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PROGRESS AND INDIVIDUAL DESIRE: BALZAC, FLAUBERT, ZOLA AND HARDY

City University of New York PH.D. 1985

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PROGRESS AND INDIVIDUAL DESIRE:

BALZAC, FLAUBERT, ZOLA AND HARDY

by

CLARE HIGGINS

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty of Comparative Literature in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy The City University of New York.

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date

Bunton Pike
Chairman of Examining Committee

December 14, 1984
date

Bunton Pike
Executive Officer

Professor Mary Ann Caws

Professor Hanna K. Charney

Supervisory Committee

The City University of New York

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. Introduction

I propose to examine the creation of the myth of progress by some principal French and English sociologists of the early to mid nineteenth century, and how that myth came to be both incorporated and challenged in major works of French and English realistic fiction, chiefly in Balzac's La comedie humaine, Flaubert's L'éducation sentimentale, and Zola's L'assomoir, as well as Thomas Hardy's Return of the Native, The Mayor of Casterbridge, and Jude the Obscure. These novels are portrayals of social man, which evaluate the possibility of compromise between man's desire for autonomy and the preservation of general social order. "Indeed the supreme objective of Western philosophy and science so far as the study of man is concerned is somehow reconciling the demands of individuality, order and freedom."[1] Both the sociologists and the novelists we shall discuss describe progress as dependent upon this reconciliation, but they come to differing conclusions as to what extent it can be achieved, and their ultimate prognoses as to the fate of man and civilization diverge greatly. By contrasting the optimistic visions of positivist philosophy with the pessimism of Balzac, Flaubert and Zola, and by evaluating the myth of progress in England in general and Hardy's work in particular, I hope to achieve an understanding of the nine-

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[1]Robert A. Nisbet, Sociology as an Art Form (New York: Oxford University PRess, 1976), p. 39

teenth century realistic novel's vision of man, specifically, what the limits are to his individuality vis-a-vis the social structure of which he is part, and to what extent he is master of the "progress" of his destiny.

The nineteenth century in Europe is the "century of progress" for many reasons, not only because of its accelerated development of industry and agriculture, but because progress as a moral reality pervades so much sociological thought from the late eighteenth century onward. If we focus on France, we witness a society whose hierarchical system was broken down in 1789 and which was rebuilt repeatedly upon one set of laws after another. The need for a stable, harmonious society sure of its future direction was recognized by many historians, whose concern was "the achievement of an explanation of structure or order on the one hand and of change or development on the other. No matter what the structure under consideration -- mankind, society, culture as a whole . . . the overriding aim was that of obtaining movement conceived as development."[2] Such historians as Condorcet, Delaborde, Saint-Simon and his followers and Comte strove to isolate the active principle of coherence, not merely in the Revolution as a specific historical event but in the whole socio-historical life of mankind. They also sought to evaluate the extent of man's

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[2] Ibid., p. 94.

participation in civilization's progress. Most important are their theories on the power and effect of man's will and the nature and scope of his desires, because these writers specify desire and will as the catalytic agents of individual and social progress and as the chief concerns of social morality. I emphasize this because the relation of individual desire and will to progress also becomes a concern of many major realistic novels, as we shall later see. Let us first discuss some of the early French and English creators of the ideal of progress.

The work of Condorcet, for example, is a reaction to the Revolution and to the spectacle of a fragmented society in need of unified direction. Even during the Terror, Condorcet expressed his hope for a new and regenerated world. The seeming promises of the American and French revolutions fired him with such enthusiasm that he set out to describe the successive changes in human society as advancing toward a democratic utopia of universal equality. This progress would be concurrent with and dependent upon the increasing perfection of human intellect, from primitive to modern times. Intellectual progress was inseparable from an increasing respect on man's part for virtue and for the rights of others. Man's perfectibility was a dynamic, manifold process that would continue en masse, independently of individual will.[3] This emphasis on ordered and uninterrupted

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[3]Marquis de Condorcet, Esquisse d'un tableau historique des progrès de l'esprit humain (Paris: 1795, n.p.), as referenced in John Bury, The Idea of Progress (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1960), pp. 208 - 215.

movement through time pervades a good deal of the socio-historical writing of the early nineteenth century in France, and there is a repeated insistence upon progress as dependent on the predominance of the "general good" over private individual satisfactions. The writings inspired by the development of industry after the Revolution provide a case in point.

Advances in industry, which had not stopped even during the Terror, found new impetus under the reign of Napoleon, whose continental blocade created a greater need for domestic production. The Legion of Honor also provided motivation for greater ingenuity in the invention of machines, as did the "Société d'encouragement pour l'industrie nationale." After the fall of the Bonapartes, the enormous national debt made internal production even more necessary, and the Bourbons continued to encourage and organize industry, and to sponsor industrial exhibitions.[4] It was on the whole an age of plentiful production, in which many sociologists hoped that "l'ère des combats était close ... les seules luttes possibles entre peuples civilisées étaient les batailles pacifiques de l'industrie."[5] In Le censeur

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[4]Georges Weill, Saint-Simon et son oeuvre (Paris: Perrin et Cie, 1894), pp. 95 - 98.

[5]Ibid., p. 97.

européen Charles Comte and Dunoyer insisted that social order depended upon a balanced economy bolstered by peaceful, organized labor.[6] Ganhil's La théorie de l'economie politique advised that "tant que les hommes seront dominés par la passion des richesses, et il est bien à craindre qu'elle ne dure autant que l'espèce humaine, il n'y aura que deux moyens de la satisfaire, ou la guerre et les spoliations, ou la paix et le commerce. Souverains de la terre, choississez!"[7] (Emphasis added). Ganhil perceived desire (specifically, the desire for material gain), as man's permanently dominant trait, and he insisted upon society's need to direct that desire into the productive channels of organized labor, so that it would not find more violent expression through war. Human desires were less threatening to social order in Delaborde's view. He believed that man was naturally gregarious and happiest in a collective element, such as organized commerce or agriculture. And solidarity, rather than the satisfaction of private interests, was the key to ordered progress.[8]

Clearly such sociologists saw the age of progress as more than an era of material improvements. The new age

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[6]Le censeur européen, n.d., n.p. as referenced in Weill, p. 98.

[7](Paris: 1822), Vol. II, p. 486, as quoted in Weill, p. 98.

[8]De l'esprit d'association (Paris: 1821, n.p.), as quoted in Weill, p. 100.

prompted a new definition of man, of the direction mankind was taking and the role of the individual in that movement.

These questions also began to pervade much of the socio-historical writings of late eighteenth-century England, where the French Revolution evoked both vehement attacks, as from Burke's Reflections on the Revolution in France (1790) and sympathetic reactions, from such progressive thinkers as Paine in his Rights of Man. [9] These works evaluate not only the Revolution itself, but also its implications about the relations between ordered civilization and individual desires. Burke renounces the revolution as a blind, aimlessly destructive movement toward anarchy. "When men of rank sacrifice all ideals of dignity to an ambition without a distinct object . . . the whole composition becomes low and base. Does not something like this now appear in France? . . . a tendency in all that is done to lower along with individuals all the dignity and importance of the state?"[10] Yet rather than denying the importance of individual rights, Burke attempts to reocncile those rights with the state's need for control. He does this by asserting that although men have a right that their desires should be provided for by government, among men's rights is the right to be re-

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[9]John Bury, The Idea of Progress (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1960), p. 224.

[10]Edmund Burke, Reflections on the Revolution in France and Thomas Paine, The Rights of Man (New York: Dolphin Books, 1961). p. 60.

strained. "Society requires . . . that the passions of men should be subjected [and] their will controlled . . . This can only be done by a power out of themselves . . . the restraints on men, as well as their liberties, are to be reckoned among their rights."[11]

In his answer to Burke, Paine insists that even the best government is only a small part of civilized life, existing more in name and idea than in fact. It is not the source of social harmony. That harmony arises naturally out of the mutual cooperation of men, who are by nature fitted for social life.[12] "If we consider what the principles are that first condense men into society, and what the motives that regulate their mutual intercourse afterward, we shall find, by the time we arrive at what is called government, that nearly the whole of the business is performed by the natural operations of the parts upon each other . . . Government is nothing more than a national association acting on the principles of society."[13] Paine's intention is to justify revolution as an essential aid to progress by questioning the idea of government as a fixed, providentially determined entity: "there never can exist a parliament . . . possessed of the right or the power of binding

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[11]Burke, pp. 72-73.

[12]Paine, p. 398, 403.

[13]Ibid., p. 400, 403.

and controlling posterity to the 'end of time.'"[14] Interestingly, Burke and Paine concur on the definition of man as a creature naturally inclined to harmony, order and cooperation, but they differ as to how that harmony is achieved. Burke claims that men naturally desire to have order imposed from without; Paine, that order develops naturally from within men. In each case the general well-being of society is of paramount importance.

Because governments and societal institutions have often proven to be repressive, Paine insists upon the need for democratic reform and demonstrates the flexibility of government, and its ability to absorb change and undergo progress. But this same flexibility may cause the state to break down into anarchy if the individual passions of men are not somehow controlled. Paine's confidence in man's ability to exert this control is shared by Jeremy Bentham and William Godwin.

Like Burke and Paine, Bentham and Godwin seek to reconcile the demands of individuality, order and freedom within society, but they concentrate in more detail upon the definition of the nature and function of human desire and will, and how these relate to the general good.

Bentham defines man's desires as either social (e.g., good will, friendship, religious devotion) or dissocial and

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[14] Ibid., p. 277.

self-regarding (e.g., lust and greed). Man's social tendencies, above all good will, tend to augment the happiness of the community, whereas his self-regarding motives diminish such happiness. All evil acts are motivated by dissocial tendencies. Nonetheless, Bentham is convinced that every man has all of the social motives in varying degrees, and each man is always motivated to consult the happiness of others. Man has a natural understanding of the principle of utility, by which principle the well-being of the community is the goal of all action.[15]

Godwin is also concerned with how the individual may be made to contribute to the general welfare, and he examines the relation of individual desire to reason, and to the social community. Godwin believes that man's desires are always open to the guidance of his reason, which teaches him that virtue is the desire of the happiness of the species. It is only necessary to show man the value of virtue for him to long for its attainment. Since his reason is capable of perpetual progress, man's perfectibility consists in his ability to learn such virtue.[16]

Whatever the field of discussion -- politics, society,

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[15]An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation [1789], ed. Laurence J. Lafleur (New York: Hafner Publishing Co., 1948), pp. 2-3, 120-121, 313.

[16]Enquiry Concerning Political Justice [1791-1793], ed. K. Codell Carter (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), p. 17, pp. 52-59, p. 148.

or morality -- the question of human desire vs. ordered progress appears again and again in English socio-historical thought following the 1789 Revolution. In Malthus' essay on population, essentially a statistical study, Godwin's concept of perfectibility is refuted. For Malthus, human reason, even acting through legislation and government, does not have the power to modify human behavior. Sexual passion has always caused and will continue to cause population growth to exceed food supply, and a decline in the health and welfare of mankind is inevitable.[17]

Despite Malthus' dissenting voice, the French Revolution did, at first, impress many English writers as the promise of fulfillment of their dreams of perfectibility and progress. But after the Reign of Terror, the dictatorship of Napoleon and the Napoleonic wars, the ideal of progress did not inspire much hope in the minds of English historical writers.[18] Nonetheless, during and after Napoleon's reign, this ideal was kept alive in France by Saint-Simon, whose socio-philosophical system was the first to gain wide acceptance throughout Europe.[19]

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[17]Essay on the Principle of Population (n.p.: n.d.), n.p. as quoted in Bury, p. 229.

[18]Walter E. Houghton, The Victorian Frame of Mind: 1830-1870 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957), pp. 31-32.

[19]Frank E. Manuel, The New World of Henri Saint-Simon (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1963), pp. 117-118.

Saint-Simon's philosophy, as it developed from 1802 to 1825, is many-sided in its search for a universal religion and a convergence of all sciences as well as for the key to the historical process. I prefer, however, to focus on his concepts of progress and human perfectibility and how these relate to individual desire and will.

"La philosophie du siècle dernier a été révolutionnaire; celle du XIX^{e} siècle doit être organisatrice."[20] For Saint-Simon the 1789 revolution was tragically violent and bloody, but also necessary. France's political and social system had grown static, outdated and repressive, and society needed complete reorganization. Saint-Simon's reformist program is manifold, but his main hope is placed in the industrial system as the means to greatest progress, since it is founded on equality, denies privileges of birth and class, and would bring society "le plus grand nombre des jouissances positives."[21] It is essential that a peaceful and productive industrial age succeed and permanently replace France's revolutionary age, in order to achieve "le bonheur public; on est résolu de l'obtenir à quelque prix que ce soit; les intérets privés disparaîssent devant l'intéret de tous."[22] Self-interest and egotism are the enemies of the new

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[20] Oeuvres de Claude-Henri de Saint-Simon (Paris: Editions Anthropos, 19660, Vol. I, p. 158.

[21] Ibid., Vol. IV, pp. 60-61.

[22] Ibid., Vol. I, p. 221.

society, wherein the mass organization of industry depends upon cooperation among workers. Saint-Simon enlarges this ideal of cooperation and collectivity to apply to society as a whole, using machinery as a metaphor.

> La société n'est point une simple agglomération d'êtres vivants, dont les actions ... n'ont d'autre cause que l'arbitraire des volontés individuelles ... la société, au contraire, est surtout, une véritable machine organisée dont toutes les parties contribuent ... à la marché de l'ensemble ... la perfection des résultats depend du maintien de l'harmonie ... entre tous les ressorts ... le désordre survient promptement quand des causes perturbatrices augmentent vicieusement l'activité des uns aux dépens de celle des autres.[23]

It is vital for all men to realize that they have a common interest in identifying themselves with the human race as a whole.[24]

Clearly, individualism has little place in Saint-Simon's historical scheme. Man's self-perception must exclude any sense of separateness from the mechanism of society. Therefore, one element of his being needs to be held in check, for it is the one that can foster this sense of separation and stir it into an anarchic force. This element is individual desire. For Saint Simon, the individual needs "une surveillance qui l'empeche d'être livré à lui-même, qui comprime ses désirs illégitimes, et qui le force à des travaux utiles."[25] A society divided by private desires and

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[23]Ibid., Vol. V, p. 177, 180.

[24]Ibid., Vol. IV, p. 201.

[25]Ibid., Vol. V, p. 187.

interests is simply not practicable. However, Saint-Simon confidently predicts an age when all men will be perfectly adjusted to society and no man will exploit another; no part of the "machine" will dominate any other. There will be no further insurrections and crime will be at a minimum, for men will understand that the preservation of social order is in their best interest.[26] For Saint-Simon this achievement is inevitable, for he believes in the absolute, ineluctable nature of human and social perfectibility. In a fragment of an 1812 manuscript, he asserts that the human spirit follows a predetermined course which no man's will can alter or escape. There is a general force toward perfection, of which men's intellects are only the instruments. Man can obey this law with understanding and not blindly, but he cannot change it. Even so, Saint-Simon points out that the force derives from man himself.[27] As John Bury asserts, progress is, for the sociologists, "the necessary outcome of the psychical and social nature of man; it must not be at the mercy of any external will; otherwise there would be no guarantee of its continuance and its issue, and the idea of progress would lapse into the idea of Providence."[28] Progress

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[26]Ibid., Vol. V, p. 182, pp. 128-9.

[27]Jean Dautry, "Sur un imprimé retrouvé du Comte de Saint-Simon," Annales historiques de la révolution francaise, XX (1948, 289) as referenced in Manuel, p. 151.

[28]Bury, The Idea of Progress, p. 5.

is not simply an external agent of fate. Saint-Simon assumes that the nature of man guarantees progress by defining that nature very specifically. He believes man is essentially gregarious and altruistic, and that egotism is a deviation from his true nature: "tout homme qui ne cherche pas le bonheur dans une direction utile à ses semblables est malheureux, quelle que soit son apparent prosperité."[29] Saint-Simon's ultimate dream, which he is certain will be realized, is that "tous les hommes doivent se regarder comme des frères; ils doivent s'aimer et se secourir les uns les autres."[30]

Thus, man's perfectibility consists, in part, in a diminishing of his individuality, specifically, in the controlling of the expression of that individuality through his self-serving, private desires. Saint-Simon emphasizes that the potential threat of individual desire will one day disappear, and stresses the ultimate ineffectiveness of individual will in altering that course. Man's "perfection" depends upon his recognition of the reality of such limits, and Saint-Simon is confident that this perfection will be fully realized.

The disciples of Saint-Simon enlarged upon his theories in a series of public lectures given in Paris from 1828 to

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[29] Oeuvres, Vol. V, p. 302.

[30] Ibid., Vol. III, p. 117.

1829. Like Saint-Simon they viewed the post-revolutionary age as a time of pacificism and reconstruction, and placed much hope in the mass organization of industry and commerce. Progress, in the material sense, depended on "les travaux pacifiques de l'industrie s'étendant sans cesse aux dépens des travaux de la guerre."[31] Specialization, egotism and self-interest were the enemies of order.[32] But these "enemies" ultimately prove no threat to social order, either in the sphere of man's material activity, or his moral activity. The Saint-Simonians rely with confidence upon a definition of mankind as having an inherent need for unity and order. They find evidence for this in marriage and the creation of families, the formation of families into cities and nations, and the creation of ruling doctrines and institutions. In general, "on voit se diriger sympathiquement tout les esprits et tous les actes vers un centre d'affection."[33] The lectures reiterate much of Saint-Simon's belief in the law of perfectibility as an ineluctable, integral part of the human species rather than as an external, blind fatality. Man has an innate sympathy for society and a concern for its future, and therefore tends to shape

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[31]Doctrine de Saint-Simon. Exposition première année, 1828-1829 (Paris: Imprimerie de l'Everat, 1831), p. 111.

[32]Ibid., p. 89.

[33]Ibid., pp. 160-161.

his moral behavior in accordance with the general good. He knows implicitly that in so doing, he is working with God to achieve his destiny.[34]

That destiny is "universal association," the association of all men on the entire earth, in all spheres of their relationships, and the combination of human forces in a peaceful direction. It cannot be denied that "antagonism," in the form of conflict among individuals and families, and wars among cities and nations, has always existed. Nonetheless, each "antagonistic" phase of history -- i.e, the breaking down of an old "association" or order by revolution -- paves the way for a better, more advanced association, thereby hastening the arrival of universal harmony.[35] We may say that for the Saint-Simonians, the divisive power of man's aggressive desire, while it cannot always be contained, ultimately proves more an aid than a threat to ordered civilization. Most importantly, they claim that man's destructive, anarchic instincts are in a determined state of decline, and will one day burn themselves out into oblivion.

Such ideas were developed concurrently with continued progress on a material level. After 1830, France was enjoying increasing production and consumption of goods,

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[34] Ibid., p. 12, 121.

[35] Ibid., pp. 144-150.

greater trade and better technology. New buildings, new roads and agricultural improvements multiplied. On the whole, a period of excellent material well-being was under way.[36] Such conditions of growth and betterment were described by Comte's Cours de philosophie positive as part of the universal progress of all forms of life. Comte contends that the material improvements of an industrial society, by satisfying man's physical needs, render those needs less pressing, and thereby allows for greater cultivation of man's rationality and social morality.[37] Comte allows that "les diverses passions haineuses restent certainement, après les appétits physiques, le principal mobile habituel de l'existence humaine ... [mais] l'essor continue de la civilisation développe ... nos penchants les plus nobles et nos plus généreux sentiments ..."[38]

Although Comte describes man's passions as "haineuses," some passions are apparently less so than others. While he recognizes intellectual curiosity as a desire as needful of stimulation and satisfaction as appetite and emotion, the progress of man still depends most upon intellect, the director and shaper of the other desires. This alone

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[36]César Graña, Bohemian vs. Bourgeois (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1970), p. 16.

[37]Cours de philosophie positive (Paris: Bachelier Imprimeur-Librairie, 1839), Vol. IV, p. 498.

[38]Ibid., Vol. IV, p. 33.

distinguishes man's life from the beasts'.[39] Comte's theory of man's intellectual evolution through the stages of primitive superstition, metaphysics and positivism is too well known to warrant recounting here. But for our purposes we should note his insistence upon the ineluctability of reason's eventual subordination of personal instincts to social ones, "dans la vue d'identifier toujours davantage l'individu avec l'espèce."[40]

The sociologists we have discussed strove to create order out of the chaos of revolution by discovering a single developmental principle in history. They see progress as a terrestrial, tangible reality deriving from the innate nature of man, and perfectibility as a kind of internalized determinism. Progress does not depend upon the will of any individual, but arises from the collective will, and desire, of mankind. The sociologists proscribe the scope of man's will and define his desires in such a way that those desires cannot be seen as other than consistent with civilization's ordered growth. They mitigate the potentially anarchic nature of individual desire by playing down its power and denying its endurance. It is thus man's destiny to live in a harmonious, peaceful and productive

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[39] Ibid., Vol. IV, p. 518.

[40] Ibid., Vol. IV, p. 503.

utopia unruptured by war, crime or individual ambitions, because man is essentially incapable of wanting anything else.

The increasing industrialization of England after 1830, however, was to prove a challenge to such idealism. As the feudal and agrarian order of the past was replaced by a democratic and industrial society, the average citizen felt the increasing pressure of work. New sources of supply and demand were being opened up by railways and steamships, intensifying the battle for new markets and the need to keep one's business methods up to date. As class lines gradually broke down, it became more possible to rise in the world by one's own efforts, and this added the struggle for rank to the struggle for success.[41]

Even so, England's material advancements inspired Carlyle and James Mill to believe that history's destructive phase was at an end, and that the world would convalesce, revive and rebuild itself, mainly through democratic government, wise laws and universal education. The concept of history as a natural, organic development was propagated mainly by Mill, who saw progress as governed by physical laws of evolution, and by Carlyle, who saw it as a progressive unfolding of man's moral and intellectual capabilities. Carlyle and Mill strove to revive the ideal of progress that

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[41]Houghton, The Victorian Frame of Mind, p. 6.

had lost its hold on the generation of the 1820's, by defining change as the normal condition of life and as a positive, although sometimes painful, force.[42]

There is an emphasis on the painful side of progress, however, in some of the major English and French novelists of the latter half of the nineteenth century, who shared the same concerns as the sociologists, mainly, the relation of the individual to ordered progress. The sociological insights of Dickens and Balzac are an integral part of their artistic consciousness, and provide the material for their challenges to the ideal of progress.[43] Dickens was sharply aware of the deleterious effects of industrialization, colonial imperialism and the exploitation of humans as "things," parts of engines to be used for profit. He did not see society as moving toward the greatest happiness of the greatest number, "because people, especially the working class, were being used as means for satisfactions not their own."[44] In Hard Times we see the wearing monotony of the lives of Stephen and Rachel as an indictment of the ideal of industrial progress. And Stephen's attempts to assert his will to some measure of personal ease are continually

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[42]Ibid, pp. 28-32.

[43]Nisbet, Sociology as an Art Form, p. 61.

[44]Dorothy Van Ghent, The English Novel: Form and Function (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1953). p. 128.

defeated by the industrial order as represented by Bounderby. In the Gradgrind family, the value of intellectual progress is challenged. Louisa's intellectual development is accompanied by an atrophy of emotion, leaving her alienated from others and unable to deal with her passion for Harthouse. After leaving Bounderby, she is left emotionally sterile, unable to create and nurture a family with anyone else. Tom's decline is moral, as he rebels against his austere student's life through gambling, stealing and finally framing Stephen. The consequences of Gradgrind's materialistic, scientific, "factual" approach to the world are a warning of what damage a single-minded view of progress can cause.

Dickens' objection to the great social machine was, as we saw, its reduction of people into component parts. Dorothy Van Ghent writes:

> People were becoming things, and things (the things that money can buy . . .), were becoming more important than people. This picture, in which the quality of things and people were reversed, was a picture of a daemonically motivated world, a world in which "dark" or occult forces operate not only in people . . . but also in things . . . metaphysical order can be established only if we think of things as turning themselves into people, acting under a "dark" drive similar to that which motivates the human aberration.[45]

Miss Van Ghent points out that in Dicken's world, people are often described by nonhuman attributes, and

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[45] Ibid., pp. 128-129.

things seem to come to life, in a mimetic reflection of a world denatured by this "dark drive" to progress. The houses in Great Expectations seem to spy on Pip, and Joe Gargery's hat repeatedly fallsfrom the mantelpiece.[46] I also note the grimy, grey and black "mechanized" portrait of Mr. Pancks in Little Dorrit, who moves like an avatar of energy. And the animation of inanimate objects "suggests . . . an aggressiveness that has got out of control -- an aggressiveness that they [the objects] have borrowed from the human economy . . ."[47]

This aggressiveness comes from society's collective desire to produce more and more, that propels progress, and this propulsion is seen as a denaturalizing force by Dickens. He is not, however, given to systematic analysis of this force. In attacking the ideal of progress, Dickens attacked "from the standpoint of quite ordinary and quite hearty dislike . . . he had no abstractions: he had nothing except realities out of which to make a romance."[48]

The same sense of a "dark drive," an insidious force pervading civilization, is also found in Balzac's La comédie humaine, but Balzac's approach is highly systematized and

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[46]Ibid., p. 129.

[47]Ibid., p. 129.

[48]G.K. Chesterton, The Victorian Age in Literature (London: Oxford University Press, 1966), pp. 35-36.

scientific, and is bolstered by readings of Lamarck, St. Hilaire, Cuvier, Swedenborg, and others, in an attempt to define the developmental principle of the life of man. Balzac tells us more than what he dislikes about society; he wants to explain, meticulously, the force that moves the whole world, and how that force operates through men in society.

La comédie humaine portrays the progress of the events in French social history from 1789 to 1848, and attempts to seize the active principle that synthesizes a mass of social, historical and individual detail into a unified vision of social man. There is thus an affinity between Balzac's methods and those of Saint-Simon, but Balzac's prognosis of man's fate is sharply different from the optimistic projections of the sociologists we have discussed.

The new capitalism in France had given rise to an image of society as promising, progressive and fruitful. To find his place there was the young Balzac's dream. He craved love, money, fame and success. But from his personal difficulties and his astute observation of society's classes grew an acerbic criticism of the ideal of progress both in society and in the life of the ambitious individual. Balzac felt that the surplus energy in the men of his generation was hampered by the uncertainty of discharging that energy satisfactorily. He had a sense of a lack of perfect rapport

between desire and opportunity.[49] His novels portray a constantly disatisfied and frustrated society. "L'industrialisme accouchait d'une société Tantale, enflammée de la soif du lucre, et tourmentée des angoisses de la mendicité."[50] Rather than believing man and society to be growing more perfect, Balzac tends to see progress as a wasting-process, aiding material developments but causing deterioration in other respects:

> this whole spirit of progress becomes inverted . . . The very conditions or values from which prophets of progress had derived their panoramic future of hope are shown to be productive not of progress but of decline, decay and eventual breakdown. It is the dark underside of progress that is made manifest . . .[51]

Balzac localizes this "dark underside of progress" in the same human trait whose power the positivists had played down: individual desire. In this regard it wil help us to examine Balzac's theories of desire and will.

In his study of desire and will, Balzac draws extensively upon Mesmer's animal magnetism theory. Mesmer believed in an invisible fluid that pervaded the entire cosmos and was the element of gravity and the movement of the planets. This fluid provides a magnetic attraction among all created

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[49]Pierre Barbéris, Balzac et le mal du siècle (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1970), Vol. I, p. 35, 108.

[50]Alfred Nettement, Les ruines morales et intellectuelles (Paris: Bibliothèque universelle de la jeunesse, 1836), n.p., as quoted in Barbéris, Vol. I, p. 42.

[51]Nisbet, Sociology as an Art Form, p. 118.

things, and it activates the flux of life. It is what moves men to act, since it is the stuff of all their desires, and of their wills, articulating itself through their actions.[52] In Physiologie du mariage of 1829 Balzac discusses both will and desire as arising from this fluid, and directing men's lives in differing ways. "Cette force est unique, et bien qu'elle se resolve en désirs, en passions, en labeurs d'intelligence ou en travaux corporels, elle accourt là où l'homme l'appelle."[53] Each man consumes his allotment of this energy through work or "passions funestes" (p. 152), the strongest of which is love, "un besoin semblable à la faim, à cela près que l'homme mange toujours ... "(p. 70). Balzac's repeated use of words denoting devourment points not only to his definition of life as a continual consumption, but to the danger of unchecked desire. In marriage, love is durable only if neither spouse is overwhelmed by the passion of the other (p. 108). In other areas, desire can threaten to burn out life: "jugez combien des désirs souvent répétés doivent consommer de fluides vitaux" (p. 199)? The desiring mind follows a mathematical progression whose origin and aim are both unknown (p. 160).

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[52]Franz Anton Mesmer, Memoire sur la découverte du magnétisme animal (Paris: chez P. Fr. Didot le jeune, Librairie, 1977), pp. 74-83.

[53]Physiologie du mariage (Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 1968), p. 151. All subsequent quotations are from this edition.

For this reason Balzac exhorts the exercise of will in the containment and channelling of desire. Artistic talent, for example, must consist in "la réunion de la puissance de concevoir et de celle d'executer" (p. 108). "Il n'existe pas de grands talents sans une grande volonté ... le vouloir est une conquête faite à tout moment sur les instincts, sur les gouts domptés, refoulés, sur les fantaisies et les entraves vaincues, sur les difficultés de tout genre héroiquement surmontées."[54]

The role of will is not simply to repress desire but to exercise control for the preservation of the self through the avoidance of excess. A man may also exercise his will upon his environment and his fellows in order to influence and manipulate them. By this manipulation he achieves power, whether through self-mastery or the mastery of others. In this case will becomes the "projection of energy irresistible to others."[55] Power can take many other forms: political leadership (as with Napoleon), domination of another's character (as with Vautrin) or financial domination (Gobseck, Grandet). In these cases will does not repress desire but serves it, by placing calculation and

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[54]La Muse du département, in Oeuvres complètes (Paris: Louis Conard, 1912-40), Vol. X, pp. 213-214, as quoted in Besser, Balzac's Concept of Genius (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1969), p. 128.

[55]Besser, p. 109.

patience above instant gratification. But these cases are exceptional, for not all men are capable of achieving or wielding power. Only the innately superior individual can cope with the burdens of power, which is wasted if used promiscuously.[56]

We may perceive a correspondence between Balzac's will/desire dialectic and the relation between reason and the passions in the works of the positivists. The positivists' idea is for the "nobler" faculty to channel and direct the lower one, and we have noted the sociologists' faith in man's achievement of this control as inevitable. But the same ineluctable laws of growth they applied to this "perfectibility" are applied by Balzac to the encroachment of desire within man, who thereby deteriorates just as ineluctably when he is overcome by mania or excessive appetites. Balzac does not share the positivists' optimism about the absolute controllability of desire, nor does he accept their definition of man's nature as essentially altruistic. Desire in La comédie humaine is often self-serving, as with Eugene de Rastignac and Vautrin. It is often the agent of deterioration (like Baron Hulot's lust in La cousine Bette) and, when not bolstered by strength of will, desire can lead to failure, as with Lucien de Rubempré in Illusions Perdues.

