THE MISER IN LA COMEDIE HUMAINE

A thesis submitted to the Graduate School of the University of Wisconsin in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

by

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This thesis having been approved in respect to form and mechanical execution is referred to you for judgment upon its substantial merit.

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Approved as satisfying in substance the doctor thesis requirement of the University of Wisconsin.

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PREFACE

The aim of this thesis is to show how Balzac, in his portraits of the miser, was able to recreate the spirit of a materialistic age. Balzac's individual characterizations have been considered from the point of view of their artistic merit and their faithfulness to life. Chapter IV has been included in order to show how another author, inspired by Balzac but of different racial heritage, treated the same subject.

As a point of departure Balzac's own classification of his misers has been used. In Les Paysans he lists them as follows:

> D'abord l'avare de province, le père Grandet de Saumur, avare comme le tigre est cruel; puis Gobseck l'escompteur, le jésuite de l'or, n'en savourant que la puissance et dégustant les larmes du malheur, à savoir quel est leur cru; puis le baron de Nucingen élevant les fraudes de l'argent à la hauteur de la Politique. Enfin, vous avez sans doute souvenir de ce portrait de la Parcimonie domestique, le vieil Hochon d'Issoudun, et de cet autre avare par esprit de famille, le petit La Baudraye de Sancerre! Eh! bien, les sentiments humains, et surtout l'avarice, ont des nuances si diverses dans les divers milieux de notre société, qu'il restait encore à un avare sur la planche de l'amphithéâtre des Études de moeurs; il restait Rigou! l'avare égoïste, c'est-à-dire plein de tendresse pour ses jouissances, sec et froid pour autrui, enfin l'avarice ecclésiastique, le moine demeuré moine pour exprimer le jus du citron appelé le bien-vivre, et devenu séculier pour happer la monnaie publique. [1]

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[1] Les Paysans, pp. 243-244.

To this list have been added four other characters (Nicolas Séchard, Élie Magus, Pierre Graslin and Maître Cornélius) who represent aspects of avarice not included in the above outline.

The appended bibliography is a selective listing of the books directly used in connection with the writing of this thesis. For a complete catalogue of general Balzaciana published up to 1937, the monumental work of Royce should be consulted. Should the list of critical works on Galdós appear inadequate, let it here be stated that no comprehensive study of that author has yet been published. Such a work is being prepared for publication by Professor H. C. Berkowitz of the University of Wisconsin.

I wish to express my appreciation to Professor Robert B. Michell for his helpful guidance as director of this thesis and for his patience in reading and correcting the whole manuscript. To Professor Berkowitz I also owe a debt of gratitude for his having suggested the comparison in Chapter IV, out of which the thesis as a whole evolved, for having supplied much of the factual information about Galdós, and for having read and criticized Chapter IV.

Chapter I

The Importance of Money in French Society of the Restoration Period

In his attempt to present a panoramic view of the Restoration period, Balzac takes us into nearly all social milieux, teaches us the tricks of all trades and introduces us to all kinds of people. Through the medium of La Comédie Humaine we hobnob with counts and concierges, consult with bankers and priests, and rub elbows with the misanthrope and the jealous husband. These people are vitally alive to us because each is driven by a dominant universal passion. The concierge as well as the count is often a jealous husband, and the priest may be as misanthropic as the banker, for passion knows no social or professional barriers.

Of the many reappearing passions which supply the life-force of La Comédie Humaine, one of the most widespread is that of avarice. It is true that Balzac did not create the miser as a character type, for French literature already had its Harpagon. But Molière's representation was only the pencil-sketch of the full-color portrait which was to be produced two centuries later. Whereas Molière had depicted l'avarice pur, a passion relatively simple, Balzac proposed to show it as a complex drive, in all its distinguishing nuances: its conflict with other strong passions, such as

love (Nucingen); its enjoyment as a philosophy of life (Gobseck); and its manifestations in realms other than money, such as in the field of art (Élie Magus). While only two of Balzac's characters (Grandet and Maître Cornélius) incarnate avarice to the exclusion of all other sentiments, nearly everyone in La Comédie Humaine has a touch of miserliness in his make-up because of the materialistic spirit of the age.

If we accept Balzac's study as being a faithful representation of life, we are obliged to admit that the picture is a pessimistic one. Why, of all sentiments and passions, did Balzac dwell on avarice more than on man's other evil tendencies, such as jealousy, hypocrisy or sensuality? And why did he minimize the literary importance of those sentiments which tend to elevate man's soul, such as love, sympathy for humanity, and aspiration toward an ideal? The answer to these questions is to be found in Balzac's own literary theory, as expressed in the Avant-Propos of La Comédie Humaine. We must remember that Balzac's aim was to present simultaneously a history and criticism of the society of his day, an analysis of its evils, and a discussion of its principles.[1] He wanted not only to tell the truth about his century, but "moraliser son époque." If his portrayal were to be realistic, he would have to emphasize the growing materialistic interests of the period, for money was fast

[1] See the Avant-Propos of La Comédie Humaine, Oeuvres Complètes, Paris, 1912, I, p. xxxviii.

becoming the most powerful factor in French life. If his work were to teach a lesson, he would have to stress the evils which this materialism engendered. Therefore, since avarice, the handmaid of monetary power, was the vice which best typified the spirit of the day, Balzac believed that it deserved particular attention in the novel of manners.

There have been misers in every age; there always will be misers; but probably no period in history has ever been more conducive to the development of this special type of monster than was the early nineteenth century in France. Had the Baron de Nucingen been living in the United States today, the government would have taken the larger part of his earnings and he soon would have seen the uselessness of his struggle. In France of the Restoration period, however, not only were his avaricious instincts allowed to function freely, but the whole social and economic set-up served to whet further his thirst for gold. For a complete understanding, then, of such characters as Nucingen, Gobseck and Nicolas Séchard, we should consider them in the light of the times in which they lived, keeping in mind the temptations which were always present to egg them on in their ignoble path.

I

By 1814 French society, worn out by the strain of the Revolution and the Napoleonic wars, had exhausted its idealism. Discarding most of her traditional convictions with the overthrow of the ancien régime, France had sunk into a de-

plorable state of spiritual lethargy. "Aux grandes autorités spirituelles qui, jusque là, l'avaient dirigée et contenue, qui avaient réprimé ses insubordinations et dont le fondement était mystique, à la royauté et au catholicisme, s'est substituée une puissance formidable, à la fois égalitaire et destructive de l'égalité: la puissance de l'argent."[2] This new force was equalizing in that all could seek it, destructive of equality in that it conferred rights and privileges on those who possessed it. "Enrichissez-vous" became the motto of a whole nation and a materialistic end seemed to justify almost any means. In the mad scramble for wealth, the working man could no longer compete with the unscrupulous schemer, for ingenuity had replaced honesty in the business world and self-interest had become the propelling force of industry.

