchaînements construisent la vérité et la donnent à lire” [A
retrospective telling of a chain of events which construct the truth and allow it to be
read].

It is this final step that truly places the enquêteur in the same field as Balzac and
Sand, for it is in the telling of the narrative that the author reaches his full demiurgic
potential. Details which give historical and physical context not only make the
enquêteur’s prescriptions more persuasive, but participate in the construction of a reality
of which the author is both God and apologist. We can see in this three-step schema the
passage from the positivist act of looking to the final visionary step of creation that takes
place through the process of writing.

Despite Comte’s initial gesture to separate his pre-sociology from literature, the
two domains sustained close ties, especially under the umbrella of journalistic media. In
fact, the newspapers of the July Monarchy published indiscriminately many types of
writing that we would today consider generically separate, often on the same page and
with no attempt to separate fact from fiction from opinion. The cross-contamination
between science and literature was a two-way street. Literary giants such as George Sand,
Alfred de Vigny, Victor Hugo, and Eugene Sue each sought to find answers to the social
question within the pages of their narratives. Balzac, who had originally planned to entitle

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46 Ibid, 11
47 See Thérenty.
his literary masterpiece *Études Sociales* instead of the *Comédie humaine*, ordains himself heir to a long list of natural scientists, including Buffon, Charles Bonnet, Cuvier, and Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire. But if the jump from Buffon to Balzac seems dubious to modern readers, we must remember that early modern scientists were judged just as much on their rhetoric as they were their on scientific method. It follows then that Buffon – the best-selling Enlightenment scientist who would later be known more for his stylistic éclat than for his scientific rigor or accuracy – be an appropriate role model for Balzac, the writer of novels with a scientific program.

The enquêteurs provide a clear example of how self-proclaimed “positivist” scientific texts in the 1840s still relied heavily upon literary and rhetorical devices, in particular those which depicted Paris and its inhabitants as a panoramic succession of vignettes and types such as those depicted in *Le Livre des Cent-et-un* (1831-1834) or any Paul de Kock best-seller. The writers of the enquêtes used the tropes and the types established in popular novels to set the stage for their own works and “provided the observer with the necessary lenses to confront the terrible spectacles of pauperism.” For example, Béraud’s scientific enquête on the *filles publiques* could be read alongside Balzac’s literary *Splendeurs et Misères*, alongside Louis Huart’s lighthearted *Physiologie de la Grisette*, and the series of images, anecdotes, and descriptions would complete and inform one another in the creation of a social identity of the working woman.

The enquêtes resembled their literary partners not only in that they aimed to give information and describe reality, but also in they were constructed to evoke emotion, usually horror and pity. This appeal to affect performed by the enquêteurs was a cognitive

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48 Meininger, 1111 n2
49 “Avant-propos.” 8-9
50 Lyon-Caen, 104
mechanism usually associated with literary writing, but during the 1830s and 40s it was also a common device for historians, journalists, social scientists, and other writers who wished to move their readers. When remarking upon the fact that twice as many women as men are paupers, Buret acknowledges his dependence on affect: “Nous ne voulons point faire de déclamation sentimentale, mais un tel résultat n’est-il pas deplorable? La condition de la femme pauvre, de la femme ouvrière, est affreuse.”

By evoking a dramatic sense of pity and fear in their readers, the moralist enquêteurs believed they could convince their audience – presumably politicians, academicians, and industrialists – to provide a more moral environment for the working class. The need to move one’s readers to action was an integral part of the enquêtes, for the enquêteurs considered their texts to be more than merely descriptive, but also prescriptive in nature. In addition to providing their readers with a panorama of the ills of society’s lowest classes, the enquêteurs meant to find remedies for their target groups’ problems.

In the enquêteurs’ works, their characters are – to varying degrees – based on real sectors of the population indicated in their titles. Villermé tells the workers’ story, Béraud focuses his narrative on different types of prostitutes, Buret’s protagonists are the poor, and Frégier’s are the dangerous classes. While each of these categories has its difficulties and is, to some extent, a creation of the social imaginary, none of them is more imaginary than the dangerous class. To define his target population, Frégier must perform some rhetorical acrobatics. He begins with a survey of nearly all of society to figure out who is dangerous and who is not, dangerous being defined as poor, ignorant and prone to vice.

There are three groups who are a priori excluded from the dangerous class, as they are

51 Buret, 268
52 In fact, Frégier will not rule out the existence of an intelligent dangerous class, but for the sake of precision, he does not include them in his corpus. Ibid., v.
the ones who are to be relied upon, according to the Academy’s prompt, to fix the problem: the administration, the rich (presumably philanthropists), and, most interestingly, the intelligent and hardworking members of the working class. The first two members of this list – the (well-compensated) administrators and the rich – are easily identified as non-dangerous, since one of the three ingredients in the composition of a classe dangereuse is misère. All of the dangerous class is poor, therefore, but not all poor people are dangerous. It is vice, more than anything, which forms the center of Frégier’s dangerous class, and requires the most attention, as it is present in all levels of society.

The fact that we are dealing with imaginary populations just as much as with real ones is nowhere more apparent than in H.A. Frégier’s Classes dangereuses. The Academy’s call for submissions asks for a study of “that part of the population which forms a dangerous class by its vices, its ignorance, and its poverty.”53 Already in the prompt, the Academy provides the causes which lead a group to a state of “dangerousness” (vice, ignorance, and poverty), but it does not specify what it means to be dangerous. Dangerous to whom or to what? As such, the Academy reveals its top-down, deductive approach to social science research.

Frégier places himself in dialogue with moralist philosophers such as La Bruyère and La Rochefoucauld, whose Caractères and Maximes contained philosophical reflections upon society and morality in the seventeenth century in a way that was meant to be edifying to their readers. Frégier praises the way his predecessors were able to capture the nature of morality with “elevated reason,” “touching fervor” and “energetic eloquence” but sees himself taking a different path involving “la morale basée sur les faits, et découlant du fond même de la narration” [a morality based on facts, and flowing

53 Frégier, v
Representations of *le travail* under the July Monarchy

from the very depths of narrative]. Frégier’s position is therefore a modern permutation of the early-modern moralist project of both depicting society and encouraging its members to be more moral. Like his predecessors, Frégier aims to show society how to be moral, but thinks that this can be best accomplished based on positivist observation and elaboration of facts. What’s more, he declares that this morality is best understood through narrative, that is, a plot or an intrigue. Unlike La Bruyère and La Rochefoucauld, who *tell* their readers how to be moral, Frégier will use narrative to *show* his audience just that.

Indeed, Frégier relies heavily on narrative in addition to detailed description and *typologies* to bring his subjects (or characters) to life. Rather than merely describing who they are, he tells us their stories. This practice is perhaps most evident in his critical chapter on the working class. As he tries to distinguish his vicious workers from the “good” workers, it seems that the most touching story – the best narrative – tells the tale of the good worker who falls into vice:

L’ouvrier se lève avec le jour, il se rend à son atelier ; chemin faisant, il rencontre un de ses camarades qu’il n’a pas vu depuis quelque temps. On s’aborde, on propose d’un côté ou de l’autre d’aller boire, car, en pareil cas, c’est une des premières idées qui viennent à l’esprit de l’ouvrier . . . les têtes s’échauffent, on oublie l’atelier et l’on perd non plus le tiers de la journée, mais la journée entière, heureux lorsqu’on est en état de travailler le lendemain.

[The worker gets up with the sun, he goes to work; on the way, he meets a coworker he has not seen for some time. They approach one another, one of them

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54 *Ibid.*, viii
suggests going to get a drink, because, in such a situation, this is one of the first ideas that comes to the worker’s mind;... conversation becomes heated, they forget the workshop, and they lose not a third of the day, but the whole day, and are happy if they are in a state to work the next day.]\(^{55}\)

This brief glimpse into the day of the typical worker is both troubling and ominous, for we know that this is not an isolated incident but rather a pattern of behavior. The use of the present tense tells us that this is an ongoing story that repeats itself endlessly. It is, in fact not the story of one particular worker and his friend, but rather the collective story of the working class, and Frégier retells it several times, as individual case studies. Each time, the story begins with a well-intentioned individual, an innocent-enough meeting between friends, lovers, or colleagues, and finishes with all of the characters succumbing to temptation and eventually leading to a vicious existence composed of hunger, poverty, and drunkenness.

Frégier’s character analyses go well beyond the type of scientific observation that Comte would consider positivist. Indeed, they at times delve into the psychology of their subjects. For example, Frégier’s definition of vice in inextricably tied to desire (the desire to work).

Le vicieux riche ou aisé, qui dissipe son superflu et même une partie de son capital en plaisirs condamnables, inspire la pitié et le dégoût, mais non la crainte ; il ne devient dangereux que lorsqu’il reste sans moyens d’existence et sans goût pour le travail.

[The rich or comfortable vicious man who squanders his disposable income and even a part of his capital on blameworthy pleasures inspires pity and disgust, but

\(^{55}\) Ibid., 76-77
not fear; he only becomes dangerous once he is without means of existence and without the taste for work.\textsuperscript{56}

At first, the formulation seems quite simple: if you have money, your vices remain a private affair. If you have vices and no money, you are dangerous to society. However, in addition to poverty (expressed first as \textit{dénûment} and then, more delicately, \textit{sans moyens d’existence}), Frégier’s text insists on a second element: a perverse distaste for work. It is important to note here that Frégier takes care to distinguish between the person who does not work and the person who \textit{doesn’t want to work}, implying that there is a section of the population who desires work, who has the appetite (\textit{le goût}) for work – not for money, but for work. That work could be an object of desire in and of itself is an indication that Frégier wants to promote it as something more complex than a simple economic concern.

Unlike Frégier, who had to define a population that was more imaginary than real (\textit{les classes dangereuses}) Villermé was charged with examining a demographic that already existed: the working class in a defined area. And yet, this did not impede him from using imaginative language and literary devices. In fact, as was noted in the previous chapter, in spite of their desire to distance themselves from literary style, the enquêteurs’ prose revealed a heavy reliance upon forms borrowed from realist literature. From the insistent repetition of “j’ai vu…” to the reliance on “types” and a firm belief in the readability of the body and the face, the continuity between realist literature and the social enquête is remarkable. One description of a family of German immigrants is especially moving:

\textit{J’ai vu sur les chemins, pendant le peu de temps que j’ai passé en Alsace,}

\textsuperscript{56}\textit{Ibid}, 6-7

[I saw on the roads, during the short time I spent in Alsace, some of those families who came from Germany and dragged along with them many small children. Their tranquility, their circumspection, their way of presenting themselves contrasted with the effrontery and the insolence of our native vagabonds. Everything about them seemed to make their misfortune respectable: they weren’t begging, they were merely soliciting work.]

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We can see here the dialectic between the two types of vision (empiricist-subjective and idealist-objective). Villermé’s description begins with the personal and punctual “j’ai vu…” in the passé composé. These three words assure the reader of the veracity of the testimony; this is the observation of a singular event by an expert witness, indicating an empirical and subjective mode of perception. But as the sentence progresses, the description becomes more of a typologie of the honest working-poor, for it is not one German family, but many, and the traits he observes in them go beyond the physical. His special medical vision is able to read the signs of their body so well as to conclude that they were able to “rendre l’infortune respectable.” They are the idealized essence of the working poor.

Although Villermé takes great pains to give statistical tables, to describe the tools of work, conditions in the workshop, and the effects of different types of work on the

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57 Villermé, Vol 1, 29
body, he spends very little text on an actual, reenactment of work. There is no explanation of the labor that is performed. Villermé, like Balzac, considers the abstract ideal of *le travail* too lofty and too important to be represented by work as it appears in mundane reality. The idea of *le travail* cannot be adequately understood by looking at the worker, nor the work he performs; instead, it must be allegorized. Because *le travailleur* cannot represent *le travail*, Villermé replaces the worker with a part of his body. For example, in the enquête’s methodological introduction, the doctor defines his sample population as those who work in the “*professions qui emploient le plus de bras*” [Professions that employ the largest number of arms],\(^{58}\) meaning the industries with the most manual laborers. This metonymy – replacing “ouvrier” with “bras,” substituting the most productive component of the worker’s body for the worker as a whole person – is a common metaphorical device still in use today. Villermé will use it time and again, particularly when referring to the poorest of workers. For example, he describes the immigrant laborers of Mulhouse who live in the surrounding villages and who must commute long distances every day:

 Ils se composent principalement de pauvres familles chargées d’enfants en bas âge, et venues de tous côtés, quand l’industrie n’était pas en souffrance, s’établir en Alsace, pour y louer leurs bras aux manufactures. Il faut les voir arriver chaque matin en ville et en partir chaque soir.

[The group of commuters] is composed primarily of poor families with young children, who came from all over, when industry wasn’t bad, to settle in Alsace and rent out their arms to the factories. You must see them arrive each morning in

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\(^{58}\) *Ibid.*, v
the city and depart each evening.]\textsuperscript{59}

The worker is his arm, his body; he is the true prolétaire, not a single, unified man, but an assembly of moving parts that exist in the service of movement. He is, as Balzac puts it, “[L’]homme qui remue ses pieds, ses mains, sa langue, son dos, son seul bras, ses cinq doigts pour vivre\textsuperscript{60}.” This enumeration of individual parts, listed one by one – feet, hands, tongue, back, arm and fingers – comprises an inventory of animated body parts, resulting as an image of frenzied agitation, with no information as to the identity of their possessor. The proletarian seems to be nothing but a fragmented body. Thus, we can see the result of the metonymic representation of the worker by Villermé, as two-fold: they underline the corporality of the laborer. On the other hand, however, they create a monstrous figure, and object of horror. This representation of the workers’ body as an “other” that incites horror in the bourgeois observer can be likened to Parent du Châtelet’s and Béraud’s shared fascination for the prostitute’s body and with Buret’s and Frégier’s depictions of the pauper’s body.\textsuperscript{61}

\section*{A Common Imperative}

The back and forth between empiricist-subjective and idealist-objective methods of perceiving the world found in Balzac was also a tension in the social enquêtes of the nineteenth-century. The enquêteur’s work was simultaneously dependent on both inductive and deductive reasoning: inductive in that it claimed to draw positive (as in positivist) conclusions from lived experience, but deductive in that it asserted – and, in a

\textsuperscript{59} Ibid., 26
\textsuperscript{60} \textit{La Fille aux yeux d’or}, 1041
\textsuperscript{61} Although the prostitute is not strictly working class, and is often able to cross class boundaries, she is determined by the work she performs and considered a commodity, like the manual laborer.
sense, invented – the existence of an objective reality that casual observers could not or
would not see. Like the realist novel, the enquête was both the subjective apprehension of
the here and now carried out by an expert observer and a decoding of signs which reveal
an objective eternal understanding of society. The two types of vision could come to
terms through writing. Indeed, both paradigms rely on a true belief in the power of sight
and that the creation of a new way of apprehending the real world is taking place on the
written page. I contend that, in their shared trajectory from observation, to interpretation,
to the demiurgic act of writing, the competing discourses of the enquêteurs and George
Sand meet up again in a shared purpose of revealing a reality of work that their public has
been unable or unwilling to see.

In representing a reality that they have judged either unseen or “unseeable” by the
casual observer, George Sand and the enquêteurs insist that they are merely recreating a
reality that already exists. Their texts are like written testimonies of things seen (les
choses vues, as Hugo would call them), guaranteed by their authors’ heightened visual
capacities. However, by passing from the position of observer to that of writer, they
become creative agents, authors of reality. This belief in the power of words to
substantiate a reality that already existed but could not be seen was crucial to the entire
project of Balzac’s Comédie humaine, and implicit in its very name. For even if the first
word in the title evokes worlds of art and artifice (the poetry of Dante’s Divine Comedy
and the pantomime of the Commedia dell’arte), Balzac insists upon the reality of the
spectacle as something solidly human (thus, the adjective humaine). Textual and artistic
creation, therefore, leads to the solidification of reality, and this is dependent upon astute
observation.
Villermé ends his tableau of the workers’ daily commute with an invocation to his readers to see what he has seen. “Il faut les voir,” he insists, a rhetorical interjection that goes hand in hand with the testimonial “j’ai vu.” In both cases, the writer stresses the imperative to see the workers, which is, in fact at the heart of the enquêteurs’ project to observe and report on a portion of society in its natural milieu. But this raises the question: why is Villermé insisting that his readers see the working classes who, as the most significant portion of the population, are everywhere and therefore visible? Why do we need an enquête to make us see something that is already in front of our eyes? The answer is, quite simply, because the realities described in the enquêtes were not always perceivable by the common onlooker. The metaphorical depiction of the workers who rent out their arms (“pour y louer leurs bras aux manufactures”) creates a striking image in the mind of the reader in which the immigrant worker assumes a monstrous and frightening character. The imperative “il faut les voir” and the assurance “j’ai vu” are necessary because the realities they attest to are creations of writing, existing primarily on the printed page. The rhetorical phrases therefore function as counterweights against possible accusations of fictionalization or exaggeration. “I saw this,” they seem to be saying, “and you should, too, even if this is only possible through the lens of my writing.” Whether or not they were “real,” the image they created was a powerful one which took its place in the social imaginary of the working class, and which helped to establish a powerful semiotics for reading the working body, which the worker-writers would have confront before 1848.
III. READING THE WORKING BODY: ALIENATION AND SOCIAL IDENTITY

As we saw in the previous chapter, both Sand and the enquêteurs used a combination of realist literary devices and literary figuration found in Balzac in order to reveal *le travail* as a physical and metaphysical force. On the one hand, one of the great accomplishments of July Monarchy cultural discourse was to establish *le travail* as a modern moral value. Lifted from its ancient and classical position as the fate of the disenfranchised or the damned, work was endowed in nineteenth-century France with a new spiritual and social importance. And yet, even as they promoted these metaphysical aspects of work, these same texts could not ignore labor’s very perceptible effects on the physical world, especially the human body. In this chapter, I look at how the moralist enquêtes and the socialist novels of George Sand all represent the physical effects of labor on the human body as a creative and destructive force. In spite of their differences, they all see work as the defining attribute of the social body which effects both formational and deformational changes on the person performing it.

In the first chapter of the dissertation, I looked at how Balzac’s texts imagined a paradigm for understanding labor as both as an intangible moral value and as an organic vital force that leaves its mark on the physical world. Both in his allegories and in the analytical texts, work was said to be composed of two elements: an ineffable, immaterial energy defined as *mouvement* and a tangible liquid force that Balzac calls the *vis humana* (from the Latin for life force). The term *vis humana* designated a bodily fluid which was thought to flow through the nervous system and which could, it was believed, either nourish or damage the body’s organs. The *vis humana*, that physical component of *le*
travail which could both generate and destroy the body, is the representation of work alienation in Balzac’s system. 

In her final act of atonement, for example, the heroine of *Le Curé de village* (1839) devotes all of her psychological and economic force to the reconstruction of a small town. In doing so, the body of Véronique Graslin becomes weaker, just as the countryside becomes more robust. In this exchange of energy, in which power transfers from one body (Véronique) to another (the world) through work (active prayer or penance) work energy is depicted as an alienating force that simultaneously creates and destroys. The depletion of worker, the ravaging effects of labor upon the human body, and the creative forces that may stem from this same labor serve as the matrix for understanding work alienation in Sand and the enquêtes. In this chapter, I will first look at how work’s effects upon the body are being used to draw conclusions about the nature of work. Then I will show how these representations of alienation are being used to create social identity. And finally, I will use the figure of la grisette to demonstrate how a single character may be read differently to lead to different social identities.

In the enquêtes, the doctors, policemen, and other administrative professionals bring focus to the worker’s dejected body, dramatizing the negative alienation of physical labor. However, I suggest that in doing so, they discursively construct an ideal laborer who will perform his tasks in the most agreeable and efficient manner imaginable. In Sand’s socialist novels, the process of alienation is reversed: the novelist’s working-class heroes are in fact nourished and embellished by physical labor, making them unrecognizable to real workers, as Sand attempts a Hegelian-style of estrangement in order to construct a sense of working-class solidarity.
Representations of *le travail* under the July Monarchy

**Signs of work on the body**

During the July Monarchy, there seemed to be three possible ways to represent the worker’s body: first, as a physically and morally dejected shell, second, as both morally and physically beautiful, and, third, as physically damaged but morally superior. In the first two cases, social identity is transparent. The physical and moral effects of *le travail* are identical, moving in a single direction, either towards destruction or construction, depending on the author’s political or poetic commitments. In addition to these one-to-one types of reading the body, there was also a strong desire to imagine the worker’s body was that of a martyrized shell containing a beautiful soul. The power of labor to effect these two actions at once – physical destruction and moral embellishment – was a sign of its increasing moral and social complexity. In this section, I will investigate the three ways in which social observers interpreted the body of the worker, both what traces of *le travail* they saw there, and what sorts of social and moral significance they assigned to these marks.

**Physical and Moral Corruption**

Across social discourse, writers were compelled to represent the physical deformation and destruction caused to the body by harsh manual labor, and from there, it was a short step to translating this physical dejection onto a reading of the worker’s soul. For many social observers, the worker’s dejected body could be read as a natural expression of the worker’s spiritual and social inferiority.

One proof of the immorality of the workers was to look at their living conditions, which were seen as very close to those of animals, echoing Balzac’s famous epithet “ces...
quadrumanes”¹ to designate the working-class. The comparison of the worker to the animal was a common trope in the enquêtes. William Sewell calls Villermé’s descriptions of the workers’ living conditions “scarcely recognizable as human,”² just one example of what he has found as a more widespread tendency among social observers to animalize the lower classes. This was true not only in France but in England, as well. For example, in an English study cited by Buret, the inhabitants of a cellar apartment are described as sleeping in piles on top of one another (entassées) and even sharing their space with actual beasts:

[A]joutez encore des cochons ou d’autres animaux dans la maison, avec toutes les incommodités de la nature la plus révoltante que vous pourrez imaginer, et vous aurez une idée des habitations de la partie la plus misérable de Manchester.