Balzac seems to share what Leo Bersani calls a "fear of

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[56] Ibid., p. 110, pp. 152-153.

desire"[57] among nineteenth-century realistic novelists, a sense of desire as a subversive threat to order. The nineteenth century realistic novel, Bersani continues, reveals an exertion toward significant and coherently constructed form and character, with revealing incidents, and intelligible and rigourously structured personalities, all within a temporal frame usually faithful to chronological time. This concern with structure arises from the realistic novelist's awareness of writing in a context of social fragmentation, in a society threatened by chaotically fierce human energies.[58]

> The novel makes esthetic sense out of social anarchy . . . The ordered significances of realistic fiction are presented as immanent to society, whereas in fact they are the mythical denial of that society's fragmented nature . . . Realistic fiction admits heroes of desire in order to subject them to ceremonies of expulsion. This literary form depends, for its very existence, on the annihilation or, at the very least, the immobilizing containment of anarchic impulses . . . The novelist glamorizes a figure who exposes the factitious nature of the social and esthetic orders in the name of which the novelist will sacrifice that figure.[59]

Bersani refers specifically to the defeats of Mme Bovary, and of Julien Sorel, Captain Ahab and Balzac's Claës.

But if Balzac's work expresses a "fear" of the anarchic power of desire, it also reveals his belief that the suspension of desire cannot be effected without the loss of a

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[57] A Future for Astyanax (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1973), p. 51.

[58] Ibid., p. 53, 55, 60.

[59] Ibid., pp. 60-61, pp. 68-70.

vital part of humanity. Even while subjecting his heroes to "ceremonies of expulsion," specifically, in such portrayals of failure as Illusions perdues, he insists upon the reality of the individual and of the exceptional being, especially the genius. Although, like a sociologist, Balzac categorizes humans in the Lamarckean sense by type and environment, the actual reading of his works gives us such characters as Eugène de Rastignac, Raphaël de Valentin and Balthasar Claës cultivating their desires in the hope of directing them autonomously and achieving an independent creation of self. Each character meets a different fate in his attempt to separate himself from, or adjust to, the en masse movement of life that La comédie humaine embodies. The varying degrees of success and failure with which the individual characters achieve or defy compromise with social (or metaphysical) order is what we shall examine in the ensuing chapters.

Throughout this essay the word "desire" occurs with great frequency, and we need to clarify its use, especially since the word will be given specific definitions by the authors as we discuss them. Balzac's definitions of desire and of will are inconsistent. After discussing the two forces separately in Physiologie du mariage, he equates both desire and will with "la Pensée" in Louis Lambert, summing up man's entire spiritual life with that term, only to separate the two forces again in La peau de chagrin. He

then breaks "desire" down into further specifics in La recherche de l'absolu, Le père Goriot, Illusions perdues and Les parents pauvres as he relates different desires to different goals. In La comédie humaine desire subsumes social ambition, career ambition, lust, devoted love, greed for money, hedonism, revenge and gustatory appetite. Desire is also aimed at an assumed ideal reality, such as the Platonic ideal of beauty in Le chef d'oeuvre inconnu, and the primal source of creation in La recherche de l'absolu. Nonetheless, though we will use functional definitions of desire and of will within the specific context of each novel we discuss, throughout La comédie humaine, desire and will are consistently the agents of narrative projection, as they work through the characters' actions to move the plot forward. This is narrative progress, and it is time to observe its working, beginning with La peau de chagrin.

II. La peau de chagrin

La peau de chagrin is Balzac's first comprehensive novel of desire, will and power, of the antagonism that can arise between desire and social order, and of desire as a wasting-process. It is a study of choices, of both material and immaterial goals, and of the consequences of those choices. The sequence of events in La peau de chagrin is a series of temptations to which the hero succumbs. The novel has many loose ends: one way of life is picked up, than abandoned for another. This emphasizes the place of La peau as an introductory roman à thèse to La comédie humaine. We shall later see the picking up of these loose ends by characters in subsequent novels.

Bersani admires the fact that La peau's form is not lost to chaos despite the disruptive power of its subject: "the rigid structure of a Balzac narrative is both menaced and energized by desires which may destroy characters, but which the narrative manages to contain at least formally."[1]

The disruptive desires portrayed in this novel are part of its very specific sociological content. The social life of Paris in the 1830's was quite hectic. There was a craze for wild pleasure in the form of rowdy parties, banquets and fancy-dress balls. The Carnival of 1832 was bacchanalia itself. There was a mania for such new dances as the "valse

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[1]Leo Bersani, A Future for Astyanax (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1976), p. 73.

éperdue" and the "galop infernal." Balzac, who had been living and working in Paris since 1819, was leading a double life, as both a monastic workaholic and a social-climbing dandy. He spent money recklessly on clothes, furniture and carriages.[2] As a first-hand participant and observer, Balzac was well equipped to write of the hedonistic Paris of La peau de chagrin. And it must have presented itself as a symbol and example of the prominence of the desire for pleasure among human traits. Paris in La peau is phantasmagorically decadent, but its supernatural atmosphere is not merely grotesque or melodramatic.

> A fictional society . . . arises at the point where two different projections meet: the projection into the imagination of a real world which the novelist has recorded to the best of his ability; and the projection into reality of a personal myth, expressing his self-knowledge . . . and his knowledge of the material and spiritual forces whose field is the human being.[3]

This meeting of the realistic and mythical strikes us from the beginning of La peau, when Raphaël enters a Parisian gambling casino. The casino is a pagan hell, "guarded" by a "triste Cerbère,"[4] the hat-checker, and ruled by "le

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[2]V.S. Pritchett, Balzac (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1977), p. 106.

[3]Albert Béguin, L'oeuvre de Balzac (Paris: Formes et Reflets, 1949 - 1953), XVI, p. xviii, quoted in and trans. by Donald Fanger, Dostoevsky and Romantic Realism: A Study of Doestoevsky in Relation to Balzac, Dickens and Gogol, (Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1965), p. 15.

[4]Honoré de Balzac, La peau de chagrin (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1966), p. 19. All subsequent quotations are from this edition.

Jeu" (p. 18) or the gambling mania, externalized and abstracted into a "deity," but also incarnated in the hat-clerk, who is the weary image of desire wasted out. The waste of human energy by the Parisian lifestyle is underlined by repeated references to death:

> Les galles sont garnies ... d'orgies commencées dans le vin et décidées à finir dans la Seine ... Il ne s'y trouve même pas un clou pour faciliter le suicide ... Sept ou huit spectateurs ... attentifs comme l'est le peuple à la Grève quand le bourreau tranche une tête (p. 19-22).

For Balzac, the Parisian lifestyle makes desire a degenerative process, whose "goals" of money and pleasure are only signposts down the road to death. Yet Balzac describes three old men who watch the games but never play, "des âmes blasées, des coeurs qui depuis longtemps avaient désappris de palpiter ..." (p. 21). The extinction of desire is the same as death, for desire is the propellant of life.

I believe Balzac chose to open this novel with a casino scene because the casino is an appropriate gathering place for many different desires -- some people gamble for love (to keep their mistresses), some for pure amusement, some for the power wealth gives, and some out of desperation. Others only watch out of morbid curiosity. But all the guests are in quest of something, and so the casino is an ordering device, to create a collective picture of human desire. The casino is also a hell, for in hell are found those who have surrendered to their individual passions.

Thus the casino is not only an acerbic social portrait but a symbol of the main theme of the novel.

When the despairing and bankrupt Raphaël leaves the casino and arrives at the antique shop, two other major symbols of Balzac's philosophy appear, the bric-a-brac collection and the shagreen hide. Usually in La comédie humaine, a collection of objects expresses the character of the owner (as in Le cousin Pons). The antiques collection, however, has a meaning of greater dimension. The antiques have been called "images of energy,"[5] a term Bersani uses without expanding upon his suggestion. I would therefore like to elaborate upon this by discussing the objects as symbols of the drives that move civilizations. There is a marked emphasis on objects that suggest consuming desire, beginning in the animal kingdom, up through human society and then to the world of religion. Bestial appetite is embodied in the stuffed reptiles that seem to gnaw the statues. The nude portrait of Mme Dubarry, who lived in a period of sexual license, seems to stare greedily at a long, snakelike Indian pipe. There is also the drive for material and industrial progress, reflected in the carved ship and the "machine pneumatique" (p. 34) and political ambition suggested by the statuettes of aldermen and burgermeisters. But the ship is attached to a turtle's back, and the machine is aimed at an

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[5]Bersani, p. 73.

impassible statue of August, in a seeming negation of progress.

Most of the antiques embody religious aspirations: the Egyptian desire for immortality, the Greek and Roman myths of fertility, and the Christian redemption myth. Yet mixed with these objects are symbols of lustful and violent instinct: an Italian mosaic recalls the Borgia orgies and adulteries punished by murder, and guns and helmets are decorated with scenes of Alexander's conquests and the French religious wars. All together, the antiques contain a microcosm of a world made into a chaotic jumble by the overwhelming and conflicting drives of men. Since Balzac saw the plenitude of the world as symbolic of a higher reality identified with cosmic energy, it is fitting that, on an aesthetic level, this plenitude of antiques should be a symbol of human energy and its disruptiveness.

This disruptiveness is described in more discursive and theoretical terms by the antiques dealer. By offering Raphaël the shagreen hide, the dealer offers him life. Raphaël had been contemplating suicide, and his acceptance of the skin is a return to life, but also a renunciation of control over his own life through the surrender of self to a process of endless wanting. One cannot, warns the dealer, merely "try" the skin's powers. "Peut-on arrêter le cours de la vie" (p. 55)? By using the skin's power to grant all his wishes, Raphaël runs the risk of becoming dissipated, on

an individual level, by the same excess of desire that affects the world on a general level, as symbolized by the antiques. In pursuing life Raphaël moves toward death. "Votre suicide n'est que retardé," says the dealer (p. 59).

> L'homme s'épuisent par deux actes ... qui tarissent les sources de son existence. Deux verbes expriment toutes les formes que prennent ces deux causes de mort: VOULOIR et POUVOIR ... Vouloir nous brûle et Pouvoir nous détruit; mais SAVOIR laisse notre faible organisation dans un perpétuel état de calme (p. 56).

The idea of desire as consumptive is reiterated here, with the dealer's additional recommendation to renounce both desire and will and develop one's intellect only. "Ainsi le desir ou le vouloir est mort en moi, tué par la pensée" (p. 56). By this the dealer means that he conceptualizes all human passions -- love, ambition, sorrow, etc. -- and enjoys them cerebrally only, "comme des romans que je lirais par une vision intérieure" (p. 57). He replaces realities with ideas, so that the mental representation of desire replaces desire itself. Instead of pursuing women, for example, he is content to imagine himself the owner of a harem. The dealer thus preserves his being by a refusal to participate actively in the endless stream of wanting that is life. The skin symbolizes this life. "Là sont vos idées sociales, vos désirs excessifs, vos intempérances, vos joies qui tuent, vos douleurs qui font trop vivre" (p. 58).

But we soon learn that Raphaël has already tried a life of austerity and industry, involving the repression of his

sensual nature, as the means to literary fame and success, and nearly starved. Having lost patience with that life, his reaction now is to seize the skin and wish for one night of orgiastic dissolution and vulgar debauchery, and then to die by consuming all joys in one. Raphaël believes it takes a certain heroism, a strength of will, to embrace sensual pleasure. His companions, who later accompany him to the Taillefer dinner, share this view: "la Débauche, ce monstre admirable avec lequel veulent lutter les esprits forts" (p. 64). Raphaël and his friends have taken the second of the two choices offered by the dealer: "tuer les sentiments pour vivre vieux, ou mourir jeune en acceptant le martyre des passions, voilà notre arrêt" (p. 101).

Balzac's description of the Taillefer dinner party draws upon the structuring principles of painting, theatre and music to achieve a contained portrayal of excess. The long white table is a frame for the symmetrical arrangement of dishes, and the flowers' colors are reflected in the glasses, as they might be in a painting. While the guests revel in the profusion of food and wine, an ominous note is sounded. "Cette première partie du festin était comparable, en tout point, à l'exposition d'une tragédie classique" (pp. 71-72). In the second "act," desire in the form of appetitive excess increases and intensifies "comme les crescendo de Rossini" (p. 72). The conversation becomes anarchic not only in form but in content, as criticism of every existing

institution grows more ardent. "Les philosophies, les religions, les morales ... les gouvernements, enfin tous les grands actes de l'intelligence humaine tombèrent sous une faux ..." (p. 73). Both verbally and physically the banquet is one of the novel's "orgies of disconnectedness"[6] that threatens to burst its frame and wreak anarchy on a larger scale. During dessert, the third "act," the guests reach a level of bestiality, no longer even conversing but shouting, whistling and moaning. They are now at the lowest appetitive level, suggested earlier by the stuffed animals in the shop.

The destructive power of desire is also embodied in the women Taillefer presents to his male guests. Aquilina is a "monstre qui sait mordre ... briser ... son amant; enfin se détruire elle-meme ..." (p. 92). Euphrasie also wishes to achieve power over men and then die of pleasure. For Aquilina and Euphrasie the sexual act is the combined expression of will and desire, since by it they indulge their desires and exercise their wills to dominate men. They are resigned to the burning-out of their lives by continuing such a course. This places them, as we shall see, in contrast to the countess Foedora.

During Raphaël's recounting of his life at the dinner, we learn of his past attempt to live by "le Savoir," and

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[6] Ibid., p. 72.

that he abandoned his life of quiet study and frugality, his Traité de la volonté, and the devoted and disinterested love of Pauline, for the pursuit of Foedora. This pursuit, into which Raphaël is initiated by Rastignac, is the passionate obsession of a man who sees in a woman the possibility of fulfillment of both his sexual drives and his social ambitions. Yet she is the exact opposite of what he imagines, representing the willful deadening of desire for the sake of economizing life's forces. The desiring hero is faced with a non-desiring heroine, and his attempt to achieve unity with her is bound to fail.

Raphaël's belief in the power of his will to possess Foedora inspires him to remind her that "la volonté humaine était une force semblable à la vapeur ... rien ne résistait à cette puissance quand un homme s'habituait à la concentrer ... cet homme pouvait à son gré tout modifier ..." (p. 144). But Foedora's amusement surely arises from confidence in her own ability to resist this force. Her will to social power deadens her sexual desires and therefore her susceptibility. By annihilating sexual desire in herself, she has lifted herself above the stream of wanting in which Aquilina and Euphrasie are caught up. Her glacial inaccessibility sends Raphaël upon a course of self-destructive desire as he sacrifices food, time and money to be with her. "N'étais-je pas richement recompensé par le plaisir que j'éprouvais a tout immoler pour elle? ... Un homme sans passion et sans

argent reste maître de sa personne; mais un malheureux qui aime ne s'appartient plus ..." (p. 159, 164). Money and passion are expenders of the self, in a continual projection forward toward what can become self-immolation. When Foedora continues to remain indifferent, Raphaël looks to suicide, the deliberate annihilation of self, as a means of escaping hopeless striving. "Je préfère la mort à cette vie. Aussi cherché-je le meilleur moyen de terminer cette lutte" (p. 202).

Raphaël's renunciation of Foedora and his embracing of "La Débauche" is a change from one path toward death to another. Here Raphaël articulates Balzac's consciousness of livng in a libidinal civilization: " ... la guerre est la débauche du sang, comme la politique est celle des intérêts. Tous les excés sont frères" (p. 209). All excesses are related by a common undercurrent moving toward extinction. Civilization as a whole, for Balzac, seems caught up in this undercurrent. But to choose suicide is to assert one's individual will to die over and above the movement of life en masse. This is what Raphaël hopes to achieve with "La Débauche." Debauchery thus becomes a means of extinguishing one's desires in the very act of satisfying them.

The orgy has also brought the guests closer to extinction. At dawn, they are exhausted and deathly pale, "comme dans les dernières convulsions d'un mourant" (p. 224). Raphaël too must confront death directly when, after wishing

for an inheritance, he sees the skin shrink. He is in a paradoxical position: his power to achieve satisfaction of desire is now unlimited, but by exercising that power he becomes powerless to stop the consumption of life. "Le monde lui appartenait, il pouvait tout et ne voulait plus rien" (p. 227).

Thus, after inheriting 6 million francs from his uncle, Raphaël "abdiquait la vie pour vivre, et dépouillait son âme de toutes les poésies du désir" (p. 238). Life without desire is vegetative and passive, and Raphaël now resembles the old, indifferent gentlemen at the casino. Ironically, he must go against the grain of life in order to survive. Raphaël gains self-preservation, and shortly afterward, the antiques dealer loses it. When Raphaël meets the dealer at the opera, the latter has fallen in love with a dancer, and now feels that his cerebral life was "l'existence au rebours" (p. 247). Raphaël returns to the "grain" of life when he is reunited with Pauline. But as Balzac said in Physiologie du mariage, "quand il [l'amour] existe, il existe à jamais et va toujours croissant" (p. 85). When desire is fulfilled by the attainment of an object, that particular desire ends, and is replaced by another in a repeated pattern. But love is a perpetual consumption, for even when the beloved is possessed the desire continues. Thus Raphaël's marriage consumes his life more rapidly than any of his previous occupations, and he tells Pauline, "tu es mon bourreau." It is

grimly appropriate that he should become consumptive. The erotic instinct, a dynamic extension of the self, is accompanied by a death instinct, causing a declining of the self. Raphael's progress through life is an acquisitive, self-aggrandizing process, but the movement toward death is its "dark underside."

When the ailing Raphaël goes to take the waters at Aix, Balzac examines the question of power and the fitness of those who attempt to wield it. During the Taillefer dinner Raphaël had proclaimed himself the embodiment of his society's lust for power, and swore that he would not use power trivially but on a grand scale. He viewed society as structured upon the acquisition and retention of political and financial power, and saw himself not only as part of that structure but as surpassing it. "Je ne m'amuserai pas à dissiper de vils ecus, j'imiterai, je résumerai mon époque en consommant des vies humaines ... L'univers est à moi" (p. 219). But Raphaël uses the duel at Aix as a game, to test his power, and to "play" with it. He kills his adversary by wishing the bullet into his heart. His grandiose prediction has come to nothing but the death of a man after a trivial argument. This awakens a terrible realization. "Il pensa tout a coup que la possession du pouvoir, quelque immense qu'il pût etre, ne donnait pas la science de s'en servir ... Le pouvoir nous laisse tels que nous sommes et ne grandit que les grands. Raphaël avait pu tout faire; il

n'avait rien fait" (pp. 320-1). In the use of power, Raphaël is a failure, and this theme of failure will be interpreted again in Illusions perdues.

When Raphaël goes to Mont-Dor, a rural fishing village in Auvergne, in order to escape from his desire for Pauline, he repeats the pattern of withdrawal from life attempted in "L'agonie," and Balzac describes him as an oyster on a rock, alive only on the most elemental level. Later at home, he seeks escape from desire through soporific drugs: "cette homme d'imagination si puissament active s'abaissa jusqu'à la hauteur de ces animaux paresseux qui croupissent au sein des forêts, sous la forme d'une dépouille végétale" (p. 338). But when he again sees the long absent Pauline, hs repressed passion for her explodes. He throws himself on her and dies while biting her on the breast, an act of devourment. Significantly, the sexual act is not consummated. This emphasizes Balzac's view of life as a drive to fulfill desire with no known end except death.

Raphaël's life, after he realizes the power of the hide, becomes an attempt to preserve his individuality from submergence in life's mainstream of desire. From the first he has had a sense of uniqueness and separation from humannity, like such earlier Romantic heroes as René, Chactas and Adolphe. His autobiographical recounting at the Taillefer dinner recalls Chateaubriand's method in René. These earlier heroes of the novel have a sense of the burden of

desire, of longings for ideals of happiness and love that remain elusive. They also cling to a sense of uniqueness in suffering, as does Raphaël: "je trouvai ... les troubles de mon coeur, mes sentiments ... en désaccord avec les maximes de la société" (p. 115). The French Romantic hero's desires alienate him from humanity en masse. These desires are aimed at higher realities than those perceived by ordinary men, and thus express the hero's individuality.

The desires of Balzac's Raphaël are those of a Romantic poet and artist, especially regarding his solitary work on the Traité de la volonté and his impossible love for Foedora. He even sublimates his greed for money into a poetic yearning ("vive l'amour dans la soie," p. 133). Yet no matter what characteristics Raphaël lends to his life's pursuits, the movement toward extinction is the same as for any other man. Balzac's Romantic hero cannot achieve complete uniqueness over beings as a whole. Balzac does not deny Raphaël's individuality, nor does he call it an illusion. He sacrifices it, when all Raphaël's particular qualities are submerged in the general pattern of all life.

III. Genius

Among the many ways of life open to the desiring hero in La peau de chagrin is "le Savoir," the cultivation of the cerebral faculties, "le cerveau qui ne s'use pas et qui survit à tout" (p. 56). The antiques dealer contends, first that intellectual curiosity is the "safest" of desires, since it is the least stressful, and that the cerebral man is less vulnerable to failure and disappointment than the man of action: "comment préférer tous les désastres de vos volontées trompées à la faculté sublime de faire comparaître en soi l'univers, au plaisir immense ... de tout voir ... d'interroger les autres sphères, pour écouter Dieu" (p. 57)! The dealer completely separates intellect from desire, and defines the former as the represser of desire, as that which makes the ascetic life possible. This position becomes questionable, not only because the dealer's vulnerability to physical desire is exposed by his attraction to Euphrasie, but also because of his belief that the intellect is impervious to overwhelming desire and that it cannot be defeated, e.g., by madness, or fall prey to deterioration or exhaustion. When the pursuit of "le Savoir" is undertaken by a genius, it can take the form of a mania that threatens the genius' sanity.

Balzac's interest in genius was personal as well as intellectual. His passion for deciphering the secret of the universe allows us to perceive Balzac's genius-hero as a

personal role model. Balzac also considered himself a superior individual at an early age. His feeling of being different (more mentally gifted) from other boys at school is described in Louis Lambert. Balzac's early dreams of literary fame, and his hopes in young manhood of conquering Paris, also attest to this feeling. Given his profound interest in his own creativity, we can understand his fascination with the study of genius per se.[1]

Balzac's sense of personal uniqueness was in the same spirit as many of his Romantic contemporaries. During the 1830's the "genius-hero" was a passionately cherished self-image for many artists, who saw themselves as uniquely gifted and exceptionally sensitive. There are many more sides to the Romantic genius: a sense of isolation and martyrdom, and a despair of being understood by common men,[2] but most important for this study is an understanding of the relation between the Romantic genius and a higher, absolute reality.

This relationship is often described in Christian terms. In his Nouvelles odes Victor Hugo describes the modern poet as God's intermediary, a kind of "priest" responsible for man's spiritual and moral rejuvenation.[3] Inspiration, then,

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[1]Gretchen R. Besser, Balzac's Concept of Genius, (Geneva: Librairie-Droz, 1969), pp. 61-63.

[2]Ibid., p. 18.

[3]Victor Hugo, Oeuvres poétiques de Victor Hugo, ed. Pierre Albouy (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1964), p. 13.

is a gift from God. Yet the inconsistency of Hugo's concept of deity is well known. The agnosticism from which he suffered led him to blend various Swedenborgian and Far Eastern philosophies into new mythical systems wherein deity was a pantheistic presence, intuited by the gifted poet-seer. The absolute truth, in any case, is always ultimately out of reach for the mortal genius, who is thus fated to lifelong frustration. This frustration is also expressed by Alfred de Vigny. He too sees the poet-genius as the interpereter of God's word, but the privilege of correspondence with divinity is not humbly and gratefully accepted by the poet. Vigny for one desires direct understanding of God, faith being an insult to reason, and in "Le mont des oliviers," he vows to punish God's silence by a cold and indifferent disdain.[4]

Thus a tension often arises from the Romantic genius' desire to seize upon the secret of the whole universe and contain it in his own mind. It is a struggle doomed to failure, for as we saw earlier, the genius can only catch brief glimpses of the absolute in his moments of inspiration. Only in death and in the dissolving of self into eternity can total knowledge be gained.

Balzac, too, explores the turbulent relations between the artist's mind and the absolute. One of his early works,

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[4]Alfred de Vigny, Oeuvres complètes (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1965), p. 104.

Le chef d'oeuvre inconnu of 1832, is a study of the ultimate failure of genius, and also prefigures the tragedies of Louis Lambert and La recherche de l'absolu. It is the story of Frenhofer, a consummately gifted painter with the seeming ability to breathe life into his works. Not content with this, he spends ten years laboring on a painting of a woman that he hopes will capture the very quintessence of beauty. He longs to "saisir l'esprit, l'âme, la physionomie des choses et des êtres ... voir un moment ... l'idéal enfin."[5] But when Frenhofer unveils his work, it is an incomprehensible mass of wild colors, a sublimely perfect foot being its only discernible part. Yet Frenhofer insists he can see what no one else sees, and he did, for a moment, capture the ideal. Nonetheless, to make it understandable to others is beyond his capacity, and he dies in despair after burning his works.

Le chef d'oeuvre inconnu is a transitional work for Balzac. It derives much from Romantic idealism, but at the same time moves away from the messianic genius image, and away from the context of Christian faith. The genius does not suffer from the tyranny of some authoritative deity, but rather from the "idée fixe," a concept that will be developed into studies of monomania in Balzac's later novels. Le chef d'oeuvre inconnu also prepares the ground for Balzac's detailed, scientific and systematized studies of genius and

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[5]Honoré de Balzac, Le chef d'oeuvre inconnu (Paris: Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1950), Vol. IX, pp. 394, 402.

the absolute. In subsequent novels, the story of genius is the story of the failure of superhuman desire. We need to establish the connection between genius and desire in La comédie humaine in order to understand the grim fate of Balzac's genius-heroes.

Balzac's exploration of genius is multifaceted, for he attributes the occurrence of this pheonomenon to a number of factors: physical, chemical and spiritual. In general, genius is a result of vital energy concentrated to an extraordinary degree.[6] The person possessed of this energy has limitless potential, and is called a "spécialiste:" "le spécialiste ... agit, il voit et il sent par son intérieur ..."[7] "Spécialité," a vision and knowledge of first principles, is related to the artist's creative power and the mystic's second sight, and even to an extrahuman, divine-like knowledge.[8] The knowledge of the first principle of matter can also be an object of chemical research. Thus the Balzacian genius can be a scientist as well as a philosopher or artist.

The genius' creative powers are often dangerously overwhelming, and can bring him to madness if he lacks a sturdy

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[6]Besser, Balzac's Concept of Genius, p. 645.

[7]Honoré de Balzac, Louis Lambert (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1968), p. 66. All subsequent quotations from this work are from this edition.

[8]Besser, p. 66.

constitution, a level head and a strong will. When he lacks these, and is possessed by an "idée fixe," he is courting disaster. The genius has mortal limits, and too much intellectual abstraction can lead to mental imbalance and breakdown. This is often an inevitable side effect of genius, if the gifted man pushes his faculties too far. Nonetheless, the Balzacian genius is "expected to penetrate those areas of experience which have always been considered to lie beyond the domain of science and reason."[9] The madness he risks is "l'excés d'un vouloir ou d'un pouvoir."[10]

Balzac says in his 1832 "Lettre à Charles Nodier:"

> Le temps et l'espace sont ... une seule et même chose ... un abîme aussi profond que l'idée de Dieu, et où notre raison devient infirme quand nous voulons le pénétrer ... Le sommeil démontre logiquement, par une chaîne de raisonnements, dont quelque beau génie déduira l'ensemble ... que l'homme possède l'exorbitante faculté ... d'étendre sa vue à travers la Création sans y rencontrer les obstacles par lesquels il est arrêté dans son état normal.[11]

This hopeful prophecy is tempered by the realization of the obstacles that hinder man in his "normal state." Le chef d'oeuvre inconnu, Louis Lambert and La recherche de l'absolu are novels with an awareness of the dangers and limitations of genius realized by Balzac.

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[9]Ibid., p. 161.

[10]Honoré de Balzac, La peau de chagrin (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1966), p. 58.

[11]Oeuvres diverses (Paris: Editions Garnier Frères, 1950), Vol. IX, p. 275.

Balzac's perception of the relation of genius to the absolute involves a combination of his vitalist world system with Swedenborg's theory of correspondences. As I noted in the first chapter, the universe, for Balzac, is moved by a "substance étherée," or energetic force. Ths force (most closely resembling Mesmer's magnetic fluid) is described throughout Balzac's philosophical works in both material and spiritual terms, and it permeates every existing thing. There is thus a correspondence between the visible world and this invisible force.

Swedenborg, the eighteenth-century theologian, felt that modern man had no understanding of correspondences, due to his love of all that appealed to the external senses. But this was not true of ancient peoples such as the Egyptians and the writers of the Bible. These people literally thought in correspondences: "the knowledge of correspondences was the chief of knowledges. By means of it they acquired intelligence and wisdom; and . . . had communication with heaven . . . they talked with angels . . . saw the Lord and were taught by Him."[12]

For Swedenborg, modern man had fallen from grace, had lost the privilege of "correspondences," and was out of harmony with the spiritual world, unlike the exceptional men of the past. When Balzac creates such characters as Lambert and

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[12]Emmanuel Swedenborg, Heaven and Hell, n. trans., (New York: The Swedenborg Foundation, n.d.), pp. 110-111, quoted in Brief Readings from Swedenborg (New York: The Swedenborg Foundation, 1937-40), pp. 6-10.

Claës, he portrays exceptional men who attempt to regain this lost privilege, but on their own terms. Their goal is not a state of grace, but power.

For Balzac, the "vital force" in each human being is translated into desire. Most men are driven to material goals -- money, social prestige, or power. Often such men sate their material desires to such a point that their lives have no spiritual dimension. They can become depraved and degenerate. Their lives follow a movement away from the spiritual, or non-corporeal, side of the force within them, (witness the deterioration of Hector Hulot and Félix Grandet).

This way of life is counterpointed in La comédie humaine by an opposite extreme: the way of the obsessed genius. If desire propels thought, the genius' intellectual ambition is desire concentrated to an extraordinary degree. The genius, because he has a greater amount of the "ethereal substance" than most, is irresistibily attracted to the vital force, to the point where he dares to upset the correspondence between this world and the other. His relation to the invisible world is not a peaceful one. He is not content to believe it exists. He must see it, capture it. Highly gifted and intuitive, he believes himself capable of such a quest. But the quest is disruptive, and Balzac believes above all in metaphysical unity and order. He does not firmly believe in God, but the thing that takes God's place in his philosophy

is as immovable as God, and so it endures. It is therefore unconquerable by man.

This is not to say that Balzac's genius is a fool or guilty of the "sin" of libido sciendi. The genius' daring is not immoral in a Christian sense. It is dangerous, but Balzac still admired genius, including his own, passionately. A part of himself exists in all his geniuses, especially Louis Lambert, whom we shall now discuss.

As with Le chef d'oeuvre inconnu, the "world-spirit," or absolute, is, in Louis Lambert and La recherche de l'absolu, an essential and dominating presence, because it is the object of a quest. The hero is a genius, who, at a certain point in his earthly life, loses all desire to move forwad toward earthly goals, or to develop socially, and begins to move "backward", as it were, to seek the primordial source, not only of his own being, but of all the universe. In doing so he reaches an increasing remoteness from the tangible world. That his quest is both a regression in the terms of this world and a progression toward a higher reality makes him an object both of regret and admiration, and to measure the "success" or "failure" of the quest is thus a complex task. The hero must fail in one world in order to succeed in another. The quest-theme is interpreted differently in both novels, which exposes the inconsistency of Balzac's concept of the world-spirit (in Le chef d'oeuvre inconnu it is aesthetic-Platonic, in Louis Lambert it is

intellectual, in La recherche de l'absolu it is material).