It was not that the nineteenth century, in its deification of gold, had stumbled accidentally upon something new. The possessive instinct is as old as the hills. According to Balzac himself, it is "l'idée la plus vivace et la mieux matérialisée de toutes les idées humaines."[3] It is a question rather of the emphasis placed on the power of money during the Restoration period. In past ages a few things had been considered superior to the possession of wealth, things which even a rajah's riches could not buy, such as noble

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[2] Bellessort, André, Balzac et son oeuvre, Paris, 1924, p.196.
[3] Maître Cornélius, p. 269.

birth, talent and services rendered to the state. But something had happened to society's sense of values in the nineteenth century, for now the rajah's rubies could raise a man above his social class, bring fame to the mediocre artist and alter the interpretation of just laws. Everyone bowed before "l'omnipotence, l'omniscience, [et] l'omniconvenance de l'argent."[4]

With amazing alacrity this new god insinuated himself into all the activities of daily life. One ran into him everywhere. "Il trône au milieu des salons, occupe les antichambres, soulève le rideau des alcôves princières, s'introduit chez les ministres, s'assied aux tables bourgeoises, grimpe les escaliers de service, frappe à la porte des mansardes."[5] Even within the sacred portals of the death chamber one often heard mourners calculating the extent of the deceased's estate.[6]

At first the lust for gold was most predominant among the middle classes, who were directly allied to industry and in control of the channels of wealth. The bourgeoisie, drunk with its new power, considered the public fortune as "une proie qui lui est dévolue,"[7] and was going after it with ferocious avidity. Soon, however, the malady spread to the aristocracy. Despoiled of much of their property during the

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[4] La Maison Nucingen, p. 348.
[5] Bellesort, p. 198.
[6] See Bixiou's account of the Baron d'Aldrigger's funeral in La Maison Nucingen, pp. 379-380.
[7] Bouvier, René, Balzac homme d'affaires, Paris, 1930, p. 25, quoting Proudhon.

Revolution, many titled men sought to take advantage of the times to recoup their fortunes. Where the middle-class worker remained a worker and accumulated his wealth mainly by the sweat of his brow, the aristocrat, still aristocratic in his disdain of manual labor, was finding other ways of filling the family coffers. Sometimes he gambled, sometimes he speculated, sometimes he sold his soul, but most often he contracted a mariage de convenance with a wealthy bourgeoise. "La tournoyante volute de l'or a gagné les sommités. Du fond des soupiraux où commencent ses rigoles, du fond des boutiques où l'arrêtent de chétifs batardeaux, du sein des comptoirs et des grandes officines où il se laisse mettre en barres, l'or, sous forme de dots ou de successions, amené par la main des jeunes filles ou par les mains ossues du vieillard, jaillit ver la gent aristocratique où il va reluire, s'étaler, ruisseler."[8]

A brief survey of the fiscal situation in France during the early nineteenth century will throw some light on why a materialistic ideology was able to take hold of the nation with such appalling force.

The socialistic Saint-Simon believed that industry constitutes the "source unique de toutes les richesses et de toutes les prospérités."[9] This was certainly true of the period under discussion, for it was essentially an industrial period. Speculators and profiteers of fifteen years of war

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[8] La Fille aux yeux d'or, pp. 333-334.

[9] Faillettaz, E., Balzac et le monde des affaires, Lausanne, 1932, p. 14, quoting Saint-Simon.

continued to make easy and enormous fortunes out of military furnishings. Commerce, freed from the blockade, took a great spurt forward. An ultra-protectionist regime, plus scientific discovery, favored internal industrial expansion. With the concentration of population in the industrial centers and because of the lack of governmental interest and backing, agricultural progress remained at a standstill until 1860.[10]

As a result of such rapid industrial development, many changes in national economy took place. There was a notable increase in the number of businesses and business-men. The taste for ease, spreading to all classes, was increasing the demand for objets de luxe to the point where they came to be considered among the necessities of life. As the century wore on, capitalism, with its system of monopoly, was gaining a toe-hold in French commerce. Big business had developed to such an extent that by 1845, so Bixiou tells us, there was no more petit commerce in Paris; "tout s'y agrandit, depuis la vente des chiffons jusqu'à celle des allumettes."[11] Even Marius, the coiffeur, had a monopoly on the false-hair industry and was making a big profit on the side from quack medicines.

The government, happy to hear factories buzzing and believing that this activity bespoke prosperity, made little

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[10] See discussions in Bouvier and Faillettaz.
[11] Les Comédiens sans le savoir, p. 341.

effort to control the ways of business, however unscrupulous they may have been. What difference did it make if a single large firm had crowded out a hundred simple artisans, so long as money was kept in circulation! "Qu'importe à l'État la manière dont s'obtient le mouvement rotatoire de l'argent, pourvu qu'il soit dans une activité perpétuelle![12] After all, only a large firm could take the risks involved in the forward development of industry.

Since France was not equipped at this time to take care of the vast amounts of money now in circulation, the credit system was adopted as a means of aiding industry. Banks were founded to take care of commercial business and individual fortunes. As early as 1818 the government had created departmental banks in Rouen, Nantes and Bourdeaux, extending this system to include Lyon, Marseille, Lille, le Havre, Toulouse and Orléans by 1838. All of these departmental banks were fused in 1848 by government order with La Banque de France into one big monopoly. Also in 1837, in order to extend credit to all classes of society and to encourage commerce and industry, Jacques Laffitte founded La Caisse Générale du Commerce et de l'Industrie with a capital of 55,000,000 francs.

These official institutions, however, were unable to furnish funds to carry on all the business transactions of a thriving nation. Alongside of them sprang up a number of

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[12] La Maison Nucingen, p. 398.

private concerns which also carried on banking operations. At Paris, the larger corporations were called collectively La Haute Banque. Most of them were presided over by foreigners, such as the Rothschilds and the Mallets. The Baron de Nucingen headed such a bank. Since these banks offered their credit only to a restricted clientele, those who could not secure credit were obliged to seek the services of the usurer or resort to the Mont-de-Piété in case of extreme need. The latter institution, established by the government for the protection of the poor, was considered by Balzac to be more terrible than private usury. Having had personal experience with this public "roi de l'usure," as he calls it, he knew how harsh and rigid it could be. Actually the Mont-de-Piété charged an interest of only 12% on all loans, while the private usurers regularly extorted 15% to 20%, and on small loans, sometimes as much as 50% of the principal. But the Mont-de-Piété was a cold, uncompromising institution devoid of human warmth, whereas the usurer sometimes bent to the pathetic appeals of a hard-pressed client,

With the get-rich-quick fever at its peak and governmental control at its lowest ebb, the time was ripe for a great speculative boom. Since there was no such thing as price stabilization, "l'on ne s'inquiète pas de la valeur de la chose, si l'on peut y gagner en la repassant au voisin."[13] The fortunes of such men as Grandet and Nucingen

[13] La Maison de Nucingen, p. 399.

were made largely from speculative schemes in which Fate was favorable to them. If, from time to time, a business deal did not turn out well for the sly, seasoned speculator, he could count on past and future successes to more than balance his present loss. The elements of risk seemed to appeal to a society for whom the other thrills of life had been exhausted. They were like swimmers "cherchant dans l'immense mer des intérêts...un îlot assez contestable pour pouvoir s'y loger"[14], always confident of reaching that paradise island before their strength gave out.