[Add to that some pigs and other animals in the house, with all the inconveniences of the most revolting nature that you could imagine, and you will have an idea of the living conditions in the poorest part of Manchester]³

The characterization of the workers’ homes as a sort of quasi-barn underscores the poverty of these workers, and may excite pity in the reader. But at the same time, the “animalization” of the worker also evokes horror, for it implies immoral behavior. Indeed, the link between the horrible physical conditions and the immorality of the workers appears inseparable. From the image of an entire family sleeping in one bed –

¹ La Fille aux yeux d’or, 1041
² Sewell, 225
³ Buret, Vol. 1, 331-2
another favorite detail being the filthiness of the workers’ mattresses and bed linens – one could assume incest and other depraved behaviors. In Frégier’s description of a family sleeping on a single bed of hay, he details the inevitable repercussions that this situation has on the morality of the workers’ children:

Plusieurs de ceux-ci ne possèdent qu’un lit pour le coucher de toute la famille, ce qui offre un pêle-mêle contraire à la santé de tous, et capable de flétrir de bonne heure la pudeur des enfants. D’autres n’ont pour reposer leur tête qu’un misérable tas de paille ou de copeaux.

[Many of them only have one bed for the whole family to sleep in, which makes for a pell-mell that is bad for everyone’s health, and apt to harm the modesty of the children. Others have nothing but a wretched pile of hay or wood shavings to lay their heads.] ⁴

They are essentially living like animals in a barn, and these working conditions lead to a loss of morality (“capable de flétrir de bonne heure la pudeur des enfants”). The result is a lack of family values and an animalization of the worker. Even love, argues Frégier, becomes nothing more than an animal act, a sort of primal urge: “lorsque la nature les porte à se rechercher, le cœur et l’imagination ne répandent aucun charme sur des liaisons produites par des passions purement animales” [When nature brings them to seek each other out, the heart and the imagination can bring no charm to these liaisons, products of a purely animal passion]. ⁵ These representations of the working class as animals continue biblical and classical conceptions of work as the mark of a physically and morally inferior social group.

⁴ Frégier, Vol. 1, 87
⁵ Ibid., 100-101
While this animalization of the workers was a common image in the enquêtes, it did not mean that these writers saw them as naturally inhuman or immoral. Instead, their animal-like living conditions and social norms were the result of their harsh working conditions. Indeed, the effects of industrial labor were so strong that, if not counteracted by some opposing civilizing force, they could degrade the individual completely, both materially and on a deeper level. The destructive force of labor could best be brought into focus by the figure of a “good” or uncorrupted worker who, through the destruction power of labor, falls into vice. In Frégier’s definition of a dangerous class, for example, he has to make a distinction between virtuous workers and vicious ones in order to define the latter. In general, he begins, the working classes possess “moral qualities derived from the primitive virtues of humanity.” The worker is naturally “frank, good, obliging, and capable of great devotion for his employers.” He helps out his fellow workers when they are sick or injured by providing money and other aid, offers moral guidance when he sees a friend going down the wrong path, and will even visit a coworker who has gone to jail, and can expect the same from his companions. This worker is good to the poor as well, and is usually a good husband and father.

The good worker will give most of his paycheck to his wife because he knows that, if left to his own devices, he will spend it in the bar. Even the good worker has a weakness for alcohol. Due to the difficult and painful nature of his work, he needs a certain amount of wine to “restore his forces,” “brighten his spirits,” and “charm his troubles.” Wine, consumed moderately, is seen as a medication for the fatigue and melancholy experienced by the manual laborer: it allows him to reconnect with friends.

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6 Ibid. 69-70
7 Ibid., 70
8 Ibid., 74-75
after long dehumanizing hours in the workshop and gives him the strength to do it again the next day. Indeed, it was widely accepted that small amounts of wine were necessary to the health of the manual laborer. It is only when the worker gives in to his passion for excessive drinking that alcohol becomes a problem: “Le goût du vin n’est plus ici pour les ouvriers un moyen commode de s’entretenir de leurs intérêts […] c’est la passion ou plutôt le vice de l’ivrognerie dans toute sa laideur” [The taste for wine is no longer a convenient way for the workers to discuss their interests […] it’s the passion or, rather, the vice of drunkenness in all of its ugliness].\(^9\) However, Frégier does not blame the intemperance of the working class on the workers themselves but on employers who do not adequately oversee them:

Les sollicitations du cabaret ont tant d’influence sur le sort de l’ouvrier et sur celui de sa famille, qu’on ne saurait examiner avec trop de soin toutes les circonstances qui peuvent le porter à céder à cet attrait. On jugera par là combien l’œil du maître est nécessaire pour surveiller la conduite de ses ouvriers.

[The solicitations of the cabaret have such an influence on the fate of the worker and of his family that is would be impossible to examine too closely what circumstances would lead him to give in to this temptation. We can judge from this how necessary is it that the master’s monitor his workers’ behavior.]\(^10\)

The calls of the cabarets (les sollicitations) are an active force on the morality of the worker, whose desire for liquor, as we saw above, is a physiological result of the work he

\(^9\) Ibid., 82  
\(^10\) Ibid., 75
performs. Their overtures are so seductive and so destructive to the working man that his entire life may be ruined if he gives in to them, and Frégier gives the worker little power in the face of the cabarets.

**Physical and Moral Embellishment**

Simultaneously, the body of the working-class hero could be nourished and embellished by physical labor, which could be read as a sign of his social and spiritual superiority. For example, Sand's idealized worker-intellectual heroes featured in *Le Compagnon du Tour de France* and *Le Meunier d'Angibault* and *Le Péché de Monsieur Antoine* don’t at all resemble the image of the worker described by Villermé or Buret. These craftsmen, joiner Pierre Huguenin, miller Grand-Louis, and the carpenter Jean Jappeloup are the epitome of working-class virtue: extremely skilled, extremely good, and extremely attractive. Their respective beauties are intimately connected to their respective types of labor: While the joiner/engineer Pierre is endowed with small delicate hands and large blue eyes\(^{11}\) (suitable for carving blocks of wood and sketching geometrically-sound blueprints), the miller, Grand-Louis, is most remarkable for his large stature (“robuste à proportion”) an important asset for someone who must carry large sacks of flour. In addition to its usefulness, the worker’s body is beautiful. Louis, for example, is called “le beau farinier” by the local women. His complexion is “du plus bea ton,” his features are “réguliers,” and his teeth are “éblouissantes.” Even his hair is stunning:

\(^{11}\) *Le Compagnon du Tour de France*, 47-48
[S]es longs cheveux châtaines ondulées et crépus comme ceux d'un homme très-fort encadraient carrément un front large et bien rempli, qui annonçait plus de finesse et de bon sens que d'idéal poétique.

[His long, chestnut hair, both wavy and wiry like that of a very strong man, squarely framed his full, wide forehead, which suggested sharpness and good sense more than any poetic ideal.] 12

Like the rest of his appearance, even the hairs on the meunier’s head seem to strike a delicate balance between feminine softness (“ondulés”) and masculine roughness (“crépus”). What is important here is that physical beauty and aptitude for labor are inseparable in his character: it is the physical and intellectual labor he performs that make him so beautiful. Without them, he would have no “finesse” and no “bon sens,” which are the outward signs of his inner beauty. Lacking the traits that constitute the “idéal poétique,” it is these attributes, earned through work, which make him the not just the grand farinier, but the beau farinier, as well.

Pierre Huguenin is also blessed with good looks. Upon his return from the Tour de France, a rite of passage for young compagnons, Pierre has become attractive and mature:

[S]on port était noble et assuré ; son teint clair et pur, que le soleil n’avait pu ternir, était rehaussé par une légère barbe noir. Il était vêtu en ouvrier, mais avec une propreté scrupuleuse.

[His bearing was noble and self-assured; his complexion, light and pure, and which the sun had not been able to fade, was enhanced by a slight

12 Le Meunier d’Angibault, 41-42.
black beard. He was dressed as a worker, but with a careful tidiness.] 13

Like the miller, Grand-Louis, Pierre’s appearance combines delicate beauty (“son teint clair et pur”) with signs of virility (“une légère barbe noir”). From the way he carries himself (“son port,” which Balzac would call his démarche and which is, according to writer of the Comédie Humaine, the most telling outward sign of a person’s inner make-up) to his clothing, Pierre embodies a kind of working-class nobility. It is this aristocracy of the worker, and the fact that labor not birth determines greatness, that Sand is trying to reveal to her readers.

Sand’s noble proletarians are meant to signal a shift in social superiority from the aristocrat to the worker. The goal of her social novels is to reveal this change to the bourgeois capitalist, whose values do not recognize nobility, no matter what form it takes. She offers an example of this lack or recognition in the final scenes of Le Péché de Monsieur Antoine. When the Marquis de Boisguilbault – a character who is noble in both the ancient (birth) sense and the modern (moral) sense – appears in wearing his full Imperial uniform, the industrialist Victor Cardonnet finds his “tournure bizarre … souverainement ridicule” [His bizarre get-up [was] supremely ridiculous.] 14 It is true that the Marquis, who embodies a mixture of Ancien Regime privilège, Napoleonic expertise, and communist utopianism, can appear at times baroque and even ridiculous. However, at this moment, he is purely noble, putting aside his personal grievances to help out a friend. It is the villagers and not the capitalist who recognize the greatness of the Marquis. As he walks through the town, the townspeople stop and stare, not at his uniform, but at his noble gait, “éblouis de la magnificence de sa désinvolture” [Awed by the magnificence of

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13 Le Compagnon du Tour de France, 51
14 Le Péché de Monsieur Antoine, 357
his indifference]. 15 This natural recognition of the nobility of the man *underneath* his costume is inaccessible to Victor Cardonnet. His inability to recognize nobility in any form represents what Sand sees as blindness of all of bourgeois society, and so she must make explicit the salutary physical and moral effects it has on the worker’s body.

Honor, the virtue of the nobility, is a common theme in Sand's work, but it is usually connected to family or romantic love. In *Le Compagnon du Tour de France*, it becomes a central motivation for *le travail* as identified by the worker-intellectual Pierre Huguenin:

Travaillleur infatigable, il faut que, de l'aube à la nuit, j’arrose de mes sueurs un sol qui verdira et fleurira pour d'autres yeux que les miens. Si je perds une heure par jour à sentir vivre mon cœur et ma pensée, le pain manquera à ma vieillesse, et le souci de l'avenir m'interdit la jouissance du présent. Si je m'arrête ici un instant de plus sous l'ombrage, je compromets mon honneur lié par un marché à la dépense incessante de mes forces, à l'entier sacrifice de ma vie intellectuelle. Allons, il faut repartir ; ces réflexions même sont des fautes.

[Relentless worker from dawn until the night, I am forced to water with my tears a land that will flourish and bloom for other eyes than my own. If I lose just one hour per day, feeling the life in my heart and in my thoughts, I will be lacking for bread in my old age, and the worry of the future forbids me any enjoyment of the present. If I stop here just one instant longer in the shade, I compromise my honor, tied to the incessant exertion of my forces, at the complete expense of my intellect. I have to

15 *Ibid.*, 356
In this passage, Pierre argues that he is compelled to work for two reasons: the economic argument, that his survival is tied directly to his capacity to work, is to be expected, but the second reason – honor – is rather surprising. At the height of laissez-faire policies, numerous popular uprisings, and at a time when Balzac has succeeded making economic concerns a legitimate and central literary concern, George Sand's use of the aristocratic and non-economic term is shocking. Corneille's Don Rodrigue, for example, trades in honor. But if we consider it simply as a social virtue, outwardly expressed as good manners among the nobility, then it makes sense. The new nobility proposed by Sand must have a new system of honor. Things being as they are, not only would Pierre's indulgence in intellectual reflection be harmful to him on a financial level, but also on a social level: his honor – his social value, that is – is tied to “la dépense incessante de [s]es forces.” In other words, from a social point of view, he is moral only when he is performing physical labor. When he is thinking or reading, he is not fulfilling his prescribed social role.

**Physical Destruction and Moral Construction**

And yet, even George Sand, who wanted to focus on the salutary effects of work, could not ignore the utter dejection of many of the working class. For example, her worker hero, the morally and physically beautiful Pierre Huguenin argues that he, the good worker, is essentially no different from the “bad worker”:

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16 *Le Compagnon du Tour de France*, 85
Mais l’habit grossier que porte le travailleur dans la semaine, mais ses plaies horribles, ses maladies honteuses et sa vermine ; mais ses indignations profondes quand la misère le réduit aux abois ; mais ses trop justes menaces quand il se voit oublié et foulé ; mais ses délires lorsque le regret de la veille et l’effroi du lendemain le forcent à boire, comme a dit un de vos poètes, l'oubli des douleurs ; […] il n’y a pas deux peuples, il n’y en a qu’un. Celui qui travaille dans vos maisons, souriant, tranquille et bien vêtu, est le même qui rugit à vos portes, irrité, sombre et couvert de haillons.

[The rude shirt worn by the worker during the week, his horrible wounds, his shameful maladies, his vermin; his deep indignation when poverty reduces him to desperation; his threats when he sees himself forgotten and crushed; his madness when the regret for yesterday and the fear of tomorrow force him to drink to drink, as one of your poets says, to forget his pain; … There are not two peuple, there is only one. He who works in your houses, smiling, calm, and well-dressed, is the same who growls at your door, irritated, dark, and covered in rags.]¹⁷

Pierre is arguing that even if some workers look more dangerous than others, they all have the potential to be “good” workers if given work. He reappropriates tropes of the dominant discourse on the working classes, like the use of alcohol to ease the pain of manual labor (“l’oubli des douleurs”) and the animality of the workers (“sa vermine,” “réduit aux abois,” “qui rugit à vos portes,”), in order to refute them. The allusion to the “deux peuples” (the good workers versus the bad workers as laid out in Frégier’s Classes dangereuses, and elsewhere) are clearly intended for a readerly bourgeois public. Pierre’s refutation of their negative representations of the “bad” worker are based on a

¹⁷ Ibid., 274-5
belief that all workers are equally moral and it is only the lack of moralizing work that leads some to act out.

Although among the moralists there was a great deal of attention focused on the destruction caused to the moral and physical health of the worker, there was also a strong belief that work could be a force of good, and many writers emphasized the moral and social value of *le travail*. On the one hand, this sort of reasoning was quite pragmatic, but it also shows an almost religious belief in the power of work. Doctrinaires such as Charles Rémusat saw the creation of ateliers de travail as a practical solution to the problem of indigence, preferring it to almsgiving “Associer le pauvre lui-même à son propre soulagement, au lieu d’alimenter sa misère ; l’obliger à faire effort pour en sortir, c’est assurer à la bienfaisance toute son efficacité” [Implicate the poor in his own relief, instead of adding to his misery].

Indeed this new sort of public charity depends not on giving but on creating a new morality, instilling in the people a desire to work: “en moralisant les classes malaisées; elles tendent à améliorer leur condition, en détruisant chez elles les vices qui détournent du travail ou en dissipant les produits, et en y développant l’esprit d’ordre et de prévoyance” [by moralizing the unfortunate classes; they tend to improve their condition, eradicating the vices which turn one away from work or squander its products, by developing a spirit of order and foresight].

In the enquêtes, especially, the worker’s body becomes the site of this tension between work’s moral value and the destructive physical forces of work. Moral, in that a disciplined work environment would limit the type of debauchery that had become common among the lower classes, and social in that a more productive workforce would

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18 Remusat, 54
19 Ibid., 53
improve French industry. For example, even though Buret’s writing tends to concentrate on the destruction of the pauper’s body, he argues for more attention to be paid to the moral aspect of *le travail*:

[L]a condition morale des classes ouvrières n’était pas moins digne d’attention que leur condition économique. Peut-être importe-t-il plus à l’intérêt social de soulager le dénûment moral du grand nombre des travailleurs que leur dénûment physique.

[The moral conditions of the working classes were no less deserving of attention than their economic conditions. Perhaps it is more important to the social interest to relieve the moral destitution of most workers than their physical destitution.]\(^\text{20}\)

By calling for more attention to be paid to the morality of the working class, Buret is also arguing that there is a clear distinction between economic destitution and moral destitution. The separation of the two allows for a richer understanding of *le travail*, and how its physical effects might belie a totally different set of metaphysical consequences. Indeed, there is a sort of belief in the metaphysical properties of *le travail* that goes beyond doctrinaire pragmatism. By according work the ability to effect physical harm even as it improves the worker’s morality, these writers endow it with a complexity that was almost mysterious.

\(^{20}\) Buret, 308
Representations of *le travail* under the July Monarchy

**Alienation and identity**

The term “alienation” evokes almost naturally the question of Marxist theory, so it is worth taking a moment to establish where this study stands in that regard. It would be anachronistic to suggest that July Monarchy writers were influenced by Marx: there is no proof that the French were reading him at the time, and, if anything, Marx’s political economy was heavily influenced by his time in Paris, reading French newspapers and books. For these reasons and others, I am neither interested in performing a Marxist reading of French texts, nor in reading Marx through the lens of July Monarchy literature. However, I do think that Marx’s theories of early industrial working conditions, many of which were formulated in Paris, provide a helpful framework. In my analysis, I will therefore refer to the terminology set up in Marx’s *1844 Manuscripts*, first, because, composed in Paris in the early 1840s, these texts are a product of the same reality experienced by the authors under consideration, and, second, because they provide a useful theoretical framework for understanding July Monarchy discourses of political economy.

**Alienation through Representation**

No matter what their system of signs, these writers are in agreement that work is alienating. Even Sand’s worker-intellectuals, who are physically and morally nourished by their labor, experience a sort of class alienation that results not directly from their estrangement, but from the social consequences of this estrangement. Alienation of the worker takes place on two levels in these texts. First, within the logic of the narrative – we watch the immigrants lose their forces and we see Pierre Huguenin suffer through the
realization that everything he works on is not his own. And second, the worker is commodified by the author. The drama of his alienation becomes an object of consumption for the reader. But the double commodification or alienation of the worker is not only destructive for it is the mechanism by which the social identity of the worker is created by the writer.

### Alienation of the Worker Within the Narrative

For Marx, alienation – or estrangement from the products of one’s labor – is conceived of as a purely negative process. As a worker performs work on an object, his workforce is transferred outside of his body and into the product of his work. This separation of the worker from his work not only depletes the worker’s energy and saps him of his economic value, but it leads inevitably, says Marx, to conflict. Because the product no longer belongs to the worker, it must become “a power on its own confronting him […] something hostile and alien.”

Villermé also brings to focus the destructive force of factory work on the worker by offering a before-and-after picture of the German immigrants who came to Mulhouse to work in the cotton industry. When they first arrive, he explains, the workers are serene, and even respectable in spite of their poverty. “Leur tranquillité, leur circonspection,” he says, “tout en eux paraissait rendre l’infortune respectable.” [Their tranquility, their circumspection … Everything about them seemed to make their misfortune

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21 “Estranged Labor,” 108
However, once the immigrants begin to work in the factories, their bodies quickly show its traces:

Bientôt, les chagrins, l’insuffisance de la nourriture, la continuité de toutes les privations, l’insalubrité de leur nouveau métier, la durée trop longue de la journée de travail, altèrent leur santé : leur teint se flétrit, ils maigrissent, et perdent leurs forces.

[Soon the grief, the lack of food, the continuous deprivation, the insalubrity of their new occupation, and the too-long workday degrade their health: their complexion withers, they grow thin, they lose their forces.]

In the previous paragraph, Villermé had been using the past tense, but here he switches to the present, a change that is further signaled by the temporal adverb bientôt. The shift in tenses indicates a progression of events through time, during which the family passes from one state of existence to another, from honorable poverty to abjection, a kind of narrative of alienation. Indeed, the loss of the workers’ forces (ils perdent leurs forces) is pure alienation, as they give all of themselves to the products of their work, which belongs to someone else, their bodies become withered and thin (leur teint se flétrit, ils maigrissent). This reality of factory work – the present – is all the more moving when placed in contrast with the more wholesome poverty of the freshly-arrived family of the past. The bientôt, represents a period of time in which the immigrant experiences the type of intense physical and spiritual pain that comes from hard physical labor and which transforms a respectable worker into a decrepit shell.

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22 Villermé, Vol, 1, 29
23 Ibid., 29-30
Even if they do not bear the destructive traces of labor upon their bodies, Sand’s worker heroes do experience their labor as alienating, namely, that they do not own the products of their own labor. However, the effect that this has on the worker is not physical depletion but mental anguish. For Pierre, this alienation is firmly grounded in the existence of private property and in the fact that he does not own the product of his own labor. For Grand-Louis, a property-owner, the paradigm is different, but in both cases alienation is experienced because of the social status this gives the worker. In both cases, the hero is not allowed to marry the woman of his choosing, because of class division. Grand-Louis objects to being able to provide bread for the woman he loves, mimicking a husband-wife economic partnership, but not being allowed to marry her. Rose Bricolin, the daughter of the nearby wealthy farmer who hires Grand-Louis to mill all of his wheat, is considered out of his class. The irony is not lost on the meunier:

[C’]est pourtant moi qui lui fournis le pain qu’elle mange ! […] Mes fonctions méritaient bien quelque estime […] mais que voulez-vous ? au jour d’aujourd’hui, comme dit M. Bricolin, je ne suis qu’un mercenaire employé par lui.

[And yet it is I who provides the bread she eats! …My services should deserve some sort of appreciation … But what do you want? Nowadays, as Mr. Bricolin says, I’m nothing but a hired mercenary.]²⁴

Thus, we can see that the alienation experienced by the worker-heroes is more than the simple fact of leasing out their bodies to the local landowner, but instead a psychological alienation created by class divisions, and experienced through an impossibility of

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²⁴ Le Meunier d’Angibault, 173
romantic or fraternal unification. This is what Claire White calls “the heartfelt distress of
the worker estranged not only from the product of his labours but also from his fellow
man.” According to Sand’s socialist narratives, it is the capitalist separation of love and
labor that is the cause of the alienation. By representing this type of mental anguish of the
worker on the written page, George Sand endows the worker with an interiority that was
not present in the moralist enquêtes. She combines the categories of intellectual and
physical labor in a way that proposes a solution to the problem of work alienation.