Louis Lambert's quest for truth is described through various forms of narrative. These are the dialogues between Lambert and the narrator, the narrator's summaries from memory, Lambert's letters to his uncle and to Pauline, and his pronouncements while in a catatonic state. At the same time, his metaphysical explanation of the universe is gradually systematized. This is not a dramatic progression, since the quest takes purely verbal, reflective and written forms, but it is a dynamic one, because we sense the absolute as an increasingly dominant presence to which Lambert draws gradually nearer.

Lambert's special interest is to discover the "stuff" of thought and of will, to determine if this substance is ethereal or material. The search begins with analyses of words and their histories, and a longing to rediscover the first language ever spoken. Solitary readings of St. Martin and Swedenborg follow, and Lambert becomes increasingly isolated from hs fellow classmates. "Louis marchait dans sa route aérienne, complètement détaché des choses qui nous entouraient" (p. 62). His debates with his fellow classmate, the narrator, reflect Balzac's own search for certainty about the exact nature of the absolute. Another of Louis' desires is to have the ability to separate soul and body at will during waking life. He longs to be an "être actionnel ... qui ... doit, pour se conformer à sa nature, n'être

soumis à aucune des conditions physiques par lesquelles ... l'homme est arrêté ... " (p. 82).

As the novel progresses we sense the strengthening presence of the absolute, but we also foresee a climactic moment that will decide which is the stronger; Louis' intellect or the thing it longs to grasp. We also sense the impending frustration of his ambition to be an "être actionel" when he falls in love with Pauline. Louis believes that man "doit tendre à nourrir l'exquise nature de l'ange qui est en lui. Si ... il fait prédominer l'action corporelle ... l'ange périt" (p. 66). But his collapse into madness proves the near impossibility of a successful living out of this philosophy by a human being, even a genius. Perhaps especially a genius, since the ambition of genius precludes any sense of humility necessary to nurture one's "angelic" nature. It has been suggested, however, that Louis neither fails, nor goes mad.

> In the ambiguous dénouement of Louis Lambert, it is suggested that this young mental giant, instead of going mad, as the world believes, has succeeded in divorcing his mental and spiritual faculties from his bodily nature, and attained the ultimate pinnacle to which genius can aspire . . .[13]

Nonetheless it is also true that:

> The ange is the spirit of absolute goodness, which may exist in the simplest of men . . . a gift from a divine force, unbound by . . . intellectual considerations. Thus, the genius, upon whom the gift of

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[13]Besser, p. 65.

goodness is . . . not necessarily bestowed, remains very much a man.[14]

This is not to say that Louis fails because he is "unvirtuous." But he seems not to realize the contradiction between nurturing his spiritual nature and trying to capture mentally the Ethereal substance. To become fully "angelic" is to subjugate one's intellect to the greater reality, to become integrated back into the primordial source of things and thought. Even in Séraphita, ths can only be consummated in death. Louis tries to subjugate the absolute to his genius, and wants to remain alive while doing so. Then, when this desire suddenly clashes with his sexual desire for Pauline, the strain is too great, and it breaks his sanity. His catatonia, in which state his most stunning mystical revelations are uttered, reflects his unfixed status: he is here, yet not here, is not wholly within this world or the other, but is incongruent in both.

Louis Lambert also proves that character is destiny in La comédie humaine, because the absolute for Balzac is not an active force in men's lives except in their physical and mental constitutions. The "substance éthérée" is an obscure object of desire. It is attractive, in that it inspires the joy of intellectual or scientific discovery. Ultimately in Louis Lambert, it is not moral, castigating, friendly or

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[14]Charles Affron, Patterns of Failure in La Comédie Humaine (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968), p. 33.

unfriendly. It is simply there. Although it "behaves" like a castigating moral order -- purging itself of a disturbing element -- it does this more in the manner of an unscalable mountain or a sea that cannot be plumbed. Yet the other aspect of the absolute -- the question of its spiritual nature -- adds another dimension to Louis' failure. In this regard, Louis' error is one of misplaced emphasis. He is so excited by his search that his pursuit is far more intellectual than spiritual, and thus somehow of a partial nature. His true helplessness is against his ambition and his corporality. His failure was not in going mad, but in being human, too human to commit himself to two worlds at once.

Balthasar Claës fails for simliar reasons; he devotes himself to the pursuit of the ultimate reality, and tries to take for granted the tangible world of security and family. He is a different type of genius from Louis Lambert. Claës is a scientist obsessed with discovering the first principle of all matter. Where Louis used thought and reflection, Claës uses scientific and chemical research. The instruments differ, but the obsession is just as great.

Claës' movement toward catastrophe is symbolized in a richly quantitative way, through the presence or absence of plenitude in the Claës' house. After Balzac's description of the Flemish "matérialité la plus exquise"[15] and of the Claës family's traditional love of property and possessions,

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[15]Honoré de Balzac, La recherche de l'absolu (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1967), p. 23. All subsequent quotations are from this edition.

the stark figure of Balthasar Claës descending from his laboratory dominates the book at once. His neglected, distracted appearance is the most obvious effect of his single-minded obsession and of his indifference to the pleasure of his family's world. The use of images of plenitude has other functions as well.

Part of the plot structure of La recherche is a consistent and fluid image. This is the ebb and flow of the Claës household goods, which now disappear, now accumulate, as Claës draws nearer to, or falls farther from his goal. This is both a dynamic and a dramatic progression and it makes La recherche a more vivid novel than Louis Lambert, in that the latter's progression unfortunately takes the form of an increasing documentary verbosity.

For Balzac the Flemish character is marked by a love of plenitude. He evokes Flemish acquisitiveness through cumulative descriptions of their fondness for satins, tapestries, mandolins, lace, glassware, etc., in short "leur patience à tout amasser," (p. 25) which he reflects in his own heaping up of images and precise financial figures. The description of the Claës house is lengthy and meticulous: "cette vieille maison, simple au dehors comme une coquille, mais comme une coquille intérieurement nacrée et parée des plus riches couleurs" (p. 63). The house is the principal landscape of the novel and the main theatre of Claës' drama. It is also one of the two worlds to which Claës belongs. The other is

the world of the abstract intangible ideal, the "uncluttered" realm of the pure absolute. Claës' precarious position between these two worlds, and his struggles to decompose matter until he finds its unitary source, are symbolized through a strange "antagonism" between the cluttered world of plenty and the world of ideas, which, to him, is purer, higher and finer. As Claës becomes more obsessed with the absolute, the house grows emptier: servants are dismissed, carriages, silver and paintings are sold, all is sacrificed to the pursuit of the "other" world. When Joséphine, and later Marguérite, manage to win Claës temporarily back to the family, the objects return again. Thus while the description of the house is at first static, the house as a whole does become a fluid image. It is difficult, even impossible, to tell if Balzac is assigning any "superiority" to the ideal or to the real world, but this is because of his mastery at drawing out the ambiguities of the human soul. These worlds are at war in the Claës family, since each world is indispensable to a different character.

Claës becomes bored when the women try to reintegrate him into the family and society. The parties and teas are of little help: "Ces branches que rencontrait Balthasar en roulant dans son précipice, retardèrent sa chute, mais la rendirent plus lourde" (p. 133). He is not simply gravitating toward catastrophe. His deterioration does not proceed along an unbroken line (like Félix Grandet's), but

is a series of painful withdrawals and returns between worlds. The absolute merges into the foreground and recedes back again in the same rhythm. When Marguerite returns from her honeymoon, having left the supposedly "cured" Balthasar on his own, she finds " les murailles nues comme si le feu y eût été mis ... elle parcourut la maison, dont chaque pièce lui offrit le désolant spectacle d'une nudité ... L'idée de l'absolu avait passé partout comme un incendie (p. 289).

This can even be said to reflect Claës' scientific process. When excess matter is cleared away and matter is reduced to its most elemental state, perhaps then the source can be found. This, too, parallels the stripping of the house. Later, when Claës is dying, plenty is again restored: "... tous ses enfants l'entouraient avec un sentiment respectueux, en sorte que ses yeux purent etre récrées par les images de l'abondance, de la richesse ... Marguerite paya les dettes de son père, et rendit, en quelques jours à la maison Claës une splendeur moderne" (p. 297), but Claës passes out of this world, only finding the absolute through death. The fact of his death, and even the neglect of this family, cannot make Claës an unqualified failure. Although it costs him his life, he <u>does</u> find the Absolute. This makes him a success: "s'il a tort comme chef de famille, il a raison scientifiquement" (p. 222). But in trying to bring the ultimate reality within his own power,

he has tried to disrupt the harmony of "correspondences" between the two worlds. Like Louis, he is a disordering element that must be "purged." Lambert's goal was knowledge through genius, Claës's is power through genius, as was Frenhofer's. Their methods of communicating with the absolute are ego-preserving, because their intelligences "cannot bear to be substituted either for the totality of the real, or for its simplicity."[16]

> The presence of failure in La comédie humaine indicates that some obstacle is in conflict with the steady pulsation of forces governing the system that Balzac has created . . . a particular element is poorly integrated into the great mechanism . . . The failure of the Balzacian character depends upon an imperfect interpretation of the forces that control his life, on an unwillingness to make the compromises necessary for conforming to them . . .[17]

In the novelistic universe Balzac creates, this disordering element is always expelled, and order is preserved. As much Balzac admires the exceptional mind, universal order cannot be sacrificed to it.

Through this chapter we have seen the working of superior intelligences toward a metaphysical goal, or the theme of desire on a cerebral level. In other novels, however, this theme is worked out within a purely earthly

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[16]Georges Poulet, The Metamorphoses of the Circle, trans. Carley Dawson and Elliot Coleman (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1966), p. 43.

[17]Charles Affron, Patterns of Failure in La comédie humaine, pp. 4-5.

field of human endeavor, thus developing the more worldly ways of life tested by Raphaël in *La peau de chagrin*. The "great mechanism" in such works is the city of Paris. The themes of desire and will, success and failure, in society, as worked out by less intellectual, more ordinary heroes with material goals, appear in *Le père Goriot* and *Illusions perdues*.

IV. Le père Goriot and Illusions perdues

In Louis Lambert and La recherche de l'absolu, desire and intellect are inseparable. Balzac's portrayal of genius is a questioning of the role assigned by the positivists to reason, that of a controlling faculty guiding all men toward the common good. Reason for Balzac is vulnerable to desire, for the desire to know can become a mania in the exceptional being. But in delineating other types of mania, such as paternal love, Balzac separates desire from intellect. He describes Goriot's mania as "un sentiment si grand que rien ne l'épuise, ni les froissements, ni les blessures, ni l'injustice; un homme qui est père comme un saint, un martyr est chrétien."[1]

Let us also recall Balzac's description of love as "un besoin semblable à la faim, à cela près que l'homme mange toujours ... il [l'amour] va toujours croissant."[2] This definition applies to paternal love as well as sexual love. Le père Goriot is a portrayal of the vulnerability of the family unit to the divisive power of desire. Earlier we discussed the Saint-Simonians' confidence in man's "spirit of association," his gregarious instinct that leads him to create families. Seeds of dissolution may exist within families, but even while conflicts may arise, man's divisive

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[1]Lettres à l'étrangère (Paris: C. Levy, 1899-1950), p. 195.

[2]Physiologie du mariage (Paris: Garnir-Flammarion, 1968), p. 70, 85.

desires are in a process of dissolution, and they will one day disappear when the spirit of association prevails. Le père Goriot presents three families wherein alienation and antagonism predominate: the Goriots, because of Goriot's mania, the Taillefers, because of the rejection of Victorine, and the Rastignacs because of Eugène's growing ambition. The novel offers little hope that the "spirit of association" will ultimately prevail against such dissolution. The same pessimism pervades Les parents pauvres, as we shall later see. For the moment let us examine Le père Goriot.

Returning to the question of intellect and desire, it is clear that in Goriot, intellect is weak. He is a coarse, philistine bourgeois flour merchant, astute in business but with no intellectual life and no capacity for aesthetic appreciation. He is thus ruled mainly by sentiment, whch comes to acquire an exclusivity that approaches mania. Goriot's love for his wife is "sans bornes,"[3] and when she dies, "elle commençait à prendre de l'empire sur lui" (p. 147). After her death his love for her moves from the realm of reality to that of abstraction as love becomes his "idée fixe." Goriot loses the object upon which he once expended his loving and protective instinct. His love for his wife was partly paternal and is intensified by sudden privation.

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[3]Le père Goriot (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1961), p. 146. All subsequent quotations are from this edition.

He then transfers this love to his daughters, "jusqu'à la déraison" (p. 147), and spends floods of money on their education, wardrobes and possessions. His love goes against the natural grain by its exaggeration and its vaguely incestuous quality: "elles vivaient come auraient vécu les maîtresses d'un vieux seigneur riche" (p. 148).

Goriot is satisfying his desire to express protective devotion, by satisfying his daughters' acquisitiveness. He thus nurtures and encourages their desires for social prestige and money as well as his own. In effect, he makes predators of Delphine and Anastasie, as they feed upon him persistently and ruthlessly, denuding him of money, possessions and dignity: "je voudrais être le petit chien qu'elles ont sur leurs genoux. Je vis de leurs plaisirs" (p. 189).

Like other desires studied so far in La comédie humaine, Goriot's mania appears as a drive to have, get and be more, but is actually a drive to have, get and be less, a slow process of self-annihilation of which he is not aware. When Eugène visits Goriot's room for the first time, Goriot says, "ma vie, à moi, est dans mes deux filles ... Je n'ai pas froid si elles ont chaud, je ne m'ennuie jamais si elles rient" (p. 210). Goriot mistakes self-diffusion and immolation for self-aggrandizement and extension. He believes his being permeates Delphine and Anastasie, when in fact that being is slowly dissolving through them as they destroy it. The character of Goriot is completely opposed to that of

Vautrin, who is invulnerable to being "fed upon" by another's desires. Goriot's openness to his daughters' invading greed is the cause of his gradual loss of self that will end in death. Yet he nurtures the illusion of being reincarnated in his daughters and of his daughters as extensions of himself, in the same way that creation is an extension of God. He is blind to the contrast between the natural order of God's creation and the unnatural division between his daughters and himself.

In La recherche de l'absolu, the progression of Balthasar Claës' mania was measured by the amount of material possessions in his home. The more intensely he searched for the absolute, the more denuded the house became of its riches. The plenitude vs. void motif has a similar function in Le père Goriot. Goriot's initial status in the Vauquer boarding house is described mainly by his possessions, of which Balzac provides a meticulous inventory: a full wardrobe including eighteen shirts, a gold watch chain with diamonds, a complete set of richly decorated silverware. But in the second year of his stay Goriot moves to the poorer second floor of the house and his possessions dwindle away. His ceasing to dine out and restricted use of fire are part of a denuding process as his rise to the upper floors accompanies his descent socially and financially. His dignity diminishes as he becomes the butt of the other pensioners' jokes. At the end of the third year he has moved to the top

floor, the most miserable of all the lodgings in the house, with almost no possessions left. We are witnessing the slow degradation of a chracter into the eventual chaos of mania. Yet because this decline is symbolized by diminishing amounts of goods, it is a highly ordered and quantified progression. The novel's structure effects a stylistic containment of the anarchic energies it portrays. While Balzac questions the security of social order and the perfectibility of man into a creation of perfectly balanced faculties, "the realistic novel gives us an image of social fragmentation contained within the order of significant form . . . the realistic novelist . . . tries to hold together what he recognizes quite well is falling apart."[4]

Goriot meets a frustrating obstacle when both Delphine and Anastasie visit his room and beg frantically for money. Each daughter feels the acquisitive encroachment of her husband's power, since both Nucingen and Restaud aim to place restrictive control over the women's spending. But because Goriot's resources are nearly depleted, he cannot now expend his excessive desire. The pressure in his brain is a physical translation of the intensification of a desire that can find no outlet and pushes against obstruction. A sense of impotence enrages Goriot as he vows to take vengeance against his sons-in-law. Yet at the same time

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[4]Leo Bersani, A Future for Astyanax (Chicago: Little, Brown and Company, 1975), pp. 60-61.

Goriot's first glimmer of awareness of his daughter's true nature appears in this passage, as he laments that "ce n'est qu'à vos douleurs que je dois votre présence" (p. 360).

Goriot's greatest folly, which precipitates his death, involves a dress for Anastasie. He suffers a collapse after going out to sell his last belongings to buy her a gown for the Beauséant ball. His repeated pattern of wish-fulfillment is like Raphaël de Valentin's -- it is undermined by a decline toward death. After the ball, when Delphine and Anastasie fail to visit Goriot on his death bed, comes Goriot's climactic speech denouncing his daughters. For the first time Goriot recognizes the divisive and disruptive nature of both his own mania and their greed, and invokes institutions of justice and order -- the police, the courts and the Civil code, and also nature -- to heal the breach riven between fathers and children. "La société, le monde roule sur la paternité, tout croule si les enfants n'aiment pas leurs pères" (p. 408). Goriot recognizes that his mania has perverted his paternity, because his affection was never balanced by authority, and so it has unbalanced his family, placing his daughters above him and turning them against him. Both his abnormal devotion and the daughters' greed are threats to familial and social order. But this moment of illumination is not the beginning of a reversal of Goriot's downward trend; it is only a brief glimmer of awareness, after which Goriot lapses into the general error

of his life. "Je les bénis ... bénis" (p. 414).

In a sense Goriot expelled himself from his daughters' society, by elevating them to stations far above his own. He was a bourgeois who was not allowed to adjust to his daughters' new aristocratic station. He also went against the grain of natural and familial order, and is expelled from both through rejection, and finally death.

In contrast to the failure of Goriot is the success of the career of Eugène de Rastignac, which we shall now examine. Eugène is a fairly poor young man of twenty who initially comes to Paris to study law in the hope of supporting his family. The hero thus begins in a state of privation which motivates his activities. At first, he enjoys Parisian theatres and museums, but these mild delights give way to a growing envy of the wealth of high society. Reflections by Eugène on the frugality of his family's life, his limited allowance and the misery of the Vauquer boarding-house "déculpèrent son désir de parvenir et lui donnèrent soif des distinctions" (p. 61). As Eugène's sense of privation increases, so also does his desire for success. His will to act is immediately set in motion, and after he is counselled by his wealthy cousin Mme de Beauséant, the process of seduction, initiation and corruption that is Eugène's story begins.

In attempting to cross over from his own class to Mme de Beauséant's, Eugène will divide himself from his former

life as a dedicated student, from the sincere affection of his family, and ultimately from his conscience. His story is thus another portrayal of the divisive, if not destructive, power of desire. Paris itself is evidence of that pwoer, since its variety of classes does not constitute a harmonious whole, but a mass of interests and will in mutual opposition.

> A ce qui contemple cet univers, deux faits s'imposent d'abord: celui de l'inégalité des êtres et celui de leur mouvement ascendant ... Entre ces êtres qui séparent des différences parfois très grandes, se livre une lutte désespérée. Les forts écrasent les faibles ... La lutte entre les hommes ... est d'autant plus douloureuse que la société est plus raffinée, plus évoluée.[5]

Balzac contends that development and refinement of a society can encourage competition among those who long to enjoy the products of that development. Competition breeds unscrupulousness and so is a corrupting force, especially in an ambitious young man who apsires to a higher class than his own. Clearly, those progressive forces so praised by earlier sociologists lead to very different ends in La comédie humaine. Antagonism, rather than association, is the main mode of social life.

Goriot and Victorine Taillefer attract the altruistic, heroic side of Eugène's nature. The other characters, most of all Delphine and Vautrin, tug at his egotism, coaxing it

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[5]Bernard Guyon, Le pensée politique et sociale de Balzac (Paris: Librairie Armand Colin, 1967), p. 547.

into continued growth. Eugène's conflict is between two paths of life, as was Raphaël's early in La peau de chagrin, when the latter had to choose between the studious life with Pauline and the pleasurable, wealthy life with Foedora. But Eugène has "cette vivacité méridionale qui fait marcher droit à la difficulté pour la résoudre, et qui ne permet pas ... de rester dans une incertitude quelconque ... (p. 162)." Eugène's "vivacité méridionale" is his decisive strength of will, that promptly functions in the service of his most immediate desires. Each step he takes is carefully considered and carried out with painful regret, so that he is not blindly abusive or indifferent. The interplay between his desire and will is mot often productive of action that moves forward at an economical but not manic pace. Eugène is centralized between Goriot and Vautrin, in the sense that while his desires do not reach the fever pitch of Goriot's mania, neither is he as cold and controlled as Vautrin.

In a further stage of Eugène's education, Balzac introduces Vautrin. Unlike Eugène, who emerges from a provincial background and struggles to adjust to Paris, Vautrin seems to have come from nowhere. He appears subject to no limitations of heredity or environment, but is self-creative in his ability to assume identities. Unlike Eugène, he can also adjust to any surrounding. Solitary and disconnected, Vautrin creates connections with other characters at will in order to manipulate them. He has the extrasensory perception

of the "spécialiste:" "son oiel semblait aller au fond de toutes les questions, de toutes les consciences, de tous les sentiments ... Il savait ou devenait les affaires de ceux qui l'entouraient, tandis que nul ne pouvait pénétrer ni ses pensées ni ses occupations" (p. 38). Nonetheless the mania for knowledge of a Lambert or Claës does not possess Vautrin. "Vautrin succeeds in realizing the synthesis between knowledge and desire which is withheld from every other character of the Comédie humaine."[6]

As we saw in Physiologie du mariage, will for Balzac is the projection of energy through the manipulation of men and circumstances. The character of Vautrin incarnates will, specifically the will to power. Since his chief goal is the control of others, he is not a slave to desire, Since he is also in constant control of himself. Unlike Raphaël, Vautrin is not vulnerable to self-destruction through unbridled desire. He is a master at economizing his forces. Vautrin is a consummate preserver of self.

Eugène's meeting with Vautrin is a testing of his own will not to be consumed by the will of another through temptation. Vautrin begins this temptation by telling Eugène that two attitudes toward life are possible: humble submission to law and decorum in a life of honest industry, or

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[6]Gretchen Besser, Balzac's Concept of Genius (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1969), p. 192.

rejection of all convention and an embracing of opportunism. In the former way of life the individual subjugates his desires to the general interests of society and avoids becoming a threat to social order. Such a life is devoted to progress, to becoming part of the continual stream of social improvement, not directing it but being directed by it. Vautrin denounces this way as stupid, cowardly and weak. He reduces virtue to laziness, equating it with inactivity and lack of drive. His own values are completely tangible and quantified. "Il n'y a pas de principes, il n'y a que des évenements; il n'y a pas de lois, il n'y a que des circonstances: l'homme supérieur épouse les évenements et les circonstances pour les conduire" (p. 181).

In his Mémoire sur la science de l'homme of 1818, Saint-Simon said, "il n'existe pas de phénomène qui ne puisse être observé du point de vue de la physique des corps bruts, ou de celui de la physique des corps organisés, qui est la physiologie."[7] While I do not wish to digress too lengthily about Saint-Simon's scientism, I feel it needful to mention it as an essential aspect of his theory of progress, especially in a discussion of Vautrin. Saint-Simon perceived man's intellectual evolution as proceeding thus: primitive man's conception of the world was based on idolatry and superstii-

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[7]Oeuvres de Claude Henri de Saint-Simon (Paris: Editions Anthropos, 1966), Vol. V, p. 30.

tion with little real knowledge of the causes and effects of phenomena. Man later advanced to polytheism and then to deism, i.e., from an awareness of a multitude of animated, invisible causes behind creation to the sense of a single cause. Further intellectual evolution brought man to the scientific age, with the physically-founded concept of several laws ruling different classes of phenomena. Saint-Simon perceived his own century as having reached this stage.[8] This reduction of reality to physical dimensions, while it increases the power of man's rational knowledge, also has certain moral implications. In Le nouveau christianisme Saint-Simon, describing the progress of ethics, says: "le temps de la théologie est passé sans retour, et ... ce serait folie de vouloir continuer à fonder la morale sur des préjugés dont le ridicule fait tous les jours justice ... on ne peut plus donner à la morale d'autres motifs que des intérêts palpables ... Voilà le grand pas que va faire la civilisation; il consistera dans l'établissement de la morale terrestre et positive."[9] Saint-Simon denuded reality of spiritual essence and claimed all knowledge, including man's knowledge of right and wrong, to be founded in tangible reality. As we saw, he believed that the natural altruism of men would lead them to work and

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[8]Ibid., pp. 12 - 13.

[9]Le nouveau christianisme (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1969), p. 115.

progress together in harmony. The theory of man's mental evolution from primitivism to scientism was reiterated in the 1830's by Comte, who believed that man's adaptive, altruistic sense was as inevitably a part of him as his biological being. Therefore, the lack of a set of spiritual ethics existing over and above nature did not pose a problem.

Balzac has a materially based, scientific view of reality, but it is coupled with metaphysical idealism, as we saw in Louis Lambert. But Vautrin's statement quoted above is a pessimistic portent of the scientism of Zola and the naturalists. In Zola's work, moral realities, i.e., man's emotions and motivation for action, are entirely physically rooted, so that man becomes trapped in a physical reality in which moral codes cannot prevail against his degenerative desires. Vautrin has a scientific view of the world and reduces reality to circumstances and events. For him, no situation has any moral implications and no choice is guided by law, but only by expedience. His actions proceed with scientific precision as he sets up chains of cause and effect. If he kills Victorine's brother and if Eugène marries Victorine, Eugène and Victorine will gain Taillefer's inheritance and Vautrin will have his plantation. Vautrin is a superior man insofar as he can effectively exert his will upon circumstances, but he is a criminal and a murderer. His character is a sinister suggestion

of what scientism can be corrupted into. While he confirms the scientific, materialist viewpoint, he also denies its "inevitable" contribution to harmony and progress by disconnecting it from altruism and applying it to amoral opportunism.

Vautrin also represents the corruption of power Balzac perceived in nineteenth-century French society. In an age of repeated changes of government, Balzac senses the lack of a securely centralized power, and he saw the history of power as an evolution in reverse, a gradual decentralization. "Aujourd'hui, notre société, dernier terme de la civilisation, a distribué la puissance suivant le nombre des combinaisons, et nous sommes arrivés aux forces nommées industrie, pensée, argent, parole. Le pouvoir n'ayant plus alors d'unité marche sans cesse vers une dissolution social qui n'a plus d'autre barrière que l'intérêt."[10] Vautrin is an example of this purely individual, self-serving power, and his attempts to corrupt others into exercising power the same way are a continuance of the dissolution of power, and thus another aspect of the anti-progress theme in Le père Goriot.

In addition to his separation from social progress, Vautrin lives outside the processes of nature, not only by his homosexuality but by his perverted paternal feelings for

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[10]La peau de chagrin (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1966), p. 80.

Eugène.[11] He loves Eugène and wishes to "create" him, to experience a vicarious joy in Eugène's success, as Goriot does with his daughters. Paternity is denatured in this novel by Vautrin's and Goriot's perversions and by Taillefer's rejection of Victorine. All three characters go against the grain of the nurturing, generative process that creates the human family. Such portrayals of unnaturalized sexuality are part of Balzac's view of a world whose energies tend to waste and unproductiveness.

The material rewards of Vautrin's opportunism fail to captivate Eugène. His sense of self-preservation prevents his becoming a mere avatar for the will of Vautrin, and therefore he rejects the latter's criminal plan. He then vows to work diligently, to make his own way without protectors and renounce the ambitions of the would-be dandy. But after a visit with his tailor, "en se voyant bien mis, bien ganté, bien botté, Rastignac oublia sa vertueuse résolution" (p. 187). Each time Eugène is ready to resume a life of honest work and sincere affection, he is turned away by the sight of rich furniture or fine clothes. Overcome with desire for the pleasurable life, Eugène moves further from the industrious life Vautrin had renounced, and has the foresight to know that he must seize the right levers in order to rise high in the "machine" of society. Unlike the

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[11] V.S. Pritchett, Balzac (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1977), p. 166.

Saint-Simonian "machine," wherein each part functions equally, the Parisian social machine accomodates those with the strength of will to rise into dominant positions.

The contrast between Raphaël's obsession with Foedora and Eugene's attraction to Delphine is considerable. Foedora represented society itself, the glittering prize that caused Raphaël to drive himself into poverty and emotional exhaustion. Eugene, however, is no more overcome by Delphine than he was by Vautrin. He has no illusions about Delphine and she is not an "idée fixe." Throughout the novel Eugène's sturdy, self-preserving instinct prevents his being consumed to the point of degeneration by passion or debauchery. "Cette vie extérieurement splendide ... dont les fugitifs plaisirs étaient chèrement expiés par de persistantes angoisses, il l'avait épousée ... il s'y roulait en se faisant ... un lit dans la fange du fosse ..." (p. 244). Besides this, Eugène still retains a simple, strong goodness that leaves him capable of compunction. This goodness remains with him when Goriot dies: "il regarda la tombe et y ensevelit sa dernière larme de jeune homme, cette larme arrachée par les saintes émotions d'un coeur pur ..." (p. 304).

In contrast to the career of Eugène is that of Lucien Chardon, the aspiring provincial poet of Illusions perdues. Lucien's story illustrates Balzac's fascination with the theme of failure. This theme is explored in depth in Charles Affron's Patterns of Failure in La comédie humaine. Affron

describes the general mechanism of La comédie humaine as operating toward a recurring, persistent expression of human failure. He says Balzac has a tragic compulsion to judge and doom the characters inhabiting his fictional universe, wherein any infraction of the rules set down by the forces that move the world must lead to defeat. "Each character comes into the world armed with qualities that the author has labeled . . . as liabilities or advantages."[12] While Lucien's beauty seems to be an advantage, there are reasons why it will prove a liability. His face has "la blancheur veloûtée des femmes ... Lucien était mince et de taille moyenne. A voir ses pieds, un homme aurait été ... tenté de le prendre pour une jeune fille déguisée ... il avait les hanches conformées comme celles d'une femme."[13] During Raphaël's withdrawn, non-desiring and passive life in "L'Agonie," he began to acquire a womanly appearance. But this way of life was a chosen alternative among many possible ones. Lucien is not feminized by choice but feminine by nature, a fatalistic portent of failure, because as we shall see, his sexuality is a metaphor for passivity and weakness of will.

Lucien's situation is, in its outward form, much like Eugène's. He is a young provincial who has acquired a dis-

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[12]Charles Affron, Patterns of Failure in La Comédie Humaine (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966), p. 41.

[13]Illusions perdues (Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 1966), pp. 59-60. All subsequent quotations are from this edition.

taste for his station in life, and he is attracted by the opportunity for success in the capital of his country. He is also deeply affected by his experiences there. But unlike Eugène, who remains and adjusts, Lucien is eventually expelled from Paris. The reason for this relates to the strength of will, which in La comédie humaine often operates in the service of egotism. Will serves desire by making its fulfillment possible. It also preserves the self, functioning as a survival mechanism. Eugène is never submerged or absorbed by any outward influence because he has the will to resist, or to adjust. Lucien, however, is a different case. He is, throughout Illusions perdues, so receptive to influence that he is at the mercy of it.