This speculative mania seized all classes of society and spread to all parts of the country. "L'exemple de quelques fortunes immenses réalisées en un jour par certains coups de Bourse offerts en spectacle au public, l'allèche et l'engage à la spéculation. Timide d'abord, il cède bientôt à toutes les tentations et s'y adonne avec frénésie. Bien que les affaires à terme soient longtemps désavouées officiellement, on les pratique abondamment. On joue à la hausse aussi bien qu'à la baisse. Non seulement cette passion s'installe dans le coeur de Paris, mais elle se répand très vite en province, y faisant chaque jour de nouvelles conquêtes et hélas! de nouvelles victimes. On achète même des maisons dans l'unique dessein de les voir bientôt expropriées. Il n'est rien qui ne soit matière à spéculation."[15]

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[14] La Maison de Nucingen, p. 347.
[15] Faillet^az, p. 20.

Far from trying to curb the capricious ways of chance which made a man a millionaire or a pauper overnight, the government fostered this speculative boom by allowing La Bourse to operate freely and by sponsoring La Loterie Royale. La Bourse dealt only with big stakes and hence touched only a small portion of the population, whereas the national lottery had an appeal for everyone, particularly le petit ouvrier. How many poor families were ruined by the lottery would be a hard thing to estimate, but the case of La Descoings in La Rabouilleuse was neither exaggerated nor infrequent in France at this time. For more than twenty-five years La Descoings had played the lottery regularly, putting up money which would have made the Bridaus comfortable in their squalor. She never won. By selling her effects and by strict economizing in her daily expenditures, she gathers together 400 francs for one last coup which she is sure will be successful. When her worthless nephew steals this sum for his own private purposes, she realizes how foolish she had been in the past and refuses to accept the 300 francs offered her to make up this loss. The next day, however, the number she would have chosen, wins. La Descoings dies of the shock.

An even more risky way of rapidly acquiring wealth and a diversion especially popular among the young dandies of the period, was that of gambling. The case of Philippe Bridau was that of hundreds of other young men who frequented the casinos of Paris in hopes of making a strike. Stealing

400 francs from his almost destitute aunt, he gambles and wins 150,000 francs. Not satisfied with a 375% gain on his investment, he keeps on betting. His luck changes and he ends the evening without a red cent.

To speculation and gambling, financiers and even petits commerçants added a third short-cut to the accumulation of a big income, namely, legalized theft. Allying themselves to astute but none-too-scrupulous lawyers, whom they paid liberally for their services, they carefully abided by the letter of the law while violating its principles. France's law code, particularly flexible at this time, allowed plenty of leeway for "shady" transactions. When Nucingen's fortune reached 5,000,000 francs, the public, hoping that he had reached the height of his power, as yet had no reproach to make. When, however, a few years later his wealth mounted to 18,000,000 francs, a few people began to wonder about the legality of such an acquisition. Unfortunately no one was capable of proving his dishonesty, for "l'ignorance en matière financière était encore si commune à cette époque et la loi si facile à tourner, que la Restauration apparaît aujourd'hui comme l'âge d'or des pêcheurs en eau trouble."[16]

A good portion of the wealth thus accumulated was put back into circulation by the extravagant spending which characterized the period. Probably in no time in history have appearances counted for more than they did during the

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[16] Faillettaz, p. 46.

Restoration, when one's social standing depended largely upon the display of luxury which he could put forth. To keep in the social running at all, one had to have a magnificent town-house, a sumptuous coach with a corps of footmen, a costly toilette and a well-chosen box at the opera, not to mention the minor item of a bi-weekly little dinner-party for fifty intimates. For the maintenance of such foolish appearances les grands seigneurs, and those who aped them, even went so far sometimes as to "voler décemment des millions, [ou] à trahir leur patrie."[17]

In this atmosphere of luxury and pleasure, the social parasite thrived as never before. Paris was full of those "aimables garçons dont l'existence est problématique, à qui l'on ne connaît ni rentes ni domaines, [mais]...qui vivent bien... et n'ont de souci que de leur costume."[18] Considering work as degrading and not knowing how else to use up their surplus energies, "ils les dissipaient dans les plus étranges excès, tant il y avait de sève et de luxuriantes puissances dans la jeune France."[19] Rich or poor they never had enough money for the necessities of life, "tandis qu'ils en trouvent toujours pour leurs caprices. Prodigues de tout ce qui s'obtient à crédit, ils sont avares de tout ce qui se paye à l'instant même, et semblent se venger de ce qu'ils n'ont pas, en dissipant tout ce qu'ils peuvent avoir."[20]

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17 Gobseck, p. 396.
18 La Maison Nucingen, p. 346.
19 Illusions perdues, II, p. 287.
20 Le Père Goriot, p. 380.

Of such a cut was Lucien de Rubempré, a provincial dandy lionized by Parisian society because of his beauty and supposed talent. Swept away by hopes of financial success which never materialized and refusing to accommodate his standard of living to his income, he squandered the savings of his poor mother and sister, went deeply in debt, and ended up by forging checks on his penniless brother-in-law's name.

In the midst of all this opulence, half of Paris was suffering from a _famine de l'argent_, yet no one bothered to do anything about it. Side by side with so much luxury and wealth of a doubtful origin, there reigned a frightful misery among the working classes. "À Paris, les masses s'emparent tout d'abord de l'attention: le luxe des boutiques, la hauteur des maisons, l'affluence des voitures, les constantes oppositions que présentent un extrême luxe et une extrême misère saisissent avant tout."[21] In 1835 Paris counted one indigent person out of every twelve. Even the church had become contaminated with the prevailing money madness; "la religion n'est pas assez riche pour prier gratis,"[22] and a pauper could not receive the last rites until a respectable sum had been paid.

For the alleviation of such conditions, no just remedy presented itself. The banks, still badly organized and as yet not cognizant of their full power, could not, or at least, did not take affairs into their own hands. Hence, usury,

[21] _Illusions perdues_, II, p. 13.
[22] _Le Père Goriot_, pp. 514-515.

the harshest and most pitiless form of financial control, ended up by taking over the obligations of the destitute. "Elle [l'usure] râcle les gages au passage, thésaurise, entrave les affaires, les liquide, se fixe comme un microbe destructeur sur le travail, gêne la libre circulation de l'argent, seul moyen pourtant de rendre peu à peu son règne utile et fécond."[23] Every squalid little quartier had its "catégorie spéciale de cloportes, d'araignées aux toiles tendues,"[24] which fed on human souls. From the marquis down to the mason, the usurer had taken his pound of flesh and silently gloried in the power which he held over their lives. No family or personal secret was withheld from him; he was the arbiter of their destinies.[25] Small wonder, then, that the nineteenth century should have been called by some "le siècle de l'usure."

Thus animated by a philosophy of self-interest, the Restoration was notorious for its low moral tone. "Parvenir! parvenir à tout prix!" became the slogan of the day. With no convictions to guide and inspire it, society had drifted into a state of moral bankruptcy. Where principles had once served to direct life, now only events seemed to determine the course of a man's action; where laws had once restrained his evil tendencies, now only circumstances hampered him. Virtue, which formerly had resided in good deeds and clean living, now appeared to find expression in one word: la fortune.

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[23] Bouvier, p. 29.
[24] Ibid., p. 44.
[25] See Gobseck, pp. 398-99.