Commodification of the worker by the author

No matter how it is represented, there is a commodification that takes place in
representing the worker’s body as a readable text. In addition to the estrangement of the
worker from his work, Marx characterized alienation as an objectification or
commodification of the worker. In systems based on the rational liberal political economy
of Locke, Smith, and others, founded on the values of labor and private property, he
contends, the individual worker is considered only in terms of his use-value and not in
terms of his humanity. For Marx, the overtaking of the “world of men” by the “world of
things” results in the transformation of the worker from human to commodity. The
commodity will become central to Marx’s theory in Capital, and he will struggle with a
clear definition of the term, but at this point in his thought, and in the way I will be using
it, the commodity is quite simply an object for consumption. A commodity has value that
can be measured, either by the amount of desire it provokes or by how useful it is. In
short, the commodity – and therefore the worker – is an object devoid of subjectivity and

25 “Labour of Love….” 703
26 “Estranged Labor,” 107
agency. In this sense, the very act of representing the worker is potentially an act of commodification.

Sometimes, the writers seem to exhibit a distinct pleasure in fixing their gaze upon the body of another to then write it, and thereby make it their own creation. This is no more apparent than when the enquêteurs switch their gaze from the male workers to the women. Villermé seems to take pleasure in describing the eroticized docile body27 of the ouvrière:

Il y a, parmi eux, une multitude de femmes pâles, maigres, marchant pieds nus au milieu de la boue, et qui, faute de parapluie, portent renversé sur la tête, lorsqu’il pleut, leur tablier ou leur jupon de dessus, pour se préserver la figure et le cou[].

[There are among them a multitude of women: pale, thin, walking barefoot in the mud, and who, lacking an umbrella, place their aprons or their underskirts over their heads in order to protect their faces and necks when it rains.] 28

The erotic nature of the description is undeniable. The image of the pale, partially undressed woman trudging barefoot through the mud, soaking wet and trying to protect her fragile neck, paints her as both vulnerable and seductive. If the ouvrier is represented by his bras, the ouvrière’s emblem is her cou, the promise of a secret and fragile sensuality beneath her rough exterior. The way the enquêteur looks at the woman worker reinforces her status as a commodity and implies that she is his creature, formed for his pleasure. Her commodified, eroticized, docile body is the object of his gaze.

28 Villermé, Vol. 1, 26
George Sand is also guilty in a way of this sort of commodification of the worker’s alienation, in spite of her earnest goal to promote a working-class identity. Dinah Ribard has demonstrated how it was in the financial and literary interests of bourgeois authors to play up the proletarian identities of their protégés which were powerful for their “capacité à être appropriée, mise en discours et en écriture” [ability to be appropriated, placed as an object of discourse and writing]. Even if writing about the workers was hoped to serve, notes Ribard, as “un moyen d'améliorer leur sort”\(^\text{29}\) [a way to improve their fate], there is no doubt that the figure of the “good” worker provided a rich subject of representation for authors such as Sue, Sand, Hugo, and others.

**Creation of a Social Identity**

Alienation, while it is the deleterious result of the individual’s estrangement from his labor, may also allow him to feel closer to his fellow man. For Hegel, from whom Marx borrowed the concept, alienation was a creative, formational force. Hegel saw the externalization that results from labor as a step in man’s own self-creation as a species. By acknowledging the existence of a *not-self* present in the estranged product of one’s labor, contends Hegel, man discovers himself and his relationship to other men. In other words, it is in seeing the object of his creation that man understands himself as a subject. George Sand’s interpretation of *le travail* as an alienating force is employed in a similar way. Inspired by Pierre Leroux’s theory of *humanité* where “nous gravitons spirituellement vers Dieu par l’intermédiaire de l’humanité” [we gravitate spiritually towards God by the intermediary of humanity],\(^\text{30}\) Sand sees the trajectory of progress as a

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\(^\text{29}\) Ribard, 90  
\(^\text{30}\) Leroux, 95
unifying force. Sand’s romantic socialist novels of the 1840s act out a Hegelian style of
estrangement in which the worker-hero’s understanding of his own alienation leads to a
sense of species-being.

More specifically, Sand textually invents the identity of the worker-intellectual. In
a sense, the idealized way that Sand represents work’s effects on the body is problematic
to her goal of inspiring a unified working-class identity. As Naomi Schor has
demonstrated, there is a sort of alienation that takes place in idealization, as the *ideal*
worker becomes something that the *real* worker is not and could never be.\footnote{Schor, 115} As a result, it
seems the emergence of a sense of species-being among the working class takes place on
the theoretical, idealized realm of Hegelian estrangement, and the identity of the worker-
intellectual won’t become truly imaginable until it is stabilized by the worker-press and
Michelet.

Like Sand, the enquêteurs also use writing to invent, in a sense, a working class
identity. By describing so vividly the destruction of the worker’s body, they underline the
necessity of the creation of a new moral function of work in society. Child-workers, for
example, are “given” identities by the enquêteurs. Directly after his passage on the
women, Villermé turns to the child-workers whose innocent bodies provide an excellent
canvas upon which to paint the destructive effects of alienating work. In a secondary
operation, the text uses this complete destruction of the child’s body to suggest the
creation of an ideal docile body:

\begin{quote}
[U]n nombre encore plus considérable de jeunes enfans [\textit{sic}] non moins sales, non moins hâves, couverts de haillons tout gras de l’huile de métiers,
\end{quote}
tombée sur eux pendant qu’ils travaillent. Ces derniers, mieux préservés de la pluie par l’imperméabilité de leurs vêtemens [sic], n’ont même au bras, comme les femmes dont on vient de parler, un panier où sont les provisions pour la journée.

[An even more considerable number of young children no less dirty, no less haggard, covered in rags, greasy from the oil of the loom that falls on them while they work. These ones, although better protected from the rain by the impermeability of their clothes, don’t even have under their arms a basket of provision for the journey, like the women of which we just spoke.]32

The body of the child is above all expressed in terms of neglect. It is filthy, covered in grease, dressed in rags; and poorly nourished. By drawing our attention to contrast between the women who carry their lunches under their arms and the children who have nothing to eat, the text seems to suggest a deeply pathological familial relationship in which mothers do not fulfill their basic role of nourishing their children. The eroticization of the mother not only provides pleasure to the observer, but can be used as an indictment of her lack of maternal instinct. The reader’s level of pity for these children is heightened, as the dysfunction of the working-class family becomes evident. But if we look closer, we can see that these children are better off than their mothers. For, while the women are without protection from the rain, the children at least have the grease on their clothes, which makes the fabric waterproof. The grease was not intentionally applied to the fabric for this purpose – these workers are not that farsighted – but instead it fell on them while they were working (“tombée sur eux pendant qu’ils travaillent”). In a strange twist of fate, or at least thanks to clever use of language by Villermé, the children’s work is what

32 Villermé, Vol. 1, 26
protects them from the harsh exterior world. Lacking a real family environment, these children are taken under the wing of le travail, and can be transformed into the Foucauldian docile body.

The passage above demonstrates the mechanism by which the moralist enquêteurs justify their incursions into the private affairs of the working class. Indeed, the sacrosanctity of the family, a thoroughly Republican value, was upheld under the July Monarchy by bourgeois and working class thinkers alike. Even the Saint-Simonians, who were known for their heterodox opinions about domestic issues, spoke out against the introduction of crèches, which allowed working women to return to the factory soon after childbirth. Calling them “un attentat à la famille”[33] invented by the bourgeoisie to destroy the unity of the traditional working-class family, the workers called for their suppression under the Second Republic. This is why, at the beginning of his Classes dangereuses, Frégier insists on the difference between public vice and private. Only the former can be controlled by the government.

[L]’élaboration des mœurs privées appartient au père de famille et au ministre de la religion ; mais principalement au premier, qui, sous ce rapport, semble tenir dans ses mains, non-seulement la destinée des membres de la famille, mais encore celle de la société tout entière qui, à vrai dire, n’est autre que l’image multiple de la famille.

[The elaboration of private morals is the duty of the father and the ministry of religion; but primarily the former, who, in this role, seems to hold in his hands not only the destiny of the members of his family, but that of an entire society which is nothing but a multiplied image of the

[unsigned]. “Questions Sociales” La Ruche Populaire. February 1848 (p. 42)
family.] 34

And yet, in spite of this opening gesture to limit the scope of moralist interventions, in the end, Frégier comes to the conclusion that the government and philanthropic organizations must put in place institutions to replace the values of the working-class family unit, which seem to be have been lost in the process of industrialization: “Cette direction toute morale de l’industrie créerait des habitudes d’ordre, d’économie parmi les ouvriers et ranimerait chez eux l’esprit de famille en leur inspirant le respect et le goût des choses honnêtes” [This very moral direction of industry will cultivate among the working class the habits of order and economy, and will revive in them the spirit of family, inspiring respect and a taste for honest things]. 35 He affirms that this sense of family, transformed into association will serve to moralize the workers. The replacement of the family by the workplace is an important first step in the creation of the type of docile bodies imagined by Foucault.

A Special Case: The Working Woman

The working woman, especially the grisette, is a figure on whom the effects of work may be read in many ways. The way that her body is interpreted reveals what the writer imagines to be the function of le travail in society. Does it signify morality? Immorality? Because there is no common language of le travail, one “type” can represent multiple social identities, revealing the problematic status of work as a modern moral and social value.

34 Frégier, Vol. 1, 6
35 Ibid., 373-374
An Immoral Character

As we saw played out in the enquêtes, the *ouvrière* was often both an object to be desired and an object to be used. As a woman, she was desired sexually, as a worker she was seen as a commodity with a perceived use value. As such, women-workers were doubly objectified and doubly dehumanized. In the popular imagination of the July Monarchy, the woman worker was read as an essentially immoral character. Both mainstream and marginal discourse read her status as a worker as a sign of moral corruption. Frégier states that there are two types of women workers, those who work in boutiques and those who work in factories. They have different habits and they look different, but, in the end they are both immoral. “Celles-ci ont des manières élégantes et polies qui contrastent au plus haut degré avec les formes rudes et grossières des autres […] [mais] le vice domine dans les deux classes” [These women have elegant and polite manners which contrast sharply with the others… [but] vice dominates in both classes].

This is an example of work begin read as a corrupting and destructive force, always to be interpreted in the same way, in spite of varying appearances.

In general, the woman worker (even if she was not a prostitute) simply upset the social order, taking work from the male workers. She was defined as immoral because she did not respect the social order. The role of the woman in the workplace was undergoing great changes under the July Monarchy. Women had been important members of the labor force long before the nineteenth century, but by the 1830s, the household model was being replaced by a “family wage economy.”

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36 Frégier, Vol. 1, 94
37 Tilly and Scott, 104
performing different types of labor, but they did begin earning wages from outside employers instead of participating in a single household income. Still, there was very little if any movement to try to blur the lines between gender roles in the workplace, and, if anything, men and women were becoming more segregated in the work they were doing. Men wanted assurance that their skill and their craftsmanship would continue to be valued as it had been under the guild system, while the women wanted their work to be recognized and legitimized by better pay. Among the bourgeoisie, there was value placed on the spiritual work performed by women, reinforced by the fact that girls were usually educated in convents whereas boys went to school or learned a trade. Thus, both among the working class and the bourgeoisie, there was an understanding that work performed by men and that of women should be understood differently and even kept separate.

Even Sand seemed to agree with this tenet. Although she herself was a woman-writer, a self-proclaimed feminist, and had a great interest in utopian systems, George Sand’s relationship with the Saint-Simoniennes’ brand of feminism was ambivalent. In 1848, she declined their nomination to the Constituant Assembly and instead counseled them to:

 Parlez à vos époux, à vos frères, à vos fils. C’est une grande prédication que celle de l’affranchissement sérieux et moralisateur de la femme. C’est vous qu’elle concerne et il n’est pas besoin de bouches éloquentes qui se fassent vos interprètes. Vous serez toutes de grands orateurs au foyer domestique.

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38 See Scott.
[Talk to your husbands, your brothers, your sons. The serious and moralizing emancipation of the woman is a great teaching. But it is your concern, and you don’t need any eloquent tongues to serve as your interpreters. You will all be great orators in your own homes.] 39

Sand rejected the calls for women’s suffrage, and even seemed to condemn the idea that women should engage in public discourse, preferring to keep the male/public and female/private spheres separate. Indeed, the division of male and female spaces was a value in both lower-class and bourgeois moral system.

The separation of feminine and masculine spheres – understood as interior versus exterior, or private versus public – was one question about which all classes seemed to be in agreement, but it was a social norm that was inevitably more difficult to maintain for the working classes, as most bourgeois women did not have jobs. Although lower-class women were allowed and even expected to work outside the home, this work was supposed to be a continuation of their natural jobs as women. Thus, serving as a housekeeper, minding children, and working in the garment industry were all acceptable jobs, but manual or co-ed factory labor was not.

There was a strong suspicion of porosity between the ouvrière and the prostituée, because they were both public women. Béraud, for example, argues that the prostitute in all of her forms (courtisane, femme galante, fille publique), although morally reprehensible is a part of the working class, both because she provides a service to society and, quite simply, because “leur débauche est un commerce” [Their debauchery is a business]. 40 Writing on the heels of the ultra-scientific and rational Parent du Châtelet,

40 Béraud, 296
Béraud wanted to focus more on the moral aspects of prostitution, and less on its physicality. As a result, the enquêteur is torn between two desires; on the one hand, he is compelled to see, interpret, and make visible to others the prostitute’s body through textual representation. He uses both detailed description and dramatic narratives to paint what he sees as a truthful picture of the prostitute so that she might be identifiable. On the other hand, Béraud’s concern for public morals lead him to call for the removal of the prostitute’s body from public view. The solution he proposes involves a Foucauldian gaze that will force the prostitutes to regulate their own behavior:

[J]e désire que le préfet de police ait les yeux sur elles, et qu’il ne leur laisse pas ignorer. […] Ainsi les plus déhontées seraient contraintes à voiler leurs débordemens [sic], à ne plus se donner en spectacle avec le luxe audacieux qui dénonce leurs mœurs dissolues.”

[I would like the police to have its eyes upon them and to not let this go unnoticed. In this way the most shameless of them will be constrained to hide their excesses and no longer offer themselves as a spectacle with the audacious luxury which tells of their dissolute morals.]41

Béraud figures that if the prostitutes are under constant scrutiny, even if they don’t internalize the social morals implied by the gaze, they will at least think to hide themselves, thereby staying off the public streets and leading to greater public morality.

The body of the worker and that of the prostitute are the same in that they are both commodities, and they must remain commodities in order for existing social structures to stay in place. As Charles Bernheimer has demonstrated, the figure of the prostitute in

41 Ibid., 293
literature represented not only the writer’s desires but also his fears, and so, to represent her on the written page was a way to neutralize her threat. This was true, even for Balzac, who, in the preface to his *Splendeurs et misères des courtisanes*, praised the eponymous courtesan for her social mobility and for the literary possibilities she provided.\(^{42}\) According to Balzac’s text, it was Esther Gobseck’s very uniqueness and incapacity to be categorized which made her an interesting object of narrativisation. However, suggests Bernheimer, this celebration of the “difference” of the prostitute “has an almost purely rhetorical function” and in the end she is really not outside of the all-encompassing world of economic and libidinal exchange set forth in “Physionomies Parisiennes.” In fact, suggests Bernheimer, “Just as [enquêteur] Parent [du Châtelet] defines his project in terms of the regulation and policing of this decadent figure, Balzac evokes her [the prostitute] only the better to bring disciplinary energies to bear against her disintegrative threat.”\(^{43}\) All of public discourse seemed to agree that the prostitute represented the worst aspects of the working class and must be placed under constant surveillance.

The line between the grisette and the prostitute is not quite clear. Béraud contends that the grisette is merely one of the disguises that a prostitute might change into – just like that of an elegant woman or a villageoise - in order to avoid the authorities.\(^{44}\) Villermé underscores the porosity of women workers and prostitution. Although the grisette was supposed to be a sort of pure version of the working woman – she makes clothes, she does not sell her body – she remains a suspicious character in the popular imagination.

\(^{42}\) Bernheimer, 35  
\(^{43}\) Ibid., 39  
\(^{44}\) Béraud, Vol. 1, 51-52
Moral Ambiguity of the Working Woman

Sometimes because of her vulnerability, the enquêteurs portray the ouvrière as a victim or even a martyr. Villermé interprets the working woman not only as a sexual object, but also an object of pity. She is paid much less than her male counterpart, reports Villermé, who confesses to feeling pity for the working woman who felt compelled to sell herself in prostitution:

Quand une jeune ouvrière quitte son travail le soir avant l'heure de la sortie générale, on dit, qu'elle va faire son cinquième quart de journée. Ce mot peut faire sourire, mais on éprouve un sentiment pénible, à voir de très jeunes filles dont la taille n'annonce pas plus de douze à treize ans, s'offrir le soir aux passants.

[When a young worker-woman leaves her work before quitting time, we say she’s going to do her fifth quarter of the day. This joke may spark a smile, but it is also painful to see these very young girls, who by their size can’t be more than twelve or thirteen years old, offer themselves to passerby.] 45

He also expresses admiration for the working women (“des femmes énergiques”) who take control of the family finances when the husband is too much of a drunk to do so. He praises them for having “assez de force de caractère pour se suffire à elles-mêmes, et pour élever leurs enfants sans autres ressources que le produit de leur travail” [enough force of character to provide for themselves and to raise their children without any resources, save the products of their work]. 46 Notice that the type of feminine energy valued by Frégier is

45 Villermé, Vol. 1, 226-7
46 Frégier, Vol. 2, 158
Representations of *le travail* under the July Monarchy

*a force de caractère*, and not a physical power. This type of work is bound up tightly with the value of motherhood.

Villermé’s and Frégier’s descriptions clash dramatically with those of George Sand who, rather than seeing the woman worker as a victim or an object of commodification, offers the figure of the woman worker as a possible model for working-class identity. An adaptable character who has already worked through the double imperatives of being both subject and object of the gaze, the woman worker, in particular, the Saint-Simonienne, provides a real-life example of how discursive acts of idealization may be subverted.

Sand, unlike most other voices in the July Monarchy had a more nuanced attitude towards the idea that separate work be destined for men and women. She found value in their difference, but did not necessarily respect traditional gendered division of labor. Particularly in the socialist novels of the 1840s, one can see Sand trying to set up a specific identity that is attached to and formed by women’s work, where women, like men, are defined by their *travail*. In a conversation between two women in *Le Péché de Monsieur Antoine*, for example, the motherly Janille teaches this lesson to Gilberte. Forbidden to help her friend chop wood, the young lady complains that women’s work is useless. Her older interlocutor protests:

> Comment, comment, les femmes ne sont bonnes à rien ! s'écria Janille: eh bien, donc, partons toutes les deux, montons sur les toits, équarrissons des poutres et enfonçons des chevilles. Vrai, je m'en tirerais encore mieux que vous, toute vieille et petite que je suis ; mais pendant ce temps-là, votre papa, qui est adroit de ses mains comme une grenouille de sa queue, filera nos quenouilles et Jean repassera nos bavolets.
[“What do you mean women are good for nothing!” exclaimed Janille. “Fine, let’s go the both of us, let’s climb up on the rooftop, let’s chop some wood and dig in our heels. It’s true, I would come out better than you, as old and small as I am; but during that time, your father, who is about as skilled with his hands as a frog is of his tail, will thread our distaffs and Jean will iron our bonnets.”]⁴⁷

This short exchange between young Gilberte and her adoptive mother, the housekeeper Janille, gives us several insights into George Sand’s understanding of the role of gender in the division of labor. Men are expected to perform dangerous and physically expansive jobs as illustrated by the phrases *monter sur les toits*, *équarrir des poutres*, and *enfoncer des chevilles*. The women perform the more delicate tasks of threading the *quenouille* and ironing bonnets. The idea of a man using a *quenouille* is ridiculous and would be humiliating for him, as these tools are highly feminized in the cultural imagination. The images of the virile carpenter Jean Jappeloup ironing ladies’ bonnets and of Janille and Gilberte wielding large (phallic) beams on precarious rooftops are equally ridiculous, precisely because they do not respect the sexual division of labor.

But even as Janille evokes these images as farcical examples of what could (or should) never be, and therefore seems to be reinforcing the traditional division of men’s work and women’s work, the Chateaubrun household does not in general respect normal bourgeois gender roles. At the chateau it is Janille who performs much of the so-called masculine labor, and Monsieur Antoine who provides “feminine” sentimental support. For example, when Emile and Gilberte tell her parents about their romantic plan to be secretly engaged, Janille firmly disapproves, while Antoine shares their romantic hopes:

⁴⁷ *Le Pêché de Monsieur Antoine*, 166
Lesceur affectueux et naïf du bon campagnard ne savait pas résister aux caresses et aux tendres discours de ses deux enfants, et, lorsque Janille avait le dos tourné, il se laissait aller à partager leurs espérances et à bénir leur amour.

[The affectionate and naïve heart of the good man could not resist the caresses and tender words of his two children, and, while Janille had her back turned, he allowed himself to share their hopes and bless their love.] 48

There is an element of class distinction in this role reversal, a refusal of dominant bourgeois values: Antoine, because he is noble, is incapable of working ("[il] est adroit de ses mains comme une grenouille de sa queue"). Janille, a faithful servant, is determined to spare Antoine from lowering himself to the market economy logic that has taken over the rest of the country. A foil to the strange set-up at Chateaubrun is provided by the Cardonnet family, where mother and father each play their designated role in the family structure, even to a fault.

But aside from the undercurrents of class there is also evidence of a certain feminine pride on the part of Janille, a call for recognition of the work that women perform. Antoine would be incapable of performing Janille’s work, but if, on the other hand, she were to take on a masculine job, she would succeed ("je m’en tirerais encore mieux que vous"). In this double-axis comparison of capacity to work based on gender and class, it is the working-class woman who comes out on top. Janille’s assertion of her excellent and unique skills as a working-class woman is a claim to the right to participate fully in the economic and political workings of her family. According to gender norms of

48 Ibid., 274
the period, the mother was to be the moral authority of the household, and Janille fills this role. It is thanks to “sa prudence, sa domination maternelle et la finesse de son jugement” [her prudence, her maternal dominance and the sharpness of her judgment],\textsuperscript{49} that the Chateaubrun household runs so smoothly. However, her function in the family unit surpasses this domestic and affective labor. It is, after all, Janille who earns an income when the family is ruined, charging tourists to visit the castle (“elle retirait de l’exhibition de ses ruines un certain pécule qu’elle employait, comme tout ce qui lui appartenait, à augmenter secrètement le bien-être de la famille” [from the exhibition of the ruins, she earned a certain amount which she used – like everything she owned – to secretly improve the well-being of the family.]).\textsuperscript{50} What’s more, it is Janille who keeps the key to Gilberte’s dowry “sous son traversin” [“under her pillow”].\textsuperscript{51} Indeed, it is Janille who is the rule-maker of the household, who “reconnut qu’il fallait prendre les rênes du gouvernement” [she needed to take over the reins of government].\textsuperscript{52} In this way, Sand allows a female character to perform stereotypically masculine tasks requiring rationality such as wage-earning, money management, and governance, and in this way she transgresses traditional separation of female and male workspaces.