> The will is a concrete force which, if focused and concentrated is all-powerful . . . the lack of such a will dooms men to failure . . . the weak succumb because of the lack of fortitude, the ability to dominate, the perspicacity which the never-ending and ruthless struggle for survival demands from them. As the author repeatedly outlines the failure of the weak man, he solidifies his arguments concerning the validity of strength and will power.[14]

Unlike Eugène, whose initiation into Parisian life is a gradual struggle between scruples and temptations, Lucien is revealed from the first as lacking in integrity: "qui ne recule point devant une faute s'il y a profit, et qui se moque du vice s'il en fait un marchepied" (p. 60). He is thus more vulnerable to corruption than Eugène. Lucien's

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[14]Affron, p. 76.

humiliation by the narrow-minded and insensitive haut monde during his poetry reading at Mme de Bargeton's home reveals his disgust with provincial life. But unlike Eugène, he takes no initiative to improve his lot. It is Louise' possessive persuasion that entices him to Paris. This is an instance of a weak-willed character being provided with a "surrogate will, which infuses into him the strength . . . he does not himself possess."[15] Louise' description of Parisian society is suited to Lucien's naïveté. "Ne devez-vous pas hâter de prendre votre place dans la pléïade qui se produit à chaque époque?" she asks, so that for Lucien, "Paris ... lui apparut avec sa robe d'or, la tête ceinte de pierreries royales, les bras ouverts aux talents ... Là tout souriait au génie" (p. 159).

Paris arouses Lucien's desires as it did Eugène's, at first, for the dandy's life of wealth and ease, then for a successful literary career. Lucien's demands for immediate satisfaction deny the necessity of the determined and patient exercise of will in achieving such goals. In Paris, after realizing the amount of money needed to become a dandy and experiencing the callous rudeness of publishers, Lucien feels defeated when he has barely begun his quest for success.

At the Sainte-Geneviève library Lucien meets the gentle, long-suffering writer, Daniel d'Arthez. The reader has

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[15]Besser, p. 128.

already noted Lucien's tendency to be absorbed by other characters. When Lucien meets Daniel, the latter gives him "un regard qui l'enveloppa" (p. 22). D'Arthez reaffirms Balzac's conviction that a strong will must accompany genius to reinforce the creative process. "Le génie arrose ses oeuvres de ses larmes ... qui veut s'élever au-dessus des hommes doit se préparer à une lutte ... Vous avez au front le sceau du génie ... si vous n'en avez pas au coeur la volonté ... renoncez dès aujourd'hui" (pp. 221-2). By his quiet and studious diligence D'Arthez has committed himself fully to the patient and austere life of the writer that was taken up and abandoned by Raphaël. It is characteristic of Lucien to become infatuated with and dependent upon Daniel, so that Daniel, by revising Lucien's novel and supplying the preface, also provides Lucien with another surrogate will, this time, to creative labor. Lucien does not absorb Daniel's example; rather he is absorbed by Daniel's character. As Mme de Bargeton's will to social success pulled Lucien in its wake to Paris, so Daniel's will to create draws Lucien to the "Cénacle."

Illusions perdues reflects the plot structure of La peau de chagrin by placing the hero at a crossroads, where different paths of life tempt him, and the plot is set in motion by the choices the hero's character leads him to make. Lucien is soon faced with the choice between life with the Cénacle, wherein desire for success is directed by

the will to work, and where sensual gratification is sacrificed for austere industry, and the life of "le Journalisme," which encorages sensationalist writing, quick profits, and a life of sensual indulgence. As for Lucien's choice, "son caractère le portait à prendre le chemin le plus court" (p. 257).

Lucien's initiation into journalism is aided by Etienne Lousteau, who articulates Balzac's own views of the journalistic practices of his day. In the 1830's the French press was developing as rapidly as industry. Journalism was a field of fierce competiton and rivalry and of verbal wars between critics. Criticism had the power to make or destroy the careers of actresses, novelists and poets. Despite Balzac's fascination with journalism -- where in youth he had hoped to find a career -- he saw the liberal press as abnormally, disproportionately powerful, as a kind of autonomous power-expending machine that absorbed the talents of young men only to waste them through quick, easy work uncommitted to any aim except momentary profit.[16] The press is a "machine folle, simple outil des passions, déstructrice d'hommes à illusions."[17] Etienne was once one of these "hommes à illusions," but as he tells Lucien, "mon effervescence premiere me cachaient le mécanisme du monde; il a fallu le

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[16]Pierre Barbéris, Mythes balzaciens (Paris: Armand Colin, 1972), pp. 207 - 210.

[17]Ibid., p. 212.

voir, se cogner à tous les rouages, heurter les pivots; me graisser aux huiles" (p. 251). But Lucien will not be able to adjust to the workings of this machine as well as Etienne, as we shall see.

Nonetheless Lucien soon learns the power of journalism to satisfy his desires and confer power upon him. His theatre reviews help him become the actress Coralie's lover, favorable reviews of his own novel and poetry are promised by Lousteau and handsome profits are assured by Dauriat. Thus Lucien prostitutes his art for money. But there are limits to Lucien's new-found power. His scathing review of a play at the Ambigu theatre is drastically altered so the journal will not lose the theatre's support, and he is later pressured into attacking Daniel d'Arthez's book. Lucien learns that success in journalism depends on a lack of committed and consistent views, i.e., a lack of unified ideology, for one must be ready at all times to express the opinions most expedient to the moment. Journalism is thus the enemy of ordered thought, "l'intelligence servant au désordre."[18] Furthermore, "le journaliste n'est libre que dans le cadre étroit d'une liberté ... structurellement niée, annulée ... La presse n'use les individus qu'elle emploie que parce qu'elle est elle-même l'une des pièces de l'immense machine à user de l'homme."[19] Unlike the Saint-Simonian machine,

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[18] Ibid., p. 213.

[19] Ibid., p. 211.

journalism for Balzac is a manipulative mechanism wherein certain parts can dominate others, "un instrument au service des intérêts anarchiques et déchaînés,"[20] Lucien will soon have no part in the operation of this machine; instead, he will be expelled by it.

Throughout the remainder of the novel Lucien's is a character not in the making but in the unmaking. He will assume the characteristics and attitudes of those he becomes attached to, and his helplessness will increase as he is hemmed in by those who "appropriate" him. Lucien's life will become another portrait of desire as a disintegrating enemy of the self. His decline begins on a moral level. When he finally succesds as a poet and journalist, he becomes impertinent and mocking, growing cocksure and careless through a sense of invulnerability. He acquires skill at lying and assumes petty airs of superiority. The deterioration of his character progresses in proportion to the fulfillment of his material desires.

Another stage of Lucien's decline begins when he meets the actress Coralie. Lucien differs from Eugène in regard to both female relationships and debauchery. Eugène's relationship with Delphine is inspired by self-interest. Although he is using her and she him, his lack of worldly experience causes his shock at her conduct toward her father. Eugène's

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[20] Ibid., p. 211.

attempts to reform Delphine are noble but of course pointless, and he never renounces her; she is too useful. Regarding debauchery, Eugène is never absorbed or broken down by it, as is the more susceptible Lucien. This is because of Eugène's superior adaptability, as opposed to Lucien's malleability.

When Lucien first meets Coralie, he wishes to forsake Platonic love (such as he had with Mme de Bargeton) for sensual love. His sexual desires become desublimated and more vulnerable to the destructive effects of excess. "J'ignore tout de l'amur que se roule dans ... le joies de la matière ... Voici ... ma première orgie ... ne faut-il pas apprendre les joies ... de l'amour des courtisanes et des actrices? N'est-ce pas, après tout, la poésie des sens" (p. 294)? Lucien's plan is a rather pathetic version of the mature Rastignac's attitudes on "La Débauche." "La débauche est certainement un art comme la poésie, et veut des âmes fortes."[21] Lucien has neither the constitution nor the astute sense of planning to see "La Débauche" as anything but a new toy to play with. We note further that Balzac says Lucien is "entraîné" by his desire. The frequent use of the passive mode in describing Lucien's feelings brings his near-helplessness into sharper relief.

Lucien's ascent has continued in a steady amassing of

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[21] La peau de chagrin, p. 208.

wealth, luxurious possessions, a gradual procuring of advantageous connections, and only an occasional spell of work. The plot follows a cumulative motif, the growing glamour of success being accompanied by a steady deterioration of character. There is no climactic break leading to a descent into failure, but the moment can be pinpointed nonetheless. It comes after Mme d'Espard has dangled before Lucien's eyes the most prestigious bait of all: the chance to regain his maternal family's title if he will agree to stop insulting Mme de Bargeton in print. "Insensiblement il renonça donc à la gloire littéraire en croyant la fortune politique plus facile à obtenir" (p. 391). But as if this wish were too far beyond Lucien's desserts, this scene is soon followed by Lucien's realization of impending bankruptcy, due to his profligate spending habits. One day, " ... la voiture, les chevaux et le mobilier de Coralie furent saisis par plusieurs créanciers, pour des sommes dont le total montait à quatre mille francs" (p. 395). It is a stark, brutal sentence, marking off losses as from an inventory list. It is the keynote to the now-beginning decline of Lucien's fortunes. The accumulative movement of Illusions perdues has hit its peak; now begins the denudation, bit by bit, of Lucien and Coralie's belongings, and of everything heretofore gained.

Disasters now follow in alarming succession: losses at gambling, attacks by liberal journalists after Lucien "defects"

to the monarchists, the loss of the title, the failure of his novel and the death of Coralie. "Dans la vie des ambitieux et de tous ceux qui ne peuvent parvenir qu'à l'aide des hommes et des choses ... il se rencontre un cruel moment ou je ne sais quelle puissance les soumet à de rudes épreuves: tout manque à la fois ... Les gens qui savent résister ... sont les hommes réellement forts" (p. 424).

As Lucien loses money, house and prestige, he is also drained of his will, and ceases to care if he lives or dies. His expulsion from Paris is brought about by attacks from both the liberal and royalist press. Thus, the "machine folle" of journalism casts him out of its oeprations, not as a disordering element but as an unfitted one. His casting-off might have been his salvation, were he made of worthier stuff. He might have returned permanently to Houmeau to begin a new life. Instead, as he is on his way out of Houmeau once more, intending to commit suicide, he meets Vautrin.

It is not surprising that Lucien's meeting with Vautrin should be markedly different from Eugène's. Vautrin's speech to Eugène had little effect on the latter and served more as a self-revelation than as part of the formation of Eugène. Vautrin has assumed another identity, the priest "Carlos Herrera," whereas Lucien is about to annihilate his identity through suicide. Lucien is a depleted being, an empty shell that Vautrin fills with his own philosophy.

Once again a surrogate will infuses Lucien, and he becomes Vautrin's creation, the avatar of the latter's desires: "ce marquis de Rubempré, je l'ai créé et mis au monde aristocratique; sa grandeur est mon oeuvre ..." (p. 602). As Lucien later writes to Eve, "je ne m'appartiens plus" (p. 617).

Yet in spite of Lucien's increasing malleability and corruptibility (throughout Splendeurs et misères des courtisanes), Vautrin's power over the young poet has its limits. When Lucien, disgraced and in prison, commits the ultimate withdrawal from life by hanging himself, Vautrin suddenly seems no longer to belong to himself. "Jacques Collin ... avait renonce à lui-même depuis sept ans ... Pour lui Lucien était son âme visible."[22] A part of Lucien is Vautrin, and because of Vautrin's extension of himself into Lucien, the latter's self-annihilation is crippling. For the first time Vautrin becomes vulnerable to desire, because he has loved Lucien more than any other, and his extension of self into Lucien's being has ended in a partial self-immolation. In a strange way Vautrin is at Lucien's mercy when Lucien commits suicide, his only independent act of will. Lucien breaks free from Vautrin in a permanent, irrevocable way that defeats the latter. In replacing Bibi-

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[22]Splendeurs et misères des courtisanes (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1963), p. 472.

Lupin Vautrin decides to try "une dernière incarnation, non plus avec une créature mais avec une chose."[23] That "thing," ironically, is the police force, a part of the social order from which Vautrin once divorced himself and into which he becomes integrated, he who was once the most autonomously individual character in La comédie humaine.

In 1841 Balzac made arrangements with a group of publishers for a complete edition of La comédie humaine[24], and continued to write novels, including Ursule Mirouët and Un début dans la vie, in 1842. His last two major works were La cousine Bette (1846) and Le cousin Pons (1847).

The title of Le père Goriot is suggestive of its theme of misguided paternity. Significant, too, is the title Les parents pauvres. "Poor relations" are outside the main family's life and growth. The title of "cousin" is not suggestive of generation or nurturing, and indeed the protagonists of La cousine Bette and Le cousin Pons are in effect sterile and leave no legacy. The cousins' lives are a futile exercise of desires that end in nothing and produce nothing. Their drives are monomanic and purely consumptive,

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[23] Ibid, pp. 540 - 541.

[24] E.J. Oliver, Honoré de Balzac (New York: The Macmillan Company, 19640, p. 132.

as with Pons, or mainly destructive, as with Bette. Les parents pauvres is Balzac's most sordid portrayal of social decline and dissipation, caused by desires pushed to manic intensity.

In La cousine Bette, "all that is human is thoroughly debased. The failure is that of existence at large. Men have . . . surrendered to the basest facet of their nature, and . . . have contaminated each other with the disease of unchecked passion. It is a process of mutual degradation, where the once human being sinks to his lowest state in La comédie humaine."[25]

The degradation and baseness of the events in La cousine Bette are indeed grim and melodramatic, and nowhere else in La comédie humaine is the destructive power of desire so sordidly portrayed. We have, first, three main portrayals of excessive or denatured sexuality: the middle-aged virginity of Bette, the manic lust of baron Hulot and the calculated promiscuity of Valérie Marneffe. The baron is possessed by an erotic desire that, over the course of the work, wears him down to complete physical, moral and even mental breakdown. Mme Marneffe economizes her forces more efficiently through the planned sale of sex as a commodity. When she becomes pregnant the father is unknown, and she goes through a travesty of maternal joy, assuring

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[25]Affron, p. 69.

her four lovers and her husband of paternity. The child is stillborn; having, in a sense, come from "nowhere," it becomes nothing in death, underlining the abortiveness of Valérie's sexuality as a consuming rather than a creative force.

Bette may be poised between these two extremes of controlled, calculated sexuality and uncontrolled lust. Her ugliness makes her, like Cousin Pons, an outcast from love and sex and an involuntary "economizer" of forces, since she has little opportunity to expend her desires before meeting the artist Steinbock. When Steinbock is taken from Bette by Hortense, Bette's jealousy becomes an encroaching force that invades and destroys the entire Hulot family. By encouraging Hulot's affair with Valérie, Bette becomes a catalytic agent that stirs his destructive passions further.

The family and especially the institution of marriage are undermined throughout the novel. Marriage among the main characters is either unstable or a sham. Bette and Steinbock have a spurious marriage which is really a symbiotic relationship between a possessive, domineering virgin and a weak-willed, malleable young man. Adeline Hulot desperately preserves the appearance of her marriage to the baron, though it has been disintegrating for years. Valérie Marneffe has a sordid mercantile arrangement with her husband wherein he consents to her sale of sexual favors for money, and career advancement for himself.

The motifs of decay and decline reach unusually graphic

and grotesque proportions when Montés, Valérie's jealous lover, condemns her to a putrefying death by a jungle disease. For Balzac the jungle is "that primitive place where the forces of the great machine are in their purest form, and it is only right that it should be the source of his world-killing malady."[26] The primitive world, as represented by the jungle, was part of a very distant past for the positivists, a state from which man was supposed to have progressed into greater enlightenment. But for Balzac, uncultured and prmitive energies seem very much alive, and as pervasive of society as poison in the blood.

Balzac calls La cousine Bette the depiction of a battle between vice and virtue,[27] virtue being embodied in the family. If we may, for the moment, revert to Saint-Simonian terms, the family in this novel would be an "association" unit, faced with the antagonistic forces of Bette's jealousy and Hulot's lust. The novel reaffirms the destructive power of individual mania, which does not burn itself out before it surges through the novel, breaking down the Hulot family as Bette wreaks her vengeance.

Balzac was deeply inimical to any threat to a spirit of social solidarity. Division of a family, when caused by egotistical passion, is a grave misfortune. "Aussi regardé-

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[26] Ibid., p. 71.

[27] "Préface," La cousine Bette (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1963), p. 7. All subsequent quotations are from this edition.

je la Famille, et non l'Individu, comme le véritable élément social."[28] Nonetheless this social element seems inevitably at the mercy of disruptive desire, and La cousine Bette is one of Balzac's most pessimistic novels in that respect.

Although Le cousin Pons has little of the gruesomeness of La cousine Bette, the motif of decline persists. From his first appearance in the novel, Pons is in a deteriorating state. His face is death-like, and he seems to be a deviation from nature because of his untimely birth, "cette naissance hors de saison."[29] He is also essentially excluded from the society of the Marvilles and Camusots, who barely tolerate him. Unconnected, unloved except by Schmucke, and childless, he is also unproductive. He is a mediocre musician, with an innate talent but, like Steinbock, without the force of will to disciplined creation. His mania for collecting artistic objects and his gourmandise cause a deterioration of his dignity, when he performs menial tasks for his relatives in return for meals. Pons is in direct contrast to the young Balzacian hero who, at the outset of Le père Goriot or Illusions perdues, is on the threshhold of many trials and experiences. Pons, not only because of age and

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[28]"Avant-Propos," La comédie humaine (Paris: Bibliothèque de la Pléïade, 1951), Vol. 1, p. 8. All subsequent quotations are from this edition.

[29]Le cousin Pons (Paris: Librairie Générale Française, 1973), p. 18. All subsequent quotations are from this edition.

social displacement, is at the beginning of his own end before the novel is half over, and is "replaced" by his art collection, which becomes the object of the numerous conspiracies that form the plot. When Balzac says "Ici commence le drame" (p. 192), Pons has already been excluded from the action by illness.

Throughout the work Pons is more a reactive than an active character. He is servile, and succumbs quickly to rejection from the Marvilles and Popinots. His friend Schmucke is "aussi distrait que Pons était attentif ... Schmucke était rêveur ..." (p. 22). Theirs is a "marriage" of friendship, mutual comfort and extreme dependence on the part of Schmucke, whose regressive infantilism renders him more non-active than Pons. Instead of shaping the course of events, Pons and Schmucke become the victims of Mme Cibot, Remonencq, Magus and Fraisier, a network of rapacious characters in mutual opposition, but united in their desire for Pons' art collection. Though the ailing Pons catches Mme Cibot stealing his will, this leads to nothing at all, for he merely collapses back into bed. Schmucke, upon learning Mme Cibot's characters, is shocked, but is not incited to act. Both characters are portents of the non-active hero of L'éducation sentimentale.

Pons and Schmucke are also desexualized, since their ugliness leaves them no hope for any love but sublimated friendship. Sexuality is denatured in other characters as

well. Mme Cibot has a moustache and a "beaute virile" (p. 51), and Mme Camusot dominates her husband. Other characters are described as drying out and corrupting. Madeline Vivet is a "vielle fille sèche et mince ... couperosé ... (p. 33). Mme de Marville, once fresh, plump and blonde, "était devenue sèche" (p. 37). These portraits of infantilized men and masculinized and aging women reflect a non-progressive, sterile society.

When Pons and Schmucke die, Pons' art collection becomes a mere status symbol for the Popinots, and Fraisier is "nommé juge de paix" (p. 363), a phrase which we may take as a portent of the conclusion of Madame Bovary, when the crass Homais is awarded the Legion of Honor. Thus Balzac's last major work ends with the defeat and death of an exceptionally sensisitve, Romantic individual and the triumph of bourgeois philistinism. And in every area of man's life, family, social relations, marriage, civil laws and institutions -- that is supposed to be a center of order and harmony, Les Parents Pauvres portrays corruption, chaos and waste. Yet Balzac's ultimate prognosis for social man cannot be summed up in his last works only. We shall take a final look at his life before attempting an evaluation of his views as a whole.

Toward 1850 Balzac was growing increasingly withdrawn and depressed, to such a point that he reacted to the impending socialist revolution of 1848 with a weary, irritable

apathy. He often wrote to Mme Hanska of his failing health, perpetual money problems and worst of all, of his writer's block. A trip to Saché to resume his writing proved futile, for Balzac was "burned out." He returned to Paris, where he died in 1850. Balzac's premature death confirmed his own theories of life as an expending of energy, vulnerable to waste and decline.[30] "Balzac ne fut rien que ce désir toujours renaissant du désir, cet espoir de posséder, survivant à toutes les possessions, cet élan vers l'avenir ... une vie perpetuellement en projet."[31]

This same sense of endless projection is found in Balzac's theories of social history. Unlike the Saint-Simonians, he did not perceive a future golden age toward which his present age was evolving. History was a movement that only engenders further movement. For society to achieve perfectly balanced order, movement, and therefore life, would have to stop. Balzac therefore could not accept the Utopic myth. History was progress, but it was a progress operated by and for the ambitious bourgeois, who sought, not unity, but the free expression of material desire in all directions. This tended, as we have seen, to contribute to the deterioration, rather than the progress,

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[30]Pierre Barbéris, Mythes balzaciens, pp. 323-342.

[31]Gaëtan Picon, Balzac par lui-même (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1964), pp. 158-159.

of society.[32]

It is not within governments, Empires or social classes that Balzac hoped to find the source of world unity. Pierre Barbéris reminds us that Balzac's synthesized explanations of life are focused mainly upon the intellectual and emotional qualities of men. By studying the most generalizable traits of men, Balzac hoped to seize the essence of human nature, and hoped this essence would reveal to men the guides for meaningful action. Men might then gain more control of their lives through this understanding.[33] Balzac's novels, while portraying the failure of excessively desiring heroes, do offer views of alternative ways of life, through such stable, adjusted characters as Eugènie Grandet, Marguerite Claes, Victorin Hulot, Eve Séchard and Horace Bianchon. But we cannot oversimplify Balzac's vision of man by calling such characters "ideal." Balzac is both a Romantic individualist and a socially conscious realist, and it is with compassion and admiration that he sacrifices his exceptional heroes to the social and metaphysical order whose imperfections and blindness he never forgets to expose, despite his awareness of the necessity of their preservation. Although La comédie humaine as a whole is a panoramic view of social man, within each novel Balzac repeatedly turns to the indi-

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[32]Barbéris, p. 224, 236.

[33]Ibid., p. 235.

vidual as the means of judging the effects of material progress and of the heedless blindness of metaphysical order. For Balzac, man remains the measure of things.

As I noted earlier, Balzac's life was drawing to a close just when the socialist revolution was giving new and passionate impetus to the ideal of progress. The Second Republic was founded upon principles faithful to this ideal. Armand Massant, one of the founders of the new constitution, believed in revolution as the expression and triumph of progress. Because he was opposed to the violence of revolution, he hoped to create flexible institutions that could absorb new laws, opinions and ideas in a peaceful manner. The revolution inspired many social reformers -- Proudhon, Considérant, and Leroux -- with hopes for ideal future societies.[34] Renan's Avenir de la science (1848) defined the goal of history as the achievement of the perfect state through the progressive dominion of reason over instinct. The development of science, philosophy and art would help men create an ideal civilization.[35] Progress was still optimistically believed in, and this belief was to meet with yet another challenge, in Flaubert's L'éducation sentimentale.

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[34]Bury, The Idea of Progress, pp. 318-319.

[35]Pensées de Ernest Renan (Paris: n.p., 1890), n.p.

V. L'éducation sentimentale and L'assomoir

It is fitting, for a number of reasons, to follow our study of Balzac with a discussion of Flaubert's L'éducation sentimentale. In this novel Flaubert, as Balzac did in La comédie humaine, assumes the role of social historian. The zeal of the 1848 revolutionaries and the hopes for political and social improvement that inspired the foundation of the Second Republic, provide the raw material for Flaubert's judgement of the ideal of progress. At the same time, the story of Frédéric Moreau's search for love and success invites comparison with the stories of Eugène de Rastignac and Lucien de Rubempré. Both Frédéric and the socialist revolutionaries in L'éducation sentimentale also illustrate Flaubert's concern with human desire and will in action, specifically, the effectiveness of desire and will in changing the course of progress, both within history and within the context of individual life.

Flaubert's opinion of socialist aspirations was already evident in a letter to Louis Colet of 1847: "J'ai assisté à un banquet reformist ... quels discours! ... je restais froid et avec des nausées de dégoût au milieu de l'enthousiasme patriotique ..."[1] Flaubert's contempt is aimed not only at this particular revolution and its participants, but is part of an all-embracing political nihilism. All governmental reform is futile to Flaubert.

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[1] Correspondance (Paris, L. Conrad, 1910), Vol. I, p. 78.

Socialists and republicans lack any sense of "l'insuffisance humaine, du néant de la vie,"[2] which is the sine qua non of an intelligent mind. Flaubert's "frisson historique"[3] is a desire to escape the ludicrous spectacle of contemporary political enthusiasm.

Like Balzac, Flaubert undermines the myth of historical progress toward universal harmony cherished by the sociologists we have discussed. Unlike the Saint-Simonians, who viewed revolution as an aid to progress, Flaubert uses the 1848 revolution as a portrait of failure and of the futility of all reformist hopes.

The story of the revolution is paralleled in L'éducation sentimentale with the story of Frédéric Moreau, who illustrates Flaubert's aim to "faire l'histoire morale des hommes de ma génération ... livre d'amour, de passion; mais de passion telle qu'elle peut exister maintenant, c'est-à-dire, inactive."[4] The active passions of the revolution's participants are contrasted with Frédéric's inactive passion for Mme Arnoux. We have seen how often desire, ambition and mania form the armature of Balzac's plots, and how often the discharging of energy becomes a wasting-process, sending the hero into moral and physical decline. A Balzacian character

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[2]Ibid., Vol. II, p. 17.

[3]Ibid., Vol. II, p. 19.

[4]Ibid., Vol. III, p. 15.

is usually marked from the start with character traits that help determine this course.

Flaubert's aim in L'éducation sentimentale is fundamentally different. Rather than studying propellant desire in the hero, he examines "veulerie" -- inertia and listlessness. With Frédéric Moreau Flaubert goes beyond the explorations of weak will in Illusions perdues. Frédéric has none of Lucien de Rubempré's childish arrogance or narcissism; he is almost colorless. "The reason for writing A Sentimental Education was to delineate a type of cowardice and veulerie which excludes . . . definition; characters as clearly drawn as Rodolphe or Lheureux or even Charles have no place here. . ."[5] The same tempting goals -- love, social and career success -- exist for Frédéric as for earlier heroes, but he passes through a series of half-baked, untried decisions, approaches love tentatively, and is always easily deterred.

Unlike the principal characters of La comédie humaine, the protagonists of L'éducation sentimentale do not follow a line of action that precipitates them into ruin, nor is the "present" time of the novel marked by any signs or omens of a priori dramatic significance. The characters appear caught in a suspended state between the awakening and the fulfillment of desire.

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[5]Benjamin F. Bart, Flaubert (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1967), p. 499.

In general, Frédéric either fears or depends upon external circumstances, never seeing such circumstances as pliable to his will. He lacks will power -- the catalytic agent that would work upon his tangible surroundings and cause a decisive interaction leading to his success or his failure. He therefore has little or no part in the creation of the novel's action, and his indeterminate drifting is reflected in the shape of the novel itself. "The novel, which must follow him about, becomes centrifugal, too, or at best has so many focuses that unity is denied it."[6]

Nonetheless, the novel's division into three parts allows us to perceive a pattern in Frédéric's movements. Part One has an introductory function. It reveals Frédéric's character, then portrays his exploration of several ways of life, and his discovery of the objects of his desire. Love, career, social success, and politics all present themselves to Frédéric, but he moves passively through these fields of opportunity, on a course of nonaction interrupted sporadically by abortive acts. He will often be moved about by chance rather than personal initiative, and he will sometimes feel a desire to be delivered from the necessity to act by withdrawing from life. All these tendencies are born of "veulerie." Let us examine how they interact throughout Part One.

Frédéric's essential passivity is revealed from his

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[6]Ibid., p. 486.

first appearance, as he leans upon the rail of a boat traveling from Paris to Nogent. The languid, drifting, dreamy quality of his life is shown by his submission to the boat's movement, and by the boat's merely following the ineluctable flow of the river.[7] When Frédéric first sees Mme Arnoux, "le désir de la possession physique même disparaîssait sous une envie plus profonde, dans une curiosité douloureuse qui n'avait pas de limites".[8]

Desire in Frédéric Moreau is languid, even free-floating, in that it fails to fix upon anything for long without becoming diffuse and passive. His desire strays by free association from Mme Arnoux to all the things surrounding and belonging to her, and his physical longing, for the moment, drowns in a sudden flood of other desires: to know about her servants, her house, etc. But this proliferation of smaller goals is inversely related to Frédéric's will to achieve. The more goals exist, the more languid Frédéric becomes, as if the multiplied effort were too great. He is not therefore inspired to plan any any strategy, unlike Eugène de Rastignac, whose first sight of Delphine de Nucingen is an inspiration to action.

Later, on the way to his mother's house, Frédéric dwells on the memory of the boat trip, and "bercé par le

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[7] Ibid., p. 487.

[8] L'éducation sentimentale, in Oeuvres (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1952), p. 37. All subsequent quotations from the work are from this edition.

mouvement de la voiture, les paupières à demi closes, le regard dans les nuages, il s'abandonait à une joie rêveuse et infinie" (p. 41). His revery in the rocking cab is regressive because of its infantilism, and because it leaves him in the past, ignoring any possible future. It also reveals Frédéric's tendency to substitute illusion and dream for reality.

This same tendency appears in the passage where Frédéric meets Deslauriers, his childhood friend, after a long separation. Flaubert describes the career ambitions they had as schoolboys. "Ils causaient de tout cela, pendant les recréations ... ils en chuchotaient dans la chapelle ... ils en rêvaient dans le dortoir ... ils parlaient interminablement"(p. 45). (Emphasis added).

Frédéric and Deslauriers talk endlessly around their goals and dream of them to the point where linguistic and mental representations of action replace action itself. But all the talking wears out into nothingness. Not only revery but forms of speech supplant action in L'éducation sentimentale.

Later Flaubert describes the life Deslauriers and Frédéric lead together. They often take long walks, smoking, "et les fumées de leurs pipes tourbillonaient dans l'air pur ... ils sentaient, en l'aspirant, un vaste espoir épandu" (p. 85). Desire, in Frédéric and Deslauriers, is diffuse and amorphous, like smoke, with no tendency toward resolution.

It floats from idea to idea. In this scene Deslauriers dreams of wealth, fame and power, and Frédéric of living in a Moorish palace. But then, "ces choses rêvées devenaient à la fin tellement précises, qu'elles les désolaient comme s'ils les avaient perdues" (p. 85). Ways of life pass through the realm of possibility and imagination, and fade to nothing. But so clearly drawn are the illusions, that Frédéric and Deslauriers' emotions are those of men who have actually owned and lost such pleasures. The goals of wealth, fame and power are not projected into the future by any strategies to posess them. Instead, they become the objects of nostalgia, as if they had already been possessed. This regression on an illusory plane is a further retardant to action.

When Frédéric finally does choose a career, his ambition is of the same dreamy quality as these reveries.

> Il semblait monter du fond de lui-même quelque chose d'intarissable, un afflux de tendresse qui l'énervait ... Il se demanda, sérieusement, s'il serait un grand peintre ou un grand poète; -- et il se décida pour la peinture, car les exigences de ce métier le rapprocheraient de Mme Arnoux ... Le but de son existence était clair maintenant, et l'avenir infaillible (p. 82).

This upsurge of energy is at first unfocused, then wavers between the two channels of poetry and painting. Finally, overcome by Frédéric's subjective desire for the wife of an art dealer, the energy is aimed at painting. But Frédéric has no real vocation, for after he purchases a

pile of supplies and paints for a short while, the project is abandoned. All of Frédéric's projections into the future make a spurious forward movement in his life, since they are mental only, and no tangible advancement ever takes place. These dreams are also a counterpoint to Frédéric's earlier revery in the rocking cab. Frédéric often drifts from memory to anticipation, between past and future, but in the "present" of the novel, most of his time is spent in aimless wandering and in waiting for events to occur. Often, this causes him to be influenced by chance happenings. There is, for example, the moment when he visits the Dambreuses, not by his own choice, but because M. Roque asks him to deliver some papers there. After an uneventful visit, Frédéric has his first sight of Mme Dambreuse. "Il n'apercevait que son dos, couvert d'une mante violette ... il s'échappait de cette petite boîte capitonnée un parfum d'iris ... une vague senteur d'élégances féminines" (p. 51).