Once in that "océan de boue" which was le monde, a man could not get out of it. To keep in the swim when the going got hard, thousands of Parisians adopted Coralie's solution to the financial problem and shouted gaily with her, "Je m'endetterai." For the shrewd man, though, there was even a better method of keeping afloat. This method, outlined by Vautrin in his long speech to Rastignac, sums up the general moral attitude of the period. Vautrin says:

> Savez-vous comment on fait son chemin ici? par l'éclat du génie ou par l'adresse de la corruption. Il faut entrer dans cette masse d'hommes comme un boulet de canon, ou s'y glisser comme une peste. L'honnêteté ne sert à rien. L'on plie sous le pouvoir du génie, on le hait, on tâche de le calomnier, parce qu'il prend sans partager; mais on plie s'il persiste; en on mot, on l'adore à genoux quand on n'a pas pu l'enterrer sous la boue. La corruption est en force, le talent est rare. Ainsi, la corruption est l'arme de la médiocrité qui abonde, et vous en sentirez partout la pointe....À Paris, l'honnête homme est celui qui se tait, et refuse de partager.... Voilà la vie telle qu'elle est. Ça n'est pas plus beau que la cuisine, ça pue tout autant, et il faut se salir les mains si l'on veut fricoter; sachez seulement vous bien débarbouiller: là est toute la morale de notre époque. [26]

Had this philosophy been confined to that limited milieu known as Parisian "Society", the whole nation would not have suffered. But it was eating its way into the souls of people naturally disposed to believe in something fine and big. The shattering of Père Goriot's ideals was far more tragic than the mere fact that his daughters disowned him. Wanting to believe in filial affection and hoping for it to his dying day, he finally was obliged to accept the material-

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[26] Le Père Goriot, pp. 332-333.

istic philosophy of those around him. Respected by his neighbors as "le père des écus" and not as the father of his daughters, he too had to admit that "l'argent donne tout, même des filles."[27]

Furthermore, the spirit of materialism had spread to the provinces and was threatening to undermine the very foundations of France. For centuries the rivalry between Paris and the provinces had preserved the latter from many of the pernicious influences of the "evil city," but now, jealous of the material benefits which Paris seemed to possess, la province had begun to emulate "cette grande bagasse de ville."[28] No longer une honnête fille who prided herself on her piety and her sturdy loyalty to the crown, la province had sunk into a deplorable spiritual condition. Though from sheer force of habit the routinary offices of the church were still practiced in the country regions, the soul had gone out of religious worship. Fêtes were celebrated and contributions paid, but the children no longer went to the catechism or took their first communion. The peasants still went to mass on Sunday, "mais en dehors de l'église, car ils s'y donnaient toujours, par habitude, rendez-vous pour leurs marchés et leurs affaires."[29] Thus, in the provinces as well as at Paris, the progress of materialism had resulted in the capitulation of the national conscience.

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27 Le Père Goriot, p. 495.
28 Les Comédiens sans le savoir, p. 358.
29 Les Paysans, p. 119.

For this fever of self-interest from which France was suffering, Balzac believed that there was just one cure, namely: the rebuilding of the spiritual power of the church and the permanent restoration of the monarchical system of government. Catholicism was the only existing institution which possessed a complete system for the repression of man's depraved tendencies. Religious education was the sole means of diminishing evil and increasing good in society as a whole, for, says Balzac, "la pensée, principe des maux et des biens, ne peut être préparée, domptée, dirigée que par la religion."[30] After the individual had thus been set on the right track again, social order should be maintained by a strong central government. Balzac did not favor the constitutional monarchy with its web of flexible laws through which the big flies pass and in which the little ones are caught, but rather the absolute monarchy which judges all wrong-doers by the same hard, fast rule. Thus, in the time-honored institutions of the past Balzac saw the only inspirational force which could capably direct France in the future.

II

Temperamentally and by personal experience Balzac was admirably fitted for the task of depicting a materialistic age, for he belonged to the Restoration period "par toutes les fibres de sa nature, par toutes les tendances et les

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30 Avant-propos, p. xxxi.

goûts de son esprit."[31] Furthermore, the role of the genius holding himself aloof from the world in his ivory tower did not appeal to him. Living in the midst of the world just described, he was subject to the same influences and temptations as the average man. Like all the rest,he too was carried away by the wave of self-interest and spent the better part of his lifetime trying to make a fortune. Since his genius did not extend, however, to the practical realm of finance, his own money-making efforts were not as successful as those of the financiers he so ably portrayed in La Comédie Humaine.

Although Balzac loved money, there was little of the traditional miser in his make-up. He saw in wealth not something to be accumulated for the pure pleasure of possession, but something which enabled a man to do big things, to surmount material handicaps, and to soar. "Monnaie fait tout pour vaincre les obstacles matériels," he wrote to Madame Hanska in 1835; "soyez avare par juxtaposition, avare avec un but."[32] For Balzac money was a means of raising himself socially to a material situation in accord with the genius that he knew he possessed.

Unfortunately Balzac was a man of luxurious tastes and the material situation to which he aspired was beyond his reach. Though he made a good deal of money in his lifetime, it never was enough, for he loved beautiful and costly

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[31] Bellessort, p. 80.
[32] Lettres à l'Etrangère, I, p. 289.

things. Despite his bourgeois ancestry and his early training in the principles of frugality, he considered handsome clothes, costly carriages, sumptuous banquets and big houses as essential to his well-being. Moreover, he had a mania for collecting fine pictures and objets d'art, in which hobby he sank large sums of money. Lastly, he craved the type of love which unfolded only "au milieu des merveilles de luxe." Knowing that money could buy social position, he was eager to rise above the middle-class milieu in which Fate had placed him at birth.

Balzac had a nice way of justifying his avaricious aims. The novelist, he rationalized, must first of all know how to live well. "La cuisine, les coulisses, tout cela se devine;" he says, "mais les salons ne se devinent pas: il faut y être allé pour apprendre de quelle façon on y cause et comment on doit s'y tenir."[33] Besides, he already knew la cuisine and les coulisses. Therefore, since money was the open sesame to high-society, it was his duty, as the novelist of manners interested in all aspects of society, to use this means of entering a milieu which otherwise would have remained closed to him.

Balzac's pecuniary ambitions may be explained in part by the fact that during his early manhood he was obliged to live in extreme poverty. His father was not a poor man, but, convinced that money is the root of all evil, he practiced the strictest economy with his son. Paris was a city full of

[33] Bellessort, p. 100, quoting Balzac.

temptations for the impulsive youth with a little spare cash and Père Balzac did not want to subject his son to those temptations. Hence, when Honoré was apprenticed to a lawyer at the age of nineteen, his father kept his allowance at a bare minimum. "Jusqu'à l'âge de vingt ans," Balzac tells us, "mon père ne laissa pas dix francs à ma disposition...J'ai été courbé sous un despotisme aussi froid que celui d'une règle monacale."[34] His natural awkwardness and timidity thus aggravated by a constantly empty wallet, the young Honoré dreamed of some day becoming rich and of imposing himself on a society which appeared to disdain him.

