



La Duchesse De Langeais (French Edition)

Honoré de Balzac

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Le colonel de Montriveau est épris de la duchesse Antoinette de Langeais, une coquette qui se refuse à lui et qui disparaît. Aidé par les puissants Treize, sorte de franc-maçonnerie aux pouvoirs occultes comme Balzac aime à mettre en scène, il la poursuit jusqu'à un monastère espagnol où elle s'est réfugiée sous le nom de sœur Thérèse. Là, elle accepte de le recevoir en présence de la mère supérieure à qui elle fait croire que cet homme est son frère. Mais, au dernier moment, elle avoue sa faute en même temps que son amour longtemps caché pour Montriveau. Ce début amène un long retour en arrière, à l'époque où la duchesse menait le monde par le bout du nez, faisant ménage à part avec son mari et méprisant ses soupirants. L'esprit des Treize imprègne le roman, en particulier la scène de violence où l'on voit Montriveau, conseillé par Ronquerolle, menacer la duchesse de la marquer au front avec une croix de Lorraine rougie au feu.

Dédié à Franz Liszt, ce portrait d'une coquette représentative des nobles familles du faubourg Saint-Germain, qui tiennent leur fortune de leurs terres et qui vivent dans le mythe d'une naissance supérieure, fut inspiré à Balzac par la Duchesse de Castries avec laquelle il eut une aventure orageuse, et qui l'humilia en se refusant à lui. Balzac en conçut d'abord une violente rancœur, puis les relations devinrent plus cordiales après la parution de La Duchesse de Langeais, même si la duchesse de Castries y est peinte dans un portrait assez peu flatteur.

En indiquant que l'ouvrage a été terminé à Genève le 26 janvier 1834, Balzac voulait aussi envoyer un signe à Ewelina Hańska à qui il avait beaucoup parlé de cet ouvrage durant ce mois de janvier passé non loin d'elle. L'histoire, qui montre comment l'écrivain s'est vengé des froideurs de la duchesse, aurait servi de mise en garde contre un éventuel refus amoureux de sa part — une crainte heureusement dissipée ce jour-là.

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