

# BALZAC

*Philip Higson*

(to Julien Penel)

translated from the French of Rollinat

Balzac is our consummate poet in prose,  
And no mind prone to plumb the human Hell  
Did more today's neuroses to expose,  
Or climbed in pure Art by a steeper fell.

Curious, tense, grave, in a cold age he chose  
To search its bowels, dissect its hand as well;  
His work a sentient park in which the rose  
Conducts dark nuptials with the asphodel.

A bitter miner, hacking at Truth's coals,  
He's the great charmer of corroded souls  
By spleen's, doubt's and remorse's canker chewed;

And our society, farcical and tragic,  
Mirrors its passions in this crystal's magic,  
Like life two-faced, like death displayed quite nude.

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