Having no aptitude for the law, Balzac could envisage at that time only one possible road to financial independence, namely, literature. After much persuasion, his father agreed to let him try out this new profession and gave him enough money for the bare necessities of life. During the trial period of the Rue Lesdiguières, Honoré lived in a cold, drafty garret where he nearly froze to death in the winter and stifled in the summer. Too proud to ask his parents for additional funds, he lead a monastic existence, for there was no money for pleasures. The luxury of a melon for breakfast meant eating dry bread and chestnuts for the next week. So great was his poverty at this time that he asked his sister Laure to send him an old shawl to keep his feet warm.

Although his early literary attempts were good practice

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[34] Bellessort, p. 22, quoting Balzac.

for the later writer of first-rate stories, they did not sell well and hence did not bring in the financial returns that Balzac had hoped for. Like many young writers he tried and failed at several genres before he found the one really suited to his talents. It was not until 1829, with the publication of Les Chouans, that he began to make a living from his writing. In the meantime he had accumulated a debt of 100,000 francs and had embarked upon a way of life which called for a larger income than his literary efforts ever would bring in.

Constantly preoccupied with the desire to extricate himself once and for all from debt and to make a profit which would assure his future security, Balzac engaged in a number of speculative schemes, all of which turned out badly. During the period of his literary apprenticeship, someone suggested that he edit compact editions of La Fontaine and Molière, and immediately Balzac was bitten by the speculation bug. His sister Laure considered it a big undertaking for one untrained in practical business methods and tried to discourage his interest in the affair, but the over-optimistic Honoré was not disposed to follow her wise counsel. With 9,000 francs lent him by Mme de Berny, lesser loans from a few other friends and his own meager earnings, the project was begun. A few months later the undertaking failed and Balzac was left with a large stock of unsold books on his hands, plus 15,000 francs of debts.

To redeem this loss, Balzac next bought, on the advice of M. de Berny, the printing-house of a certain Laurens and attempted to run the business himself. After eighteen months, creditors began to besiege the place, and workers, unpaid for weeks, sent in their bills. Attributing these failures to the laws of chance, Balzac, still confident in his own aptitude for business affairs, acquired next, in collaboration with Mme de Berny, a type-foundry which had just failed. Into this enterprise the Balzac family put 40,000 francs, Mme de Berny 45,000, and other investors smaller amounts. Unable to make a go of this venture either, Balzac insisted on a liquidation. Mme de Berny bought the foundry at a low price and the establishment prospered in the hands of her son.

These three experiences should have taught Balzac to stay away from business affairs, but he never was cured of his hankering after une bonne spéculation. Some years later he took a trip to Sardinia with the intention of exploiting the slag from the old Roman mines there. Because of difficulties in obtaining property rights, the venture fell through. Moreover, Balzac did not possess the specialized knowledge necessary to carry through such a project. In 1847 while on a visit to Mme Hanska in the Ukraine, Balzac conceived another money-making plan: that of cutting down 20,000 acres of large oak trees and of transporting them by rail across Europe to be sold at a profit in France. Happily for him this scheme never went beyond the realm of the ideal, at

least not during his lifetime.

The money problem constantly on his mind, Balzac was always hatching up some fantastic scheme for its solution. Perhaps the funniest of these was the one which Gozlan tells about in his Balzac en pantoufles. One day when Victor Hugo remarked about the beauty of a walnut tree in Balzac's yard, the latter told his visitor that he hoped to make 15,000 francs a year from that one tree and not from the nuts that it produced. It seems that the tree had once belonged to the village and that Balzac had bought it for a big price with the intention of enforcing again an old custom which obliged the villagers to deposit their waste materials at its base. Said Balzac to his astonished guest, "Or, jugez! jugez de la quantité et de la richesse d'engrais amassé quotidiennement au pied de cet arbre vespasien, engrais municipal que je ferai couvrir de paille et d'autres détritus végétaux, afin d'en avoir toujours une montagne à vendre à tous les fermiers, vignerons, maraîchers, grands et petits propriétaires voisins. C'est de l'or en barre que j'ai là; enfin, tranchons le mot, c'est du guano!..."[35]

With the exception of the last scheme, which he did not take seriously himself, nearly all of Balzac's business failures were due not to faulty vision, but to bad management. Later generations brought to successful fulfillment at least three of the projects which he concocted. With the improve-

[35] Gozlan, L., Balzac en pantoufles, Bruxelles, 1856; p. 141.

ment of processes and the lowering of printing costs, compact editions of the French classic authors did much to boost publishing profits during the latter part of the century. Twenty years after Balzac's Sardinian mine plan was dismissed, the Italian government took over the mines and worked them with such continued success that they are still a source of income for the Sardinians today. Not long after Balzac returned from the Ukraine, Polish oaks were actually brought to France and there sold at a big profit. Balzac had seen correctly, but in most instances was ahead of his times.

From the time he left the parental hearth until his death, Balzac was never free from financial worries. Although he finally achieved his ambition to become l'homme à la mode and had all the external appearances of wealth, he was constantly pursued by creditors whose numbers increased each year. While he received his elegant friends in the salon, the landlord, the baker and the tailor were in the kitchen clamoring for payment. Théophile Gautier, upon seeing the beautiful establishment which Balzac had furnished for Mme Hanska at Paris, remarked: "On a raison de vous croire millionnaire." Balzac replied with a humble air, "Je suis plus pauvre que jamais... Rien de tout cela m'appartient."[36] Though a past master at manipulating commercial intrigue in his novels, Balzac was unable to cope with the problems of the actual material world in which he lived. As Baudelaire said, he

[36] Bellessort, pp. 350-351.

possessed "la plus forte tête commerciale et littéraire du XIX^e siècle,"[37] but not the practical ability to adjust his own business affairs.

Moreover, this lack of practical business ability was coupled with a corresponding lack of scruples in regard to the acquittal of old debts and the contraction of new ones. Had the master mind been reinforced by a strong sense of duty, Balzac's debts would surely have diminished more rapidly, but unfortunately this was not the case. Acquiring early in his youth the habit of debt, he came to consider it such a normal state of affairs that he spoke of it to everyone, not as something which weighed on his conscience, but as something with which he could regale his listeners. Modern psychologists might be tempted to analyze such an attitude as a manifestation of a real inner chagrin covered up by an apparently disinterested exterior. But perhaps a better explanation for Balzac's lack of conscience in money matters is to be found in the attitude of his own generation as a whole. If we remember the discussion at the beginning of this chapter in which emphasis is placed on the low moral tone of the Restoration period, we can understand why a man who moved in the "best" social circles would not be greatly upset by such a trivial matter as a few hundred francs owed

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[37] Lovenjoul, C. de; Un dernier chapître de l'histoire des oeuvres de H. de Balzac, Paris, 1880, p. 61, quoting Baudelaire.

to the butcher or the baker. In the following excerpt from a letter to his mother in 1834, Balzac reveals himself more as a typical man of the Restoration than as one who is trying to hide his moral scruples under a hard, worldly exterior. "Je me suis aperçu, au moment du départ," he writes, qu'il te manquait cinq cents francs pour payer l'épicier. Bah! l'épicier attendra, quoique, aujourd'hui, l'épicier soit roi."[38]

Balzac borrowed from everyone - wealthy friends, money-lenders and his bourgeois neighbors at Les Jardies. According to Léger, some of his friends, particularly women, ruined themselves for him. In 1835 Josephine Delannoy lent him 15,000 francs. By 1848 Balzac had not yet paid her back, though her family now was in want and she had been obliged to sell her precious belongings. Balzac promised to pay "as soon as possible", which turned out to be more than a year later (October 20, 1849). Léger also tells us that with money received from the Comtesse de Guidoboni Balzac built a model dairy, and we have already mentioned his financial connections with Mme de Berny.