In addition to the singular character of the enterprising Janille, Sand destabilizes the male/female workplace division through the creation of other non-traditional female characters. In the complementary novels \textit{Le Compagnon du Tour de France} (1840) and \textit{La Ville Noire} (1859), for example, the success of the novels’ heroes depend upon a strong female character, not only for the fraternal and romantic love she brings to the

\textsuperscript{49} Ibid., 166
\textsuperscript{50} Ibid., 161
\textsuperscript{51} Ibid., 341
\textsuperscript{52} Ibid., 113
workplace, but also for the decisive actions she takes to lift the paralyzed worker-intellectual from his incertitude. In *Le Compagnon du Tour de France*, it is Yseult, not Pierre who makes the final decision to leave him for his own good: “Yseult était inébranlable dans son dessein de s’unir à celui qu’elle avait élu; et Pierre, accablé de cette lutte contre lui-même, ne sut que lui répondre” [Yseult was unshakable in her plan to marry the one she had chosen; and Pierre, overwhelmed by this struggle against himself, could not responde].

It is the woman, then, who is unwavering (*inébranlable*), and the man who is overwhelmed (*accablé*); it is the woman who makes the decision and the man who is speechless. In the end, Yseult makes the decision to leave, offering Pierre the only logical solution to his problem (*cette lutte contre lui-même*) of having to choose between romantic love and political conviction. Similarly, while it is true that Tonine, the heroine of *La Ville Noire*, offers the hero Sept-Epees the romantic affection that makes his work more bearable, the extent of her help goes far beyond that. It is, after all, Tonine who purchases and sets up the factory that provides the novel’s utopian ending. In addition to the traditional spiritual and emotional work that would be expected of the woman, these heroines also perform masculine rational work, eschewing a gendered division of labor.

**La Grisette**

La grisette offers an example of a “type” who can be read in many ways. What’s more, she does not allow herself to be read but instead becomes a creator of language herself. An adaptable character who has already worked through the double imperatives of being both subject and object of the gaze, the woman worker, in particular, the Saint-
Representations of *le travail* under the July Monarchy

Simonienne, provides a real-life example of how discursive acts of idealization and commodification may be complicated.

There is perhaps no figure that embodies the nineteenth century’s anxiety about the maintenance of defined gendered spheres better than the *grisette*. By the 1830s, this young working woman had become ubiquitous as representations of Paris and its inhabitants multiplied with the rise of panoramic literature. While her moral attributes might vary, la *grisette* was always a lower-class single woman who earned her living by working in the garment industry. Unlike the *lorette* (the kept woman), the *grisette* was a hard worker, and if she suffered from moral degeneration, it was not from lack of industriousness, but because she was insufficiently paid.

The grisette is the opposite of all that is masculine and leisurely. She therefore runs counter to a tradition of nineteenth-century literary criticism – from Balzac to Baudelaire to Benjamin – that has consecrated the flâneur – the man who walks, who observes, and who does *not* work – as the privileged inhabitant of the nascent modern city. Walter Benjamin, looking back from the early 20th century, was the first to codify the figure of the flâneur as the foremost practitioner of the type of semiotic logic used to “read” the city as a series of signs. For Benjamin, the flâneur, the arcades, and panoramic literature were all concurrent and interactive phenomena, products and producers of the modern city:

If one can say that the physiologies employ an artistic device, it is the proven device of the feuilleton – namely, the transformation of the boulevard into an *intérieur*. The street becomes a dwelling place for the flâneur; he is as much at home among house façades as a citizen is within
his four walls.  

The flâneur transforms the impersonal public sphere into a private space of intimacy and familiarity, where passerby are no longer anonymous strangers but readable types. This transformation happens most readily in the arcades, because their hybrid inside/outside nature facilitates the flâneur’s passage between spheres. But there is something even more explicitly literary happening here, as Benjamin establishes a parallel between the flâneur and writer of panoramic literature (the physiologies, the feuilleton). Because the flâneur is designated as the observer and writer of life in the modern city, everything he captures with his eyes becomes an opportunity for textual creation. Everything that he sees is his creature, destined to remain the object of his gaze and never a subject in its own right.

What then to make of the female figure who operates in those very same arcades, and whose character is just as prevalent in panoramic literature: la grisette? From Mercier, to Paul de Kock, to Balzac, no tableau of Paris was complete without this ubiquitous character. Just like the flâneur, the grisette too moves freely in modern urban spaces, blurring the line between the interior and exterior, intimacy and publicity. Such disregard for the separate spheres becomes more troubling when it is performed by a woman, however. For instance, a character in a Nicolas Brazier vaudeville remarks about the arcades: “les femmes y sont dans leur boudoir” [the women there are in their

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54 Benjamin, 68
55 Alain Lescart has taken on the task of providing the grisette a more prominent place in the study of nineteenth-century cultural and literary history, unearthing a wealth of instances of the grisette in popular literature, song and iconography.
boudoir], meaning they are just as comfortable on the street as they would be in their bedrooms, evoking voyeuristic sexual desire. While the flâneur may reverse the interior/exterior divide in the name of literary or artistic creation, the grisette’s appearance in public becomes a conspicuously physical phenomenon. Even if the typical working woman does not display her body as a commodity (like the prostitute), she is bound to be an object of desire. Thus, even if the only appropriate way to look at her is through the eyes of the voyeur (a theme that is reinforced by her metaphorical situation in the boudoir), she remains firmly an object of the gaze.

And yet, the grisette is also sometimes represented as a subject in her own right, one who can observe, interpret, and even play with language. In Balzac’s *Ferragus* (1833), for example, a spirited grisette named Ida composes long, imaginatively-composed letters to her lover. Although the letters are filled with grammatical and orthographical errors, making them appear comical to the reader, these very mistakes are also a sign of her literary inventiveness. Obviously uneducated, Ida nonetheless takes up the pen, refusing to be a uniquely physical being. Even if she is destined to suicide at the end of the novel, her letters provide a preliminary subjectivity to the working woman.

Several years later, Balzac once again features the grisette as a linguistic inventor in *Un grand homme de province à Paris* (1839). When Lucien de Rubempré, the naive poet from the provinces, comes to Paris to make a name for himself, one of his first encounters with urban modernity takes place in the arcades of the Palais-Royal. The scene is told from the point of view of Lucien, who walks through the covered streets, keenly observing everything as he passes. The grisette returns the gaze of her would-be voyeurs.

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as she becomes a social commentator:


[A grisette, whose tongue was as loose as her eyes were active, sat on a stool and hassled the passerby: “Will you buy a pretty hat, Madam?” “Let me sell you something, Sir?” Their fertile and picturesque vocabulary was varied by vocal inflections, by looks, and by their criticisms of strollers. The booksellers and the shopwomen got along well.]\(^{57}\)

This grisette is quite at home in the arcade, but in contrast Brazier’s description, she is not in her boudoir, that is, she is not only the object of the voyeuristic gaze but a seeing and speaking subject. Indeed, not only does she see, but she interprets and she speaks, undertaking the same trajectory of observation-interpretation-representation that the doctors and other professional “lookers” were carrying out in their enquêtes. But the grisette, as the writer of the modern city, resembles more the flâneur than the enquêteur; she is a creator of language and of culture, as indicated by the bookstore next door. She is not the flâneur’s creation but a creator of language in her own right. Although the direct quotes refer only to the wares for sale, the rest of the paragraph indicates the grisette is speaking about many other things. Her commentary is composed of “rich and picturesque vocabulary,” as she comes up with a witty critique for each passerby.

\(^{57}\) Cited in Lescart, 94.
When Balzac presents the grisette as a gazer rather than an object of the gaze, this is in contrast to earlier popular depictions of the type set up by Paul de Kock’s romans de moeurs, Mercier’s eroticized *Tableaux*, and Beranger’s chansons in which she is always the object, and never a subject in her own right. In fact, her objecthood is double: As a worker, she is observed by the moralists and industrialists who fear more than anything a restive and idle working class. As a woman she is the object of the flâneur’s gaze, who will stop in his tracks to “lorgner la gentille grisette” [ogle the pretty grisette]. This is because the grisette is both woman and worker – two categories destined to be object rather than subject. Even Balzac’s more complex representations of the woman-worker seem unable to give her full subjectivity: in *Ferragus*, she commits suicide, while in *Illusions Perdues*, she remains a minor character.

It would not be until George Sand’s *Horace* (1841) that a heroic grisette with “une nouvelle individualité comme une nouvelle humanité” would be placed at the center of a novel. In fact, the tale revolves around two grisettes: one, a Saint-Simonienne who seems to have mastered the difficulties of being a working woman without becoming object of the gaze; the other, a younger character who struggles with her situation. In spite of their differences, these women are both complete people with subjecthood. Unlike the worker-heroes discussed above, they are not idealized past recognition. More than any other of her strong female heroines, it is the Saint-Simonienne grisette Eugénie who Sand proposes as a model figure for working-class solidarity. She has worked through all the difficulties of objectification and idealization in order to claim for herself an identity based on labor.

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58 See Mall
60 Nesci, 292
To be sure there is a great deal of idealization or at least “typification” of characters in the novel. Like *Le Compagnon du Tour de France*, *Horace* (written just one year later) is a historically-situated allegory of political and sentimental conflicts. As such, each character must represent a particular social or political group. The novel follows the story of Marthe, who, coming from modest means, must work as a *modiste*. As is often the case for the grisette-type, she falls in love with a law student, the eponymous anti-hero of the tale. First, we see how perceptions of the grisette-type are enunciated through the eyes of Horace, who stands in for an entire class of young romantic bourgeois law-students. His prejudice against the working woman is used to expose his character in a conversation with fellow student Théophile:

*Ces malheureuses grisettes […]* me font tant de pitié, que pour tous les plaisirs de l’enfer, je ne voudrais pas avoir à me reprocher la chute d’un de ces anges déplumés. Et puis, cela a de grosses mains, des nez retroussés ; cela fait des *pa-ta-qu’est-ce*, et vous reproche son malheur dans des lettres à mourir de rire. Il n’y a pas même moyen d’avoir avec cela un remords sérieux.

*[Those unfortunate grisettes …make me feel such pity that, for all the pleasures of hell, I would never want to have to blame myself for the fall of one of those wingless angels. And plus, they have big hands, and snub noses; they say “pa-ta-qu’est-ce” and reproach you in their sad letters which could make you die laughing. You couldn’t even feel any serious remorse with one of those.]*

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61 *Horace*, 40
The grisette, according to Horace, is an object of mockery, both for her physical appearance (*de grosses mains, des nez retroussés*) and for her inferior intelligence. Her attempts at writing, even simple letter-writing, are laughable (*à mourir de rire*), recalling the unintentionally comical note written by Balzac’s Ida. To Horace, these women embody a wide variety of qualities: they are unfortunate (“malheureuses”) and disgraced (“anges déplumés”), objects of both pity and contempt. In his eyes, there exists no beauty, no heroism, no desire even in the figure of a working woman. When Horace and Marthe (acting out a seemingly inevitable étudiant-grisette coupling found on the pages of the feuilletons), move into a small apartment, his disdain for her situation as a grisette endures, and finally he forbids her to work. In spite of the couple’s real economic troubles, Marthe is forced to comport herself like a bourgeoise, filling her days with “que de lecture et de toilette, sous peine de perdre toute poésie aux yeux d’Horace.”62 His gaze is therefore all-powerful. Estranged from her origins as a working-class grisette, Marthe becomes entirely his creation.

Horace represents the typical flâneur law student of July Monarchy: ambitious and passionate, but unable to commit to any one relationship or political party, much like a Julien Sorel or a Frederic Moreau. He embodies a sort of mainstream romanticism that George Sand had been moving away from since her first meeting with Pierre Leroux who inspired her to leave behind the *mal du siècle* in favor of a *santé du siècle*.63 Indeed, Sand gives her voice not to the anti-hero Horace, but to the first-person narrator, the honest and sensible Théophile. He and the grisette Eugénie form the ideal couple, and it is through

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62 “nothing but reading and primping, or else she would lose all poetry in Horace’s eyes.” *Ibid.*, 168
63 Naginski, 169
the eyes of Théophile, not Horace, that we can understand Sand’s opinion of the working woman.

Even if the relationship between Théophile and Eugénie may be somewhat idealized, she herself is quite recognizable, identifiable, and believable. Like the intelligent Yseult from *Compagnon*, Eugénie is not only hard-working, but also politically involved, and even interested in women’s rights. However, like Sand, she does not take her feminism to an extreme that would make her outrageous to Sand’s bourgeois or working-class reading publics. For example, when Horace questions Eugénie’s commitment to gender equality, she responds firmly, “Je la réclame et je la pratique,” before adding the caveat, “bien qu’elle soit difficile à conquérir dans la société présente” [I demand it and I practice it … even if it is difficult to manage in today’s world].64 By replying in a nuanced manner, one that puts forth an ideal of women’s rights while recognizing and accepting a reality that does not live out that ideal, Sand’s heroine remains within the realm of the possible. At the same time, Eugénie’s response is utopian, pushing a better reality to an undetermined future, while calling for action in the present, a stance that recalls the writings of Saint-Simon. Indeed, we learn early on that the grisette is an active participant in the Saint-Simonian movement. The narrator, Théophile, wonders if she might even be the Femme-Messie sought by the Saint-Simonians:

[C’]était une adepte assez fervente de la réhabilitation des femmes. […] Je me disais parfois que cette femme forte et intelligente appelée par les *apôtres* à formuler les droits et les devoirs de la femme, c’eût été Eugénie.

[She was a fairly fervent believer in the rehabilitation of women. Sometimes I

64 *Horace*, 132
thought to myself that she could have been the woman called by the Apostles
to establish the rights and duties of the woman.] 65

The narrator is making a direct reference to the controversial “Call of the Woman,” part
of a new moral doctrine set forth by the Saint-Simonians in November 1831. This
“Appel” (Call) posited the existence of an ideal Woman-Messiah who would serve with
Enfantin as a Mother-Father Couple at the head of the movement. Théophile is suggesting
that Eugénie herself could be this Woman (capital W) called by the Saint-Simonian
apostles to direct the moral and private spheres of society. She could be the woman “forte
et intelligente” who belongs in the empty chair next to Père Enfantin. Yet, continues
Théophile, the modest grisette would probably refuse such a public position. Like Sand’s
mentor, Pierre Leroux, Eugénie is inspired by the general doctrine of the Saint-
Simonians, but is wary of many of the group’s teachings and especially their bizarre
spectacles. Because it is deceitful, the spectacle runs counter to both Sand’s and
enquêteurs’ project of reading the traces of work on the body.

Before the “Call of the Woman” there had been vibrant discussions as to the role
and the rights of women in the organization. As Olinde Rodrigues explains in October
1831, the group was in general agreement about two things: first, just as all men should
be equal, so too should men and women be treated as equals. Consequently, government
should be the affair of not a single person but that of a “premier couple, placé au sommet
de la hiérarchie saint-simonienne,” whose task is, in part, “de jeter une vive lumière sur
ces problèmes de la vie intime.” Rodrigues continues:

La première femme qui s’assoira au trône pontifical pourra seule révéler et

65 Ibid., 184-185
proposer à l’élaboration méditative de l’homme la loi des *convenances* au-delà desquelles commencerait l’*immoralité*.

[The first woman to sit on the pontifical throne will alone reveal and propose for man’s meditative elaboration the law of decency outside of which immorality would begin.]  

Thus, women had a special role to play in government, as the leaders of moral and religious concerns. If, as the Saint-Simonians believed, the function of government is not limited to public lawmaking, but should also reach towards a moral restructuring of society, then the woman was needed to complete and to bring further insight to the leadership. Rodrigues concludes his presentation of the generally-accepted Saint-Simonian understanding of the woman ruler by emphasizing that this woman must be liberated: “c’est à la femme *affranchie*, LIBRE ET PRETE POUR L’AVENIR, qu’il appartient de révéler la loi des convenances, LE CODE DE LA PUDEUR” [It is the job of the liberated woman, FREE AND READY FOR THE FUTURE, to reveal the law of decency, the code of modesty]. On paper, then, the Saint-Simonian attitude towards women seemed to be empowering, especially to working class women. Not only were the distinctions between classes to be eliminated, but women’s rights seemed to be a primary concern. However, when Enfantin came out with his official decree on November 21, 1831, it became clear that he saw women’s equality differently. Not only was the Femme-Messie an ideal and not a reality, but so was the case for women’s equality in general. While the text is couched in the language of equality and freedom, it quickly becomes a statement on the ineptitude and the stupidity of the real woman:

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66 *Œuvres de Saint-Simon et d’Enfantin*. Vol. 4. 133
67 *Ibid.*, 134
L’homme et la femme, voilà l’individu social ; mais la femme est encore esclave, nous devons l’affranchir. Avant de passer à l’état d’ÉGALITÉ avec l’homme, elle doit avoir sa liberté. Nous devons donc réaliser, pour les femmes saint-simoniennes, cet état de liberté, en détruisant la hiérarchie jusqu’ici constituée pour elles aussi bien que pour les hommes.

[Man and woman, that is the social individual; but the woman is still a slave, we must free her. Before passing on to the state of EQUALITY with man, she must have her freedom. We must make this freedom a reality for the Saint-Simonian women, by destroying the hierarchy formed until now for both women and men.]^68

Thus, continues Enfantin, women must be excluded from the hierarchy of the Saint-Simonien community – they must exist in what he calls a state of égalité confuse until they can understand the doctrine. Male Saint-Simonians are obligated to bring women up from their subaltern position, because women cannot do this themselves ("Nous devons donc réaliser, pour les femmes saint-simoniennes, cet état de liberté"). Until such emancipation happens, however, women are excluded from the group. The decree managed to both celebrate and marginalize working women by first announcing the existence of a Femme-Messie, and then declaring that she was not to be found among the existing members of the Saint-Simonian family. By revering an absent ideal Woman who must be sought elsewhere, the movement denied the existence of a free working woman. Thus, the Saint-Simonienne becomes what Christine Planté calls “l’impossible être-femme” unable to identify with the imagined ideal of herself represented on the printed page. “À tant parler de La Femme, on ne sait plus trop comment la définir. Les femmes ne savent plus s’y reconnaître; plus on en parle moins elles existent” [We talk so much

^68 Ibid., 198
about The Woman, we no longer know how to define her. Women can no longer recognize themselves; the more we talk about them the less they exist].\textsuperscript{69} This type of unrecognizability is similar to that of the worker-intellectual represented in George Sand’s socialist novels.

**Spectacle**

Even more than their strange attitudes towards the emancipation women, George Sand and her heroine Eugénie find the Saint-Simonians problematic for their reliance on spectacle. Like Sand’s mentor, Pierre Leroux, the grissette Eugénie is inspired by the general doctrine of the Saint-Simonians, but is wary of the changes taking place with Enfantin’s ascension to power in the early 1830s, especially its reliance upon ceremonious displays of social piety, such as those seen in Ménilmontant. Sand / Théophile characterizes the movement’s activities as “un théâtre où l’on jouait trop souvent la comédie sociale au lieu du drame humanitaire” [a theater where too often was played social comedy instead of the humanitarian drama],\textsuperscript{70} reveling in the spectacular nature of the social upheavals going on at the time, rather than addressing the real problems facing the people.

Sand’s critique of theatricality and readability is brought into focus by the artificiality of Horace himself, an astute practitioner in the art of spectacle. When Théophile first visits him in his mansard, he walks in on what seems to be the perfect tableau of the poor student at his desk: head in his hands, hair a mess, papers flying everywhere, but he soon discovers that these are not the serious notes of a law-student,

\textsuperscript{69} Cited in Riot-Sarcey, *La Démocratie à l’épreuve des femmes*, 48.

\textsuperscript{70} *Horace*, 185
but a series of first chapters, first stanzas and first acts of multiple novels, poems, and vaudeville plays. Not only is Horace forsaking his studies to write literature, but he cannot bring himself to focus on a single piece, let alone genre. Even before this revelation, Théophile has detected the subterfuge in the small pains his friend has taken to adopt the “look” of a serious student in a place of study:

Il avait arrangé sa petite chambre garnie avec une sorte d’affectation. Il avait mis son couvre-pied sur sa table, afin de lui donner un air de bureau […] et de son rideau d’indienne, roulé autour de lui, il s’était fait une robe de chambre, ou plutôt un manteau de théâtre.

[He had arranged his little furnished room with a kind of affectation. He had put his quilt on his table, in order to give it the look of a desk …and, rolling his calico curtain around him, he made a housecoat or more like a theater frock.]  

Through the use of terms such as “affectation,” “air de bureau” and “manteau de théâtre,” Sand signals Horace’s bad-faith attempt to give the appearance of being something he is not. He does not truly believe in the power of appearances, but is merely playing a game of dress-up.

In the end, it is Eugénie, a simple grisette, who offers solution to the type of idealization-beyond-recognition that takes place in both Sand’s *Compagnon du Tour de France* and Enfantin’s “Call of the Woman.” Through the positive but non-idealized depictions of Eugenie, Sand lifts her from the dominant perception of the grisette-type, as an intimidating public woman painted by Balzac or a shameless or dejected object of pity.

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71 Ibid., 99
Representations of *le travail* under the July Monarchy

envisioned by Horace. By refusing to play the role of the Woman (capital W) in the Saint-Simonian movement, Eugenie refuses the spectacle of public life and remains true to her political convictions. In this way, she embodies two feminine characteristics valued by George Sand: she is engaged in political life, but she remains within her domain in the private sphere.