An acquaintance with Mme Dambreuse would provide Frédéric with the means to social and career success among the bourgeoisie. Another opportunity arises for Frédéric, and as before, he remains distant and passive. He perceives only the appurtenances of Mme Dambreuse: clothes, perfume and a carriage, things that represent the woman. He does not actually "see" the woman herself. "Il regrettait de n'avoir pu distinguer Mme Dambreuse" (p. 52). Throughout L'éducation the personal belongings of Mme Dambreuse and Mme

Arnoux become distancing factors keeping the protagonist peripheral to reality, and far from the objects of his desire.

This becomes clearer with Frédéric's entrance into Arnoux's shop, "L'art industriel." He had no plans to visit the shop, but by chance saw the sign "Jacques Arnoux," and once again "le hasard" makes a decision for him. He seems at last to have penetrated Mme Arnoux's "territory," but in fact will grow even more distant from her by entering the shop.

A plenitude of objects presents itself to Frédéric in the shop: statuettes, drawings, catalogues and paintings. These objects are peripheral not even to Mme Arnoux but to her husband. And Frédéric does not "see" them with any discrimination: "de grands tableuax dont le vernis brillait ..." (p. 52). (Emphasis added). Only the surface gloss of the paintings appears to Frédéric. Finally there is the staircase, with its locked door at the top, a symbolic obstacle. When Frédéric learns Mme Arnoux is out, he meekly replies "je reviendrai" (p. 52). Houses and shops in La comédie humaine open doors of opportunity to ambitious characters, like the wealthy houses in Le père Goriot and the antiques shop in La peau de chagrin. But the shop in L'éducation is a localized field for Frédéric's half-actions, and becomes a cul-de-sac when Frédéric backs off. The shop is a place for nothing to happen in. After this, Frédéric

completely gives up any hope of success with Mme Arnoux or Mme Dambreuse.

After Frédéric settles permanently in Paris, and passes his law exam, he receives another opportunity for action, when he comes upon a student's uprising in the rue Saint-Jacques. In any scene of mass activity, Frédéric's role is that of a passive observer. When violence breaks out and the clerk Dussardier is arrested for assault, Frédéric and Hussonet follow him in the rear of the crowd, always distant from the center of action. When they visit the prison and pretend that Dussardier is a fellow law student, they establish an illusory contact with him that reflects their spurious contact with the uprising. They act under the illusion of involvement. Dussardier shamefully senses his own coarseness when he observes Frédéric's and Hussonet's white hands. But Frédéric's hands are white because they are unsullied by experience and involvement.

The students' rebellion is a mass expression of hopeful desire for reform, but it also illustrates Flaubert's conviction of the futility of action. When Dussardier, in his cell, takes out his broken pipe, he gazes upon the ruins of his joy. He had spent three years making the pipe only to have it shattered. This foreshadows the outcome of the hopeful preparations leading to the revolution of 1848 as we shall later see. For the moment, I would like to return to

the question of Frédéric's distancing from his empirical surroundings, and how it affects his knowledge of the realities of his life.

The novel's title would appear to qualify it as a Bildungsroman about an education of the feelings. But in fact, Frédéric's perception of the world is a series of moment-to-moment impressions creating a fragmented pattern of non-education. If we were to describe this pattern in Balzacian terms,we might say that Frédéric, obviously not interested in "pouvoir" in any active sense, and of weak "vouloir," also cannot commit himself to any quest for knowledge, or "savoir." This places Frédéric in direct contrast to the Balzacian genius, who perceives all things as peripheral to a hidden reality that he is obsessed with penetrating. Frédéric, however, remains on the periphery of reality, living on a representational plane. The Balzacian genius' quest may lead to madness, but Frédéric's leads to nothing at all.

For example, in the Bordelais tavern, when Regimbart and Pellerin begin to disparage Arnoux's character, Frédéric comes to the latter's defense, suddenly seeing him as good, intelligent, and much maligned. But this is only by virtue of Arnoux's closeness to Mme Arnoux. When Frédéric visits Arnoux after this incident, he is offended by the latter's crass vulgarity, and so "Mme Arnoux se trouvait diminuée par la vulgarité de son mari" (p. 74). Frédéric first views

Arnoux in the light of Mme Arnoux's virtues, then only minutes later he views Mme Arnoux in the light of her husband's vices. Each of Frédéric's impressions proves impermanent when it gives way to a new one, in an aimless pattern that leads to no knowledge at all. On both an active and a perceptual plane, therefore, Frédéric makes no progress toward anything. Indeed, the whole of Part One of L'éducation sentimentale reveals "une tendance constante au rien, à l'absence. Mais une absence qui n'est pas extérieure, qui a sa source profonde dans une pour-suite du non-être, inscrite au coeur des personnages."[9] For example, one night Frédéric walks through the streets of Paris after one of his abortive visits to the Arnoux. "Des nues sombres couraient sur la face de la lune. Il la contempla, en rêvant à la grandeur des espaces, à la misère de la vie, au néant de tout ... pourquoi n'en pas finir" (p. 109)?

Death becomes attractive as a possible means of evading the reality of the necessity to act. Drunkenness, sleep, revery and the temptation to die emerge at various points in the novel as presumed havens for a soul tormented by desire. They are paths to will-less nothingness. Frédéric is overcome with a longing to be assimilated into this nothingness. Yet it is not fear, but listlessness, that prevents his performing the one act of will -- suicide -- that would free

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[9]Jean-Pierre Duquette, Flaubert ou l'architecture du vide (Montréal: Les presses de l'université de Montréal, 1972), p. 64.

him from the trying interaction between his desires and the outside world. He thus decides to return to his native province of Nogent.

When Frédéric visits his mother there, he learns of the financial disasters that have left her, and himself, nearly penniless. In a rare moment of resoluteness he plans to return to Paris. But his limitless suggestibility, and the vulnerability of his will to external forces, make him succumb to the cajolings of his mother, and he is lulled into the dreamy comforts of provincial life: "se considérant comme un homme mort, il ne faisait plus rien, absolument" (p. 124). By renouncing all his desires, Frédéric retreats into a death-like state of suspended animation.

It is also during his stay in Nogent that Frédéric sees Louise Roque for the first time. Although Frédéric meets Louise after Mme Arnoux and Mme Dambreuse, Louise might be said to represent a young man's first love, an introductory phase in his "éducation sentimentale." But her appearance in Frédéric's life is mistimed. She was born too late, both because of Frédéric's age and because his obsession with Mme Arnoux has already begun. Thus, Frédéric's attraction to Louise' innocent playfulness is another form of regression. Louise is part of Nogent's listless, somnolent world, where Frédéric seeks refuge.

At this moment in L'éducation sentimentale, Frédéric has come full circle. He began by traveling to Nogent, then

passed through a series of tentative approaches to love, career and political involvement. His failures and disappointments led him back to Nogent, where he now sinks into the same dreamy languor that characterized his life at the very beginning of the novel. "Le sens à donner à la vie serait l'accomplissement solitaire d'une simple révolution sur soi-même."[10]

Nonetheless Frédéric is soon jolted out of his revery, not by his own will but by circumstance, when an inheritance from his uncle enables him to return to Paris. Thus begins Part Two of the novel, which concentrates more deeply upon Frédéric's experiences with love and politics. We will see Frédéric become more closely involved in those areas of life he so timidly approached before, and yet his involvement will remain only partial and temporary. Part Two also examines the growing political discontent of Frédéric's friends, that helps lead to the 1848 revolution. This second phase of the novel, like the first, is a study of desire and will interacting toward many goals on a personal and an historical level, but it also examines in more detail the causes leading to the failures in Part Three.

A new phase in Frédéric's "éducation sentimentale" begins after his return to Paris, when Jacques Arnoux takes him to a ball at the home of the courtesane Rosanette, who will introduce Frédéric to a more sensual and physical passion than he felt for Mme Arnoux and Louise. The masked

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[10]Pierre Cogny, L'éducation sentimentale de Flaubert (Paris: Librairie Larousse, 1975), p. 29.

ball is reminiscent of the Taillefer dinner party in La peau de chagrin, in its reflection of the pleasurable life of Paris in 1846. Flaubert's description of the costumes is lengthy and detailed, with emphasis on the richness of cloth, lace and jewelry. Most noticeable is the Bacchante figure, who incarnates the intoxicating spirit of the ball. The dining scene is described more sparingly than Balzac's lurid orgy in La peau, without the latter's nightmarish fever pitch of appetitive and drunken indulgence. But during the dinner, a woman dressed as a Sphinx coughs up blood on a handkerchief, and Frédéric realizes she is dying of consumption. "Alors, il frissona, pris d'une tristesse glaciale, comme s'il avait aperçu des mondes entiers de misère et de désespoir ... et les cadavres de la Morgue en tablier de cuir ..." (p. 155). The sphinx is a tomb for the dead, and the cadaver image recalls the death-like figures of the Taillefer "morning-after." Like the shrinking of the shagreen hide, the blood emphasizes the pathological process of deterioration that undermines the pursuit of sensual pleasure. And Frédéric is soon caught up in this process, as he is seduced by the coarse, voluptuous Rosanette. When Frédéric returns home after the ball, he senses that an entirely new world has opened up for him. "Une autre soif lui était venue, celle des femmes, du luxe et de tout ce que comporte l'existence parisienne" (p. 158). As "La Débauche" in La peau de chagrin tempted Raphaël, and as the pleasures

of Paris tempted Eugène and Lucien, so now Paris seems like pleasure objectified to Frédéric.

But such pleasure is only one of the temptations of Paris. There is also the hope of a career in the state Council, and to achieve this, Frédéric becomes a frequent visitor of the Dambreuses. This sets the scene for some of Flaubert's most merciless exposure of what he considers bourgeois philistinism and stupidity. The gatherings in Mme Dambreuse's home contrast completely with the masked ball: here there is no frenzied excess of sensual joy, only dull complacency. Mme Dambreuse' social graces are mechanically perfected and she is like a "fruit conservé" (p. 161), without sexual attraction. Throughout this section of the novel, Frédéric will move about from Mme Dambreuse's home to Rosanette's and to Mme Arnoux's, vacillating among different ways of life: the sensual life, the social life, and the life of true and hopeless devotion. His desire is divided among these three, and he lacks the resolution to commit himself to any one of them.

Frédéric also cannot commit himself to any solidarity with his male friends, Deslauriers, Sénécal and Pellerin, who are passionately opposed to the regime of Louis Phillipe, and firmly committed to a better future society based on democratic principles. Throughout this chapter the reader senses that Frédéric is pursuing a wasteful course with Rosanette, and that his need of Mme Dambreuse separates him

from his friends who need his support. Frédéric's confidence of success with both these women is leading him on a path to certain disappointment. At the same time his three friends, by their idealism and excessive certainty of achievement, are setting themselves up for disillusionment. By assuring themselves of success as the only possibility, they display an imperceptive subjectivism not unlike Frédéric's. The stage is being set for failure on a personal and an historical level.

Despite his liaisons with Rosanette and Mme Dambreuse, Frédéric's love for Mme Arnoux is undiminished, and he attempts to declare himself to her, by visiting the earthenware factor now owned by Arnoux.

The earthenware factory is a place of prodigious productivity. Once again, a mass of objects representing Arnoux's ambitions appears: decorative objects displaying little insipration and intended only for profit. This factory is a place where financial progress is sought, an ironic setting for Frédéric, who makes no "progress" with Mme Arnoux in this scene. When Mme Arnoux continues to resist Frédéric, he leaves, calling her "une imbécile, une dinde, une brute," thus tryingto convince himself that his desire no longer exists. By first imagining Mme Arnoux is unattainable, then insisting she is undesirable, Frédéric deceives himself as to where the difficulty really lies, by projecting the reasons for failure onto the object of

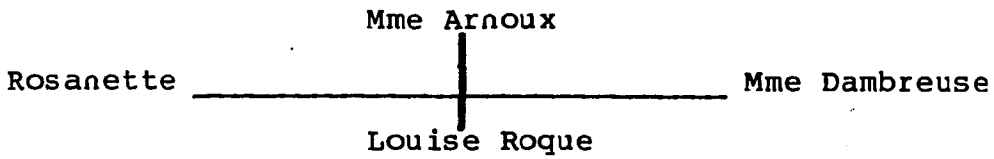
desire.

Frédéric's relationship with Rosanette also proves disappointing because of her exasperating fickleness. This, coupled with his own dwindling supply of money, makes Frédéric's sadness so hard to bear that he thinks again of Louise Roque, and returns to Nogent, repeating his pattern of failure and escapism. Louise is now a young lady, and the stage is gradually set for her marriage to Frédéric.

Louise' attraction to Frédéric is similar to his devotion to Mme Arnoux. Louise is younger than Frédéric and worships him, with "un de ces amours d'enfant qui ont à la fois la pureté divine religieuse et la violence d'un besoin" (p. 281). She tends to idealize Frédéric, seeing him as with a glowing halo. He is, she hopes, the agent of her deliverance from the restrictions of provincial life.

Yet Frédéric feels no passion for Louise, only a fraternal solicitude and a desire to develop her good qualities. When Louise asks if he would like to marry her, Frédéric says, "je ne demande pas mieux" (p. 284). He does not love her; he loves the fact that she loves him. Frédéric repeatedly turns to Louise as a last resort, after giving up other hopes, while Louise places all her hope in him. Their desires are out of harmony as well as mistimed.

In order to evaluate Frédéric's "éducation sentimentale" we may diagram his relationships with women spatially:



Mme Arnoux is the supreme love of Frédéric's life, and as we have seen, Rosanette and Mme Dambreuse are deviations from the path toward that love. They are on an equal level, for each has attractions and deficiencies. Frédéric can give up neither of them despite his awareness of their faults. Louise, I believe, is diametrically oppposed to Mme Arnoux in many ways. Mme Arnoux is mature and experienced in sorrow, refined and composed. Louise is young, lives a limited life and has a provincial coarseness. But most importantly, Frédéric assumes that Mme Arnoux is forever unattainable, and that winning her might prove disappointing. At the same time, he assumes that Louise will always be accessible, and that marrying her will bring at least some measure of contentment. Frédéric's feelings about Louise and Mme Arnoux are two extremes of his tendency to act upon preconception rather than perception, a tendency which makes the phrase "éducation sentimentale" ironic. "Les illusions sentimentales" seems more suitable for Frédéric, and "Les illusions politiques" for his friends.

These political illusions are expressed when Frédéric returns to Paris, abandoning Louise yet again. The opportunity for significant political action presents itself once more, when Frédéric is invited to a party to celebrate

Sénécal's release from imprisonment for subversion. Again the ideals of a new regime are discussed, as Sénécal states that universal suffrage will bring the triumph of democracy, and "le Pouvoir," in the person of Louis Philippe, is condemned. But Flaubert's questioning of such ideals becomes more open than in the previous chapter, even contemptuous: "ils mélaient aux griefs légitimes les reproches les plus bêtes" (p. 294). Once more Frédéric's participation in the general enthusiasm is minimal. Some time after the party he visits Mme Arnoux again and swears he will never marry Louise, saying, "Qu'est-ce que j'ai à faire dans le monde? Les autres s'évertuent pour la richesse, la célebrité, le pouvoir! Moi, je n'ai pas d'état, vous êtes mon occupation exclusive, toute ma fortune, le but, le centre de mon existence, de mes pensées" (p. 300-1). And so, when Mme Arnoux goes to the rented house in Auteuil, Frédéric follows her there and begins an idyllic tryst. While the active revolutionary spirit is growing stronger among his friends, Frédéric retreats altogether, truly believing there is nothing for him to do in the world.

At Auteil, Frédéric and Mme Arnoux live in the safety of the imagined impossibility of fulfillment. "Il était bien entendu qu'ils ne devaient pas s'appartenir. Cette convention, qui les garantissait du péril, facilitait leurs épanchements ... ils s'imaginaient une vie exclusivement amoureuse ..." (p. 302-3). And Frédéric "tremblait de perdre

par un mot tout ce qu'il croyait avoir gagné ..." (p. 304). Imagined joys replace real ones, and Frédéric lives with the appearance of having won Mme Arnoux. But "this preserved purity is an 'arrested' surival . . . a privileged and rare condition in the world of Flaubert. And it can exist only where there is a denial of life."[11] Nonetheless, Frédéric's increasing lust begins to interfere with their idyllic, insouciant life, to the point where he ignores the obvious, reasonable obstacle of Mme Arnoux's son's illness and insists she join him at a hotel. It is February 21, 1848. Frédéric had decided that Mme Arnoux must act upon her love for him. While waiting at the hotel he receives a note from Deslauriers, who has arranged for Frédéric to take definitive action, too, by joining the uprising at the place du Panthéon the next morning. But once again Frédéric's love directs the course of his life, to the point where he brushes aside the coming revolution as irrelevant. Opportunity and readiness never coincide in L'éducation sentimentale. Frédéric is not ready to help his friends, and Mme Arnoux, because of Eugène's illness, and because she is not ready to give herself, will not come.

When Mme Arnoux does not appear, Frédéric renounces her, seemingly forever. "Il se jura de n'avoir plus même un désir; et comme un feuillage mort par un ouragan, son amour

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[11] Brombert, p. 180-1.

disparût" (p. 314). If Frédéric's love can disappear like this, it is too variable, too suggestible, like his sense of will. When in La comédie humaine a character is obsessed by an "idée fixe," he pursues it relentlessly, forgetting and forsaking everything and everyone else. So does Raphaël de Valentin in his longing for Foedora, and Balthasar Claës in his quest for the absolute. But Frédéric Moreau does not pursue Mme Arnoux in a unilateral course, having not the single-mindedness of Balzac's obsessed heroes. Balzac wanted to demonstrate the workingsof a chosen set of drives, among them greed, lust, ambition, metaphysical and scientific curiosity, and his heroes tend to follow a steady and consistent course of fixation. But since Flaubert's interest is amorphous "veulerie," his hero is unable to fixate and then act the fixation through.

Having renounced Mme Arnoux, Frédéric turns again to Rosanette. As the revolution reaches a climax, Frédéric and Rosanette consummate their passion in the hotel room reserved for Mme Arnoux. Thus the life of Frédéric and the history of France undergo a new phase: the ending of one order and the start of another, as Frédéric's former love is banished for a new one. Definite choices have been made on both an individual and a social level, and the third part of L'éducation sentimentale is a study of the consequences of those choices. It is also the novel's definitive portrayal of failure and disillusionment.

Early in Part Three Flaubert portrays the pillage of the Tuileries. The crowd celebrates its own energies in a frenzied, joyous destruction that absorbs the individual members into a massive movement of energy, "comme un fleuve refoulé par une mareé d'équinoxe, avec un long mugissement, sous une impulsion irrésistible" (pp. 319-320). This discharge of desire through action contrasts with the amorphous, irresolute desire of Frédéric, that often surges up and then vanishes. It may therefore seem that Frédéric's passivity is meant, by contrast, to place the passion of the revolutionaries in a favorable light. But Flaubert says that "une joie frénétique éclata, comme si, à la place du trône, un avenir de bonheur illimité avait paru ..." (p. 320). The above remark foreshadows the revelation of this undertaking as an historical example of the futility of action. The new regime will have its own imperfections. Already the crowd's glorious dream has its degenerate aspects, as we see when they attack the wine cellar and indulge in an orgy of drunkenness. For the moment, desire for reform and progress degenerates into appetitive excess. Higher ideals give way to lower appetites. When Hussonet tells Frédéric, "ce peuple me dégoûte" (p. 322), we can assume this is Flaubert's voice.

But for such an idealist as Dussarder, the dream of a future Utopia persists. He tells Frédéric and Hussonet, "on

sera heureux maintenant" (p. 323)! His ecstasy over the new republic parallels Frédéric's ecstasy over Rosanette. In each instance, one world of values is renounced for another, in the hope that, this time, satisfaction will result.

In the aftermath of the revolution, hope and gaiety infuse and join crowds of people, so that "rien ne fût amusant comme l'aspect de Paris, les premiers jours" (p. 325). These last words already foretell the ephemeral nature of the dream. The first days are gay, the ensuing ones will not be. Flaubert underlines the lack of realistic expectation among the working class: "chaque métier, chaque industrie atendait du gouvernement la fin radicale de sa misère" (p. 325). The characters also have individual dreams prompted by personal desire rather than public concern. Pellerin longs for an art forum wherein artists would pool their talents and produce works of genius. Mlle Vatnaz makes passionate speeches about equal rights for women. But the tone of Flaubert's criticisms grows harsher. He calls such desires part of "la démence universelle" (p. 330). The revolution first appears as a communal expression of desire exploding into violent action, then as separating into a mass of conflicting separate desires with subjective motives. But these subjective motives always existed -- the revolution only gave a momentary appearance of solidarity. In the aftermath, we witness a series of individuals whose personal desires are not necessarily compatible with reality,

or with one another's desires.

As for Frédéric, he is denounced at a meeting at the Club de l'intelligence for having missed his appointment at the place du Pantheon on February 22. It was Frédéric's subjectivism and remoteness from reality that made him miss the meeting for Mme Arnoux's sake, and avoid battle action to be with Rosanette. He did not have the will to act in the breaking down of the old order, and thus is expelled from the new order.

In June of 1848, Frédéric and Rosanette take a "honeymoon "trip to the Fontainebleau forest, just when the June riots are raging in Paris. Rosanette and Frédéric are seen walking through a vast and empty field that stretches away into nothingness. The field may beametaphor for the revolution itself as leading to nothing. It certainly has this meaning for Frédéric and Rosanette's affair, for Frederic begins to grow disillusioned with Rosanette. He is disturbed by her recounting of her courtesane's life, and irritated by her egotism. At the same time, the June riots are exploding the myth of progress cherished by Dussardier. The riots are more than a violent protest against the new Republic's closing of the national workshops. It is not merely the violence between guards and insurgents, the pools of blood and general wreckage of property that concern Flaubert, vivid though his descriptions are. When Frédéric visits the wounded Dussardier, the latter, once so passiona-

tely hopeful for the new republic, now expresses disillusionment and regret over the regime's broken promises to the working class. In February Dussardier and the others had overthrown the repressive rule of Louis Phillipe in the hope of a utopia. Only a few months later the socialist experiment was itself the object of rebellion. The reformist movement is losing force and breaking up, at the same time that Rosanette's desirability is fading. The child she is expecting gives Frederic no hope of any joyous beginning. Its death symbolizes the abortiveness of their affair and of the 1848 venture. On both an historical and a personal level, the novel reinforces Flaubert's view of life as moving from desire to action to disillusion, in a fatalastically repeated pattern. There is no such thing as progress, only this pattern of wanting, gaining, renunciation and new wanting.

Frédéric continues this pattern when he dreams of yet another new life, which, he hopes, will begin with Mme Dambreuse. Frédéric's liaisons with Rosanette and Mme Dambreuse are described in terms of the deleterious effects they have on his character. Rosanette led him into a life of lazy pleasure and indifference to the urgency of social change. Mme Dambreuse will now lead him into a change of character for which Flaubert makes his contempt quite clear. "Si médiocres que lui parussent ces personnages [les bourgeois] il était fier de les connaître et intérieurement

souhaitait la considération bourgeoise" (p. 394). It is interesting that Frédéric proceeds so fearlessly in his attachment to Mme Dambreuse. It may be that his lack of true love for her precludes the disappointment that, in a case of such love, would be inevitable. He is safer from disillusionment by pursuing what he does not deperately want to begin with.

Frédéric's shift to Mme Dambreuse parallels the shifting of French government to the right, towards a re-establishment of the old order. While Frédéric never becomes politically involved in this movement, the stultifying effects of his connection with Mme Dambreuse' circle leaves no doubt as to Flaubert's opinion of a social change favorable to the bourgeoisie. The bourgeoisie for Flaubert was the embodiment of torpor, complacency, and philistinism. We note that for all her charm Mme Dambreuse is insensitive to the poor, egotistical and culturally impoverished. She lacks physical desirability, so that Frédéric experiences "la désillusion de ses sens" (p. 404). Her most attractive quality -- wealth -- becomes greatly reduced when her husband dies and leaves the bulk of his estate to his illegitimate daughter. Frédéric's hopes of a new life are again shattered. "Adieu ses rêves et toute la grande vie qu'il aurait menée" (pp. 414-415). In the same way, any government, any change men hope to effect by revolution, and any order they establish, will also have something lacking.

Utopia, like perfect love, is always out of reach.

Frédéric's final breaks first with Rosanette and then with Mme Dambreuse, are among the few acts of will he performs. His leaving Rosanette, however, is prompted solely by the misconception that she ordered the sale of the Arnoux household goods after Jacques Arnoux's financial difficulties. Thus his response to her pleas, "si tu me connaissais mieux, tu saurais que ma décision est irrévocable!" (p. 441) is supremely ironic. No decision of Frédéric's is irrevocable, and though this decision will not be revoked, it is a foolish and unfair one, motivated by the illusion of Rosanette's treachery. Frédéric, always out of synchronization with reality, still lives and acts through illusion.

The rupture with Mme Dambreuse occurs in December of 1851, the day before Louis-Napoléon's coup d'état dissolves the Assembly. It is the beginning of the dictatorship of the Second Empire. The death of the Second Republic parallels the end of Frédéric's affair with Mme Dambreuse, as he effects his own "coup d'état," at the auction of the Arnoux household goods. Once again Frédéric is faced with a collection of objects symbolizing the Arnoux: "le partage de ces réliques, ou il retrouvait confusément les formes de ses membres, lui semblait une atrocité, comme s'il avait vu des corbeaux dechiquétant son cadavre" (p. 443). From the first Frédéric has been attracted to the objects that suggest Mme Arnoux. Now, separated from her and violated by the handling

of the auctioneers, the objects seem like relics of a dead person. Mme Arnoux is dead to Frédéric in that he has renounced his pursuit of her; he will not even see her again for sixteen years. The auction represents a triple decline: the Arnoux's financial downfall, Frédéric's loss of Mme Arnoux and the passing away of the objects themselves. The actions of the auctioneers are a symbolic dismemberment of Frédéric himself. "C'était comme des parties de son coeur qui s'en allaient avec ces choses: et la monotonie des mêmes voix, des memes gestes l'engourdissait de fatigue, lui causait une torpeur funèbre, une dissolution" (p. 444). In earlier episodes Mme Arnoux's dresses, jewels and combs were objects of adoration to Frédéric. His desire focused on these objects and became suspended in contemplation of them. It took years for Frédéric to go beyond the symbols of the woman and approximate real possession. Now that she has left Paris without seeing him again, their attachment ends as it began, representationally only, symbolized by the loss of her personal effects. The reality behind the symbol has disappeared. The will of Frédéric is not merely suspended in contemplation now. It is paralyzed, because the objects suggest an absence, not a presence.

Mme Dambreuse's insensitive acquisition of the letter box is too great a violation for Frédéric. In taking the box she attempts, symbolically, to break its association with Mme Arnoux. This Frédéric cannot allow, and he renoun-

ces her forever.

Following this: "en haine du milieu factice où il avait tant souffert, il souhaita la fraîcheur de l'herbe, le repos de la province, une vie somnolente passée à l'ombre du toit natal ... " (p. 446). Frédéric's reason for this return to Nogent is, as it was twice before, a desire to escape the sorrows and disappointments of his life. He feels he ought to have seized upon the chance to marry Louise, since she did love him. Thus, when he beholds her wedding procession, and her new husband Deslauriers, he is shocked by her rejection of him, and heedless of its justification. Louise has "overthrown" him as he overthrew Mme Arnoux, Rosanette and Mme Dambreuse. Frédéric has been expelled twice, first from the new republic (at the Club de l'intelligence), and now, in effect, from the old life at Nogent. In each case his fault lay in an inability to committ himself to a single course by force of his will.

When Frédéric returns to Paris he begins a life of apathetic motions. A list of his movements is presented.

> Il voyagea.
>
> Il connut la mélancholie des paquebots, les froids réveils sous la tente, l'étourdissement des paysages et des ruines ...
>
> Il revint.
>
> ... il eut d'autres amours encore. Mais le souvenir continuel du premier les lui rendait insipides; et puis la véhémence du désir, la fleur même de la sensation, était perdue. Ses ambitions d'esprit avaient également diminué. Des années passèrent; et il supportait le desouevrement de son intelligence, i'inertie de son coeur (pp. 448-449).

All hopes are exhausted and abandoned, and no ambitions stir within this perfunctory life led by a depleted being. In Balzac's view, desire kills the desirer. In Flaubert's desire dies but the desirer lives on. This is worse than death; it is death-in-life. Frédéric drifts for sixteen years, until he meets Mme Arnoux again.

When Mme Arnoux and Frédéric are alone together, and at last she may be his, Frédéric is appalled when he beholds her white hair. He still desires her, with "une convoitise plus forte que jamais" (p. 452), but her maternal appearance gives him a fear of feeling disgusted afterward. It is not only because of Mme Arnoux's loss of youth and beauty that Frédéric feels this way. Frédéric has missed fulfillment of desire in many areas, mainly career and love, but where desire <u>was</u> consummated, as with Rosanette and Mme Dambreuse, disappointment followed. If Mme Arnoux's qualities surpass those of the other women, if she is the most desirable of all his goals, then to possess her might make Frédéric vulnerable to a disappointment that would surpass all the others. It is possession, not Mme Arnoux herself, that daunts Frédéric. The illusion of incest is another of Frédéric's unconsciously deliberate assumptions of a barrier to fulfillment. And so Mme Arnoux and Frédéric part, never to meet again.

As a counterpoint to this scene, <u>L'éducation sentimentale</u> ends with Frédéric and Deslauriers, now middle-aged, reminiscing about a visit to a brothel they had made one night

in their youth. Upon entering, Frédéric hesitated.

> ... la chaleur qu'il faisait, l'appréhension de l'inconnu, une espèce de remords, et jusqu'au plaisir de voir, d'un seul coup, tant de femmes à sa disposition, l'émurent tellement, qu'il devint très pâle, et restait sans avancer, sans rien dire ... il s'enfuit ... (p. 456)

As Mme Arnoux represented ideal love, the prostitutes offer consummate physical pleasure. But possession in any kind of love, whether devoted or purely carnal, is so daunting to Frédéric that the more easily available love is, the more frightening it becomes. And so the opportunity for sex, with no hindrance and for mere money, is best renounced, in Frédéric's view.