Whereas Balzac's personal friends, who had lent him money, usually did not press him for payment unless they themselves were in extreme need, other creditors were not so lenient in their dealings with him. Unable to pay even the smallest bills of daily life, Balzac had to resort to all sorts of ruses for putting off collectors. In Paris he had

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[38] Correspondance, p. 206.

a hideout at 112 Rue de Richelieu where he would imprison himself for days during the collecting season. He was also known to assume false names in order to throw his pursuers off the scent. At Les Jardies the servants were instructed not to answer the bell when an unknown and unexpected person rang, so that the place would appear to be deserted and the collector would then go away. And because he had not yet paid the milkman, the grocer and the breadman, Balzac was obliged to stay within the narrow confines of Les Jardies for long periods of time, not daring to walk into the open countryside during the daytime for fear of being accosted.

Gozlan recounts an amusing incident which gives us some insight into Balzac's attitude toward the payment of debts. Arriving at Les Jardies for a visit one fine morning at five, Gozlan asked Balzac to accompany him on a walk in the woods nearby. Balzac demurred, saying he dared not face the garde champêtre, who was a terrible man. Failing to see any real reason why Balzac should be afraid, Gozlan dragged the reluctant novelist into the woods. Soon they met the garde. Balzac, breathless and silent, clutched Gozlan's coat sleeve. The garde champêtre, calm, rigid and erect as the statue of Napoleon, pierced Balzac with his direct glance and said in a grave voice, "Monsieur de Balzac,

ça commence à devenir musical." With that he walked haughtily away. Balzac looked at Gozlan, Gozlan at Balzac. "Avez-vous entendu! cried the enraptured novelist; "Avez-vous entendu? Ma parole d'honneur! la phrase est sublime à vous donner le vertige; elle est à conserver dans l'eau-de-vie: 'Monsieur de Balzac, ça commence à devenier musical.' Non! elle vaut mille fois les trente francs que je lui dois."

"Vous devez trente francs à ce garde champêtre?"

"Oui, depuis trois mois. Je comptais le rembourser aujourd'hui: Dutacq m'a apporté quelque argent hier au soir; mais sa phrase est trop belle; il faut que nous la répétions aux échos toute la journée: il ne sera payé que demain: 'Monsieur de Balzac, ça commence à devenir musical!'[39]

Unfortunately not all of Balzac's contemporaries were as charitable as Gozlan in their judgment of the debtor. Balzac's unpaid bills helped to keep him out of the French Academy. The role that money played at this time even in decisions regarding a man's literary genius is shown in the following excerpt from Charles Nodier:

> Mon cher Balzac, vous avez l'unanimité à l'Académie. Mais l'Académie, qui accepte très bien un scélérat politique qui sera traîné aux gémonies de l'histoire, qui élira même un fripon qui a su ne pas aller en cour d'assises à cause de l'immensité de sa fortune, s'évanouit à l'idée d'une lettre de change qui peut envoyer à Clichy. Elle est sans coeur ni pitié pour

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[39] Gozlan, pp. 129-130.

> l'homme de génie qui est pauvre ou dont les affaires vont mal. Ainsi ayez une position, soit par un mariage, soit en prouvant que vous ne devez rien, soit en ayant pignon sur rue; et vous êtes élu. 40

It must be said in Balzac's behalf that for a good many years he made a genuine effort to try to square himself financially with society. All his life long he worked like a galley slave at his writing, for that was the one certain means of acquiring ready money. What he made from this, however, was not enough to pay off old debts and to maintain his high standard of living. According to Gozlan, his yearly earnings from the publication of his books, after the immense proof-correction charges had been deducted, were not more than 10,000 to 12,000 francs. To supplement this income he contributed many articles and stories to newspapers and periodicals. When the need for ready cash was particularly acute, Balzac would ask for payment in advance, but sometimes he forgot to follow through

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40 Bellessort, pp. 345-346, quoting Nodier.

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with the promised article. From time to time he was known to

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41 Lovenjoul tells of a lawsuit brought by La Revue de Paris against Balzac for articles promised and paid for, but never delivered. Receiving 1,700 francs in advance for Séraphita, Balzac failed to turn in the last chapters even after a year, and the public was clamoring for the dénouement. A similar thing occurred in regard to the publication of Le lys dans la vallée, for which 2,000 francs were paid and only three parts received by the editors. When readers requested a reason for the discontinuing of the two stories, the magazine decided to expose within its columns the real cause of its embarrassment. Moreover, after the publication of the first chapter of Eugénie Grandet, Balzac took a trip. Not long afterwards, a friend of his came to the editor in the novelist's behalf and demanded 2,000 francs for the continuation of the story. Although the story was a good one, La Revue de Paris considered the price much too high, especially since the verbal agreement had been for 1,000 francs (already paid) and since proof changes would bring the cost of the whole thing to as much as 4,000 francs. Displeased with this method of extorting money, La Revue de Paris brought suit against Balzac, not only for the purpose of recovering funds advanced to him, but also to show up the novelist in his true light to an adoring public. See Lovenjoul, pp. 3-26.

Baudelaire also had something to say about Balzac's way of dealing with newspaper editors. In an article appearing in l'Écho des théâtres on August 25, 1846 and entitled "Comment on paye ses dettes quand on a du génie," Baudelaire tells the following story: Balzac offered to le Siècle and les Débats two big articles on "Les Français peints par eux-mêmes." The 1,500 francs agreed upon were to be paid on the receipt of the first article. Too busy with other things to write the articles himself, but badly in need of the money which they would bring in, Balzac hired a professional hack writer (Edouard Ourliac) to compose the first article for him. The article appeared two days later, in le Siècle as per schedule, but strange to say it was signed not by Balzac, nor by Ourliac, but by a third writer, Gérard de Nerval. The second article, written by Théophile Gautier, was published a week later in la Presse. See Ibid.,pp.61-63.

pawn or sell his personal effects,[42] but it never occurred to him to cut his standard of living to conform to his earnings. Instead, he usually sought in vain for some business venture which would clear him once and for all. The failure of these schemes resulted merely in the increase of his debts.

The extent of Balzac's debts at any one time in his life is not accurately known. Probably Balzac himself, in spite of his interest in figures, never knew exactly how much he owed. Gozlan believed that, with his tendency to exaggerate everything Balzac magnified in his own mind the actual sum total of his debts. If this be true, we shall have to take with a grain of salt the letter which Balzac wrote to Mme Hanska in 1838, on his return from the Sardinian trip. In this letter he declares, "j'ai trente-neuf ans, cent cinquante mille [redacted] francs de dettes... et...Je n'ai plus le courage d'achever, car je m'aperçois que la tristesse qui me dévore serait trop cruelle sur le papier...."[43] Even if a liberal allowance for Balzac's imagination had been deducted from this sum, the remainder would still have been

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[42] Once he put his silver service in pawn at the Mont-de-Piété. Also when he wanted to engage in the Sardinian mine affair, he took his jewels to the Mont-de-Piété to get money for the trip and the project.