While Sand’s worker-heroes never have a chance to refute their idealization by the author, (because they are her creations), the women workers of the Saint-Simonian movement did read Enfantin’s “Call,” and they responded to it. Working-women writers published prolifically and formed their own newspapers, such as the *Tribune des femmes*. The proposition of an ideal Woman – represented by the empty chair next to Enfantin, always desired but never found – served to disenfranchise regular working-class women from the Saint-Simonian project. Quite literally, they were no longer allowed to participate in the organization. Thus, many women-workers, such as Jeanne Deroin, Eugenie Niboyet, and Desirée Gay refuted the political implications Enfantin’s “Call” and argued for women’s freedoms directly, as Michele Riot-Sarcey has so thoroughly explored. And yet, even after 1831, many of the Saint-Simonian movement’s most ardent participants were women who were able to find in Enfantin’s “Call” a meaning which served their purposes. For even if these women were not the Mother quested by Enfantin, the fact that there existed a Mother had serious consequences for a society that, up until this, had been organized along patriarchal lines. Leslie Wahl Rabine has demonstrated how Claire Démar, Flora Tristan, Suzanne Voilquin, used the figure of the Mother (Femme-Messie) to imagine a social and religious order in which women may be subjects rather than mere objects. By writing, these women created their own subjectivity, and
made their appeals to the Mother figure to legitimate their claims. If the God-figure of the Saint-Simonian religion was a Woman (capital W), they argued, why couldn’t all women be seen as legitimate subjects in that same system? In fact, some Saint-Simoniennes actively participated in the quest for the Woman, interpreting it as a call for women to empower themselves. In 1833, for example, Saint-Simonienne Claire Démar writes in a pamphlet:

It is up to women, then, to make this cry of emancipation reverberate, to repudiate the injurious protection of the man who would call himself her master and is only her equal! […] I, too, call upon her; I will hail her with delight. I, too, immerse my gaze in this immeasurable horizon, asking the nations of the North and South, of the Orient and the Occident, where, then, is she? When will she come?²

Démard’s impassioned call is tempered by a semblance of patience – she admits in the next paragraph that “the hour has not come” – but her general tone is one of audacity. Enfantin’s “emancipation” of the woman had been conceived in deliberately vague terms, meaning both sexual freedom outside of marriage and a type of civil freedom that would give women more rights. In practice, the charismatic Enfantin seemed more interested in the physical emancipation of young women no longer fettered by the constraints of bourgeois morals. In this passage cited above, Démar focuses on the second political significance of women’s liberty, pushing it to its extreme. Not only does she assert multiple times that women and men are equal, and not only does she declare that woman will be the instigator of this new state of gender equality, but, most importantly for our purposes, she assumes the position of observer, performer of the gaze. In this way, Claire

Démär, who is herself a grisette, offers a way out of the idealization-beyond-recognition of Enfantin’s “Call of the Woman.”

By adopting the tenets of Saint-Simonianism that she found true, while maintaining a distance from the controversial parts she deemed harmful, Eugénie resembles many working-class Saint-Simoniennes of her time. The Call of the Woman was so controversial because it brought to the surface two pairs of conflicting tendencies inherent in the position of the working woman of the July Monarchy: her status as both desired and rejected object, and her shifting position as both object and potential subject of the gaze. By assuming the role of interpreter and writer, and by offering a textual refutation of the woman-worker, the Saint-Simoniennes were able to subvert the problem of idealization. They offered themselves as a new reading of the effects of work on the body. This is the same kind of move that we will see the worker-writers and Michelet perform in Chapter 4, in order to establish a uniform definition of *le travail*.
IV. REALIZATION OF THE PARADIGM: THE WORKER- INTELLECTUAL DEFINES LE TRAVAIL

Car, moi aussi, mon ami, j’ai travaillé de mes mains. Le vrai nom de l’homme moderne, celui de travailleur, je le mérite en plus d’un sens. Avant de faire des livres, j’en ai composé matériellement ; j’ai assemblé des lettres avant d’assembler des idées, je n’ignore pas les mélancolies de l’atelier, l’ennui des longues heures.

--Michelet, 1846

In this chapter, I show how Jules Michelet and the contributors to the worker-run newspapers La Ruche populaire and L’Atelier concretize a paradigm of representing work that had first been imagined by Balzac and then elaborated by a variety of voices across social discourse, including the enquêteurs and George Sand. Through their writing, Michelet and the worker-writers strip le travail of its polysemy and establish a clear definition of work as a physical and metaphysical force. If Balzac, as the acute observer, was able to picture le travail in images, Michelet and the worker-writers gave its intelligibility as a complex but unified object of discourse – le droit du travail – the rallying cry of the Second Republic.

By the 1840s, there were two notable literary trends that led to the explosion of proletarian writing. First, depictions of the lower classes (including workers) had become more frequent on the pages of newspapers, novels, and social studies. Second, at a time when popular taste demanded both realist precision and romantic sentimentality, there was a call for an authentic narrator – one who had seen and felt the story he told. The representations of le travail set forth by bourgeois writers – whatever their political leanings – were fundamentally lacking in this authenticity. Thus, there was an obligation

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1 Le Peuple, 58
Representations of *le travail* under the July Monarchy

on the part of the worker-writers to enter into social discourse as well as an appetite among the reading public to hear what they had to say.

Nonetheless, the worker-writers had to tread carefully as they worked to accomplish their goal of establishing a unified discourse of *le travail*. Before they could speak, they had to justify their right to take part in the conversation. And when they did speak, they had a difficult and paradoxical task of making *le travail* more narrow and, simultaneously, more abstract. They had to first distinguish labor from other social problems, but also broaden its reach to form category that could include intellectual and physical labor. A worker-intellectual himself, and theoretician of a modern value of work that would include all productive activity, be it in a factory, on the land, or at the historian’s desk, Michelet provides the key to the worker-writer project, both embodying and elucidating their arguments.

**Authority, Authenticity, and Experience**

As we saw in the previous chapter, most depictions of *le travail* relied upon a privileged gaze, be it positivist or idealist, to read the worker’s body and to determine what sort of moral conclusions could be pulled from this reading. Regardless of their political leanings, the majority of these writers came from the middle class, creating a paradigm in which the bourgeois subject observed a working-class object of the gaze. Rancière has argued that the bourgeois looked at the worker the same way a master regarded a slave, such that “la matérialité de ses travaux et la grossièreté de ses loisirs, dans le vide de sa pensée et la flétrissure de sa chair,” served as “les marques de son appartenance à une race inferieure.” [the materiality of their labors and the coarseness of
their pleasures, the emptiness of their thinking and the decay of their flesh [were] the marks of their belonging to an inferior race, 262]. The adequation of the worker to the slave was a fruitful image for workers and moralists alike. The former spoke of the proletariat as being enslaved to his passions, while the workers accused the industrialists of thinking of them as slaves: For example, when it looked as though the *Chambre de deputés* was going to vote to abolish slavery in the colonies, the workers, emboldened, demanded a similar liberation for themselves:

Nous demandons une organisation nouvelle du travail, qui n’est en d’autres termes, que l’affranchissement de l’esclavage civilisé, qui met tous les travailleurs à la merci d’un misérable salaire, qu’aucun des ouvriers n’a le droit de débattre librement.

[We demand a new organization of labor, which in other words is nothing but the émancipation from civilized slavery, which places as workers at the mercy of a wretched salary which no workers have the right to debate freely.]

In the nation of *liberté, égalité*, and *fraternité*, this type of accusation was a powerful critique of the political and economic system. The majority of bourgeois writers would deny the accusation of treating workers as an inferior race, but even so, such naturalized class distinctions were repeated and reinforced in the enquêtes, the newspapers, and novels. Even George Sand, who wanted to paint the *le travail* in a noble light, committed the sin of objectification as she fixed her writerly gaze upon the working class, creating an idealized laborer with whom the real worker would never identify. It was therefore

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2 Rancière, 270  
almost inevitable that the working class would come to the conclusion that the only writer who could delineate a universal language of *le travail* would be the worker himself. Just as the fictional grisette dared to look back at her flâneur in order to claim her own subjecthood, the worker-writers responded to the mainstream representations of work in order to redefine it on their own terms. By paying careful attention to concerns of authority, authenticity, and sentimentality (both physical and emotional), the worker-writers argued that they – and not the professional writers – were best suited to represent work as a moral value.

**Authority**

As I discussed in chapter 2, writers often claimed authority under the July Monarchy through an insistence upon the *chose vue*, or the faithful recounting of events witnessed firsthand. The closer an author could get to his subject, the more authentic his story, and the more legitimately he could claim authority. This is the primary motivation behind the enquêteurs’ excursions into the margins of society and their fondness for the expression “j’ai vu…” As they sought to enter the social debate as to the moral value of *le travail*, both *La Ruche populaire* and *L’Atelier* were greatly concerned with giving a voice to the working class, and, by proving that this voice was authentic, claiming moral authority. As workers themselves, these worker-writers offered their own lives as proof of the paradigm of *le travail* as a force that forms a social identity, even as it deforms the individual body. In a literary landscape where realist and first-hand accounts of society dominated, the worker-writers, in spite of their many disadvantages in terms of education,

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4 Perrot, *Enquêtes sur la condition ouvrière*..., 28
access to publicity, and economic freedom, had one very important asset; for who better to give a reliable account of life as worker than the worker himself?

The workers needed to enter into dialogue with the bourgeois discourse – whether it be the liberal enquêteurs, or the romantic socialists such as George Sand, or the system of signs set up in panoramic and realist literature – in order to best formulate a new language for understanding the marks of work on the body as *le travail* signs of a moral, political, and social value. Unlike the authors discussed in the previous chapters, the compulsion to see and make seen the realities of *le travail* was not the goal of the worker-writers. Instead, the worker had to go beyond these physical realities of *le travail* and establish its place in the metaphysical realm. To do this, “pour entretenir ces passions, ces désirs d’un autre monde” [to entertain and maintain his passions and desires for another world, 20], Rancière has shown, the worker had to borrow bourgeois modalities of expression. Unlike *L’Echo de la fabrique* and other workers’ papers of the early 1830s which were primarily political, *La Ruche populaire* and, to a lesser extent, *L’Atelier* used a variety of styles and genres on the pages of the worker-papers. Writing in poetry, fables, allegories, and figurative language, the worker-writers made use of the literary devices that they saw in other publications. By using these imaginative forms, they could bring forth a certain ineffability to their days, and perhaps a sense of higher meaning to what might otherwise be seen as soul-crushing banality and materiality.

At the same time that they entered into discourse with bourgeois writers, using their forms and borrowing their tropes, the working class had to justify why they, better than the enquêteurs, better than George Sand, were suited to the task of establishing a stable understanding of the moral value of *le travail*. After all, their expertise was

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5 Rancière, 32
precisely not writing, but performing manual labor; the novelists, poets, academicians, and administrators who dominated social discourse were, in contrast, professional observers and writers. Although many socially-thinking literary figures maintained relationships with and even helped publish worker-writers, there was always the understanding that their representations were in many ways inferior. Buchez, for example, a champion of working-class rights, boasted as early as 1831, of his ability to communicate with the proletariats, who, “with their rude speech, their simple language, [spoke] about things which would certainly have been unintelligible to many men of the salons.”6 The belief that the proletariat's creative genius relied upon the professional writer or publicist was especially important to the patrons of the worker poets. “Soyez toujours ce que vous êtes” wrote Victor Hugo to worker-poet Gabriel Gauny, “afin que nous puissions demeurer ce que nous sommes” [Stay always what you are … so that we can remain what we are].7 In the face of these obstacles, the worker-writers insisted that they alone, as workers themselves, could both embody and represent *le travail*.

**Representative Authority**

From its very first issue in 1839, *La Ruche populaire* and its Saint-Simonian editors showed an acute awareness that the battle for representative authority on the question of *le travail* was in full swing. The monthly periodical was devoted to the publication of articles written by workers who spoke for themselves, rather than allowing others to speak on their behalf. This came at a time of great interest in the working classes. Not only the moralists and novelists discussed elsewhere in this dissertation, but

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6 Cited in Sewell, 203
7 Cited in Ribard, 85
political thinkers like Louis Blanc, Etienne Cabet, and Proudhon took it upon themselves to write in the name of the workers, convinced that they were fighting for their best interests. While avoiding class animosity, the worker-writers of La Ruche nonetheless began their prospectus with a critique against the very journalists and publicists who claimed to want to help their cause:

Quelques hommes du peuple, des ouvriers, frappés de l’étrange façon dont les journaux de toutes les nuances prétendent défendre les intérêts populaires dont ils se disent champions, ont résolu d’entreprendre eux-mêmes cette tâche. […] Elle a aussi, elle, une balance et une équerre pour apprécier la valeur des choses de ce monde. Tout leur sera un sujet de polémique : questions littéraires ou sociales, ils aborderont tout ce qui ne leur paraîtra pas au-dessus de leurs forces.

[Some men of the people, struck by the strange way newspapers of all nuances pretend to defend the interests of the people, of whom they say they are the champions, have resolved to undertake themselves this task…They too have a scale and a compass to appreciate the value of this world. Everything will be the subject of polemic: literary or social questions, they will take up anything that seems not above their forces.]

The tone of La Ruche, as laid out in these lines, is one of independence but not exclusion. The paper’s objective is to provide a forum for worker-writers to interpret and comment upon political, social, and cultural topics, using their own metrics of evaluation. As such, the workers are claiming their independence from the bourgeoisie on both a social and an aesthetic level. However, although the prospectus is firm in its intention to promote and publish only working-class creations, it does not aim for exclusivity. That is, it does not

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8 Les Membres du Comité. La Ruche Populaire. December 1839. (p 2)
seek to address only the working class, nor to be the only voice of the working class, but to enter into the larger public discourse. By responding to the many opining voices in printed media (primarily other newspapers and works of fiction, but also para-scientific publications such as the enquêtes as well as political speeches), the Ruche will permit the ouvrier to join but not dominate the conversation. What’s more, in a similarly diplomatic gesture, the editors stress that their objective is only to give the working class a voice in the conversation, and not to enter into the business of journalism:

[I]ls n’ont pas la prétention de passer pour des littérateurs ou des publicistes ; ils désirent seulement élever une tribune où les hommes du peuple, ouvriers comme eux, pourront dire ce qu’ils sentent.

[They don’t pretend to pass for literary writers or publicists; they simply desire to raise a tribune where men of the people, workers like them, can say what they feel.] 9

This apparent respect for the journalist is both a mark of the working-class proscription against encroaching on someone else’s livelihood, and perhaps a nod of the head to the writing class’s command to “restez ce que vous êtes,” as Hugo put it. It could also be read as a refusal to enter into the business of authorial control. Indeed, it is telling that La Ruche populaire calls itself a “tribune,” which would be understood in its very literal sense, as a raised platform upon which one stands in order to speak to a large crowd, such as church or an assembly hall. The term “tribune” here implies that La Ruche will provide the infrastructure for the workers’ self-expression, but will not direct what the individual workers say. The editors of L’Atelier will critique this lack of editorial control, opting for a more uniform mission statement, but for La Ruche, it is simply a part of their refusal to

9 Les Membres du Comité. La Ruche Populaire. December 1839. (p. 1)
be absorbed into the world of “littérateurs and publicistes.” They insist on their identities as workers first and become writers only due to a moral imperative.

The editors of *La Ruche* did not seek to displace or dominate the social discourse on work, but they did intend to prove that many of the qualities attributed to the working class were inventions of a class of outsiders who shaped the public discourse. In their depictions of workers on the pages of mainstream journals, novels, and reports, argued *La Ruche*, these outsiders made observations that did not always reflect reality as experienced by the workers themselves. Thus, even the very name given to the working class could not be spoken without some discussion about where that name came from. If we are *travailleurs*, stressed the editors of *La Ruche Populaire*, this is not for any natural or scientific reason but simply because we are “la portion du peuple qu’on a désignée de nos jours sous le nom de *travailleurs*” [the portion of the people that have been recently designated by the name *travailleurs*]. This handle, *travailleurs*, was one that was given to the workers by another social group (the “on” in this citation), and not a name that the workers had assigned to themselves. It was not the name itself that the editors objected to, but the manner in which it had been established. Ultimately, the workers’ movement accepted this label wholeheartedly, but *La Ruche*’s caveat of designation was meant to illustrate to what extent workers had not been able to represent themselves in the social discourse.

In addition to and as a part of their calls for worker-solidarity, the worker-run newspapers assigned themselves the task of creating a single working-class morality. In particular, they needed to promote an image of the worker as a highly moral individual that would run counter to the images painted in the major *enquêtes* commissioned by the

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10 Les Membres du Comité. *La Ruche Populaire*. December 1839. (p. 2)
\textit{Académie des sciences morales et politiques}. Contrary to the Académie’s assertion that the working class was generally weak in morality and that the upper classes had a duty to improve them, \textit{L’Atelier} affirmed the natural goodness of the worker and accused the dominant class of trying to degrade the lower classes by denying them education and opportunity. One writer observed that there seemed to be “un parti pris de nous corrompre,” and to leave the workers “ignorants de la morale qui fait les hommes, sans courage contre les sollicitations de l’égoïsme et capables seulement de comprendre nos passions et nos appétits” [a commitment to corrupting us… [leaving us] ignorant of the morality when makes men, without courage against the solicitations of egoism and capable only of understanding the passions of our appetites]. \textsuperscript{11} And yet, affirms the \textit{Atelier} writer, the conspiracy to keep the workers ignorant and immoral had not been successful: the creation of their paper was to serve as proof and guarantee of this fact.

Many of the worker-writers’ efforts to solidify the paradigm of work as active prayer were written in direct response to articles in moralist or industrialist publications claiming to speak on behalf of worker morality. In a letter published in the first issue of \textit{L’Atelier}, a worker responds to a piece written by a contractor, M. Lenoble, who condemns striking construction workers. Using a fairly typical paternalistic formula, M. Lenoble reminds the \textit{ouvriers} of the sacrifices he and other bosses are forced to make in order to pay their employees a fair salary while remaining competitive in the wider marketplace. According to this argument, the entrepreneur is more moral than the laborer, for he is the source of the worker’s morality, as he bestows \textit{le travail} on the worker, whereas the worker simply performs the work that he is given. A worker is moral, according to a widely-accepted liberal-industrialist understanding of social obligations.

\textsuperscript{11}unsigned. “Introduction” \textit{L’Atelier}. September 1840. (pp. 1-2)
(apparent in the enquêtes discussed in the previous chapters) only when he is performing work. The striking worker is therefore immoral for not performing his duty (devoir), which is to work. The writer of the response, a “commis négociant” named Lambert, combats this discourse using both legal and religious reasoning:

Nous savons comme vous que le droit s’acquiert par la pratique du devoir, et nous le pratiquons plus que vous. Notre temps tout entier, à nous autres, est occupé par des travaux plus ou moins pénibles et toujours mal rétribués ; […] au proverbe que vous nous citez : Qui travaille prie, et que nous vous engageons à méditer, joignez celui-ci : Celui qui ne travaille point ne doit pas manger.

[We know as you do that rights are acquired by the practicing of duty, and we practice it more than you. All of our time is occupied by labor, more or less difficult and always poorly paid; … to the proverb that you cite “He who works prays,” and that you engage us to ponder, add this: “He who does not work must not eat.”]¹²

Lambert takes up the moralist/industrialist paradigms of work as social duty and work as active prayer in order to turn them back on themselves. First, on a legal level: if, as the Guizot government has tried to argue, political participation is not a given right, but something that is naturally attributed to those in society who are the most capable (capacité being defined by Guizot in 1841 as the “faculté d’agir selon la raison”¹³), and earned through carrying out one’s duties (“la pratique du devoir”), then, argues Lambert, the workers have earned more rights than anyone. The worker’s devoir is to work,

Lambert doesn’t dispute this, and because he works constantly, he is always fulfilling his

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¹² Lambert. “Correspondance” L’Atelier. September 1840. (p. 8)
¹³ Cited in Rosanvallon, 96
duty. Therefore, he has earned the right (“le droit”) to play an active role in society, most notably through voting and association. But in addition to – and perhaps more important than – political representation, Lambert’s argument calls for a moral validation of the workers’ claims. At the end of the citation, Lambert refers to a popular saying of the time: “qui travaille prie.”\textsuperscript{14} If work is prayer, and if prayer leads to morality, then it follows that the workers are more moral than the entrepreneurs. But Lambert is not content to remain at the spiritual level of prayer; he goes on to add the Saint Paul quotation: “He who does not work shall not eat.”\textsuperscript{15} In this way, the metaphysical value of le travail is translated into very real, material terms. This interpretation of legal (Guizot), traditional (Augustin), and Biblical (St. Paul) discourses to support working-class values is an affirmation of the worker’s right to speak for himself, backed up by the legitimacy of historically respected authorities.

\textbf{Authenticity or Morality}

Taking it upon themselves to embody the paradigm of work as a moralizing value, the worker-intellectuals were soon faced with an internal conflict. Should they stress their authenticity as workers themselves, or should they promote a unified working-class identity based on a unified moral system? The writers of \textit{L’Atelier}, begun a year after \textit{La Ruche}, seemed to choose the latter. Their prospectus calls for a more uniform conception of worker identity and worker morality which goes hand in hand with the Buchezians’ aggressive version of worker solidarity according to a combination of revolutionary,  

\textsuperscript{14} Proverb attributed to Augustine and further popularized by Académie member Philibert Damiron in his \textit{Cours de Philosophie: Deuxième Partie. Morale.} (1834). It also seems to have come into vogue with Arthur Clough’s “Qui Laborat, Orat” (1847)

\textsuperscript{15} 2 Thessalonians 3:10. “Si quelqu'un ne veut pas travailler, qu'il ne mange pas non plus.”
The newer paper’s assertive style of expression, is highlighted by comparing the two papers’ prospectuses. For example, while *La Ruche* used the third person (*ils*), to designate the worker-writers, *L’Atelier* expressed itself in the first person (*nous*):

Nous sommes l’avant-garde des travailleurs, et […] nous réclamons, non pour nous seuls, mais pour le travail, mais pour l’industrie, pour tous ceux qui, comme nous, vivent chaque jour du pain qu’ils ont gagné la veille.