In general, Frédéric's sentimental education has proved to be no education at all. He has experienced an innocent, young love, a passionate, mainly sexual attraction, and a mechanical, self-interested attachment to a woman of social prestige. Each of these women has been incomplete and none could make Frédéric forget Mme Arnoux. This is an "education" in outward form only. It has taught Frédéric only what he always knew: that Mme Arnoux was his only true love. As we saw earlier, "le sens à donner à la vie serait l'accomplissement solitaire d'une simple révolution sur soi-même."[12]

Flaubert might have also used the phrase "révolution

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[12]Cogny, p. 29.

sur soi-même" to describe the effectiveness of political revolution. The revolution of 1848 was a seizure of the opportunity for change by a group of passionately committed people. Their dreams were broken when the nation turned out to be more conservative than they had anticipated, and the promises to the workingclass were not kept. Perhaps their failure lay in the assumption of a uniformity of desire among all people of the nation, and their hope that leftist reform would bring a utopia desired by all. But ultimately, the 1848 venture only convinced Flaubert of something he already believed:

> ... on n'a guère fait autre chose que de disputer sur la forme extérieure qu'il convient de donner à l'être fantastique et odieux appelé l'Etat.
>
> L'expérience prouve (il me semble) qu'aucune forme ne contient le bien en soi; orléanisme, république, empire ne veulent plus rien dire, puisque les idées les plus contradictoires peuvent entrer dans chacun ... Il ne s'agit plus de rêver la meilleure forme de gouvernement, puisque toutes se valent ... [13]

As the nineteenth century progressed in France, the tendency to emphasize the ineffectiveness of will, and the

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[13] Correspondance, Vol. VI, pp. 32-33.

movement of life as a pathological process, continued, not only in a socio-historical but also a scientific context. In the 1870's there was an increasing influence of scientific principles and methods in literature, as the writers known in literary history as "naturalists" looked to science for the guiding laws that could explain human behavior.

The belief in a supernatural reality, coupled with an obsession with precise observation and documentation, enabled Balzac to establish connections between the tangible world and that higher reality. His aim was to make the mystery of cosmic unity scientifically explicable, to seize the secret of man's intangible drives and discover their laws of movement within the context of historical necessity.

With Zola and the naturalists we find the same passion for scientific explanations of man and the world, and the same reliance upon scientific extraliterary sources, such as Darwin and Bernard, but all this is accompanied by a tendency to move away from metaphysical explanations of reality. Man's emotional, psychological and mental processes are viewed as entirely tangible, as having no source other than chemical. In 1864, while employed in a bookstore, Zola wrote Thérèse Raquin, a novel that departed radically from the sentimental works of his youth. It was his first major attempt to study passion scientifically, as an organic disorder. Zola reinforced his scientific method by

reading Darwin's work, several medical texts on heredity and Claude Bernard's Introduction à l'étude de la médicine expérimentale, in 1865.[14]

By the time Zola read Bernard and Darwin, he had already conceived of writing a series of novels examining the development of a family in Second Empire society.[15] When Darwinian theories of appetite and struggle, and Bernard's theories on the influence on man of such determining forces as heredity and environment were applied to this family history, the result was a chronicle of progressive decline, both of society and of man.

For Zola, as for Balzac, there is a single dynamic element that drives humanity forward. In his 1871 preface to the first volume of the Rougon-Macquart series, Zola identifies this element:

> Je veux expliquer comment une famille, un petit groupe d'êtres, se comporte dans une société ... j'analyserai à la fois la somme de volonté de chacun de ses membres et la poussée générale de l'ensemble.
>
> Les Rougon-Macquart ... a pour caractéristique le débordement des appétits, le large soulèvement de notre age, qui se roue aux jouissances ... mon oeuvre ... s'agite dans un cercle fini; elle devient le tableau d'un règne mort ...[16]

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[14]Pierre Martino, Le naturalisme (Paris: Librairie Armand Colin, 1965), pp. 23-29.

[15]George J. Becker, Documents of Modern Literary Realism (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 19630, pp. 160-161.

[16]Oeuvres completes (Paris: Fasquelle Editeurs, n.d.), I, 29-30.

Although the novels of the Rougon-Macquart series follow a linear progression faithful to chronological time, Zola describes the work's form as a closed circle. Both this phrase and the words "règne mort" underline hs view of the Second Empire as a non-progressive period. It simply arose, degenerated for a time and died, contributing nothing to later generations.

Exactly what kind of desire is "appétit," and what are the social and literary implications of Zola's belief in its predominance over man's life?

Bersani asserts that the nineteenth-century novel is haunted by the subversive potential of desire, considering it "a disease of disconnectedness in a part of the social structure which rejects being defined by its relation to other parts and assets."[17] Zola was aware of the potential threat of this "disease" to society: "dans la société comme dans le corps humaine, il existe une solidarité qui lie les différents membres ... de telle sorte que, si un organe se pourrit, beaucoup d'autres sont atteints, et qu'une maladie très complexe se déclare."[18]

In L'assomoir Zola distinguishes between disruptive desires, which he identifies with physical appetites, and

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[17]Leo Bersani, A Future for Astayanax (Chicago: Little, Brown and Company, 1976), p. 66.

[18]Le roman expérimental (Paris: G. Charpentier, 1880), p. 26.

socially structured and controlled desires, such as the desire for financial independence and career success. When the more disruptive desires predominate, man is expelled from the social organism, like a diseased part, and he is banished to a different, more primitive kind of order, very like the natural order described by Darwin.

In The Origin of Species, Darwin makes observations of the natural world in order to distinguish and define its underlying laws of growth and development. His theory of evolution is based on a repeated pattern of primal desire, specifically, the instinct for survival. This pattern expresses itself through mutual devouring among beings, the persistence of violent and aggressive impulses and the predominance of physical appetite. But with Darwin, even while so many forms of life survive by the destruction of other forms, the movement of beings as a whole is called a "progress toward perfection,"[19] in the sense that a being grows more sophisticated in form as it adapts to new environments. Those who cannot adapt to nature's structured development are cast off. Extinction is nature's "ceremony of expulsion" of the unfit.

In L'assomoir Zola incorporates both Darwinian natural order and Second Empire social order, and subjects his

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[19] The Origin of Species in Darwin, ed. Philip Appleman (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, Inc., 1970), p. 198.

characters to a more complicated rite of expulsion. First, by reducing man to purely physical dimensions, Zola narrows the division between men and animals, bringing man perilously close to the dangers of uncontrolled bestiality. With no transcendent, spiritual side to his nature, man has little defense against being drawn into the violent Darwinian pattern which is his heritage. Man may attempt to avoid this fate by directing his desires into the constructive channels offered by society. He may emphasize "higher" desires, e.g., independence, success in work, family security, and suppress or structure "lower" ones: potentially disruptive, primitive drives, such as eating, drinking and sex. Thus man is poised between two modes of living, structured civilization, of which he aspires to be a part, and the ancient natural order of which he is inescapably a part. This is the situation of Gervaise and Coupeau in L'assomoir. At first they attempt to lead controlled lives by adapting to the structure of the Second Empire working class, but in a kind of reverse evolution, each becomes reduced to a mass of physical appetites, and both are eventually expelled from social order. The novel's action arises from their efforts to cling to the higher order through efforts of will, their eventual failure of will and their deterioration into the lower order.

As L'assomoir begins, its heroine, Gervaise Macquart, has lived with her lover Lantier for eight years, during

which time they have wasted their savings on a life of pleasure, and been reduced to a life of squalid poverty in a slum. Gervaise' appetite for pleasure and her sexual desire for Lantier have weakened her will, and she has acquiesced to his abuse of her and his devouring of her money. The first chapter also reveals the depths to which Gervaise sinks when she is overwhelmed first by passion, then by anger. The scene in the laundry room where she fights Virginie is of a violent bestiality: "elle fut prise d'une colère folle ... Elle avait un visage si terrible, que personne n'osa approcher."[20] All her poverty, subordination and fury are because of her lust for Lantier. He has been her "idée fixe," and because of his abandonment of her, she feels that "sa vie ... allait tenir là, entre un abbatoir et un hôpital" (p. 40). But Lantier's leaving is the beginning of a purging process for Gervaise. Her will becomes disengaged from his influence. Yet it will not be long before her new strength of will meets with another encroaching force, embodied in the roofer Coupeau.

As Gervaise and Coupeau converse in père Colombe's bar, Gervaise tells Coupeau that her goals in life are to "travailler, manger du pain, avoir un trou à soi, élever ses enfants, mourir dans son lit ..." (p. 51). She is also

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[20]Emile Zola, L'assomoir (Paris: Fasquelle, n.d.). p.20. All subsequent quotations from the work are from this edition.

determined to remain independent from men. Gervaise has set up a system of orderly, structured, socially-directed desires. Coupeau does the same, when he resolves to work steadily and never to drink. But the fact that both these structured lives are in danger of disintegrating through the encroachment of primal physical appetites is revealed, first, by Coupeau's assiduous wooing of Gervaise. His very presence is a threat to her plan, since his lust is a force she must contend with. At the same time, Coupeau is threatened by the presence of the still. "L'alambic, sourdement ... continuait, laissait couler sa sueur d'alcool, pareil à une source lente et entêtée, qui à la longue devait envahir la salle, se répandre, sur les boulevards extérieurs, inonder le trou immense de Paris." (p. 50).

The still has the potential to discharge its energies so far and wide as to engulf not only Coupeau but the whole city in destruction: "l'instinct des machines est fort proche de l'instinct de mort, et l'énergie qui les anime ne cherche par elle-même que le chemin le plus court vers sa dissolution."[21]

Zola shared his society's fascination with machines, and machinery acquires symbolic value in his novels. But he saw industrial progress as the expression of a collective

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[21] Jean Borie, Zola et les mythes (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1971), pp. 82-3.

appetite that sends society into decline. The energy of machines is a force that drives society toward dissipation in the same way that appetite drives the lives of men. The still, by its relentless operation and its appeal to man's appetite for drink, is thus doubly threatening. Coupeau will later reveal his affinity with the still, when it overcomes his will.

The plot of L'assomoir now begins an upward movement, with a motif of ascent and accumulation, as Gervaise and Coupeau work, save money and find better housing. The birth of Nana is also a hopeful beginning. Gervaise' original goals begin to expand. She becomes "obsédée d'un rêve d'ambition: elle voulait s'établir, louer une petite boutique ... Au bout de vingt ans, si le travail marchait, ils pouvaient avoir une rente ..." (p. 125). Mme Goujet tells tells Gervaise, "elle était certaine de faire ses affaires et de n'être pas mangée" (p. 128), but the irony of this is revealed when the family's upward movement is cut into by Coupeau's fall from the roof. This accident is a triggering mechanism that releases Coupeau's inherited decadent tendencies. "Le plus grand mythe des Rougon-Macquart, celui de l'hérédité, est conçu comme l'expression par excellence de la fatalité d'une répétition et d'un retour. Les ancêtres déterminent les descendants, ils les appellent, les aspirent à eux ..."[22] Zola's insistence on the fatalism of recurring

[22] Ibid, pp. 82-3.

addiction is a denial of man's perfectibillity and an affirmation of his regrettable predictability.

Coupeau begins to rationalize his drinking. "Coupeau tournait mal, Coupeau lui mangerait sa boutique" (p. 143). As Coupeau becomes an alcoholic, he will degenerate into a purely appetitive drive, and will overwhelm Gervaise again in a more destructive way. His convalescence is a period of nonaction that begins to appeal to him. "Et il prenait là ... une joie à ne rien faire ... c'était comme une lente conquête de la paresse, qui profitait de sa convalescence pour entrer dans sa peau et l'engourdir (p. 139).

Nonetheless, Gervaise' ambition is too pressing for her to await a more prudent time to rent a boutique. By borrowing money from the Gouejts she initiates the encroachment of indebtedness into her life. Yet: "Il lui semblait faire quelque chose de très hardi, se jeter au beau milieu d'une machine en branle, pendant que les marteaux du serrurier ... tapaient ... "(p. 145-6). The "machine en branle" is the industralized, competitive life of Paris, with its constant struggle against failure and starvation. If Gervaise can sustain the will to remain a regular part of this mechanism, she will succeed. But she enters the struggle heedless of the hindrances within Coupeau and within herself. Her acquisition of the boutique is premature; her ambition outruns her practical sense. This appetite for gain is translated through increased physical appetite. "Jamais

Gervaise n'avait encore montré tant de complaisance ... Dans le leger abandon de sa guelardise, quand elle avait bien déjeûné et pris son café, elle cédait aux besoins d'une indulgence generale" (p. 156). Rather than becoming stimulated by success, Gervaise' will grows slack due to a surfeit of satisfaction. Her drives begin to deteriorate into a simple, elemental desire to eat more and more and struggle less and less. Her self-indulgence and indulgence of Coupeau's drinking precipitate the couple's decline. "On a pu dire de Gervaise Macquart qu'elle était une machine à vouloir qui s'épuisait graduellement."[23]

As Gervaise' determination to succeed gives way to idleness, she becomes susceptible to yet another encroaching force: her lust for Lantier. Lantier's return is imminent when Gervaise meets Virginie, and the latter begins to speak of Gervaise' former lover. "Le nom de Lantier lui causait toujours une brûlure au creux de l'estomac, comme si cet homme eût laissé là, sous la peau, quelque chose de lui" (p. 213). Virginie is the vanguard of a new invasion into Gervaise' life, one that will precipitate deeper deterioration. The return of Lantier coincides with Gervaise' birthday party, itself a scene of deterioration by appetitive indulgence.

In La peau de chagrin, the Taillefer dinner party was a

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[23] Ibid., p. 82-3.

phantasmagoric tableau of desires converging into massive excess, followed by a "morning-after" of exhausted characters whose catatonia and near-spectral appearance was a reminder of approaching death. Balzac's aim, as we saw, was to depict the wasting effects of appetitive desire. Zola's aim, with his description of Gervaise' birthday, is similar. Coming in the central chapter of the novel, this passage is the culminating devouring-image in the work. In preceding passages Gervaise and Coupeau have grown weaker in will and stronger in appetite, and have continually rationalized their indulgences. The party, both by the money wasted and the appetitive excesses of it, is a turning point in their decline.

The scene is replete with animal imagery, underlining man's affinity with devouring beasts. And at first, no speech that might distinguish men from animals is indicated. "Si l'on ne parlait guère, on mastiquait ferme ... les visages se penchaient et cherchaient des champignons .. quelque chose de doux et de solide qu'on sentait couler le long de son boyeau ... Gervaise ... ne parlant pas, de peur de perdre une bouchée ..." (p. 240, 244). The characters lose their identities and are suggested by a series of synecdoches: snouts, chewing actions, snuffling, and sensory body parts: "les nez se tournaient vers la cuisine ... les regards suivaient le couteau" (p. 241, 243).

As for Gervaise, her indulgence is a withdrawal from

the struggles of life which demand exercise of the will:

> elle cherche dans la fête des échapées de bon temps, mais surtout nous la voyons s'enfoncer à plaisir dans la nourriture, s'y creuser un nid imaginaire, ce que révèlent, au mental, l'état de somnolence béate qu'elle en retire et, au physique, la coquille de graisse qui progressivement enveloppe et protège son corps.[24]

And into the midst of this gustatory orgy comes Lantier, welcomed by the accomodating Coupeau. The roofer's forgiving attitue is a laxness that will allow yet another degenerating element into the Coupeau's lives.

After the party, the goose's skeleton, stripped and lifeless, is chewed on by a cat: "le chat ... acheva d'enterrer la bete, avec le petit bruit de ses dents fines" (p. 263). This is a grim portent of the fate of Gervaise, whose body, stripped of all belongings and dignity, will be "eaten" by death, and taken by Bazouge, who will bury her in the earth as the cat "buries" the goose in its stomach.

The gradual encroachment of Lantier into the Coupeau's lives illustrates the dominance of one will over another in the struggle for existence. Lantier has drifted into a delicious idleness, a "vie de fainéantise" (p. 266), but still he must feed, and he proceeds to "feed" upon the Coupeaus, economically and sexually. Lantier is a predator, and he and Coupeau "bouffaient la boutique, s'engraissaient de la ruine de l'établissement ..." (p. 282). Coupeau

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[24]Jacques Dubois, L'assomoir de Zola (Paris: Librairie Larousse, 1973), p. 49.

cooperates with Lantier's encouragement to shirk employment, and Gervaise feels drawn to cooperate with Lantier's sexual encroachment: "elle avait peur, s'il la touchait jamais, de sa lâcheté ancienne, de cette mollesse et de cette complaisance auxquelles elle se laissait aller ..." (p. 290). When Coupeau's drunken vomiting drives Gervaise from her bed to Lantier's, this is only a trigger that sets her feelings into action.

Yet Gervaise's surrender to Lantier is also the result of a new phase in her "veulerie." Earlier, her flaccidness of will resulted from a surfeit of satisfaction. Now, her "paresses l'amollissaient, son besoin d'être heureuse lui faisait tirer tout le bonheur possible de ses embêtements" (p. 312). Lantier is a means, not of happiness, but of sexual pleasure as a retreat from misery. Gervaise' desires are becoming more and more elemental. She had once wanted independence and success, but now makes use of Lantier to snatch pleasure where it is available. "La dévoration est universelle, les hommes et les femmes se mangent entre eux dans toutes les combinaisons possibles."[25]

The movement of L'assomoir is now one of unrelieved decline, of "decumulation," as Gervaise' business falls away.

La boutique aurait pu crouler; pourvu qu'elle ne

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[25]Borie, p. 65.

> fût pas dessous, elle s'en serait allée volontiers ... sentir la maison s'alourdir autour de soi dans un engourdissement de fainéantise, cela était une vraie volupté dont elle se grisait. Sa tranquilité d'abord; le reste, elle s'en battait l'oeil (pp. 320-321). (Emphasis added).

Gervaise' indifference comes from a weariness of the struggle for live, success and love. She seeks above all the kind of peace that comes from renunciation of the will to succeed, from a refusal to participate in life's struggles. But within the mechanism of working-class Paris, such tranquility is impossible. To relax in the struggle is to lose what benefits it may give.

The disintegration of the family now follows: Nana hates her parents, wishing them dead, and the husband/wife solidarity is also broken. "Tous les trois, Coupeau, Gervaise, Nana ... s'avalant pour un mot, avec de la haine plein les yeux; et il semblait que quelque chose avait cassé le grand ressort de la famille, la mécanique qui, chez les gens heureux, fait battre les coeurs ensemble" (p. 368).

Machinery is a metaphor for society and for the family in L'assomoir, and as such it represents order. Society's machine will rumble on without Gervaise and Coupeau, but the family is more vulnerable to division and destruction. Because Gervaise and Coupeau fail to adjust to and presrve order, they lose the benefits of communality. This is not due simply to egotism or to an unwillingness to compromise on the part of the characters, but to the inevitable ineffectiveness of will against the factors of heredity and

environment as posited by the author.

Nonetheless, machinery is also a threatening force. Gervaise soon begins to share Coupeau's indulgence in liquor, and when she joins him one night in the bar, the still looms over them again. It brings Gervaise and Coupeau together through a shared complusion to drink. Gervaise feels "une peur mélée de désir" (p. 391) at the sight of it. "Une jolie source de poison ... ça n'empechait pas, elle aurait voulu mettre son nez là-dedans ... goûter à la cochonnerie ... elle était raccommodée avec Coupeau ..." (p. 391-2). The marriage union has dissolved; a spurious union of common degradation takes its place. Gervaise' will is completely overwhelmed by this pleasure-giving force. "Oh! elle se connaissait, elle n'avait pas pour deux liards de volonté" (p. 390).

As Gervaise' lassitude increases, all her once-desired goals are progressively lost. She works sporadicallly, starves, is beaten by Coupeau, loses all control over Nana, and sells her bed for food. The decumulation motif works on a moral as well as a physical level. Gervaise ceases to feel shame or pride, or to believe in virtue for herself or Nana. When she has sold nearly everything, Coupeau give her leave to sell herself. This finalizes the division between them, and precipitates Gervaise' moral and physical decline profoundly.

Yet through this decline Zola does not describe

Gervaise as sad or tearful, but mainly as abulic: "elle ... était tombée à ce point d'abrutissement, où l'on préfére crever que de remuer ses six doigts" (p. 441). As her misery increases her will weakens, causing more misery. The result is that death becomes a seductive force. "Gervaise aurait voulu tâter la mort, voir comment c'était bâti ... la jouissance de sommeil est si forte, qu'on oublie du coup toutes les misères ..." (p. 371). Death appears as an avenue of retreat into nothingness, a haven of "sleep," of withdrawal from struggle. It would mean a renunciation of will, a deliverance from the necessity to act. It would mean freedom, but only by the permanent surrender to oblivion, and Gervaise cannot comply with this condition. She seeks only temporary rest, and is not ready to lose herself in nothingness.

The continual devourings of Lantier and the deaths of Coupeau and Gervaise, are related to the machinery motif in L'assomoir. Each character is inhabited by an energetic, instinctual force that, once unleashed, and unchecked, takes over and reduces the character to a perfunctory, will-less avatar of appetite. The human becomes a machine. "Cet homme lui-même, à force d'être machiné, tend à devenir machine: telle est la forme que prend son aliénation ... Il y a Coupeau ... producteur frénétique de visions et de paroles, ... comme une machinerie déréglée ... Il y a Bazouge, méchanique à happer les vivants puis à les faire disparaître

..."[26] As for Gervaise: "la mort devait la prendre petit à petit, morceau par morceau, en la trainant ainsi jusqu'au but dans la sacrée existence qu'elle s'était faite ... Elle creva d'avachissement ..." (p. 494).

Gervaise and Coupeau are not expelled from society simply because they do not conform to its working order, but because their behavior becomes consistent with an older, primal order. L'assomoir portrays the intrusion into civilized live of perpetual biological realities, through characters whose wills are ineffective in exercising control.

The slow death of Gervaise recapitulates the movement of the whole novel, with its picture of man as being wasted into the grave by his appetites. "La pensée ... de Zola semble affirmer: la vie ne peut se prolonger qu'à travers le contrôle, la mise en oeuvre, l'exploitation detournée d'une energie, qui, livrée à elle-même, n'aspirerait qu'a un épuisement immediate."[27]

This control is not impossible to achieve, for Zola's vision of life is not confined to his portrayals of Gervaise, Coupeau and Lantier. Goujet the forger is a steadily reliable and industrious character, in love with Gervaise but without the crude lust of Coupeau and Lantier. Goujet

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[26]Dubois, pp. 60-61.

[27]Borie, p. 83.

at his forge is in charge of the machinal functions: "la face attentive, avec ses yeux pâles fixés sur la flamme, sans un clignement, il semblait un colosse au repos, tranquille dans sa force" (p. 187). Goujet's character remains the same throughout the novel, for he is not overcome by any degenerating force, inward or outward.

Nonetheless he appears to be more the exception than the rule in Zola's assessment of human character. For the most part, "le comportement de Gervaise nous est donné comme un comportement individuel, mais capable de gagner de façon homogène tout un groupe social."[28]

But even if Zola sees his society as declining, he has faith in the usefulness of literature in affecting change. Literature should attempt to understand how a human passion operates within a social milieu. By demonstrating this operation the novelist helps advance science's understanding of the individual, and makes more attainable science's goal of acting on individuals and milieus in order to improve social conditions. Literature cannot actively and directly change social life; this is a task to be left to legislators.[29]

But Zola offers no hope that man may improve himself on his own. Human life, for him, is devoid of spiritual dimension. Unlike Balzac, he denies any metaphysical source

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[28]Dubois, p. 83.

[29]Le roman expérimental, pp. 22-24.

of human energy. He believes that not only bodily appetite but also moral vices and virtues are reducible to physical chemistry and can be analyzed as such. Man's body is only a machine, running on inescapable mechanical laws of thought and the passions.

Life assessed as such can be understood with confident clarity, but to define man as a soulless being whose life is a process of decline is to close off any avenue of redemption, any hope of transcendence. Zola's characters can often resort only to revolt or escapism:

> Face à l'adversité de la vie, l'homme n'a guère le choix qu'entre le repli ou la revolte. Ensemble les ouvriers de Germinal choisiront la révolte; ceux de L'assomoir optent pour l'une des formes le plus accentuées du repli, ils se réfugient sans trêve au plus intime de leurs realités et de leurs rêves.[30]

The choice between withdrawal and revolt also occurs throughout L'éducation sentimentale, as Frédéric Moreau is faced with the decision to pursue or forget Mme Arnoux. He could have revolted against the obstacles to his love, but he continually chooses withdrawal, and the novel ends with Frédéric suspended in a perfunctory, unproductive middle age. Yet those who do revolt against life's adversities, in a larger, historical context, e.g. Pellerin, Dussardier and Sénécal, are also, ulitmately, ineffectual in producing change. Flaubert's historical novel portrays the individual will in action as an exercise in futility. Revolutions are

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[30]Dubois, p. 53.

a recurring proof of this same futility, for they are an expression of man's idealistic belief that he can create progress.

For Zola, biological necessity is the basis of the socio-historical process, and the individual is submerged in the inexorable laws of its movement. Revolt is also pointless, and withdrawal leads to death. Zola's work is a deeply pessimistic example of the effects of scientific principles -- Darwin's especially -- upon the realistic novel's vision of the individual. If we return to the question of individuality and progress as it developed in England in the latter half of the nineteenth century, we shall witness the fullest impact of Darwinian theory. The glowing faith in progress and individuality expressed by Mill and Arnold is offset by the Darwinian challenge to man's sense of uniqueness and perfectibility. As we explore these ideas, we will also be forming a context for the development of Thomas Hardy's views on progress and the individual on a natural and a metaphysical level, and will observe how these theories inform his major novels.

VI. Thomas Hardy

After 1850 England was enjoying a growing material prosperity surpassing that of France. Industrial production and foreign trade were reaching very high levels. In 1850 about half of England's agricultural lands were cultivated by farms of fifty to 300 acres in size. Agriculture also benefited from improvements in stock-breeding, reaping and threshing, and machine plowing. The building of railways continued, and great new shipbuilding industries flourished, as did England's prodigious production of iron.[1] Such material progress was accompanied by the growth of democracy in England, through a series of reform bills. An understanding and assessment of these developments was attempted by J.S. Mill's On Liberty of 1859 and Matthew Arnold's Culture and Anarchy of 1869. These works provide major contributions to the search for a reconciliation of civilization's ordered growth with the demands of individual freedom.[2] In On Liberty Mill attempts to make individual liberty compatible with ordered society by focusing on the nature and function of human desire and its role in both material and moral progress.

Mill, like Dickens and Balzac, was keenly aware of

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[1]David Thomson, England in the Nineteenth Century, 1815-1914 (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1963), pp. 100-101.

[2]Edward Alexander, Matthew Arnold and John Stuart Mill (New York: Columbia University Press, 1966), p. 243.

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living in a highly industrialized society, in which the increasing collectivization and dehumanization of men in the work force was causing a waste and decline of human energy.[3] Mill emphasizes that human nature is not a machine, and that man's individual desires need the freedom of natural growth and expression. This holds true not only for the world of commerce, but for contemporary morals, whose insistence on uniformity of conduct causes a stifling and atrophy of human energy.

For Mill, freely expressed individual desires are not likely to become a threat to society. Desires are as much a part of human beings as beliefs and restraints, and are only dangerous when not properly balanced. As the raw material of human nature, they are only another name for energy, which can sometimes be used for evil ends. Nonetheless, "more good may always be made of an energetic nature than of an indolent and impassive one" (p. 73). The same susceptibilities that make desires also generate love of virtue and self-control. Character is the development and modification of one's own desires through the government of one's will (pp. 72-73). And it is in the development of each man's individual character that progress consists. "In proportion to the development of his individuality, each person

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[3]On Liberty (New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc. 1956), p. 85. All subsequent quotations are from this edition.

becomes more valuable to himself, and is, therefore, capable of being more valuable to others . . . when there is more life in the units [of society], there is more in the mass which is composed of them. (p. 76).

Arnold expressed equal faith in the individual as the true source of social harmony. As democracy gradually became a reality in Europe following the French Revolution and the English reform bills, Arnold sensed a lack of ordered, conscious direction in the development of society. And increased industrialization, he felt, not only encouraged the worship of money and machinery, but was morally corruptive by its encouragement of material ambition.[4] Arnold felt that since a center of social stability could no longer be found in govrnment or in any social class, it must lie within the individual. And the corruptive power of material progress could be counteracted by each man's being faithful to his individual "best self."

The "best self" is that collection of qualities that binds us to other men -- gregariousness, altruism, and a social collective instinct. In Arnold's view of morality, the best self should prevail over the "ordinary self," that part of man's nature that is given over to the satisfaction of his individual desires. By his best self man is "united, impersonal, at harmony" (p. 134). Man has a sense of the

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[4]"Culture and Anarchy," The Complete Prose Works of Matthew Arnold (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1965), Vol. V, pp. 120-123. All subsequent quotations are from this edition.

order inherent in all things by the will of God, and if he orders and subdues his desires to this knowledge, it follows that he will behave in an orderly, altruistic, socially non-disruptive way. Man must continue to cultivate his "best self" to render it independent of external rule and make it a law unto itself. Thus his individual nature -- specifically the "best" side of that nature -- is the true source of social and moral progress.

At the same time that Mill and Arnold were expressing such optimism, certain developments were taking place in scientific thought that were to have an incalculable impact on all theories of human individuality and progress. Because of the omnipresence of progress as an idea in nineteenth-century thought, the ground was amply prepared for Darwin's Origin of Species, published the same year as Mill's On Liberty. Nisbet writes that the appeal of Darwin's work "depended on the prevalence of the whole panoramic envisagement of time in so many areas of thought in the age . . . the enormous emphasis that Darwin places on what he calls the 'geologic record,' that is the geological strata . . . is not different in its way from the 'strata' of extant peoples . . . used by Comte, Spencer, Morgan, and others."[5]

And yet Darwin's work was different because of what its

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[5]Robert A. Nisbet, Sociology as an Art Form (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), p. 105.

study of that geological record revealed about extant peoples. In Darwin's time the fixity of species was an established truth among scientists. Philip Gosse, for example, believed that each organism was stamped indelibly and immutably with a specific character, separating it from everything else.[6] Lamarck and Erasmus Darwin had speculated on the transmutation of species, but their ideas were generally refuted and had little influence. By 1857 scientists who questioned the fixity of species were very rare in England.[7]

To assert the fixity of the human species is to assert the individual uniqueness of man as opposed to the beasts. For sociologists like Mill and Arnold, and indeed every sociologist we have discussed, it is proof of man's special superiority that he has the rational intelligence to recognize the general good and to work toward its preservation. If in the ancient past man was primitive, he still showed the ability to create some measure of communal order, and this ability continues to be perfected. Although nineteenth century sociologists tended to play down individuality in a social context, their admiration of man in general relied upon his individuality as a species superior to the violent, unruly animals. This assertion of superiority, however, was

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[6]Omphalos (London: n.p., 1857), pp. 111-112, as quoted in Philip Appleman, "Darwin: On Changing the Mind," in Darwin (W.W. Norton and Company, Inc., 1970), p. 634.

[7]Appleman, p. 631-634.

challenged by Darwin's assessment of man's place in the evolutionary scheme of nature. Darwin saw nature as proceeding through infinite, progressive variations of structure. Man's sophisticated physical and mental apparatus was only a fortuitous development within a vast plan, in which he was not at all a central figure, but only one atom-like particle. "Of course, philosophers had always seen man as a 'part of nature,' but as a much grander part; as the crowning achievement of God's universe . . . It was the Darwinian demotion of man from that lofty station that . . . caused tremors among the professional thinkers . . . "[8]

Equally sobering was the lack in Darwin's scheme of any ruling intelligence, benevolent or otherwise, as the agent of change. This did not allow for any goal of happiness as an aim of evolution, nor did it explain the omnipresence of pain, evil and suffering in the world. But for Darwin, the idea that suffering was willed from on high was an intolerable conception. Even the traditional Christian view of suffering as expiation did not explain the pain experienced by animals. Darwin felt that men would rather have senseless suffering than suffering deliberately willed and therefore claimed to be intelligible. Thus he assured his fellow men that the world's evil was like the world itself, "brute and ungrounded and ready to be stamped by each man

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[8]Ibid., p. 637.

with his own meaning and no other."[9]

The shock, controversy and heated debate caused by The Origin of Species are so well known, that it will serve our purpose best to focus on the literary reaction to Darwinism. Tennyson had discussed evolution in Locksley Hall before the publication of Darwin's work, and Browning explored Darwinism in "Caliban and Setebos" of 1864. We have seen that Zola embraced Darwinism as a support for his materialistic view of humanity. Evolutionary ideas also pervaded the novels of Bulwer-Lytton, Reade, Mrs. Humphrey Ward and Gissing, and in the late nineteenth century, the works of Meredith, Hardy and Swinburne.[10] I would like to explore the effects of Darwinism, as well as other influences, on the development of Hardy's world view.