[43] Lettres à l'Etrangère, I, p. 478.

more than Balzac could ever have paid off. Ten years later Balzac suffered losses during the Industrial Revolution which Bellessort estimates at another 60,000 francs. In 1849, completely swamped by his financial obligations, Balzac gave up all hope of ever getting his head above water. After his death, his wife, Mme Hanska, paid off all his debts and gave a generous annuity to his mother.

III

Living in a materialistic age, sensitive to social tendencies, and personally affected by this materialism, Balzac naturally made money the most important consideration in La Comédie Humaine. Many other authors before him had treated this same subject, but Balzac was the first to make it the principle basis of his work, even more important than love. Self-interest provides the motivating force of nearly all the intrigue in La Comédie Humaine. "L'argent est là, partout, troublant la foi, contrariant l'amour, gâtant de ses calculs les étreintes les plus passionnées, engendrant les plus cyniques complots, les crimes les plus sombres."[44] Two examples chosen at random will suffice to prove this point. The whole action of La Rabouilleuse centers around the fight between two parties, one legitimate and one an

[44] Bouvier, Avant-propos, p. 20.

imposter, for the succession of a tottering old fool. All except two characters in Le Cousin Pons are money-grabbers: La Cibot, hoping for a good share of his estate, tries to kill Pons by breaking him down morally; Rémonenco kills Cibot by a slow poison process in order to win La Cibot and her nice pile of savings; the Mephistophelian Fraisier manipulates this black intrigue for his own personal monetary and professional gain; and Poulain, Magus and Mme Camusot all stick their fingers into the pie in search of a nice gold plum. Even Pons himself is a miser of a sort. Were this analysis extended to include all of Balzac's plots, it would be found that money is the source of the conflict in nearly all of them.

Money figures not only as a motivating force, but accounts for a good portion of the realistic detail in La Comédie Humaine. The account-book is always kept in full sight. Balzac was perpetually preoccupied with the most minute expenditures, investments and revenues of his characters. He seemed to know better than anyone else such items as the cost of launching a new banking business, the setting up of a household budget and even the determining of the price of a lady's hat. Though the reader is sometimes bogged down by a superfluity of figures and monetary calculations, as in La Maison Nucingen, the use of these details, however, adds greatly to the realism of Balzac's novels. Moreover, Balzac enriched the vocabulary of monetary, commercial and

economic terms by borrowing words from other languages, restoring dormant French words, and inventing new ones of his own through the liberal use of the prefix and the suffix.

La Comédie Humaine breathes forth the spirit of materialism with which the Restoration period was saturated. Small wonder, then, that Faillettaz should call it "l'épopée des affaires et de l'argent."[45]

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[45] Faillettaz, p. 84.

Chapter II

The Miser in La Comédie Humaine

According to George Saintsbury, perhaps the worst and commonest vice of the French character is not the frivolity and license with which foreigners usually charge it, but rather the pushing of thrift to the extreme of loathsome avarice.[1] Molière, whom we think of as personifying l'esprit gaulois, realized this and incarnated the national vice in the character of Harpagon. But Molière had not said the last word on French miserliness. His study, written in the comic vein, had treated avarice as a ridiculous weakness. Moreover, Molière had presented it only as a simple, elemental urge. It remained for Balzac to dare to treat this passion seriously and to endow his misers with unquestioned grandeur. Furthermore, it was Balzac who portrayed the complexity of avarice as manifest in the daily life round about him.

Balzac, like Molière, began his study with a picture of the traditional miser whose every action was directed and explained by one simple driving force the hoarding instinct. But Balzac did not stop here. From this simple starting point he branched off into many directions, creating new characters who represented new aspects of the vice and build-

[1] See the introduction to vol. III of The Works of Honoré de Balzac, N. Y.; 1901, Part I, p. x.

ing up a complete composite picture of avarice as evidenced in the society of his day. From Grandet and Gobseck he takes us to Nucingen, whose avarice came into conflict with love and even succumbed to it for awhile, then returned with all its force when love had gone. Next we meet Graslin, a provincial miser who began his life in poverty, grew to be the richest man in Limoges, but in spite of his economical habits left nothing at his death. Then, there is La Baudraye of Sancerre who at sixty-four at last achieved the wealth and social standing he had coveted all his life. In old Hochon of Issoudun we see a type of avarice quite widespread among the provinces: that of the household miser who personally looks after the kitchen provisions and dispenses them with severe frugality. Next in line is Nicolas Séchard, in whom this passion completely annihilated the sentiment of paternal affection. After him come the revolting Rigou, whose miserliness became the servant of his loathsome sensuality: Élie Magus, who loved beautiful pictures as Grandet loved his gold; and finally Maître Cornélius, who represents avarice turned against itself.

In these ten characters, some of them fully drawn, some of them merely outlined, we are shown the avarice of the hoarder, the collector and the spender, the avarice of the provincial peasant and of the Parisian aristocrat, the covetousness of gold and of other material things - in short, avarice in all its many complex manifestations. In La Comédie

Humaine we have the full-color portrait, not just the pencil sketch; the serious study, not just the caricature.

I

In Eugénie Grandet, Balzac's best-known work, the old-time miser is portrayed. The artist has used a new color-method, added a few details and put the canvass in an early nineteenth-century frame, but essentially the character follows pretty closely the traditional concept. Père Grandet is the monomaniac who hoards gold for the pure pleasure of its possession. Avarice is as much an integral part of his nature as cruelty is to the tiger. Because of the force of this drive, all other sentiments and passions have been annihilated; the paternal instinct has been quenched and romantic love never did and could not exist within him. His acts, finding no obstacles to block them, are reduced to a minimum simplicity. Everything in his environment is favorable to the development of his avarice; he does not have to struggle against a resistence which forces him to dissimilate or even regulate his passion. His wife and daughter fear him; his fellow citizens either esteem him for his wealth or are afraid of the power that his wealth gives. Pursuing a straight-forward path from which he never deviates, he departs from the realm of the human and becomes a veritable monster. Père Grandet personifies l'Avarice Pur.

Politically Père Grandet was a republican, not because he believed that republicanism was good for the country as a whole, but because it brought him in nice personal returns. For example, soon after the Revolution, he, a republican, had the privilege of buying a large tract of national property for a song. During his administration as mayor of Saumur under the Consulat he had a good road built to his house "dans l'intérêt de la ville."[2] Hence, when under the Empire he was replaced by someone else in the mayor's office, he was ready to retire on his lands and give himself exclusively to the management of his income which was growing daily. His lands now were bringing in a good return, his wine was the best in the region and netted him a large profit, and he soon came into possession of three big inheritances. A "slick" business-man, he knew when to buy and sell, and increased his fortune by successful speculative schemes. Moreover, through his lawyer Cruchot he lent out sums of money to townspeople at a sizeable rate of interest. Scarcely anyone in Saumur had not at one time or other felt his "griffes d'acier"[3] tearing into their flesh. As early as 1806 he was the richest man in the city; by 1817 even he himself did not know the size of his fortune, so large it was. The people of Saumur looked upon him with a mixture of respect and terror.