[We are the avant-garde of workers, and we make our demands not for ourselves alone, but for work, for industry, for all those who, like us live each on the bread he earned the day before.]

Unlike the editors of *La Ruche populaire* who pointed up the original inauthenticity of the name *travailleurs*, the Bucheziens fully assumed the label and even gave *le travail* their own definition. In this way, the worker-writers of *L’Atelier* shed the passive status of “namees” to take on the more active role of “namers.” The editors of *L’Atelier* set out a mission that went beyond providing a platform for workers to “dire ce qu’ils sentent” (see the prospectus for *La Ruche*). Instead, they identify themselves as l’avant-garde des travailleurs who speak for *le travail* in general. While *La Ruche* conceives of its constituency as a class of individual workers (*ouvriers, travailleurs*), *L’Atelier* uses the stronger image of *le travail* in the singular to evoke the image of a monolithic force. What’s more, the writers of *L’Atelier* establish a parallel between *le travail* and *l’industrie*, both defined as those who “vivent chaque jour du pain qu’ils ont gagné la

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16 For more on this, see Bowman, pp. 196-200.
veille.” This equality between the two terms is established by the repeated formula, “mais pour le travail, mais pour l’industrie,” and indicates that owners of the means of production and laborers were united by the same concerns. The adequation of le travail and l’industrie was an old idea, dating from the times of corporations, when masters and ouvriers had similar interests. The two terms had come to designate two opposing groups with the rise of capitalist and liberal systems. At a time when workers and industrialists were finding themselves increasingly at odds, this nostalgic assertion of unity between travail and industrie was a significant – if optimistic – statement. It placed the workers on the side of progress and sought to lift le travail from its connotations of vice and disorder.

As dedicated as they were to their moralizing cause, the directors of L’Atelier also wanted to provide a platform for authentic proletarian expression. As such, they found themselves caught between their need to promote their specific religious imperatives and the desire to allow for the democratic participation of all workers, who would not necessarily harmonize with their moral program. This push and pull between polyphonic self-representation (authenticity) and uniform morality (identity) can be observed in the paper’s membership policy, located at the top of the first page of each issue. Here, the editors detail the requirements for participating in the publication of the paper. As we can see, the requirements will change over time, reflecting the shifting importance that is placed on the two conflicting values of authentic (and potentially contradictory) worker self-representation and a single unified working-class morality. In November 1840, both values are invoked, but the emphasis is placed on authentic self-representation, which is given the primary position in the sentence and written in all-caps:
Pour être reçu fondateur, il faut vivre de son travail PERSONNEL, [et] être présenté par deux des premiers fondateurs, qui se portent garantie de la moralité de l’ouvrier convié à notre œuvre.

[To be received as a founder, one must subsist on his PERSONAL labor, [and] be supported by two of the first founders who will guarantee the morality of the worker called to our group.]^{18}

A year later, the basic message remains the same, but the emphasis on “personnel” has been removed. Here, it seems that the competing values of moral identity and authenticity are roughly the same level of importance:

Pour par participer à sa fondation, il faut vivre de son travail, et offrir des garanties de moralité.

[To be a part of its base, one must live off of his work and offer guaranties of morality.]^{19}

We can see that the language has become less precise and the requirements are more lax, both as to the morality of the writer and to the writer’s status as an authentic worker, but, based on the order in which the requirements are presented, the emphasis is still on self-representation. By the next year, November 1842, the tone has changed:

Il suffit, pour participer à cette œuvre, d’être ouvrier, de présenter des garanties de moralité, et de payer une cotisation mensuelle de 1 franc.

[It suffices to participate in this work, to be a worker, to present guaranties

^{18} unsigned. [editors’ note] L’Atelier. November 1840.

^{19} unsigned. [editors’ note] L’Atelier. November 1841.
of morality, and to pay a monthly fee of one franc.]^{20}

Putting aside the somewhat strange demand for a monetary contribution, the new submission statement is important for the shift in vocabulary: instead of requiring contributors to “vivre de son travail (PERSONNEL)” the policy asks that they be *ouvriers*. Thus, the identity of the person is no longer defined by what he does (he works - *travailler*), but instead by who he is (a worker – *un ouvrier*). Thus we can conclude that the imperative to construct a moral identity has taken precedence over the question of authenticity. This differs greatly from position taken by *La Ruche* when they assured their readers that they did not intend to become journalists, and by June 1844, the difference in the papers’ positions has grown even more:

> Tout ouvrier peut participer à la rédaction de *l’Atelier*, sous les deux conditions suivantes: 1° justifier qu’il est bien l’auteur des articles qu’il propose ; 2° se soumettre aux corrections indiquées par le jury.

> [Any worker may participate in the composition of L’Atelier, under the two following conditions: first, justify that he is truly the author of the articles he proposes; second, agree to the corrections indicated by the jury.]^{21}

First, there is the opening formulation *tout ouvrier*, which, in its inclusiveness, resembles the *Il suffit* from November 1842. In both cases, there is an opening up to all *ouvriers*; essentially, the only requirement is that you be a worker. In this most recent policy statement, it seems at first that the stress is placed on authenticity: the worker must prove

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^{21} unsigned. [editors’ note] *L’Atelier*. June 1844. (p. 129)
that he is indeed the author of his article, but it remains the case that the term *ouvrier* is a broad category. However, the emphasis on class identity – that the individual define himself not by what he does but by his belonging social category – still differs from the polyphonic inclusiveness of *La Ruche populaire*, and will serve as the blueprint for the type of worker solidarity that will take place on in February 1848. Looking at the two papers’ prospectuses, we can detect the tension that runs throughout worker-writer discourse, not only between the competing poles of authenticity and unified morality, but also between the opposing forces of narrowing its definition (to exclude the negative associations of crime and prostitution), and promoting it as a large category of bodily activity which includes all types of labor.

**Sentiment and Sensation of *Le Travail***

In spite of their differences, both worker-run papers believed in the importance of the participatory “je” or “nous” in the representation of work. In order to claim authority, a writer needed to be an authentic *travailleurs*, and in order to be authentic he had to have experienced the pains of harsh physical labor. According to this reasoning, it was not enough to have seen working conditions, as the enquêteurs had done; the authentic voice of *le travail* would have to have experienced the physical and sentimental sensations of work. In their system, it was not the “j’ai vu” of the enquêtes but a more intimate “j’ai vécu” that could give authority.

By the early 1840s, it had become increasingly common for writers to compare their literary efforts to physical labor. In his *Physiologie du poète*, for example, the journalist Texier mocks the seriousness with which the Hugo-like poet “Olympio” takes
his literary labor, and Daumier draws him deep in thought, lines of effort pulsing from his head (see image 3). Balzac was especially known for his excessive hours at the writing desk and for his use of the very physical verb *piocher* (to dig) to characterize the process of literary creation. However, in most cases, these comparisons were metaphorical; authors wanted to be seen as *like* the proletariat, but not proletarians themselves. Michelet, on the contrary, insisted that he *was* a manual laborer. Indeed, his preface to the 1846 *Le Peuple* describes in detail the historian’s boyhood experiences as an apprentice in his father’s printing press, where the work was both boring and physically uncomfortable. The dedication serves as a sort of justification for his writing of the book, which tells the history of France not from the point of view of its kings but by following the trajectory of its laborious people who were the real motors of progress.

In spite of his chair at the illustrious Collège de France, Michelet considered himself one of the *peuple* about which he wrote because of the labor alienation he had experienced during his days at the printing press. This alienation came in the form not only of physical discomfort, but also at the level of psychological pain. Michelet has vivid memories of long hours in the cold workshop, including a feeling of complete solitude except for a spider who worked alongside him. The figure of the tireless creature mirrors the boy’s own industriousness and underscores his loneliness. “J’y avais pour compagnie […] toujours, très-assidument, une araignée laborieuse qui travaillait près de moi, et plus que moi, à coup sûr.”22 In addition to bringing attention to the naturalness of *travail*, there is something very curious and poetic about the spider. Its presence in the workshop startles the senses and brings to life the young boy’s painful experience, not only on an intellectual level, but on a psychological one. This combination of physical and poetic

22 *Le Peuple*, 68
figuration of the experience of work announces work as a complex matrix of sentimental associations.

In spite of the ennui and the loneliness, Michelet does not depict his experience in the workshop as a purely negative one. On the contrary, he finds that the mindlessness of the repetitive manual tasks is excellent for the development of his imagination and that his mental wanderings improve his physical capacity. “Plus mes romans personnels s’animaient dans mon esprit, plus ma main était rapide, plus la lettre se levait vite.”23 This appreciation for the symbiotic relationship between physical and imaginative creation is analogous to another theme dear to Michelet, that is, the close relationship between spiritual, artistic and manual labor as embodied by the Lollards of the Middle Ages. According to Michelet, these Flemish weavers combined manual labor and religious meditation (Loller meaning to chant or sing softly) to turn repetitive physical tasks into a more meaningful and meditative activity.

The ease with which Michelet is able to identify with these strange figures is representative of how personally invested he is in his work of writing history. Not only is it pulled from the archives, but also from his own experience, which is not the professionalized observation of the enquêteurs but a personal and experiential testimony. In combining these two forms of knowledge, the historian is able to depict an image of le travail that is at once generalized and deeply personal:

Il arrive dans les travaux manuels qui suivent notre impulsion, que notre pensée intime, s’identifie [au] travail, le met à son degré, et que l’instrument inerte à qui l’on donne le mouvement, loin d’être un obstacle au mouvement spirituel en devient l’aide et le compagnon.

23 Ibid., 66
[It happens in the type of manual labor that follows our desires that our inner thoughts identify with the work, bring it to our level, and that the lifeless instrument to which we give movement, far from being an obstacle to spiritual movement, becomes an aid and a friend.]\(^{24}\)

In his use of the first person *nous*, Michelet draws his lineage from the Medieval Lollards and seems to offer such meditative reflection as a possibility for the manual workers of his day. A kind of labor that is at once spiritual and physical is available to all artisanal workers.

It is important to note that Michelet was not just any manual laborer, but a worker-intellectual. The difficulties he could recount were not those of the factory worker but those of the man of the people who sacrifices sleep and many hours of labor to pursue an education. As a student, he had recognized the disparities between his situation and that of his classmates, and suffered both physically and psychologically as a result:

[S]ans feu (la neige couvrait tout), ne sachant pas trop si le pain viendrait le soir, tout semblant finir pour moi, - j’eu en moi, sans nul mélange d’espérance religieuse, un pur sentiment stoïcien, - je frappai de ma main, crevée par le froid, sur ma table de chêne (que j’ai toujours conservée), et sentis une joie virile de jeunesse et d’avenir.

[Lacking a fire (everything was covered in snow), no knowing really knowing if I would have bread to eat that evening, everything seemed to be finished for me, I experienced – without any religious hope – a purely stoic sentiment. I banged my hand, broken from the cold, on my oaken

\(^{24}\) *Ibid.*, 99
table (which I have still), and felt the virile joy of youth and the future.]  

Like the description of the spider, this scene contains a strong organic image – that of the frozen hand pounding on the table – which emphasizes the sensory and psychological experience of the worker, told from the first person point of view. The table that he strikes is both a physical object and the symbolic representation of the difficulty of intellectual work. And yet, like the loneliness and the fatigue represented by the spider, this tale of physical and emotional pain is also one of “une joie virile de jeunesse et d’avenir.” There is a value of energy in physicality, even if it is apprehended through pain. It is because of this experience that Michelet, in spite of his exceptional status as a worker-intellectual, can represent and speak for all workers, even the factory worker. Like the writers of the workers’ newspapers, Michelet is convinced that a true discourse on le travail requires authenticity. The lived experience, which goes beyond the realist to see, is the only vehicle by which the psychological aspect of work may be understood and by which the political and sociological value of work may be expressed. Not content with a readability of the worker’s body, Michelet delves into the sentimental, sensorial aspect of being a working body.

**A New Definition of le travail**

Convinced that it would be through authentic self-representation and the cultivation of a unique working-class moral identity that the reality of work must be expressed, the worker-writers made their argument for a cohesive understanding of le travail as a modern value. To do this, the writers had first to distinguish le travail from

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25 *Ibid.*, 70
other social questions, like poverty and crime, and second establish a broader category of work that included both intellectual and physical production. This new paradigm would have to originate in the lived experience of physical labor, something Sand, the enquêteurs, and, as much as he may claim otherwise, even Balzac could not do. For even if one of the goals was to open up the category of \textit{le travail} to include intellectual labor, this gesture of inclusion must come from the worker-writers themselves, and not from the professional writers who wished to align themselves with the proletarians.

\textbf{Differentiation of \textit{Le Travail}}

In their project of creating a new way of speaking about labor, the writers of the workers’ press set about differentiating \textit{le travail} from the other social “problems” treated by the enquêteurs, namely the problems of vice and crime. They did this in three ways: first they had to make a distinction between good workers and bad workers; second, they had to create a discourse of work-morality that the “good” workers could subscribe to; and third, they had to establish a new way of reading the worker’s body that would reveal the worker’s inner morality.

As I have already shown, the modality of the social enquêtes of the 1830s and 1840s was one of diagnosis and treatment, and by including \textit{le travail} in their category of social “ills” – a list which included vagrancy, poverty, prostitution, and, in Frégier’s case, vice – the members of the \textit{Académie des sciences morales et politiques} were, perhaps unintentionally, hindering the emergence of work as a moral value. In the dominant discourse of the government and mainstream newspapers, the workers were being depicted as immoral, even degraded to the level of animals. And when they were
represented in a positive light, as in George Sand’s socialist novels, they were often idealized beyond recognition. Faced with these unflattering and impossible representations, the workers’ press had to invent a new way of representing the worker that was both authentic and moralizing.

In order to invent a new way of interpreting labor, the worker-writers had to engage with the dominant discourse, either by refuting its arguments or using its images to make their own argument in favor of a new worker morality. In his response to an article published in *Le Courrier français* in September 1842, in which the working classes are described as vicious because they spend their money at the cabarets on Mondays, Jules Vinçard shoots the accusation of immorality right back at the non-working class:

> [Q]uand vous osez chaque jour, vous, promener votre oisiveté vicieuse dans les cafés ou les cercles de la ville ? et Dieu sait si vos plaisirs du tapis vert, de l’écarté, sont bien plus moraux et plus exemplaires que les siens !

> [When you dare, every day, to parade your vicious leisure in cafes and town circles? and God knows if your pleasures of the gaming table, card games, are more moral or exemplary than his [those of the worker]!]

Through this accusation of hypocrisy, Vinçard tries to discredit the *Courrier* writer, thereby deflecting the guilt. At the same time, many of the worker-writers recognized that the workers themselves were contributing to this stereotype. For example, the editors of *L’Atelier* accepted many of the accusations levelled at the workers by those publications, most notably, that the leisure time of the working class was the cause of their degradation.

Especially in the factory settings, where backbreaking labor and extreme poverty were

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26 Vinçard. “Accord édifiant” *La Ruche Populaire*. October 1842. (p. 3)
often accompanied by excesses at the bars or the *barrières*, the working classes seemed to be falling into what Rancière calls “cette abjection qui consiste précisément dans l’indistinction entre la misère matérielle et la déchéance morale” [the abject condition of the ancient slave, which consists precisely in the lack of differentiation between material poverty and moral decadence, 262].

It was imperative that the worker-writers make clear the distinction between moral depravity and extreme poverty to show that not all poor workers were necessarily poor in morals. To do this, they had to establish two separate entities: the good worker and the bad worker, “pour bien montrer que l’ivrogne des barrières n’est pas seulement un ouvrier plus assoiffé que les autres mais le consommateur d’une liqueur de l’orgie qui n’a rien à voir avec le breuvage roboratif du travailleur” [to make clear that the barrier alcoholic is not just another drunken worker but the consumer of an orgiastic brew that has nothing to do with the invigorating beverage of the worker, 259].

The difference between the immoral and the moral worker was, therefore, not one of degree but of two different species. Nourished by different diets, they seemed to be composed of completely distinct substances.

**Formation of a Working-Class Morality**

When the worker-writers of the 1840s entered into the public discussion on the value of *le travail*, they were all too aware of the difficulty of promoting the moral importance of an activity that was physically and psychologically painful. For them, the Greek and Roman definitions of work as both physical torture and political incompetence were not simply a matter of etymology, but rather constant realities, lived in the workshop.
and in the chambers of government, where they were denied a voice. Thus, the type of physical and psychological alienation depicted by Balzac, Sand, and the enquêteurs was a familiar story. However, when it came to the moral value of *le travail*, the paradigm of work as active prayer proved to be an idea that did not speak for itself, but instead needed to be worked out. The competing Old- and New-Testament understandings of *le travail* made its moral value particularly ambiguous: did man’s work mark him as innately immoral, as the God of the Old Testament had declared to Adam,\(^{29}\) or did the worker, through his suffering, become more like Jesus, sacrificing his own well-being for the good of others? If they were to come together as a legitimate political force, the workers would need to have the moral fortitude to do so. But it was equally important to improve the morality of the workers precisely because it has been so thoroughly attacked by the writers of the bourgeoisie.

**Reading the Bible to Read the Worker**

One of the most useful tools the workers had for the creation of a specifically working-class definition of morality was scripture and the figure of Jesus himself. Lamennais had begun theorizing a reading of Jesus as a friend of the poor in his *Essai sur l’indifférence en matiere de religion* (1823), in which he urged the Church to take a greater interest in the physical needs of the people. Lamennais understood Jesus’ message as a call to social justice, as Bowman explains:

> [L]e Christ a mis fin à l’esclavage, il a fait des hommes des serviteurs de...

\(^{29}\)“Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat food from it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return.” Genesis 3:17-19
Dieu et non des esclaves des hommes. Jésus y est vu de moins en moins comme celui qui réalisa les prophéties et les figures, et de plus en plus comme celui qui fit une révolution dans la condition humaine.

Christ put an end to slavery; he made men servants of God and not of other men. Jesus was seen less and less like the figure who realized the prophecies, and more and more like the one who sparked a revolution in the human condition.]\textsuperscript{30}

His strongest critique was that, by supporting absolutist powers across Europe, the Catholic Church had lost its way and had become something that the original “Socialist” Jesus would have condemned. Much to the displeasure of conservatives, Lamennais founded his own newspaper, \textit{L’Avenir}, in 1830, in which he called for Church support for workers’ organizations. When the Vatican chastised him, Lamennais stepped down from his position as parish Priest, and continued to critique the ultra-conservative Pope Gregory XVI as a layman. In spite of his retirement from office, the radical Abbé remained influential, especially among a school of progressive Catholics, notably Maret, Lacordaire, de Coux, and Frédéric Ozanam, founder of the Société de Saint-Vincent-de-Paul. These social Catholics wanted to reconcile the three seemingly incompatible philosophies: “liberal” progress, “socialist” workers’ rights, and an “ultramontane” hierarchy where political power would take a backseat to spiritual authority. When Lamennais published his \textit{Paroles d’un Croyant} (1834), where he further developed his ideas of a socialist Jesus, Bowman tells us, it was a great success. “Les typographes pleuraient en composant le texte, et son succès fut énorme. Ce fut un des ‘grands événements littéraires’ – aussi bien que religieux et politiques – de la France” [The

\textsuperscript{30} Bowman, 190
printers cried as they composed the text, and its success was enormous. It was one of the
great “literary events” – religious as well as political – in France].31 Among these
typographers, of course, were the contributors to La Ruche populaire. The Saint-
Simonians had always had a complicated relationship with the Catholic Church – Saint-
Simon himself had proposed a New Christianity without Rome – and they found the
humanitarian bent to Lamennais’s interpretation of scripture reflective of their own
religio-political beliefs.

In 1846, Lamennais published an edited translation of the four Gospels, and his
notes and commentary provided his readers with compelling arguments against
institutions that would use biblical authority to promote inequality. For example, in the
Gospel of Matthew, Jesus tells a parable about a landowner and some workers he hires to
work his vines. At the end of the day, the landowner pays all of the laborers the same
amount, even though some of them worked a full day while others only put in a few
hours. When the full-day workers complain, the landowner makes the argument that it is
his money to spend how he wants. Although the parallels between the Biblical landowner
and the modern-day factory owner are striking, Lamennais interprets the parable not as an
argument for laissez-faire economics or even for liberal-style philanthropy, but as an
affirmation of Jesus’s mission to upend the current social order based on inequality and
individualism. In the commentary section after the parable, he writes:

Partout la tyrannique domination de quelques-uns, la servitude des autres,
opprimés au nom de la force, ou sur le prétexte insolent d’une supériorité
de nature. […] Jésus vient mettre un terme à ce profond désordre, il vient
relever ces têtes courbées, affranchir ces multitudes esclaves. Il leur

31 Ibid., 192
apprend qu’égaux devant Dieu, les hommes sont libres à l’égard l’un de l’autre ; qu’aucun n’a par soi-même de pouvoir sur ses frères ; que l’égalité, la liberté, lois divines de la race humaine, sont imprescriptibles ; que le pouvoir dès-lors ne peut être conçu comme un droit ; qu’il est, dans l’association qui le délègue, une fonction, un service, un dévouement, une sorte d’esclavage accepté par l’amour en vue du bien de tous. Telle est la société que Jésus commande à ses disciples d’établir entre eux.

[Everywhere, the tyrannical domination of some, the servitude of others, oppressed in the name of force or under the insolent pretext of natural superiority. … Jesus came to put an end to this profound disorder, he came to raise up these bowed heads, to liberate the enslaved multitudes. He teaches them that, equal before God, men are equal among each other; that not one of them has power over his brothers; that equality, freedom, those divine laws of the human race, are imprescriptible: that power can no longer be conceived of as a right; and that it is, in the association with delegates, a function, a service a devotion, a kind of slavery accepted by love in the name of the general well-being. This is the society that Jesus commanded his disciples to establish among themselves.]

Lamennais’s reading of the parable is empowering to the worker, pointing out that the landowner in the tale is not the entrepreneur, but God. In the face of God, all men – employees and employers alike, are equally small and equally powerless. As such, all of humanity should unite in order to form a sort of slavery of love (“esclavage accepté par l’amour”) that, according to Lamennais was ordered by Jesus himself. Applied in this surprising way, “slavery” subverts liberal discourse. Indeed, the use of the terms “slavery” and “association” would have spoken directly to the working-class reader.