In his youth Hardy, as an Anglican, had believed in a transcendent God, an omnipotent and beneficent deity aware of the significance of each individual. He was acutely sensitive to the suffering apparent on all levels of nature. But despite his distress at the death by starvation of a sheep-boy and the suffering of birds in winter, he still believed in a personal and just God. Nonetheless certain forces were at work, in the late 1850's, that would affect his optimistic view. In Dorchester he was able to observe

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[9]Donald Fleming, "Charles Darwin: The Anaesthetic Man," Victorian Studies, IV, 1961, 219-236, in Darwin, p. 585.

[10]Appleman, pp. 647-648.

the superstitious practices of the peasants, who believed in a malign force behind things and events. In the outside world, far from Hardy's sheltered country life, the controversy over Darwin's world view was raging.[11]

When Hardy read the Origin of Species in 1859, it confirmed his childhood impressions of the pain and cruelty involved in the continuation of life. Growing up near Egdon Heath, Hardy had observed many forms of life struggling to increase and feeding on each other. It is suggested that during the 1860's he also read Spencer's applications of Darwinian theory to the struggles and conflicts within human society. In general, Hardy was forming a vision in which the world was not the work of a beneficent Creator who cares for man and his desires. Yet he wished to find a positive counterpart to such negative conclusions, that would allow him to believe in the eventual improvement of things. He read Mill's On Liberty and considered it a cure for despair, especially because of Mill's faith in the ultimate regeneration of society through the free expression of individuality. Nonetheless, Hardy did not come to share the confident optmism of Arnold, Tennyson, Browning and Spencer on the continued betterment of the world.[12] His early poetry reflects

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[11]Harvey Curtis Webster, On a Darkling Plain (Chicago: Archon Books, 1964), pp. 22-26.

[12]Ibid., p. 34, pp. 44-52.

his loss of faith in any benevolent force behind events. In "Hap" of 1866, he writes:

> How arrives it joy lies slain,
> And why unblooms the best hope ever sown?
> Crass Casualty obstructs the sun and rain,
> And dicing Time for gladness casts a moan . . .
> These purblind Doomsters had as readily strown
> Blisses about my pilgrimage as pain.[13]

There is inconsistency in Hardy's naming of the force behind all things first as a single abstraction, "Crass Casualty," and then as a multitude of anthropomorphized "purblind Doomsters." In "Amabel" of 1865, Hardy identifies this force with Nature and with Time. A young man who once loved Amabel now finds her undesirable, for Time has brought the fading and the death of love. Amabel's uniqueness has disappeared, for their love is only an instance of Nature's unconscious processes, which continue heedless of the lovers' sorrow: "though Love cease,/Love's race shows no decrease;/ All find in dorp or dell/An Amabel."[14]

The life of the world is nothing but a series of accidental variations, and one of these is man's consciousness, which causes him to desire and to suffer. Hardy sees man as constantly tortured by unrealizable desires, in a universe indifferent to his values and aspirations.[15]

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[13]The Complete Poems of Thomas Hardy, ed. James Gibson (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, Inc. 1976), p. 9.

[14]Ibid., p. 8.

[15]Webster, pp. 66-67.

Hardy did believe in progress on a social level, and he retained a hope for the betterment of social conditions. In The Poor Man and the Lady of 1867 he saw class distinction as the cause of the characters' unhappiness. Since the class system was creation of man and not inherent in nature, it was open to remedy. From A Pair of Blue Eyes to The Hand of Ethelberta, Hardy's social meliorism grew more militant. Nonetheless, he continued to feel that there was no remedy for man's possession of hopeless desires or for the cruel struggles of indifferent nature.[16] This bleak vision pervades his first major work, The Return of the Native (1878), and it also helps explain his later interest in Schopenhauer.

Schopenhauer's Welt als Wille und Vorstellung was translated into English between 1883 and 1886,[17] after the publication of Native and before that of The Mayor of Casterbridge. It is difficult to speak of any direct influence of Schopenhauer on Hardy, since he read the German philosopher's works late in life, finding in them a confirmation of ideas he had already formed. Hardy also wrote in 1911, that he read Darwin, Huxley, Spencer and Mill more than Schopenhauer.[18] Nonetheless, we may refer to

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[16]Ibid., pp. 71-72, 77, 134.

[17]Ibid., p. 138.

[18]J.I.M. Stewart, Thomas Hardy: A Critical Biography (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1971), p. 31.

Schopenhauer's principles as we discuss Hardy's three major novels, because affinities do exist between the world views of both thinkers. It is not our purpose to establish any degree of factual influence, but to draw upon any appropriate source that will help us understand Hardy's vision of man.

While Schopenhauer's work did not have the impact of Darwin's he did become well known in England in the late 1870's and early 1880's.[19] For several reasons, his philosophy seemed to deal yet another blow not only to the image of man as a central figure in the universe, but also to the faith, propagated by science and naturalistic literature, in man's capacity to understand the causes and operations of phenomena. Schopenhauer believes in the "Will"[20] as the ultimate reality, existing in and unto itself and with no knowable origin. All forms of matter in their infinite variety are only objectifications or signs of this will; they are not "real." However assiduously man may study the world, what he calls "reality" is only his impression of the moment, and thus his perception is defective, his knowledge limited and superficial.

As Schopenhauer elaborates upon the nature of the Will, we understand why his work gained so much notice in the age

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[19]Webster, p. 138.

[20]Arthur Schopehnauer, Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung, trans. R.B. Haldane and J. Kemp, The Philosophy of Schopenhauer, ed. Irwin Edman (New York: The Modern Library, 1928), as reprinted in The European Philosophers from Descartes to Nietzsche, ed. Monroe C. Beardsley (New York: The Modern Library, 1960), p. 665.

of Darwinism. The Will is a blind, unconscious force, expending itself continually and articulating itself through the desires and wills of all forms of life, including man's. Man himself is only an objectification of the immanent Will. His ideas of individuality are a sorry illusion, for "every human being and his course of life, is but another short dream of the endless spirit of nature . . . only another fleeting form" (p. 710). The active process through which the Will operates is a pattern of desire, struggle, and competition among living creatures, who are only embodiments of the Will conflicting with itself.

We may call this vision the metaphysical counterpart to Darwin's vision of Nature as a vast unconscious process, working through the conflicting desires of animals and men. The suffering inherent in this process is, as we saw fortuitous. Schopenhauer also believes that in the life of man, persistent desire causes constant suffering, for when man wins one goal he longs for another, and yet another, in a frustrating pattern that stops only in death. The realization of desire is ultimately impossible.

The main difference between these bodies of thought is that Darwin sees Nature -- specifically, natural selection -- as working for the good of each species, as progressing toward perfection, i.e. superior adaptability.[21] Schopenhauer

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[21]The Origin of Species, in Darwin, ed. Philip Appleman (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1970), p. 198.

sees the expending of will on both a universal and an individual level as a process of deterioration, a will toward death. His influence in England, belated as it was, was partly due to his work's appearing as a challenge to the ideal of progress. His philosophy was discussed in a good many articles and books in England in the 1880's, and his world view was shared by such poets as Meyer and Levy, and the novelists Schreiner, Gissing and Allen.[22]

Hardy's interest in Schopenhauer was, as we saw, also belated, but that interest reflects the compatibility of Hardy's world-view with the German philosopher's. All the theories or progress and decline discussed in this chapter play a part in the shaping of Hardy's vision.

Hardy depicts characters whose desires conflict with a kind of order in the universe, and this order is of a varied appearance. In The Return of the Native it most resembles Schopenhauer's immanent Will, in The Mayor of Casterbridge, an ancient, vindictive moral order[23], and in Jude the Obscure again as the immanent Will operating through several channels, mainly nature, social convention and hereditary determinism. This Will, the force behind all things and events, moves blindly and is completely heedless of humanity. It is man's

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[22]Webster, pp. 138-139.

[23]John Paterson, "The Mayor of Casterbridge as Tragedy," Victorian Studies, Vol. III (December 1959), pp. 151-172, in Thomas Hardy: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. Albert Joseph Guerard (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1963), p. 100.

affliction, as well as his gift, that he is a thinking, conscious being in an unthinking universe. Yet nowhere in Hardy's novels do we find an obsessed genius who sets off on a quest for the absolute. The thoughts and feelings of his main characters -- Clym Yeobright, Eustacia Vye, Michael Henchard, Sue Bridehead and Jude Fawley -- relate to this absolute in a variety of ways as they create constructs of fate, and the novels give us a series of their impressions, but the whole truth is never grasped by any character. The Unknowable persists in Hardy's world, and it is accepted by the less rebellious characters such as Elizabeth-Jane, and -- after much struggle -- by Clym.

The characters' actions relate to this Will as well. They seem to be continually frustrated in their desires by the Will as it operates through chance, circumstance, natural law, social law, heredity, and other factors The plots of the novels I shall discuss follow a similar pattern: the main character begins in a state of privation and desire, and is repeatedly thwarted in his attempts at satisfaction. Strong desire becomes an affliction, as it is in Schopenhauer's philosophy, for it sends man on a course of repeated wanting, transitory happiness, and new wanting. The relationship between Hardy's characters and this multitude of forces is played out in terms of a conflict whose outcome is tragic for those whose desires lead them to rebellion. How the individual characters' desires and wills

work with, and sometimes against, fate as posited in The Return of the Native is what I shall now examine, beginning with Eustacia Vye.

Eustacia's beauty is in contrast to the "thought-worn"[24] face of Clym Yeobright. Hardy calls thought a "disease of flesh" (p. 194) and says that "ideal physical beauty is incompatible with . . . a full recognition of the coil of things" (p. 194). This recognition is lacking in Eustacia, whose beauty is ideal, and who throughout the novel feels more often than she thinks. Eustacia sees her confined and stifled life in tragic terms, but has no real understanding of tragedy or of the "coil of things." For example, little stands in the way of her leaving Egdon but her own indolence, and little stands in the way of her possessing Wildeve, except her own perverse pleasure in his occasional "desertion" of her. Yet she nurtures a sense of being thwarted by a "Prince of the World," in a simple cause and effect perception wherein neither chance nor personal fault play any part. She retains this impression of suffering as willed from on high throughout the novel. Hardy says that "existence is either ordered a certain way, or it is not so ordered, and conjectures which harmonize best with experience are removed above all comparison with conjectures which do not so harmonize" (p. 479). But we shall see that for

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[24]The Return of the Native, ed. George Woodcock (New York: Penguin Books, 1978), p. 194. All subsequent quotations are from this edition.

Hardy, the lesson of experience is that we can know nothing of the "why" of things, and that excessive conjecture is useless. Besides, Eustacia perceives experience in such a way as to make it harmonize with her conjectures. To herself, she is helpless and hopelessly thwarted. She has a one-sided unambiguous perception of the conflict between her desire and fate.

Eustacia' desires make her an isolated being who refuses to adjust to the Egdon community. She has lost the "godlike conceit that we may do what we will" (p. 123) but cannot adjust to doing what is possible within her environment. She will not accept work, nor will she marry Wildeve. She is thus, as was Mme Bovary, a socially nonadjusted, nonconforming character. Her rejection of marriage is caused by the nature of her desire. She seeks deep fulfillment and the consummation of passion in a single timeless moment, and sees nothing beyond that. She wishes to rise above the timebound stream of wanting that moves ordinary material life. Fidelity over the years, she feels, would mean the attenuation and eventual death of desire. Eustacia therefore prefers Wildeve's occasional inaccessibility.

Eustacia does not allow free and natural expression to her desire, because each time it aries she makes it a planned and informed act, with consciously provided shape and motion. She tends to want, for example, whatever man is most desirable in the abstract. Wildeve seems to represent

this ideal, until he is rejected by Thomasin: "what was the man worth whom a woman inferior to herself did not value? . . . Her lover was no longer to her an exciting man whom many women strove for . .. ." (p. 155, 157). Eustacia does not want Wildeve as a man in himself, but because of his association, established in her mind, with desirability.

The same is true of her attraction to Clym Yeobright. Clym is associated with Eustacia's idea of Paris, a city as distant, ideal and desperately desired by her as it was by Emma Bovary, and for that Eustacia longs to meet Clym. After seeing him, she is "half in love with a vision" and her passions are now "in the hands of the weakest will" (p. 174). Hardy also says that if Eustacia's intellect and reason were not so weakened, she would kill off this passion (p. 175). Yet ironically, she loves Clym because she wills to. "She had loved him partly because she had determined to love him" (p. 176). Eustacia wilfully instigates a passion for Clym in herself, then loses her control over that passion as it possesses her. Even so, by insisting that Mrs. Yeobright does not like her, she tries to send Clym away, deliberately seeking obstacles because they intensify desire. Eustacia's reason is concentrated fully upon the creation, nurturing and intensification of her desires, to the point where her perceptions of reality become clouded.

And yet her desire is never shaped into ambition or action. She is "luxurious" rather than ambitious, seeking

intense passion in the most pleasurable way. Paris does not represent social prestige to Eustacia, but only great pleasure. She believes that "pleasure not known beforehand is half wasted . . . to anticipate it is to double it" (p. 264). She seeks to increase and perfect pleasure through preconception. "Never mind what is -- let us only look at what seems" (p. 264). Pleasure is Eustacia's "idee fixe," and her imagination invests the future with promises of pleasure that are out of all proportion to reality. By looking only at what seems, she remains removed from the realities of her world, displaying the defectiveness that can sometimes cloud human perception.

In contrast to Eustacia, Clym is meant to be the embodiment of modern consciousness. He has the "typical countenance of the future . . . The view of life as a thing to put up with, replacing that zest for existence which was so intense in early civilizations, must ultimately enter . . . into the constitution of the advanced races . . . " (p. 225). The defects of natural laws and the quandary man is in by their operation are being increasingly discovered, and this sobering truth will one day cause all men to acquire Clym's thought-worn look. Natural laws are seen by Hardy as defective because of the perpetually thwarted and sorrowful lives of men. He thus denies Darwin's contention that the struggle for existence works for the good of the species. Intellectual progress, which for Comte meant the recognition of the

material causes of phenomena, and for Mill and Arnold the recognition of right moral behavior, becomes for Hardy a recognition of life as a thing to be borne. And yet, this state of modern consciousness has not been fully achieved by Clym at the start of the novel. He, too, has illusions, and these illusions will cause him much disappointment and suffering before he achieves the consciousness of which Hardy speaks.

Clym's story recalls that of Eugene and Lucien, and Pip in Great Expectations, but with certain important differences. He is raised on the heath, and as a child shows promise as an artist and scholar. Unlike these other heroes, however, Clym is at one with his surroundings and is reluctant to go to London and later to Paris, where he becomes a diamond merchant. Eugene's own desires drive him to Paris, and the weak-willed Lucien is drawn there by Mme de Bargeton. Pip is helped to London by the agency of Magwitch. But Clym is said to go by a "waggery of fate" that "banished the wild and ascetic heath lad to a trade whose sole concern was with the especial symbols of self-indulgence and vainglory" (p. 227). Clym's journey to Paris is a thwarting, not a fulfillment, of his desires. He cannot adjust to the hedonistic life there, or to the aggressive materialism of that city, and he wilfully rejects that order of life to return to the country, not like Frederic Moreau, to escape into inaction, but because he has a noble goal: to educate the poor. But

like many Balzacian heroes, Clym sets out on his quest with certain liabilities he does not realize. He assumes that he can read the desires and needs of the poorer classes and that they long for wisdom, but they wish he would "mind his own business" (p. 229). Clym's charity, altruism and idealism, while superior to Eustacia's egotism, are impracticable. Eustacia's pagan zest places her behind her time, but Clym is before his, for his aspirations are ahead of those of the heath dwellers. Neither Eustacia nor Clym has a "well-proportioned" mind (p. 231), a mind without obsession or ambition whose blessings are happiness and mediocrity. But is exactly this that will "ennoble them despite their weaknesses."[25]

Clym does perceive the possible conflicts between his way of life and Eustacia's nature. But when he finally proposes to her, his "feelings were high, the moment was passionate, and he cut the knot . . . the card was laid, and he determined to abide by the game" (p. 266-267). He allows his passion to overcome his rational misgivings, and is then determined to take the consequences. It is an impropitious beginning, prompted by his deluded hope that Eustacia can be cured of her desire for Paris. But for Hardy, man, "exercising his reason, would prefer that compatibility should be the

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[25]F.R. Southerington, Hardy's Vision of Man (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1971), p. 84.

basis for love; Nature cares for neither man's wishes nor man's ethic and dictates that physical attraction should be the basis for mating."[26] Clym makes an ill choice with Eustacia, then takes up a fatalistic attitude as if concurring in his own puppetry. He displays here a kind of deterministic abnegation of responsibility.[27]

Eustacia's frustration spurs Clym to study harder than ever, to the point of eyestrain. His weakened sight hinders his education plan, and yet a "quiet firmness, and even cheerfulness, took possession of him . . . Yeobright was an absolute stoic in the face of mishaps which only affected his social standing" (p. 310). Clym has a superior adaptability to physically difficult circumstances, despite his being intellectually out of his element. Though he seems a failure to Eustacia and Mrs. Yeobright, his decline is purely one of external circumstance. Within, he is heroic.

Circumstance again tries Clym severely when his mother dies of a snake bite. Her death arose out of a complex combination of small chance events and circumstances in which no evil was intended by any of those involved. It is not impossible to understand the alienation between Clym and Mrs. Yeobright that kept him from visiting her, or Eustacia's reluctance to open the door to Mrs. Yeobright and be caught

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[26]Webster, p. 70.

[27]Stewart, p. 43.

with Wildeve. These situations, as well as Mrs. Yeobright's weary trudge home and the gratuitous accident of the snake bite, are a multitude of small causes leading to her death, that nonetheless do not add up to a cause explicable to the grieving mind of Clym. Crazed with sorrow, he is driven to insist that he delayed reconciliation with his mother because he was "horribly perverted by some fiend" (p. 373). Her death is not an accident, not a senseless tragedy to him,; rather he feels so unbearably responsible that he denies that responsibility by temporarily adapting Eustacia's view of events. This is Clym's third delusion. The first was his dream of educational reform, the second his hope to change Eustacia. But if he has failed in society and in love, he does not fail in overcoming his delusions. Determined to know the truth, he learns from Christian and Johnny the real circumstances of his mother's death. Clym insists upon a full look at the worst; he will not, like Eustacia, look only at what seems.

The differences between Clym and Eustacia so far seem to indicate that rational thought in The Return of the Native is given a superior position to passionate desire, and that those who fail are those who do not make rational choices. Nonetheless Hardy is also concerned in this novel with the mutual destructiveness of reason and passion. Eustacia's Romantic fantasies are incompatible with modern consciousness, which demands a full look at the worst, and a recogni-

tion that there is unexplained suffering in the workings of natural law. She has not "progressed" to this consciousness, but is out of her time. "She had the passions and instincts which make a model goddess, that is, those which make not quite a model woman" (p. 118). And yet, the defeat of Eustacia objectifies Hardy's regret at the loss of the zest for existence of earlier civilizations and the inevitable destruction of the Romantic view of life.[28]

Before continuing my analysis of the characters, I would like to discuss Hardy's portrayal of Egdon Heath. In The Return of the Native Hardy's concept of fate, symbolized by Egdon Heath, is the object of the main characters' conjectures and questions about "the coil of things." The characters express conflicting interpretations of the purpose behind certain occurrences, and this is reflected in the changing nature of Egdon Heath as it appears to different characters. "No truth . . . is more certain . . . that all exists for knowledge, and therefore this whole world, is only . . . perception of a perceiver."[29] The heath is also, at any given moment, the perception of a perceiver. This is explained in the 1911 Preface to the novel. "Positive views on the Whence and the Wherefore of things have never been advanced by this pen as a consistent philosophy . . .

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[28]Southerington, pp. 87-88.

[29]Schopenhauer, p. 648.

the sentiments in the following pages have been . . . mere impressions of the moment, and not convictions or arguments."[30] Each view of the heath is an impression of the moment, colored by the presence of one character or another and made reflective of his mood or situation. Hardy feels that to a balanced mind, convictions as to the operation of events is ill-advised and impossible. He believes that any constant perception of the world as one's own idea is one-sided and therefore defective. We have observed the limits of Eustacia's knowledge of the world and Clym's struggles for understanding. Let us discuss some of the changes in Egdon Heath, the symbol of the elusive truth about the coil of things.

As twilight approaches on a Saturday in November, Egdon Heath grows increasingly dark until it merges with the sky in a "black fraternization" (p. 58). Hardy says the heath can only be understood at such a time, for it "could best be felt when it could not clearly be seen" (p. 53). Since the heath embodies the immanent will, it cannot be understood in the "daylight" of ordinary perception. It is a mystery that can be intuited but not seen. If the heath can only be "understood" in darkness, it cannot be truly understood at all, but only felt, and so the darkness is that of the human mind, intuiting the nature of things but groping for clearer understanding.

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[30]Thomas Hardy, "Preface," The Return of the Native, p. 479.

So far Egdon Heath is only a presence. But with the appearance of Eustacia and Wildeve the presence becomes ominous. When Wildeve suggests eloping to America, "their black figures sank and disappeared from against the sky. They were as two horns which the sluggish heath had put forth from its crown, like a mollusc, and had now again drawn in" (p. 139-140). It is an ugly image, the first in which the heath is seen as "possessing" the characters, and is a foreboding other consequences of Eustacia and Wildeve's attempted rebellion against their circumstances. Here the heath is "a tentacle of the Immanent Will whose business it is to crush the desires of its people." [31] The image is also Darwinistic, "part of a timeless Nature which seems to swallow up his [man's] pretensions to individuality."[32]

There are other scenes where the heath envelops the characters, but not in an oppressive way. When Mrs. Yeobright sees Clym as a furze-cutter for the first time, "he appeared of a russet hue, not . . . distinguishable from the scene around him . . . He appeared as a mere parasite of the heath" (pp. 338-339). Even though Clym seems a failure to Mr. Yeobright and Eustacia, there is a peaceful harmony between him and the heath, and a resigned patience in his work. Clym seems at

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[31]Albert Pettigrew Elliott, Fatalism in the Works of Thomas Hardy (New York: Russell and Russell, 1966), p. 86.

[32]Ibid., p. 85.

home on the heath as Diggory Venn (we note that Clym is also now of a reddish color).

There is an interesting sequence of impressions of the heath when Clym finds out from Johnny that Eustacia avoided admitting Mrs. Yeobright to the house. In a state of extreme stress and jealousy over Wildeve, he sets out across the heath, "which, having defied the cataclysmal onsets of centuries, reduced to insignificance by its seamed and antique features the wildest turmoil of a single man" (p. 387). Throughout this novel Hardy's focus shifts from a panoramic, omniscient view of small characters dwarfed by the vast heath, to scenes like the furious confrontation between Clym and Eustacia that follows this passage. Here setting is forgotten and only the characters appear larger than life. The contrast here is almost as great as that between the highly detailed and hyperbolic portrait of Eustacia on her first appearance, and her (and Wildeve's) "shrinking" to a mere part of the heath. Clym, Eustacia and Wildeve appear to the reader sometimes as intense, vividly individual characters, and other times as insignificant atomic parts of a vast world. Such changes in Hardy's view of man's place in the cosmos have prompted critics (e.g. Southerington), to say that Hardy lacked a consistently worked out philosophy. But we can accept such shifts of perception by remembering that Hardy, like Balzac, insists upon the reality of the exceptional individual even while accepting the natural and

cosmic laws that seem to dwarf man into near insignificance.

Later, when Eustacia decides to elope with Wildeve, she waits for him on the dark, rainy heath. "Never was harmony more perfect than that between the chaos of her mind and the chaos of the world without" (p. 420). This is a Romantic theme, but more is involved here than an emotional communion with Nature. Eustacia's oneness with the heath is a form of entrapment. The heat is not a place to escape to but one to escape from. Thus the blending of her tears and the rain is an ironic use of Romantic imagery. Her turbulent emotions mix with the turbulence of the storm, but her perception does not connect with the truth of her situation. "How I have tried and tired to be a splendid woman . . . I was capable of much; but I have been injured and blighted and crushed by things beyond my control" (p. 431)! Eustacia's goal of being "splendid" has never been clearly defined, and she has been too luxuriously inert to do very much "trying." Not having perceived this, she blasts the heath, and the "Prince of the World," persisting in her one-sided world view.

When Clym crosses the heath to find Eustacia and Wildeve, Thomasin follows him, and the heath changes once more: "Egdon in the mass was no monster whatever, but impersonal open ground. Her fears of the place were rational, her dislikes of its worst moods reasonable. <u>At this time</u> it was <u>in her view</u> a windy, wet place . . . " (p. 430). (Emphasis

added). Thomasin's is not a deeply reflective mind nor are her emotions of the range and intensity of Eustacia's. But if her view of the heath is prosaic, it is the view most conducive to a bearable life, adjusted to circumstance and without thought as a "disease of flesh". Thomasin has suffered, like Clym and Eustacia, but she simply recovers and goes on, seeing no demons and no malice in her surroundings.

When Eustacia and Wildeve are drowned in the lake, they are submerged into the endless stream of wanting that is the undercurrent of all life. Their individuality is wiped out and their desires, unfulfilled, are assimilated into the immanent Will. "The earth rolls from day into night, the individual dies . . . the form of life is an endless present, no matter how the individuals, the phenomena of the Idea, arise and pass away in time . . ."[33]

Eustacia's own general frustration with life and her uncertainty over Wildeve may have led her to suicide, but Clym feels responsible for her death, not recognizing the multitude of smaller causes beyond his control. "It would have been a charity to the living had the river overwhelmed me" (p. 443). Eustacia never exercised her will to change the course of her life, but Clym exaggerates the power and range of his will over events, assuming that his momentary anger could unilaterally have such far-reaching consequences.

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[33]Schopenhauer, p. 704.

Clym seems to feel that "against the impassivity of nature, and situated in an unconscious universe, the only responsibility which can possibly exist is man's."[34] Therefore he will not blame fate. "Human beings, in their generous endeavour to construct a hypothesis that shall not degrade a First Cause, have always hesitated to conceive a dominant power of lower moral quality than their own . . ." (p. 449).

Eustacia, of course, always saw a dominant power in the world that was inferior to herself in its cruelty. Her protests against this power continued until her death. But Clym comes to abandon conjecture about destiny. When he becomes a preacher, he leaves alone creeds and systems of philosophy, and theological doctrine, preaching a purely terrestrial morality, "finding enough and more than enough to occupy his tongue n the opinions and actions common to all good men" (p. 474). Clym's attempts to understand the force behind events does not end in madness, as it does with Balzac's genius-heroes, because he renounces the search.

The surviving characters in The Return of the Native -- Thomasin and Venn -- do not in any sense rebel against cosmic order, but are the victims of human inadequacies and personal resentments.[35] Neither one expects very much from life, and both lack the infinite aspirations and the discon-

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[34]Southerington, p. 83.

[35]Ibid., pp. 84-85.

tent of Clym and Eustacia. Venn is twice disappointed in his love for Thomasin, but his pain is short-lived because he never expected much.[36] Thomasin suffers from the fickleness of Wildeve and his abandonment of her, her aunt's and her husband's death and the near loss of Clym, but she does not, like Eustacia, blast the heath. "Egdon is a ridiculous old lace; but I have got used to it, and I couldn't be happy anywhere else at all" (p. 462).

In The Return of the Native we witness the defeat of two exceptional beings who could not accept the social and metaphysical order of things. Eustacia's desires were overwhelming and completely unchecked. She rejected all opportunities of satisfaction that would have been consistent with social order, but was too passive to exercise her will to greater things. Clym's ideals of educational reform, if not disruptive, were out of harmony with his environment.

As we saw with Balzac, realistic fiction "admits heroes of desire in order to subject them to ceremonies of expulsion . . . The novelist glamorizes a figure who exposes the factitious nature of the social and esthetic orders in the name of which the novelist will sacrifice that figure."[37] Even if Eustacia is destroyed and Clym defeated, it does not

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[36]Webster, p. 124.

[37]Leo Bersani, A Future for Asyanax, p. 51.

follow that the communal order in which they live -- a community full of superstitious ignorance -- is right. Hardy also emphasizes that the First Cause is not kind to man. Clym and Eustacia's minds may not be "well balanced," but Hardy also points out that a well-balanced mind is a mediocre one. It is not without regret that he sacrifices his exceptional characters, for ultimately he does not attempt to assert the "rightness" or "wrongness" of any world view. The Return of the Native is, as he said, a series of impressions. It is the world as will and idea.

Albert Elliott says that in Hardy's early works, frequent use is made of chance occurrence, but that in The Mayor of Casterbridge, "inevitable determinism replaces mere Chance as a controlling force. Coincidence . . . plays a part, but only as an instrument of Determinism . . .fateful incidents . . . are natural parts of a relentless plan."[38]

The "impressions of the moment" throughout The Return of the Native give the reader a paralyzing sense of the ultimate impossibility of understanding the why and the wherefore of things. On this, man is as much in the dark as the characters who wander on the heath by night. But The Mayor of Casterbridge seems to be an attempt to make the will explicable to some measure. The connection between deed and consequence is clearer here than in Native. There is a

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[38]Elliott, pp. 67-68.

"concatenation of phenomena where each thing is known to have its accounting cause."[39] This can be seen in the plot structure as it relates to Henchard's life and actions. Here two patterns of rejection are discernible. There is first Henchard's gravest rejection, the sale of his wife and child at Weydon-Priors. Afterwards, there is the rejection of Jopp in favor of Farfrae, the enforced rejection of Lucetta (because of Susan's return), the dismissal of Farfrae, and the rejection of Elizabeth-Jane after the discovery of Susan's letter. This is followed by a reversed pattern, where, after heavy financial losses and the furmity-woman's revelation, Henchard is rejected by the town of Casterbridge, loses Lucetta and his mayoral post to Farfrae, is publicly humiliated by Farfrae and finally, incurs the hatred of Elizabeth-Jane. It would appear that Henchard sows exactly as he reaps.

This is the impression John Paterson receives, as we see from his essay, "The Mayor of Casterbridge as Tragedy." "Hardy assumes what the literature of tragedy after Shakespeare has not found it easy or possible to assume: the existence of a moral order, an ethical substance . . . in terms of which man's experience can be rendered as the drama of his salvation as well as . . . his damnation."[40] Paterson calls this

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[39]The Mayor of Casterbridge (New York: Penguin Books, 1978), p. 41. All subseqent quotations are from this edition.

[40]Paterson, p. 92.

an archaic cosmology, a Sophoclean and Shakespearean ideal of justice and wisdom, unaffected by the influence of nineteenth century science or transcendentalism . . . Henchard affronts, in casting off wife and child, a nature that antedates both Wordsworth and Darwin."[41]

According to Paterson, each act of rejection that Henchard commits is a violation of this moral order. Because Henchard repeatedly rejects human solidarity, he has no right to be the mayor of Casterbridge. Casterbridge is, like Thebes in Oedipus Rex, "plagued" by the presence of one "whose ancient crime has gone unacknowledged and uncorrected."[42] The downfall of Henchard also reflects society's need for a subjugation of passionate impulses and the preservation of order and moderation.

Paterson also feels that Henchard's greatness lies in his eventual realization of the rightness of social and moral order: "it is the measure of his grandeur . . . that he should acknowledge from the very beginning the extra-human and specifically moral agency of the opposition that has set itself against him."[43]

While I agree with Paterson's argument in principle, I feel something is lacking in his perception of an unambiguous

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[41] Ibid., p. 100.

[42] Ibid., p. 102.

[43] Ibid., p. 94, 116.

link between crime and punishment and a perfect commeasurability between deed and consequence in this novel. Where such causes and effects are so clearly established, there can be no tragic mystery. If the scheme of The Mayor of Casterbridge were this simple, the character of Henchard would not have the poignancy that he does. The inexplicable does exist to a degree in this novel, and it is painful. It has to do with Henchard's attempts at self-castigation and reparation. Let us first examine Henchard's dutiful remarriage to Susan.

> He passed on the preparations for his union, or rather reunion . . . in a dogged, unflinching spirit which did credit to his conscientiousness . . . [he had] three large resolves -- one, to make amends to his neglected Susan; another, to provide a comfortable home for Elizabeth-Jane under his paternal eye; and a third, to castigate himself with the thorns which these restitutory acts brought in their train . . . (p. 155)

Henchard's self-punishment seems somehow insufficient, as can be seen from his later tribulations. Although he makes himself suffer for his acts, he is only made to suffer more. Perhaps his self-castigation may be called an effort to act by his own individual moral order, to judge for himself how punishment should be meted out. It is an attempt to decide subjectively and by one's own measure how one's acts of disorder can be righted. Henchard's actions appear to be proof of Mill's assertion that individuals, acting freely and without need of coercion, naturally tend toward solidarity. Henchard is not being forced to marry Susan. We may

also say that Henchard makes a valiant effort to subdue his "ordinary self," or personal desires, to his "best," or socially and morally integrated self. But in this novel Hardy reflects a world in which even such efforts at reparation are sorely tested and challenged. What is done cannot be undone or even expiated. When Henchard discovers Susan's letter, "this ironical sequence of events angered him like an impish trick from a fellow-creature" (p. 197). The event seems "impish," but what has really happened is that the moral order has intruded into Henchard's plans with its own justice, a justice far harsher than his self-imposed one.

This is even more severely revealed when Newson returns and Henchard lies about Elizabeth-Jane's death. It is difficult to condemn Henchard unconditionally for this act. He is one who attempts to cling to good things, although in a bad way. But he breaks up familial order, separating a father from his daughter, and causes Newson great sorrow. A year later when Newson returns, Henchard banishes himself from Casterbridge. "Henchard was not the man to stand the certainty of condemnation on a matter so near his heart" (p. 286). When he is a mile from the town he says "I -- Cain -- go alone as I deserve -- an outcast and a vagabond. But my punishment is <u>not</u> greater than I can bear" (p. 388)! But the punishment has not yet come; this is a self-imposed banishment, which Hardy attributes to Henchard's "own haughty sense that his presence was no longer desires" (p.

397). Henchard is not allowed to decide for himself what he deserves. Further punishment comes when Elizabeth-Jane rejects him, and this is more than he can bear. He leaves Casterbridge again, and having lost all will to live, starves to death.

I have not intended to belittle Henchard's attempts at reparation, but to show the painful mystery of how they are harshly belittled by the "moral order" as posited in this novel. There is nobility in his efforts, and we should admire this nobility for itself, and not merely judge its success or failure. If Henchard desires reconciliation, then something in him is akin to that moral power. There is good in him, and his suffering pains us. Given Paterson's description of The Mayor of Casterbridge as reverting to the Shakespearean idea of tragedy, I think the following passage from Bradley's work on that subject, although it is written about King Lear, may be applied to Michael Henchard:

> We might not object to the statement that Lear deserved to suffer for his folly, selfishness and tyranny, but to assert that he deserved to suffer what he did is . . . to obscure the tragic fact that the consequences of action cannot be limited to what would appear to us to follow "justly" from them . . . Nor does the idea of a moral order asserting itself against attack or want of conformity answer in full to our feelings regarding the tragic character. . when, to save its life and regain peace from this intestinal struggle it cast them [the tragic characters] out, it has lost a part of its own substance . . . There is no tragedy in its expulsion of evil: the tragedy is that this involves the waste of good.[44]

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[44]A.C. Bradley, Shakespearean Tragedy (Greenwich: Fawcett Publications, Inc., n.d.). p. 40.

The Mayor of Casterbridge, although it is set in 1846-49, is partly inspired by the decline in England in the 1870's of traditional agricultural methods and the inruption of new techniques.[45] Hardy draws upon the realities of such progress to provide a factual context for Henchard's gradual expulsion from his community. He uses social Darwinism by positing the agricultural order of Casterbridge, as it undergoes progress, as a field for the playing out of the survival of the fittest, when Farfrae rises up the ladder to success and Henchard descends. This emphasizes the two fold nature of Henchard's expulsion. He becomes a misfit on a practical level as well as a moral one. As such, he is offset by a character whose desires never rise above social, working order. Donald Farfrae is "a man unconscious of inner conflict and incapable either of suffering or of much awareness of suffering. This does not prevent his being an excellent citizen: undeviatingly fair-dealing; fair-minded and generous."[46] Farfrae moves through the novel without committing a single morally or socially disruptive act. His every desire is consistent with the requirements of moral and social order, and his moves toward success are smooth and easy. He displays no overwhelming drive to success, but

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[45]David Daiches, Some Late Victorian Attitudes (London: Andre Deutsch Limited, 1969), pp. 78-79.

[46]Stewart, p. 117.

steps into the flow of agricultural commerce and production without trouble. Farfrae gradually accumulates social prestige, financial success, political power, and the love of two women. He seems endlessly adaptable, with no determining characteristics that might impede his adjustment to his surroundings or hinder his success. The contrast between Farfrae and Henchard is balanced by the contrast between Lucetta and Elizabeth-Jane.

By having an affair with Henchard, the sensuous, self-indulgent Lucetta surrendered to her desires and ignored the sexual restrictions of Jersey society. Her arrival in Casterbridge and her wish to marry Henchard are prompted by a need to "right her position" (p. 226), to become reintegrated into the social order against which she had rebelled. Like Henchard, she wishes to make amends with the moral order she has offended.

But Lucetta's need for reconciliation with the civilized life around her is undermined by deeper, natural needs. The ineluctable laws of sexual selection work through her with no regard for propriety.[47] Her attraction to Farfrae causes her to be moved by individual desire once again, as she was with Henchard. "'I won't," [she says], "be a slave to the past -- I'll love where I choose!' . . . conscience had ruled well enough till new love had intervened and usurped

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[47]Webster, p. 147.

that rule . . ." (p. 250, 269). But Lucetta's past will eventually overtake her. Her illusions about having the power to escape the past are as blinding as her belief that she chooses to love Farfrae. Their meeting and their mutual attraction are both by chance, and this chance will lead to Lucetta's defeat.

Lucetta is caught up in the flow of her desires and has not will toward renunciation, as does Elizabeth-Jane. But she is not a dissolute character, nor is Hardy's view so simplistic as to make Elizabeth-Jane appear consistently superior to her. When Elizabeth-Jane insists to Lucetta that she is required by honor to marry Henchard, Hardy tells us that her "craving for correctness of procedure was, indeed, almost vicious" (p. 289). Here Elizabeth-Jane reflects the occasional harshness of social convention and its disregard for individual contentment, a harshness that will be portrayed more strongly in Jude the Obscure. Lucetta no longer loves Henchard, but her attempt to follow her nature and remain independent from convention is doomed to fail. As Henchard is rejected by the people of Casterbridge when they learn of his past, so is Lucetta. She breaks under the shock of the skimmington ride and from her horror of rejection by Farfrae, miscarries and dies.

It would be as simplistic to say that Lucetta deserves all her suffering as to say that Henchard deserves all his. Lucetta's story does not follow an unambiguous sin/punishment

scheme. Hardy calls her former passion for Henchard "absurd" (p. 351) but not evil, and her desire to be reconciled with society is portrayed with compassion. The skimmington-ride episode is an indictment of the cruelty society can inflict. Lucetta's fate is a combination of victimization by that cruelty, by chance occurrence, and by her cooperation with natural forces.

Of all the characters in The Mayor of Casterbridge, only Elizabeth-Jane makes a studied effort to subdue and shape her desires to whatever fate and circumstance offer. With Farfrae such effort never becomes necessary, except when he loses Lucetta. For the most part, he neither loves nor hates anything or anyone so passionately as do the defeated rebels, Henchard and Lucetta, and his understanding of life's reverses is summed up in the vague and empty phrase, "'tis the way of the warrld." Farfrae has little occasion to wonder at the unforeseen, or to reflect on the quandary man is in by the operations of natural laws. He may be a perfectly adjusted character, but his consciousness, like Venn's and Thomasin's, is mediocre.

But Elizabeth-Jane's perception of life is a further development of Clym Yeobright's. Unlike him, she is resigned to the idea of life as a thing to be borne from the start of the novel. Her desires for self-improvement through education are as strong as Clym's, but they are "sober and repressed" (p. 93). Her loss of Newson and her poverty have

led her to a fixed vision of life as a "tragical rather than a comical thing . . . moments of gaiety were interludes, and no part of the actual drama" (p. 124). Unlike Lucetta, who seeks the pleasurable satisfaction of her desires, Elizabeth-Jane is wary of pleasure. After Henchard marries Susan and Elizabeth-Jane's material life improves, she refrains from indulgence with an "innate perceptiveness that was almost genius . . . 'I won't be too gay . . .' she would say to herself. 'It would be tempting Providence to hurl mother and me down . . . " (p. 158). For Hardy, perceptiveness is the ability to recognize that to nurture and indulge strong desire is to invite disappointment and defeat. He thus attributes near genius to Elizabeth-Jane, a compliment he pays to no other character in this novel, The Return of the Native, or Jude the Obscure, and certainly not to Lucetta, who, he says, "reasoned nothing."

Despite Elizabeth-Jane's attempts to avoid excessive desire, she suffers greatly and repeatedly throughout the novel, from her father's loss, her mother's death, and Henchard's revelation and rejection. Then the natural attraction between Farfrae and Lucetta, which operated without consciousness of Elizabeth-Jane's needs, causes her to lose Farfrae. Even a resigned, perceptive character who meets each reversal with calm equanimity is not guaranteed safety from sorrow and deprivation, which occur heedless of man's perceptions. But Hardy feels that such insight as

Elizabeth-Jane's, which seeks for no causes behind things, makes sorrows more bearable than does the belief in a malignant, punitive deity that Henchard sometimes reveals in his moments of superstition.

Elizabeth-Jane's ability to adjust to adverse circumstance is equalled by her acceptance of social and moral standards. She is naturally altruistic, with "a willingness to sacrifice her personal comfort and dignity to the common weal" (p. 112). But this same trait prevents her from accepting any aberration from that common weal, such as Lucetta's and Henchard's actions. She proves harsh and unforgiving with Lucetta, and belatedly forgiving of Henchard. This is her only flaw, in Hardy's eyes. But her adherence to the standards of communal life is one of the reasons for her survival. She is slighted, but enduring. Her marriage to Farfrae brings her a life of "unbroken tranquility" (p. 411). Farfrae's and Elizabeth's contentment is aided, however, by the fact that neither character has the large-scale passions of a Henchard. "This teaches that tranquility can be achieved: but only by the recognition that man belongs to a social organism from which all disruptive elements must be excluded; and the tragedy behind this is that in excluding his disruptive energies man must exclude a dynamic part of his own being."[48]

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[48]Southerington, p. 105.

Hardy's next major novel, Jude the Obscure of 1895, deals "with the fret and fever, derision and disaster, that may press in the wake of the strongest passion known to humanity, and to point . . . the tragedy of unfulfilled aims . . . " [49] The novel is a study of failure. Jude is an obscure working-class character who develops an obsession with acquiring a sublimated life of the mind and a belief in his capacity for intellectual perfectibility. But as he pursues this goal, he is beset by a multitude of obstacles from within and without.

The difficulty with Jude the Obscure is its lack of any single identifiable source of the frustration and sorrow that beset Jude and Sue: "we cannot say precisely why Jude suffers -- not because the reasons are not implicit in the novel but because they are so numerous and so different . . . in Jude the Obscure man's conflict is not against a single antagonist but against every possible force an indifferent or hostile universe can summon up."[50] Even though there are weaknesses in Jude's character, "Hardy has created a world calculated to prey on weakness."[51]

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[49]Thomas Hardy, "Preface," Jude the Obscure (New York: Random House, 1923), p. vi.

[50]Lee Lemon, "The Hostile Universe: A Developing Pattern in Nineteenth-Century Fiction," in The English Novel in the Nineteenth Century, ed. George Goodin (Chicago: The University of Illionis Press, 1972), p. 12.

[51]Ibid., p. 12.

Jude is reminiscent of Lucien Chardon by his discontent with his surroundings at Marygreen. Lucien was a poet and Jude is "crazy for books,"[52] but Jude feels more than creative or intellectual ambition. He senses an inherent brutality and suffering in his world, a pattern of wanting and frustration. After being beaten for feeding his employer's seed to the birds, "his heart grew sympathetic with the birds' thwarted desires . . . Events did not rhyme quite as he had thought. Nature's logic was too horrid for him to care for" (p. 13, 15). As Mme de Bargeton inspired Lucien to go to Paris, Phillotson's example inspires Jude. Christminster is the city of light and knowledge wherein Jude plans "some mighty undertaking" (p. 25).

In the initial phase of Jude's quest he is hindered by his imperception of his own intellectual limitations and of the difficulties of learning Greek and Latin. His will to succeed persists, however, until he is sidetracked by his attraction to the coarse and sensuous Arabella. His attempt to merge with the sublimated, cerebral order of Christminster is defeated by his "lower," primal sexual desires. Jude finds himself inextricably trapped in that same Nature whose cruel processes he had lamented and from which he had hoped to escape.

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[52] *Jude the Obscure*, p. 9. All subsequent quotations are from this edition.

Yet physical nature appears in Jude the Obscure as an instrument of some other force. "Something which . . . seemed to care little for his reason and his will, nothing for his so-called elevated intentions . . . moved him along" (p. 48). It moves him away from the "higher" progress which he had sought to join, toward a physical progress close to that of lower animals. Even when he is freed -- though not legally -- from Arabella, the breakup of the union seems a repetition of a determined pattern, for Jude's own parents had also separated. "The Fawleys were not made for wedlock" (p. 81), says Jude's aunt.

The initial phase of Jude's quest has formed a pattern of privation, desire and action toward fulfillment, followed by a major deviation from the quest due to the hero's innate limitations and the pressing power of social and natural laws. No single source of hindrance is discernible, for Jude the Obscure, like The Return of the Native, is "an endeavor to give shape and coherence to a series of seemings."[53]

When Jude finally reaches Christminster after years of study in both the classics and stonemasonry, he passes through the streets as "one who walked, but could not make himself seen or heard" (p. 91). He is in alien surroun-

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53"Preface," Jude the Obscure, p. vi.

dings, but his rapturous love of the city clouds his realization of this, until he observes the Christminster students: "Only a wall divided him from those happy young contemporaries of his . . . but what a wall" (p. 59)! Nonetheless, Jude's desire to become a son of the University is so great, that he continues to invest the city with a dreamlike, ideal quality. "His desire absorbed him and left no part of him to weigh its practicability" (p. 101).

Another desire absorbs Jude when he sees Sue Bridehead. Despite his idealistic fantasies about Sue's supposed ethereal, Christian nature, Jude's interest in her is sexual. His will consents more freely to this attraction than it did to his feelings for Arabella, where he seemed to have no control. But his love for Sue causes a second deviation from his intellectual quest. It becomes a "desire that operated without regard for consequences" (p. 122).

Yet this desire is hindered, too, by Jude's marriage to Arabella and Sue's growing attachment to Phillotson, to whom Jude himself introduced Sue. These plot details give us a multitude of small causes for the thwarting of Jude's desire: social law, chance occurrence, actions by characters with a momentary lack of foresight. All of these, too, are responsible for Jude's frustration.

Christminster soon provides a source of further frustration to Jude. Like Lucien, who learned the severe difficulties of publishing and of achieving social success, Jude

learns the impeding power of material difficulties. His quest had not be planned, his goal not defined clearly enough, but was inspired by a nebulous, ideal vision. Due to his lack of time and of funds, "the whole scheme had burst up, like an iridescent soap-bubble" (p. 137). The letter from the master of Biblioll College only formalizes Jude's sense of rejection, and later his despairing drunkenness causes another expulsion, from the manual laborers, the only order of which he felt a part. In three areas of life -- daily work, intellectual improvement, and love -- Jude has thus far failed, in the "ideal" city from which he now takes his leave as ignominiously as Lucien left Paris.

The obstacles to Jude's success give us a series of impressions of fate, and the last impression given in this part of the novel is Jude's own: that he alone is to blame. "He saw himself as a fool indeed . . . [and was] convinced that he was at bottom a vicious character, of whom it was hopeless to expect anything" (p. 141). This is more than an excessive self-denigration. It is an attempt to explain suffering through the assumption that one has deserved it, to avoid degrading the First Cause. Like Clym, Jude will not believe that the First Cause is of an inferior moral character to himself. And yet his present situation is the product of a number of unconscious causes, and of conscious actions on his part, which were never morally vicious. Here Jude seeks moral explanations in an amoral universe, by his

perception of a crime and punishment scheme in the operation of things.

Jude's second plan to do something with "a touch of goodness or greatness in it" (p. 152) by taking Holy Orders, is also hindered, again by his attraction to Sue. Like Jude, who tried to rise above the cultural limits of his class, Sue is also trying to free herself from repressive tradition. In the last third of the nineteenth century the situation of women was changing, from subordinate domesticity to the beginnings of emancipation.[54] Sue's rebellious nature is revealed by her tomboyish childhood, her purchase of the naked pagan statues and her escape from the suffocating discipline of the Melchester Normal School. Against all forms of structured repression, Sue asserts her individual desires. "I am not modern, either. I am more ancient than medieval, if you only knew" (p. 159). Sue's "ancient" or pagan zest for existence recalls Eustacia's, and like Eustacia she is out of her time. But Jude tells her she is "quite a product of civilization" (p. 164) and this is also true. Throughout the novel Sue will suffer frequent conflicts between her natural and her "civilized" selves.

Yet in a way, Sue is denatured. Despite her rebellion against all external repression, sexually she is self-repressive. She denies her sexual desires, thus avoiding

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[54]Irving Howe, "On Jude the Obscure," in The Victorian Novel: Modern Essays in Criticism, ed. Ian Watt (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 438.

being drawn into the natural progress of life, and tries persistently to live on a sublimated, intellectual level. This denial of sex sets her "against the grain," and is part of her struggle to assert her individuality. Nonetheless, if she lacks "focused sexuality, she casts a vaguely sexual glow over everything she touches."[55] When discussing the Song of Solomon with Jude, Sue denies the song any religious meaning. "I hate such humbug as could attempt to plaster over with ecclesiastical abstractions such ecstatic, natural, human love as lies in that great and passionate song" (p. 181)! Sue's self-emancipation from religious and social repression has made her independent but irresolute, as if she did not quite know what to do with her freedom.

To attain Sue's love is the third of Jude's great hopes, and that hope is shattered when she marries Phillotson. A chasm seems to open between Sue and Jude despite their natural affinities. Yet later in a Melchester Bar, Jude meets Arabellla again, "the woman, between whom and himself there was no more unity than between east and west, being i the eye of the Church one person with him . . . Arabella was perhaps an intended intervention to punish him for his unauthorized love" (p. 219).

It is not Arabella herself, but the institution of marriage, that intervenes and impede's Jude's happiness.

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[55] Ibid., p. 442.

Hardy's major novels have so far been imbued with a system of inevitable determinism and a sense of the irremediable ills in the human condition. But social conventions are not beyond man's control, since they were created by man. Hardy did believe in social order and was far from being an anarchist, but he was opposed to the abuses inherent in the marriage laws which restrained man in opposition to his better nature, and which ignored the demands of individual temperament. Fate is unconscious of man, and thus it mates people like Jude and Arabella, Sue and Phillotson, with no regard for their suitability. Marriage then aids these misfortunes by turning a passing attraction into a lifelong contract. Both fate, and marriage as its instrument, disregard individual desire. But this is a remediable ill, and Hardy's indictment of marriage laws in Jude the Obscure reflects his hope that progress can be made by reforming those laws.[56]

After Sue deserts Phillotson to live with Jude, and they are both legally divorced, they begin to drift through life in a socially indeterminate state, Sue unable to give herself physically and both avoiding marriage. As Jude's aunt had said, "the Fawleys were not made for wedlock . . . There's sommat in our blood that won't take kindly to the notion of being bound to do what we do readily enough if not

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[56]Elliott, pp. 99-103.

bound" (p. 81). Jude and Sue remain together through a natural affinity. They do not need marriage, perhaps because they lack the "apelike faculty of imitation." But the subsequent events of their lives are a severe test of the possibility of maintaining such individuality and independence in the world in which they must live.

The introduction of "Father Time" into Jude and Sue's lives is portentous of the disillusionment and change that will come to them with the passing of the years. Hardy is skeptical of self-stimulated and self-contained happiness -- the kind of independent happiness Jude and Sue have -- for happiness depends upon temporary things, which are subject to time. Therefore, time ultimately triumphs over man's illusions of happiness.[57] "Time, the bringer of all things, is usually the bringer of regret, decay and death."[58] The child himself seems to have a full recognition of these ideas, which gives him an "ancientness" far beyond his years. He is the future of modern consciousness, which Hardy believes will be more deeply pessimistic than the consciousness of Clym that life is a thing to be borne. Father Time will bring this consciousness to Jude and Sue in a tragic way.

Sue and Jude's continued resistance to marriage during their life at Aldbrickham causes them and the child to be

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[57] Ibid., pp. 71-74.

[58] Ibid., p. 72.

increasingly ostracized. Forced to leave, they wander aimlessly for three years, until returning to Christminser again. Jude had hoped that Father Time would grow up to realize the dreams he himself could not fulfill, and still sees Christminster as the center of his universe. Jude is forgetting the disillusioning effects of the time that has passed since his original dream. But he comes to the city on Remembrance Day, and the procession is an inevitable reminder of his failure. "I'm an outsider to the end of my days . . . I'll never care any more about the infernal cursed place" (p. 401).

There is further disillusionment in the repeated ostracism Jude and Sue suffer when they can find no housing in Christminster. They are gradually being defeated by social circumstance, but only externally, until the ghastly murder and suicide of the children. This scene has been described by many critics as excessively grim and melodramatic. But if we interpret the incident symbolically, we sense that Jude's hopes for the future as embodied in his children are killed by the effects of time passing. Time brings death, indiscriminately and often prematurely. The child Time has learned of the cruelty of natural law from Sue, and that people have children by this law even though it is better not to be born. Jude calls Father Time "the outcome of new views of life. They [boys like Time] seem to see all its terrors before they are old enough to have staying power to

resist them . . . it is the beginning of the universal wish not to live" (p. 411). This wish was incipient in Clym at the beginning of The Return of the Native and was full expressed by him after Eustacia's death. Hardy predicted that Clym's thoughts would become part of the general consciousness of future mankind. He repeats the prediction through Father Time, enlarging and deepening it into a universal wish for death, a cooperation with the movement of all life toward death as described by Schopenhauer. This, for Hardy, is the bleak outcome of man's intellectual progress.

To Hardy, the sine qua non of an intelligent mind is a conviction that "the First Cause worked automatically like a somnambulist, and not reflectively like a sage" (p. 418). But with Sue, "affliction makes opposing forces loom anthropomorphous" (p. 418). The enormity of Sue's suffering drives her to seek explicable causes for the children's deaths. As in Native, the inquiring human mind, faced with a silent universe, will find not answers, but its idea of answers. Sue conceives the cause of her suffering in human terms -- she comes to believe in a conscious persecutor of herself and Jude. This is an impression of the moment induced by affliction, but it is the answer to a desperate need to wring forth rational answers from the seeming nonrationality of fate.

Sue decides that she and Jude, by cultivating their own individual desires rather than conforming to social

morality, have proven a disruptive element in an ordered world. She perceives this in a Christian context and decides to expiate her "sin" by returning to Phillotson. Sue feels defeated by what she sees as the unyielding rightness of social and religious order. She becomes the figure she had once rebelled against being -- a dutiful Victorian wife.

When Jude, drunk, is tricked into remarrying Arabella, he cynically performs the "noble" gesture of "saving a woman's honor," and resigns himself to a repetition of his earlier error. As Clym did before marrying Eustacia, Jude feels an abject resignation to his lot, and cooperates with it. His life has come full circle. He has done nothing but proceed through time along a pattern of desire and frustration ended by his death, which is caused not only by illness but by his wish not to live. Through death Jude escapes from the endless stream of wanting that is life.

Jude the Obscure is about the defeat of two exceptionally sensitive individuals who attempt to live a life based upon natural affinity rather than social convention. Their desires are not overwhelming or disruptive, but their hopes for an autonomously individual life together are doomed to fail. Each characters's attempt at a creation of self independently of class restrictions is also defeated by a multitude of social and natural forces. Hardy does not believe that it is always a a suprahuman power that causes human sorrow, for the guilt of society is unmistakably indi-

cated throughout Jude the Obscure. Throughout his life Hardy maintained the hope, as did Zola, that social amelioration could result if literature continued to emphasize the need for change.[59]

But like The Return of the Native, Jude the Obscure also portrays the world as will, an invisible will that works through a multitude of channels, and idea -- the world as it appears to the mind of each character. Hardy says that in his philosophy, the question of systematic consistency or discordance, permanence or transitoriness, is not of the first moment.[60] This is, I believe, because, far more than Balzac or Zola, he accepts the Unknowable. In Hardy's view man cannot rely upon his philosophies and sciences for understanding of the workings of things. These philosophies and sciences are themselves only impressions of the moment, despite their attempts at consistency and permanence. Perhaps Hardy's changing visions are meant to remind us of his belief, confirmed by Schopenhauer, that all we can know of the world is our idea of the moment, and each of Hardy's novels gives us his ideas of the moment. This does not have to mean that he is a feeler rather than a thinker, but that he is showing us the limits of thinking: "he has no desire to explain experience; he wishes only to

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[59]Webster, p. 194.

[60]"Preface," Jude the Obscure, p. vi.

present it."[61]

But Hardy also developed a belief in progress on a metaphysical plane in the years following Jude the Obscure. He saw the universe, and therefore the immanent Will, as constantly changing. This infinite process of change had fortuitously produced man's rational consciousness. Through that consciousness man can control those parts of the universe that he himself creates (e.g., society), even if he cannot, for the present, change the unconscious laws of the universe, or overcome the nonrational parts of his being (i.e., his desires). But perhaps one day consciousness will pervade the entire Will, and it may grow more sympathetic to man's desires. Hardy never lost this melioristic interpretation, at once idealistic and evolutionary, and this vision gave shape to The Dynasts.[62]

To the end of his life Hardy interpreted fate as a combination of different forces. Fate included evolution as a necessary means of change in all things, and the passage of time, which brought the process of decay and the despair of retrieving lost opportunities. Fate also implied historical necessity, as in The Dynasts, and the requirement that, to be effective, human actions must be adapted to the environ-

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[61]Elliott, p. 12.

[62]Webster, p. 195, 205.

ment. Actions which did not take the environment into account are doomed to failure. Nonetheless, the human will and intellect are instruments of which man must make the best use he can, so that he may cope with and even alter, his environment.[63]

Despite his emphasis on the importance of the living being's adaptation to his environment, Hardy neither forgot nor ignored the force of the individual. He offers no easy solution for the conflict between the individual and the community. His reason led him to embrace collective values, but his sympathies were always with the impassioned and rebellious being.[64] Man's desires, while they may be a source of pain and often uncontrollable, are essential to his being, and Hardy's hope that the unconscious will will one day awaken to man shows that he considers those desires of great importance in the scheme of things.

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[63]Elliott, pp. 233-234.

[64]Ibid., p. 230, pp. 235-236.

VII. CONCLUSION

It has not been my aim in this essay to discuss the entire history of the debate over progress vs. individual desire. But by focusing upon the period from 1789 to the late nineteenth century in France and England, I hope to have chosen a highly representative phase of that history. This was an age in which the ideal of ordered progress was repeatedly set up against the chaos of social change in all directions. The American and French Revolutions had greatly altered the image of government as a permanent center of order, leading many sociologists to place the source of order within man himself.

It was characteristic of nineteenth-century sociology to conceive of man en masse, not only as a method of analysis but as a support for the ideal of order. Order could be changed by revolution, but it had to be preserved, and in their recognition of the urgency of this need, such writers as Saint-Simon, Comte, Mill and Arnold evaluated the individual by his relation to social harmony, i.e., as an aid rather than a hindrance. It became necessary for them to assume certain generalizations about man's nature, generalizations that would promise the return of order and peace. There is an emphasis, in nineteenth century socio-historical works, upon the more generalized, less individualized aspects of human nature, resulting in a future vision of a utopia that would be achieved at considerable cost to each man's self-image of uniqueness and to his personal desires.

As we saw earlier, social awareness is also an integral part of the artistic consciousness of many major French and English novelists from the mid to late nineteenth century, and they, too, tend to portray the individual in relation to ordered progress. The theme of the failure of individual desire pitted against social, natural and metaphysical forces appears frequently in Balzac's work, as well as Dickens', Flaubert's, Zola's and Hardy's. And yet the ideal of progress is often judged by its effect on the individual. Balzac's indictment of capitalism is evident in his portrayal of its corruption of ambitious young men. Dickens pointed out the dangers of excessive collectivization in any area of society. Even in Zola's bleak Darwinian view, the defects of industrial progress and natural law are exposed by their degrading effects upon individual characters.

But many such novelists, especially Balzac and Hardy, also present man as tortured by and even as a prisoner of his desires. Desire and its attendant suffering are inherent in the nature of things, unlike remediable social ills. This suffering can only be remedied if man renounces his desires, thereby killing a vital part of his being. The non-desiring human leads a death-in-life, as does Balzac's Raphael, or is portrayed as mentally "mediocre," as are Hardy's Venn and Thomasin. At the same time, the exceptional being who strives against various forces fails again and again.

But failure in the realistic novel is a double-edged sword. Failure may be the price to pay for keeping one's individuality, but the value of keeping it is never in doubt. The individual is sacrificed because the author recognizes the necessity of order, but the flaws in social order and relentless blind cruelty of natural and metaphysical order are repeatedly exposed and challenged. The individual's defeat, while presented as inevitable, is also an indictment of the forces that defeat him. If Balzac and Hardy, for example, had not believed in the individual, they would not have continued to create so many exceptional characters with such poignancy and compassion. It is as if the value of individuality were being reasserted with each novel, in spite of all reversals. The novels we have discussed here show that

> . . . man has not stopped defending his uniqueness. If he is unique because of a certain type of brain rather than some supernatural prerogative . . . the case is nevertheless the same: man's uniqueness, his dignity, remain important to him . . . Looking back at a million years of man's struggle to be human, at his errant and painful attempts to be a special kind of animal -- the animal who thinks, the animal who creates -- it seems to me that despite his shortcomings, we must remain man's admirer . . . He is worth keeping because . . . we may continue to hope that he has, as Darwin surmised, "a still higher destiny in the future."[68]

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[68]Appleman, p. 651.

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