“Association,” especially, was a deeply political term at the moment, the number one goal

32 Lamennais, 83
of the workers’ movement. By evoking such contemporary political concerns into his interpretation of scripture, Lamennais served as a model to the many fervently-religious workers who saw the Church’s teachings as incompatible with their own convictions.

It was important for the workers to have models within the Church such as Lamennais and Buchez, as well as more radical versions of religiosity such as Saint-Simon’s *Nouveau Christianisme*, for, despite scientific and philosophical moves away from what Comte called the Age of Metaphysics, the nation remained firmly attached to its Catholic roots. Therefore, rather than rejecting an institution that seemed to doom them to endless labor, the working class sought to reconfigure their relations. They were especially interested in a theory that would recognize the physical difficulty of labor without abasing work as a penitence for original sin. Beginning in 1843, following a split between the original founders and the new editor Duquenne, *La Ruche populaire* became overtly religious, engaging in questions of theology and spirituality as never before, and inviting Church leaders into dialogue. Many of these working-class writers were dismayed by use of religious values to promote capitalist ends. One such dialogue took place in the form of an epistolary exchange between *Ruche* writer Noël Roley (profession unknown) and the Abbé Castelbou, director of the Jesuit Société de Saint-Francois-Xavier. The Société, which considered itself a sort of “modeste université populaire, où seront enseignées, sous des formes agréables et faciles, toutes les connaissances utiles à la conduite loyale d’*une vie de travail*” [a modest public university where we will teach, in an agreeable and easy manner, all the knowledge useful

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33 See Sewell, 201-250
34 They went on to form a new paper, *L’Union*, which they considered to be the true successor to *La Ruche*. 
to leading a true life of work,\textsuperscript{35} had been holding public assemblies intended for the instruction of poor laborers. Roley attended one of these meetings in November 1844, and voiced his displeasure at its teachings in an open letter to the Société. In his letter, Roley expressed shock that one of the instructors was not a religious man, but “\textit{un Monsieur en habit de ville},”\textsuperscript{36} whose clothes clearly marked him as some sort of capitalist or industrialist. In the sermon, the man had explained that, were it not for original sin, man would be able to work forever without rest. According to this logic, not only is work a sign of virtue, but resting is a sign of sinfulness. Although the editors of \textit{La Ruche} did, indeed, believe that hard manual labor was a salutary activity, Roley found the industrialist’s theological argument indicative of a collusion between Church and capitalist powers. To convince the workers that working hard is penance and that relaxing is sinful is to claim a theological justification for industrial exploitation. After receiving a somewhat dismissive response from the Abbé Castelbou, Roley performs his own reading of the creation story to prove that neither work nor repose is sinful. For God himself worked for six days on the creation of the world, and on the seventh day rested:

\begin{quote}
Dieu nous ayant donné l’exemple du travail, voulut aussi, tant sa bonté est grande, nous donner l’exemple de repos ; et je ne puis voir là un châtiment.
\end{quote}

[God, in giving us the example of work, also wanted, his goodness so

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\textsuperscript{35} Nisard, 6
\textsuperscript{36} Roley, Noël. “Les confrères de Saint-François-Xavier à Saint Gervais.” \textit{La Ruche Populaire}. December 1844. (p. 375)
\end{flushright}
great, to give us the example of rest; I can’t see any punishment in that.]³⁷

Thus, because God both worked and rested, Roley can only conclude that work and leisure are neither punishment nor sinful. Two months later, the Abbé Castelbou responds unequivocally that, in fact, *le travail* is very much a punishment, as well as a duty:

*Le travail, Monsieur, est la première loi de l’homme ; avant comme après la chute il devait travailler. Mais les conditions du travail ont changé par le péché ; il est devenu plus dur, plus opiniâtre et plus stérile ; plus mal reparti et plus contraire aux forces de l’homme : c’est ce qui l’a fait appeler, ainsi que les infirmités et la mort elle-même, la solde du péché. Le travail est en lui-même aussi naturel que moral et nécessaire.*

[Work, Monsieur, is the first law of man; both before and after the Fall, he had to work. But the conditions of work were changed by sin; it has become harsher, more difficult, and more sterile; more disorganized and contrary to human forces: this is why we call it, like sickness and death itself, the price of sin. Work is in itself as natural as it is moral and necessary.]³⁸

These three sentences of the Abbé’s response provide an interesting look into the structure of the Church’s argument, which, although theological in nature, must be framed by political statements. The second sentence which judges the moral value of *le travail*, uses bleak adjectives that explicitly evoke disgust and displeasure such as “dur,” “opiniâtre,” “sterile” and “contraire.” The Abbé explains this ugliness using the same theological justifications that may be used for death and illness; they are all three, in his

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³⁸ L’Abbé Castelbou “À M. Roley” *La Ruche Populaire*. March 1845. (p. 81)
Representations of \textit{le travail} under the July Monarchy

words, “la solde du péché.” In the first and third sentences, however, he focuses on the positive and almost legal aspects of \textit{le travail}: it is both “la premiere loi de l’homme,” and a “devoir,” as well as “naturel,” “moral” and “nécessaire.” In the end, it is clear that the theological depiction of \textit{le travail} as penance must be backed up by a temporal argument that can arouse a sentiment of obligation and civic duty. Roley agrees that work is \textit{naturel, moral} and \textit{nécessaire} but still takes exception to its designation as a form of divine retribution. This view is shared by his fellow \textit{Ruche} contributor, Coutant, an \textit{ouvrier-compositeur} who wonders why the proletariat would seek out work so assiduously if it were a punishment for crimes committed by their forefathers:

Ordinairement, on se révolte contre une punition, surtout quand elle paraît injuste ; nous voyons, au contraire, les travailleurs réclamer qu’on le leur inflige sans trêve ; ils ne sont heureux que quand on leur assure du travail pour longtemps, c’est-à-dire, la punition du péché de nos ancêtres les plus éloignés.

[Usually, one revolts against a punishment, especially when it appears unjust; and yet we see workers demanding that work be inflicted upon them incessantly; they are only happy when their work has been assured for the long run, that is, the punishment of the sin of our most remote ancestors.]\textsuperscript{39}

Coutant points out that it is not God who inflicts work upon the workers, but the workers themselves who seek to labor, underscoring the agency of the working-class.

Simultaneously, the image of an entire class which solicits its own suffering paints the proletariat with a holy aura, evoking comparisons to Jesus or other martyrs. At around

\textsuperscript{39} Coutant. “Le Législateur” \textit{La Ruche Populaire}. January 1848 (pp. 7-8)
the same time, another *Ruche* contributor, a florist named Veuve Miesville, began writing a recurring column entitled “Lettres aux Français,” consecrating each month to a different question about God and society, always beginning with the following epithet: “Dieu protège *sic* la France pour en faire l’instrument de la régénération et de la félicité du monde,” *régénération* and *félicité* being the keys to the Saint-Simonian moral system. She published this column regularly between 1844 and 1848, although surprisingly little is known about her life outside of these pages. Like Roley and the Abbé Castelbou, Miesville carried out a reading of the creation story to support a specific moral understanding of work. In particular, she felt the need to explain the passage in Genesis where God tells Adam: “By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food.”

Le travail, she affirmed, was not a curse but a gift given to Adam to understand his new surroundings. Both before and after the Fall, affirmed Miesville, the two most important faculties that defined man were his physical labor and his contemplation, but, rather than representing different activities, the two are inextricably linked:

[Le travail,] qui, à l’égard de l’homme, est l’action qui lui fait acquérir la science et produire ; action si importante à la perfection et au bonheur de l’humanité, qu’elle est le point essentiel et particulier sur lequel le créateur a basé la régénération. [author’s emphasis]

[[Work] which, in regard to man, is the action of which makes him gain knowledge and produce; an activity so important to the perfection and the happiness of humanity, that it is the essential and particular point upon

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40 Genesis 3:17-19
which the creator based the concept of regeneration.]

In this statement, Madame Miesville takes as a given the inseparability of intellectual and physical labor. *Le travail* is a single action, but it flows in two directions, pulling information into the self and pushing creation into the world. To *acquire* (knowledge) and to *produce* (objects) are, therefore, two effects of the same cause, two sides of the same coin. Miesville’s moral order, which is based on Saint-Simonian ideas of progress and regeneration, depends upon an equal balance of intellectual and physical labor:

*[P]ar ses travaux d’esprit et de corps bien ordonnés, il commencera par modifier sa nature en restituant à sa puissance intellectuelle et morale sa prépondérance légitime ; puis par elle, il modifiera l’ordre social ; puis enfin il travaillera à modifier le globe lui-même.*

*[By his well-organized corporal and intellectual work, he will begin by modifying his nature in restoring its intellectual and moral power with its rightful power; by doing this, he will modify the social order; next, he will work to change the globe itself.]*

Indeed, a worker who is able to organize his forces in such a way that the work he performs is equally physical, intellectual, and moral will be restored to his legitimate nature. The trajectory of such a worker is one of growing reach: first the self, then society, then nature itself (“*le globe lui-même*”) will be affected by his work. In this way, Veuve Miesville anoints the worker-intellectual with the holiness of a martyr:

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41 Miesville, Ve. “Lettres aux Français, VI.” *La Ruche Populaire.* January 1847. (p. 27)  
42 Miesville, Ve. “Lettres aux Français, VII.” *La Ruche Populaire.* March 1847. (p. 90)
Representations of *le travail* under the July Monarchy

[C’]est ainsi que le *travail* auquel il est assujetti est un des moyens de la régénération, et que les *travailleurs* sont et seront les ouvriers mêmes de cette grande transformation sociale.

[It is in this way that the *work* to which he is subjected is one of the means of regeneration, and that the *workers* are and will be the laborers of this great social transformation.]^{43} [author’s emphasis]

It is the difficult and painful nature of work – its function as something to which the worker is subjected (*assujetti*) – that better allows the Saint-Simonians and other socialist groups to compare the modern worker to Jesus Christ, that other figure in history who suffered great physical pain in order to revolutionize human morality.^{44} At the heart of this movement was a paradoxical image of Jesus as humble carpenter and divine revolutionary. Some, such as Buchez and his followers focused on the revolutionary aspect of the Christ story, seeing progress as “une révolution continuelle […] jusqu’à ce que la volonté de Dieu soit accomplie sur terre” [a continuous revolution… until the will of God shall be accomplished on the Earth],^{45} and calling for action on the part of the workers to bring about social change. In a different manner Lamennais focused on “le sacrifice violent de la croix qui deviendra pour lui l’image du mécanisme du progrès dans l’histoire” [the violent sacrifice of the cross will become for him the image of the mechanism of progress in history].^{46} In both interpretations of Jesus as revolutionary/martyr, suffering became not a punishment for sin, but a revolutionary act

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^{43} Miesville, Ve. “Lettres aux Français, VII.” *La Ruche Populaire*. March 1847. (p. 90)
^{44} See Bowman
^{45} Ott. A. *Appel aux hommes de bonne volonté*. 1840 (p. 11). Cited in Bowman, 200
^{46} Bowman, 53
in and of itself, and by analogy, the workers could see their own difficult labor as an occasion for what Veuve Miesville summed up as régénération and félicité, or progress.

The Catholic Church did not take these heterodox interpretations of scripture lightly. When La Ruche asked the clergy to read Miesville’s “Lettres aux Français” their response was unequivocal. Everything that the florist has written, they state, is “faux, ou très entachée d’énormes erreurs, philosophiquement, historiquement, théologiquement, politiquement.”\(^{47}\) Such rebukes were not directed only at the worker-writers. Lamennais, of course, was told many times to stop publishing. Michelet’s relationship with the Catholic Church is especially interesting. The historian did not try to reinterpret scripture, but rewrite it. In his 1864 Bible de l’humanité, he argued that it was not the Church but the nation which served as the central motor of French history and progress. In spite of the Church’s injunctions, the image of a Socialist Jesus remained an important figure in the popular imagination. He was an appealing hero for two reasons: first, as a legitimizing authority, and also as the embodiment of physical pain and spiritual exaltation that seemed also to manifest itself in manual labor. This and other heteroclite interpretations of Christian teachings occupied a significant part of social discourse and offered a religious basis for a modern conception of le travail as a moral, political, and social value.

### A New Reading of the Worker’s Body

In addition to establishing a different reading of Bible which would legitimate workers’ claims to equal rights, the worker-intellectuals would also have to come up with a new way of reading the worker’s body. By the 1840s, claims Rancière, the worker-intellectuals were less interested in representing “le cœur pur battant sous les habits

\(^{47}\) Salmon. “Au gérant de la Ruche Populaire.” La Ruche Populaire. November 1847. (p. 268)
Representations of *le travail* under the July Monarchy

grossiers” or “des mains calleuses ou des fronts basanés.” [the heart that beats under plain clothes […] callused hands and bronzed foreheads, 258]. Using the realist or panoramic version of reading the signs of the body was not useful to them because it had become nearly impossible to distinguish the good worker from the bad one based on appearance. Where social observers once thought they could use visual signs such as clothing and gait to identify the poor but assiduous worker or the corrupt deadbeat, now all workers’ bodies seemed to becoming more uniform, all of them ravaged by drink or back-breaking labor or both, “ce spectacle mixte où les stigmates de la misère se mêlent à ceux de la jouissance pour composer la figure d’un peuple animalisé.”

One of the primary objectives of *La Ruche populaire*, as we saw in their prospectus, was to allow the working class to comment on issues that affected them, and to show that they had their own system of values. And yet, these new methods of evaluation could not spring forth out of nowhere. They had to be formulated in opposition to the dominant discourse. In his response to the bourgeois writers’ constant depictions of dissolute working-class morals, the tailor Desplanche had to first summarize the enquêteurs’ position and lay out their argument before he could offer up a new reading of *le travail*, not as an inevitable cause of worker immorality but as a means by which the weaknesses of society could be seen:

La misère séculaire qui pèse sur la classe ouvrière, selon certain moraliste, est due aujourd’hui moins à notre organisation sociale en elle-même qu’à la mauvaise conduite des ouvriers.

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49 Ibid.
[The secular misery which weighs upon the working class, according to certain moralists, is caused not by our social organization in itself, but rather by the bad behavior of the workers.]^{50}

The formulation suggests two possible causes of working-class immorality: the composition of the “organisation sociale” or the workers’ “conduite.” If the moralists attributed the most blame to the latter, this should come as no surprise. In addition to the liberal emphasis on personal responsibility and individual will that is implied by “conduite,” the term is also quite similar to another word anointed by Balzac as the most reliable way to read a person’s inner morality: “démarche.” The enquêteurs’ tendency to read the workers’ physical dejection as a sign of their moral decrepitude was in keeping with the goals of panoramic and realist literature to paint a world that was completely readable and transparent. The “organisation sociale,” on the other hand, which is where Desplanche places the cause of *la misère*, is a less stable target. Society is an undecipherable entity, a monster even,^{51} an amorphous mixture of signs that seems to defy readability? This explains why most of the social literature of the 1840s tends focus in on a specific human body or a type of human body, such as the worker, the prostitute or the pauper. This is the unit that is accessible to interpretation within the system of bourgeois signs.

If the worker-writers were going to counter the dominant bourgeois discourse, they would have to come up with their own system of signs. They would have to use a different language, in a sense, to come to the conclusion that the worker was not

^{50} Desplanche. “Un Mot à la bourgeoisie.” *La Ruche Populaire*. July 1841. (p. 7)
^{51} *Ferragus*, 794-5
immoral but, in fact, a practitioner of a different kind of morality. Putting into action his new language for reading the body, Desplanche declares:

À la physionomie pâle et sans poésie de l’aristocratie bourgeoise, nous lui préférons mille fois la classe ouvrière avec ses allures rudes et grossières. C’est que chez le peuple, avec ses passions violentes, il y a du cœur et qu’il est capable du plus grand héroïsme.

[We prefer a thousand times more the working class, with its rude and vulgar movements to the pale and poetry-less physiognomy of the bourgeois aristocracy. It is the people with their violent passions and their big hearts who are capable of the greatest heroism.]

Desplanche is using the language of dominant discourse against itself. If paleness was once a sign of distinction, it has now become a marker for lack of elegance (“sans poésie”). What’s more, the bourgeoisie has taken on the staleness of the aristocracy, while the worker is dynamic, poetic, passionate, and even heroic (“capable du plus grand héroïsme”). The violent passions of the peuple, condemned in the enquêtes as the source of the ouvrier’s undoing, have been transformed into a mark of distinction, precisely what makes him superior to the dry and heartless bourgeois.

**Michelet’s Definition through Differentiation**

Unlike the worker-writers who must adopt the dominant bourgeois discourse in order to deny it, Michelet alters that discourse profoundly by endowing it with a complexity that it did not have before. This complexity comes from his vision of *le*...
*travail* as an abstract value that can take on multiple images: be both the alienated *ouvrier* and noble farmer. While Balzac had set up a tableau of society in “Physionomies Parisiennes,” the phylogenesis that is sketched out in *Le Peuple* contains a temporal element, showing that society is not only put into motion by work, but also that this movement is one of progress through time. Michelet differentiates *le travail* from other social issues by establishing a new genealogy of social classes, that is, by writing a history of *le travail* from its beginnings in order to better depict the difference between *le travail* in its noble sense and other types of work that do not have this greater meaning. In his definition Michelet sets up a clear distinction between the workers’ physical alienation and their moral nobility. He agrees with the enquêteurs’ assertion that factory work is alienating, and indeed he goes into this quite a bit. “La machine ne comporte aucune rêverie” [The machine has no reverie],\(^53\) he states, summarizing succinctly the alienation caused by changing working conditions, which deny the worker any contact with the product of his labor and therefore any possibility for self-reflection. The factory is “un monde de fer, où l’homme ne sent partout que la dureté et le froid du métal” [a world of iron, where man can feel everywhere nothing but the hardness and the cold of metal].\(^54\) But even if the worker is physically alienated, argues Michelet, he may still remain morally intact. If, as the bourgeois press has so constantly remarked, the worker is given to excesses at the bar and in the brothel, Michelet explains this as a sign of his continuing humanity, his search for some sort of warmth outside of the factory

> L’homme se sent là si peu homme, que dès qu’il en sort, il doit chercher avidement la plus vive exaltation des facultés humaines, celle qui

\(^{53}\) *Le Peuple*, 93.  
\(^{54}\) *Ibid.*, 101
concentre le sentiment d’une immense liberté dans le court moment d’un beau rêve. Cette exaltation, c’est l’ivresse, surtout celle de l’amour.

[Man feels so little like a man there that, as soon as he leaves, he must search greedily for the most lively exaltations of the human faculties, those which concentrate the sentiment of an immense liberty in the short moment of a beautiful dream. This exaltation is drunkenness, especially of love]ˈ55

In search of some sort of human sentiment, which is nowhere to be found in the factory, man feels the need to find “love” wherever he can. Because his monotonous industrial work has rendered him incapable of recognizing real love, what he finds, “n’est plus que débauche.”ˈ56 And yet, argues Michelet, he still has the desire for it.

However, even the most alienated of the factory workers is more noble than the merchant. In the modern hierarchy of travail, the most honorable tasks involve creation or invention, often using science and technology. This work can be performed honestly and without shame or subterfuge. The most esteemed forms of “travail” are therefore farming and artisanal craftsmanship. The lowest form of work involves what Michelet calls the ordinary practices of commerce. Although a merchant may make more money than a factory worker, and may have more physical freedom, it is the latter who can perform his job in perfect moral tranquility: “Serf du corps, il est libre d’âme.” The merchant, on the other hand, will “asservir son âme au contraire et sa parole, être obligé du matin au soir de masquer sa pensée, c’est le dernier servage” [A serf in body, he is free in his soul… To subjugate one’s soul and one’s word, on the other hand, to be obligated morning till night

55 Ibid.
56 Ibid.
to mask one’s thoughts, that is the worst kind of servitude].

This ignoble work of the merchant provides a foil to better understand the nature of le travail in all of its nobility. The difference lies primarily in the lack of Hegelian creational alienation in the businessman’s type of work. In the first place, the merchant does not produce anything, whereas the travailleur has the joy of creating something foreign to himself and realizing his own identity. “[I]l n’a pas le bonheur sérieux, dignifié de l’homme, de faire naître une chose, de voir avancer sous sa main un œuvre qui prend forme, qui devient harmonique, qui par son progrès, répond à son créateur” [He does not have the serious joy, dignified of man, to create a thing, to see appear under his hand a work which takes form, which becomes harmonious, which, by its progress responds to its creator], because he does not make anything solid. Here Michelet seems to be speaking in terms of a formative alienation, in the Hegelian sense. True, the merchant doesn’t experience alienation, but this, according to Michelet, is to his detriment. Second, the merchant’s fortune relies on subterfuge, while the real worker can be paid transparently for the work performed: “L’ouvrier donne son temps, le fabricant sa marchandise pour tant d’argent ; voilà un contrat simple, et qui n’abaisse pas. Ni l’un ni l’autre n’a besoin de flatter” [The worker gives of his time, the industrialist gives his merchandise for so much money; here is a simple contract which does not demean. Neither of them has a need to flatter]. This noble work is at once physical (in that it produces, creates) and moral (for it is sincere and honest).

We can see here that it is not only the “original” worker (the farmer) who is noble, but also the laborer of the future, the factory worker and even the manufacturer. Michelet

\[57\] Ibid., 121
\[58\] Ibid., 123
\[59\] Ibid.
begins his genealogy with the idyllic farmer in his fields, and maintains the lineage all the way to the broken men in the crowded workshops. He establishes a family resemblance, evidenced through their common value of travail, and simultaneously inserts himself into that lineage.

**Abstraction of Le Travail**

Even while they are trying to lift le travail out of its more negative associations with crime and poverty, thereby restricting its definition, the worker-writers also try to make it into a more inclusive category, where manual and intellectual labors are equally legitimate. In this way, le travail becomes a more generalized term. For the Saint-Simonians of *La Ruche populaire*, the harmony of different types of labor was built into their very belief system. From Saint-Simon’s own call for a ruling trinity of artist/priest, engineer/intellectual, and physical worker/industrialist to Enfantin’s “rehabilitation de la chair” in 1831, the movement envisioned a type of palingenesis where the physical and metaphysical worlds were porous and parallel. This inclusive view of work as being able to include a wide variety of activities made the divide between intellectual labor and physical labor easy to cross, and when intellectuals such as Michelet claimed proletarian authenticity, they were open to listening to them. Although Michelet quit the workshop in adolescence, the text of *Le Peuple* shows that he continued to perform a different kind of labor, that is, his theorization of le travail as the driving force of History.

There are signs that the working class, although they agreed with his message, did not truly believe Michelet’s assertion of being working-class. For example, when Pierre Vinçard (nephew of the editor of *La Ruche Populaire*) wrote to Michelet in December
1847, he stressed the importance of maintaining a dialogue between the workers and the intellectuals, and he expressed the hope that their differences would soon disappear, but he did not go so far as to say that they were already gone:

[J]e crois que cette communion intellectuelle et fraternelle des intelligences d’en haut avec celles d’en bas sera une des plus méritantes, car c’est cette communion qui réellement efface l’esprit de caste et les privilèges.

[I believe that this intellectual and fraternal communion of lofty minds with those below will be one of the most deserving, for it is this communion which will really erase the spirit of caste and privilege.]\(^{60}\)

Indeed, rather than seeing equality between intellectuals and workers in the present, Vinçard places it in a near future, seeming to predict the coming revolution of February 1848, where the concept of \textit{le travail} will play a central role: “Le moment est proche et vous le préparez où l’on sera forcé de ne plus être ingrat envers lui [le peuple], car le titre de travailleur sera le plus glorieux de tous” [The moment is near, and you are preparing it, when they can no longer be ungrateful to the \textit{peuple}, and the title of \textit{travailleur} will be the most glorious title of all].\(^{61}\) Vinçard uses the terms \textit{peuple} and \textit{travailleur} interchangeably, demonstrating how the working classes are reading Michelet’s work, not as the history of the lower classes, but, more specifically, of the workers.

Even if the difference between the classes was not erasable in the present moment, and even if they did not completely accept his claims to worker-status, the workers embraced Michelet’s project. This blurring of the lines – of making all kinds of

\(^{60}\) Michelet \textit{Correspondance}, 474

\(^{61}\) Michelet \textit{Correspondance}, 475
productive work equal, both intellectual and physical – was at the heart of Michelet’s
*Peuple*, and his working class admirers understood this. They saw in the book, as well as
in his other works and his courses at the Collège de France a reflection of their own
concerns. The working classes attended his classes in droves. According to a witness who
attended the class on January 29, 1846, the day after the publication of *Le Peuple*, the
historian’s auditorium was enthusiastic and overflowing:

> Malgré la pluie qui tombait à seaux, il y avait queue à la porte du Collège
de France dès 8 heures du matin […] Tu ne peux point te figurer le
tonnerre d’applaudissements qui accueillit le professeur. Le calme s’étant
rétabli, il se fit un silence étonnant dans une telle foule et M. Michelet put
parler.

[Despite the rain which was falling in buckets, there was a line at the door
of the Collège de France as early as 8 o’clock in the morning… You can’t
imagine the thunder of applause that greeted the professor. When calm
was reestablished, there was a stunning silence among the crowd, allowing
M. Michelet to speak.]\(^62\)

It was not only the Saint-Simonians but all stripes of workers who filled his classroom. It
makes sense that the worker-intellectuals should accept Michelet, a former typographer,
as their ally and even mouthpiece. Like the tailors, the workers in the printing trade were
at the forefront of the proletarian movement, what Rancière calls “cette étrange avant-
garde de manieurs d’aiguilles et de petits carrés de plomb” [the curious vanguard made up
of those who handle needles and type characters, 46].\(^63\) The leadership of these somewhat

\(^{62}\) Letter from Eugène Noël to his parents. Cited in Michelet *Correspondance*, 20
\(^{63}\) Rancière, 58
mediocre workers – neither highly-skilled artisans nor completely alienated factory workers – was necessary in order to establish a common discourse of *le travail* that could apply to all workers, and also, on a symbolic level, to do away with the old forms of work-hierarchies which, as Rancière contends, were reflections of society-wide inequalities, the embodiment of, “au sein même du monde ouvrier la loi des castes qui détermine sa position subordonnée” [the law of castes that fixes the worker’s subordinate position [to] implant it in the very midst of the worker’s world itself]. To respect the work hierarchies that placed the carpenter above the shoemaker would be perpetuating what they saw as an outdated and problematic social structure based on privilege. The typographers and tailors existed in a liminal space between skilled and non-skilled labor and could therefore speak for all manual workers. What’s more, due to their close proximity with the bourgeoisie via the newspaper and book industries, the typographers served as a crucial point in the articulation of *le travail* as both manual and intellectual activity.

One can detect the proximity between the manual and intellectual laborers in the way the former often mock the latter. The *ouvriers* in the printing presses were especially apt to critique bourgeois writers. In an informative article about the different hierarchies within the printing profession, the typographer Vannostal erases any natural or skill-based superiority of the journalists to other workers (*metteurs en page, paquetiers*, etc). Their only distinction is that they are paid more:

Les journalistes sont des ouvriers qui, étant doués d’une dextérité assez grande, se sont assuré le monopole du travail des journaux, dans lequel on

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64 Ibid., 57-58
This passage places the journalist firmly within the category of manual laborer who has no superior talent other than the “dextérité” of securing for himself a monopoly on a certain type of work. Even spatially within the article, Vannostal affords no special importance to the journalist. His description appears before the sketch of the “paquetier” (who only gains about 40 sous per day) and after that of the “homme de conscience” (who gains 5 francs per day). This banal placement indicates that the journalist does not occupy any special rank in the printing world. It is difficult to tell whether this description is good natured or disdainful, but it clearly shows that Vannostal means to erase any sense of superiority that the professional journalist may feel towards the working class.

Occupying an intermediary spot between the intellectual world and the world of workers, Michelet was ideally situated to create a reading of le travail that could be used by both the bourgeoisie and the workers. Michelet argues that France is not a country divided into intellectuals and peuple but a country of love. “La patrie,” he writes in Le Peuple, “c’est bien en effet la grande amitié qui contient toutes les autres” [The

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65 Vannostal, L.J. “De l’Imprimerie Typographique.” La Ruche Populaire. April 1842. (p. 23)
66 Basically, a freelance compositeur.
motherland is indeed the great friendship which contains all other friendships], and this theme will serve as the basis for his course of 1846. One can even conclude that it was in part Michelet who inspired the great cooperation that took place between workers and intellectuals in February 1848. In an address dated January 7, 1848, after the cancellation of his course, Michelet urged his students to overcome class divisions by relying on “la parole fraternelle qui, sans intermédiaire, va, chaude et vive, au cœur ; et la même parole écrite, un nouveau mouvement littéraire, un large esprit, ni lettré, ni peuple, mais France” [a fraternal word which, without intermediary, goes warm and lively to the heart; and that same word written, a new literary movement, a large spirit, neither lettered nor peuple, but France]. It was not only le peuple who understood and embraced his language, but the members of the press as well. “Ce livre est fait tout entier par le cœur,” writes Alfred Husson in his Charivari review of Le Peuple dated February 19, 1846, “la tête et l’esprit n’y sont pour rien. Je soupçonne fort M. Michelet d’avoir écrit ce volume avec une fibre de cet organe” [This book is composed of the heart… the head and the intellect can add nothing. I suspect M. Michelet of having written this volume with a fiber of this organ]. This type of praise for the historian’s rewriting of history came from many different readers from varied social positions. Readers reported being moved to tears; it was said to come straight from the heart, and the book was called a “bonne action.” There is an effort to get around the difference between intellectual and manual labor by appealing to affect, or, more specifically, love.

In the end, it is not only work, but also love which drives all progress in

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67 Le Peuple, 199
68 Michelet Correspondance, 518
69 reprinted in Correspondance, 57
70 Michelet Correspondance, 118
Michelet’s retelling of history. These two forces, synthesized as la sève or life force of the French people. This sève, which recalls the vis humana imagined by Balzac is both “le travail” and “l’amour” and is most abundant in the agricultural worker who is brimming over with “la chaleur vitale,” “l’intensité,” “l’âpreté,” and “la conscience dans le travail,”71 but it is present in all real workers. What Michelet values so much about la sève is that it is a force of sacrifice. For Michelet, even ennui, that psychologically alienating force of le travail can be a sign of love, as is evidenced in the workers’ search for physical comfort (albeit at the bar and the whorehouse) after their long days in the sterile workshops. Even after an entire day of ennui, lacking social interaction, these workers do not lose their need for human contact. This ennui, this depravation of their sentimental needs, is proof of the sacrifice the workers make for France. The sacrifice Michelet calls for is no longer the Christian sacrifice of de Maistre, nor the military sacrifice of Napoleon, but a sacrifice of one’s life force in the form of physical labor, for the good of the nation.

Like the worker-writers of the La Ruche populaire and L’Atelier, the historian imagined a society that is held together not by religious or economic ties, but one that is based on the reciprocal sense of duties and rights, sacrifice and recognition. In 1844, the writers of L’Union had stressed the importance of both sides of the equation in an article which demanded, not the droit de travailler (the right to perform work) but the droit au travail (the right to be provided work by society), which required a sense of duty from the worker but also from the employer. In the importance that Michelet placed on the sève, this sense of duty should come not only from political obligation, but also from a sense of friendship between members of the same nation. It was this sève, a life force that did not

71 Le Peuple, 72
make distinctions between classes, but was present in all those who performed productive work with love that, according to Michelet, would allow all kinds of workers – manual and intellectual alike – to come together. In a sense, his prescription for social progress was accurate.

A decade earlier, the radical Republican Louis Blanc had already begun imagining *le travail* as unified social force. In his successful and influential, *L’Organisation du travail*, he was one of the first to suggest state-run workshops and one of the first to use the name *le travail* to designate a force that was at once moral, social, and economic. It was therefore fitting that it should be Blanc who formulated the famous decree which fulfilled – at least in words – the demands of the workers in February 1848.

> Le gouvernement provisoire de la République s’engage à garantir l’existence des ouvriers par le travail. Il s’engage à garantir du travail à tous les citoyens. Il reconnaît que les ouvriers doivent s’associer entre eux pour jouir du bénéfice légitime du travail.

> [The provisional government of the Republic commits itself to guaranteeing the living of workers through work. It will guarantee work to all of its citizens. It recognizes that workers must associate among themselves in order to enjoy the legitimate benefits of work.]\(^{72}\)

Although, as Francis Démier has noted, Blanc never used the exact phrase “droit au travail,” the message of the statement is clear: the workers have been officially recognized (“[i]l reconnaît…”), both as social beings (“l’existence”) and as legitimate citizens, possessors of political rights. In the provisional government of the Second

\(^{72}\) Cited in Démier, 161.
Representations of *le travail* under the July Monarchy

Republic, cooperation between writers and workers led to an astonishing rate of efficiency in passing legislation in favor of workers’ needs, including the right to association and the establishment of the Luxembourg Commission and the *ateliers nationaux*. These developments, although they would not last, are testament to the type of recognition and friendship that political activists of the Left expected from their government, and are the culmination of a discourse of *le travail* which has made work not a crime, nor a punishment, but a right and an honor to which all of society should aspire.
V. CONCLUSION

(C’était dans les premiers jours de juin) [...] “La charité? Merci!” s’écria Gorgu. “À bas les Aristos ! Nous voulons le droit au travail!”

-- Flaubert, 1881

In all of the texts discussed here, whether political, historical, scientific, or poetical in intent, there is a sense of duty on the part of the writer to come up with a new representation of *le travail*. The authors, observers of a new reality of work, seem obligated to write what they see. Balzac is compelled because work is everywhere; the enquêteurs, because they see it as a sickness; Sand, to suggest an improved reality; the worker-writers, because they demand political change, and Michelet, because our understanding of labor throughout history has been incorrect. Through his allegories, Balzac sets in place a paradigm for talking about *le travail* as both a physical reality and a metaphysical force but it is the worker-writers and Michelet who produces, in a sense, his own allegory, will turn this imperative of literary representation into one of political representation. The worker becomes not only the producer of material goods (as he was in Balzac), but the creator of social transformation. He is not only the object of the literary gaze, but a gazer himself. By 1848, as the widespread support for *le droit au travail* indicates, *le travail* has become not only a literary imperative but also a moral, social, and political value, accepted by all.

Despite their disciplinary and philosophical differences, the texts in my corpus share a similar insistence upon the insertion of the authorly self into the narrative. The “je” – either as a first-person narrator or a sense of earnestness on the part of the writer –
guarantees the veracity of the testimony. Balzac’s unofficial manifesto of realist literature set up in the “Avant-Propos” prioritized the scientific observation of society by expert witness, demanding that events be recounted based on real things seen rather than imagination. In spite of their differences, we can observe this same sort of imperative to see a new reality, not only in the scientific social enquêtes, but also in Sand’s utopian tales of social harmony. The je is equally prevalent in Michelet’s *Le Peuple* and in the worker-writers’ texts, only now the first person pronoun has shifted from that of an objective observer to one of a lyrical participant. No longer is it sufficient to say “j’ai vu…” but to talk about labor one must insist “j’ai vecu…” The author’s transformation from social observer to embodiment of a political ideal marks a shift in the understanding of le travail, from that of moral and social phenomenon to that of an object of discourse to a reclamation of rights (*le droit au travail*).

Social discourse in the July Monarchy was full of images and ideas about labor: its organization, its different manifestations, its moral importance, and its physical power were all subjects of debate. The term, *le travail*, seemed to carry so many different connotations that nearly every political faction or social group could claim it to speak in their proper interests. As such, the literature of the period provides a rich corpus from which to draw conclusions about that culture’s understanding of the nature of work, before the arrival of Marxism. From social historians such as Louis Chevalier to William Sewell to Philippe Régnier to Dominique Kalifa, the library of works which focus on the overlapping of social, political, moral, and literary discourses of work is full of illustrious names.
This dissertation is unique in that it traces the development of a discourse on work which begins in the literary realm and reaches towards political realization. It places disparate texts into dialogue with one another, not to point up their differences (which, in the case of these heterogeneous texts, would be quite easy) but to figure out what common sets of images and languages they are drawing from. By granting Balzac the privileged position as the founder of this discourse, I am not arguing that he invented this way of representing *le travail*. Balzac himself insisted that his stories were not imaginary but rather the things that happen everywhere. However, I do contend that he was the most important force in making it ubiquitous: both through the genius of his images and through the pure weight and variety of his texts. What’s more, this dissertation tries to take seriously a group of texts which have usually been avoided by literary scholars. The articles written by the worker-writers of *La Ruche populaire* and *L’Atelier* have already been the object of serious historical study, but the literary practice of reading these pieces on their own terms and as part of the wider cultural landscape is new.

This study, while it tries to understand a large conversation that is taking place across social groups, does not capture a complete picture of society. For the sake of concision, important voices in the discussion about work, notably Victor Hugo, Flora Tristan, and Charles Fourier have been left out. No doubt, an investigation of texts by these authors and others would provide a richer understanding of the various matrices of meaning that were circulating. Additionally, I was unable to go into detail as to the political events taking place during this period. Especially when reading the worker-run newspapers, more contextualization would be invaluable. Instead, I chose to focus on a group of texts whose relationships were not immediately evident, but who seemed to be
using the same set of images to represent realities of labor, and who seemed to be in
dialogue with one another, either directly or indirectly. I found their many disagreements
belied common assumptions about work and society, which led to the emergence of *le
travail* as a universal value that was not just moral, but also social, and eventually
political.

In the future, I would like to further investigate two specialized problems that
came up in the dissertation. First, I would like to explore the relationship between the
woman and the worker-intellectual (or worker-poet, as he is often called). Two of George
Sand’s novels, *Le Compagnon du Tour de France* (1840) and *La Ville Noire* (1859)
feature a worker-intellectual hero who becomes trapped in a moral dilemma and is able to
escape only with the active intervention of his rational and practical female counterpart. I
would like to see if these narratives can give us insight into the role of the working
woman in the popular imagination. Second, to better understand this, I would like to look
at how ideas of masculinity and femininity get played out on the pages of the worker-run
newspapers of the 1830s and 1840s, not only in the *L’Atelier, L’Union, and La Ruche
populaire*, which included female contributors, but also in the explicitly feminist papers
*La Tribune des femmes* and *La Voix des femmes*. Drawing on the wealth of feminist
scholarship and taking part in an emerging field of journalism as literature, this research
would add a new perspective to the understanding of work in the July Monarchy, which,
although well-studied, still contains a wealth of sources outside of the canon that have yet
to be explored seriously. Jacques Rancière’s foundational work on the workers’ press has
long dominated the field. Because of the thoroughness with which he exploited his
sources, his work serves for me as a reference rather than an object of critique. However,
I hope in the future to become as familiar with this rich archive in order to come up with my own critical voice, and contribute to a better understanding of this important corpus.
Representations of *le travail* under the July Monarchy

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Representations of le travail under the July Monarchy


Representations of le travail under the July Monarchy


Rebecca Terese Powers
rpowers7@jhu.edu

EDUCATION

**Johns Hopkins University**, Baltimore, MD  
PhD. May 2015. Dissertation: “Representations of *le travail* under the July Monarchy (1830-1848)”

**Tulane University**, New Orleans, LA  
M.A. 2009 French Literature and Language  
B.A. 2004 Political philosophy, major

PUBLICATIONS

"Charles Testut and *Les Mystères de la Nouvelle-Orléans*: Journalism in Exile"  
*Médius 19* [En ligne]. Actes de colloque *Les mystères urbains au XIXe siècle : circulations, transferts, appropriations Littérature, Histoire, Médias.* (4500 words)


CONFERENCE PAPERS AND OTHER PRESENTATIONS


(continued)


TEACHING

Fall 2014  JHU, Instructor – Paris Underground: Paris Souterrain

→ Three-credit upper-level undergraduate literature and culture course conducted entirely in French
→ Focus on close reading of literary texts and French writing exercises (explication de texte and dissertation)

2013-2014  Towson University, Instructor, French Elements (French 101, 102)

→ Three-credit French language course
→ Ensure department-determined learning outcomes
→ Responsible for all pedagogical material, including oral and written exams and cultural enrichment activities.

2013-2014  JHU Department of GRLL, Teaching Assistant – Advanced Writing and Speaking in French (French 301, 302)

→ Three-credit French language course
→ Analysis and discussion of thematic texts and films, grading and consultation with students on weekly writing and revision exercises

2013  INSEEC, Paris. Instructor – Conférence de Méthode

→ Adapt French course into English for non-native speakers
→ Teach MA students to form and express persuasive arguments in oral and written forms in English
→ Total of 120 students, 6 contact hours/week

(continued)
Jan, 2012  JHU Winter Session, Instructor – Paris Underground
→ Intensive one month 15-hour course
→ Introduction to French culture via historical, literary, and film representations of Parisian underworlds

2009-12  JHU Department of GRLL, Teaching Assistant – French Elements and Intermediate French (French 101, 102, 201, 202)
→ Three-credit French language course per semester
→ Weekly meetings with teaching coordinator

OTHER PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

2012-15  JHU GRLL, Graduate Student Forum (GGSF) Representative
→ Meet monthly to discuss department policy
→ Serve as liaison between graduate members and other organisational bodies, i.e., directors of graduate studies, university-wide graduate student government groups

2011-13  JHU Milton S. Eisenhower Library, Service Desk Supervisor
→ Coordinate various library departments, i.e., electronic reserves, audio-visual, reference librarians, and IT support
→ Maintain databases, i.e. requests, recalls, and reports
→ Supervise and assist undergraduate workers

2011  JHU French, Conference Organizer (Normes et Formes)
→ Compose call for papers, select participants, create panels
→ Construction and maintenance of website, communication with participants and keynote speaker, Antoine Compagnon
→ Oversee all logistical details

2008-11  Tulane University Yvonne Arnoult Chair for Francophone Studies, Translator
→ Consult with Chair as to purpose and audience of text
→ Translate scholarly and other texts, i.e., book proposals, conference papers, and cover letters (French to English)

2008  Tulane University Payson Center, Translator
→ Assist in creation of training program for social workers helping AIDS patients in Francophone Rwanda
→ Translate English materials to French for student use
→ Translate French student work to English for professors

2004-07  Peter Hart Research Associates, Focus Group Coordinator
→ Responsible for back-end operations of qualitative studies
→ Recruit, hire, train, and manage temporary employees
FUNDING AND ACADEMIC AWARDS

**Fall 2014**  Dean’s Teaching Fellowship, Johns Hopkins University
**2012-2013**  Pensionnaire Étranger, École Normale Supérieure
**2010-2011**  F. Millard Foard Fellowship, Johns Hopkins University
**2009-2014**  Gilman Fellowship, Johns Hopkins University

PROFESSIONAL MEMBERSHIPS

- Society of Dix-Neuviémistes (SDN), member
- Nineteenth Century French Studies (NCFS), member
- Société des Études Romantiques et Dix-neuviémistes (SERD), member
- Doctoriales de la SERD, member
- GRLL Graduate Student Forum (GGSF), French section representative

SKILLS

Languages
- English (Native)
- French (Near-Native)
- Italian (Reading Knowledge)

REFERENCES

Jacques Neefs, James M. Beall Professor of French Literature  
Johns Hopkins University Department of German and Romance Languages and Literatures  
niejfs@jhu.edu  Tel. +1 410 516 7727

Dominique Kalifa, Professeur d'histoire contemporaine  
Université Paris 1 Panthéon – Sorbonne Centre d'histoire du XIXe siècle  
Dominique.Kalifa@univ-paris1.fr  Tel. +33 (0)1 40 46 28 20

Bruce Anderson, Senior Lecturer, French Language Coordinator  
Johns Hopkins University Department of German and Romance Languages and Literatures  
bcanderson70@gmail.com  Tel. +1 410 516 0478

Derek Schilling, Professor of French Literature  
Johns Hopkins University Department of German and Romance Languages and Literatures  
dschilling@jhu.edu  Tel. +1 410 516 7727

Jean-Godefroy Bidima, Yvonne Arnoult Chair in Francophone Studies  
Tulane University Department of French and Italian  
bidima@tulane.edu  Tel. +1 504 862-3116