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[2] Eugénie Grandet, p. 281.
[3] Ibid., p. 283.

In his business dealings Grandet was guided solely by self-interest. Wherever possible he would get what he could for nothing. For instance, he urged Cruchot to plant his poplars, which would soon grow into large wood-bearing trees, as close to the Loire as possible, so that they would be nourished at government expense and not drain his own land of valuable soil. His business methods were those of the tiger and the boa: he would hide himself away, watch his prey for a long time, then spring on it just at the right moment. Opening the mouth of his purse, he would swallow down the dollars, then go off quietly to rest, "comme le serpent qui digère, impassible, froid, méthodique."[4] He seemed to have a persistent need to play a game with other people and win legally their sous. Always keeping the letter of the law, Grandet prided himself on his financial integrity, for he was honorable "jusqu'au bout des cheveux."[5]

As he advanced in years, Grandet's passion for gold became more and more intense. The daily sight of his gold and the complete and sole possession of it became his idée fixe. Concurrently his despotism grew in proportion to his avarice and the idea of having to give over a portion of his wife's property to her legitimate heiress seemed to him something against nature. Furthermore, to tell even his daughter the extent of his own and of her fortune would be like cutting

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[4] Eugénie Grandet, p. 283.
[5] Ibid., p. 386.

his own throat.

Only once in his life did Grandet realize that his avarice had been harmful to anyone else. At his wife's deathbed, he was a pathetic, repentant figure. Thinking he could restore her to life and health and usefulness by giving her the money he had denied her for so many years, he scattered gold over her bed, babbling like a child his promise to keep her from want in the future. But even in this momentary repentance, it was the miser who spoke, not the husband, for Grandet was more interested in the resurrection of the household manager than of the wife. After her death, Grandet's avarice only increased all the more.

Just before his death, Grandet, now old, paralyzed and childish, had his daughter wheel him to the door of his den. Fearful lest someone steal his precious gold, he ordered Eugénie to spread it out on a table before him. His eyes, like those of a new-born child just learning to see, remained fixed for hours on the piles of gold louis. "Ça me réchauffe," he mumbled, as a beautific smile crossed his face. Not long afterwards the priest brought in the gold crucifix for the dying man to kiss. Grandet, seeing only the metal of which the cross was made, made a frightful effort to seize it and this effort cost him his life.[6]

Had we not been told at the beginning of the story that Grandet was a miser, we could have guessed it from the

[6] Eugénie Grandet, p. 457.

things he did unconsciously or from certain aspects of his nature which are typical of all traditional misers. In the first place, he spoke little, made little noise and seemed to economize everything, "même le mouvement."[7] Moreover, he was a suspicious old man who believed that everyone was after his money and that even his closest friends and business associates (the Cruchots and the des Grassins) paid court to him and his daughter because of the possibility of their one day getting his money through a marriage alliance. Further unconscious evidence of his avarice was the fact that he was by nature a solitary soul, telling no one of his secrets or chagrins and liking to shut himself up alone in his den with only his money for company. No one, not even his wife was allowed to enter that room. And whether he realized it or not, his yearly habit of giving to Eugénie a valuable gold-piece and of urging her to guard it carefully, was an instinctive attempt on his part to prolong his avarice beyond the grave by instilling it into his daughter. He loved to watch her treasure grow and demanded an account of its size at the beginning of each new year. It was like putting his money from one chest into another, while at the same time planting the seeds of avarice in the heart of his heiress. As he once said to Eugénie, money was absolutely essential to his happiness; écus were more alive to him than human beings.

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[7] Eugénie Grandet, p. 286.

In addition to these unconscious manifestations of his passion, Grandet adopted a number of conscious habits which he found very useful as aids to his greed. In business deals, when he wanted to throw his adversary off the track and bring him to his way of thinking, he would affect an incoherent stammering. This trick, learned long ago from an old Jew who had fooled him by it, was so skillfully employed that people thought the stammering natural. By appearing unable to express his thought, he made his commercial adversary impatient. In trying to help the incoherent Grandet express himself the adversary thus forgot his own thoughts. After a few minutes of this, the adversary would usually give up in despair and accept Grandet's offer.

Another little habit which Grandet, like all misers, had was constantly to belittle the extent of his fortune. When his nephew Charles came to visit him, Grandet, with affected humility, said: "Vous les entendrez peut-être tous ici vous disant que je suis riche: monsieur Grandet par-ci, monsieur Grandet par-là! Je les laisse dire, leurs bavardages ne nuisent point à mon crédit. Mais je n'ai pas le sou, et je travaille à mon âge comme un jeune compagnon, qui n'a pour tout bien qu'une mauvaise plane et deux bons bras."[8] Actually this speech is true, though the implications of it are not. Grandet possessed not a sou because he had converted his fortune into gold louis. And he did work with his hands,

[8] Eugénie Grandet, p. 326.

but not from necessity. He repaired the cellar steps himself because he was too stingy to pay anyone else to do the job.

In his domestic habits Grandet revealed himself most directly to be a miser. Regardless of how early winter came or how chill the late spring nights were, he never lighted the one fire in his house before the first of November and put it out always on the last day of March. Of his wife and daughter he made household drudges, requiring them to do by hand all the heavy laundry, "ce véritable labeur d'ouvrière."[9] Candles of the cheapest variety were the only source of light, and at night only one room was lighted in order to save tallow. Lest Madame Grandet be tempted to be generous or not too careful in her measurements, Père Grandet himself dispensed the daily food rations, measuring out the flour, butter and sugar with great care. And in order not to make a drain upon his meat and poultry stock, Grandet often killed crows for supper. The only known expenditures of the Grandet household were for holy water, Madame Grandet's and Eugénie's scanty wardrobes, the church pew, candles, Nanon's meager wages, taxes, necessary repairs on the farm buildings, the costs of Grandet's business deals and the silvering of his mirrors.

Grandet's avarice so completely possessed his whole personality that there was room for no other sentiment or

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[9] Eugénie Grandet, p. 292.

affection within him. Though he considered himself generous with his wife, to whom he gave 100 sous a month for herself and her daughter and from whose meager savings he frequently borrowed, actually he was generous only with that which cost him nothing or which would bring in certain profit. When his wife was dying, he refused to call in a doctor until it was pointed out to him that his wife was too useful a person to lose. Once he did display a spark of paternal affection, as he gazed upon the imprisoned Eugénie combing her long hair. For a moment the desire to embrace his daughter vied with his tenacity of character. This conflict, however, was short-lived. His avarice won out without even the semblance of a struggle and he went on about his business as before.

Although Grandet pretended to love his brother, his unwillingness to pay the price of the proof of that love indicates how entirely foreign to his nature was the sentiment of family attachment. How revealing is his statement to his nephew Charles when he said, "J'aimais mon frère, et je le prouverai bien si ça ne me coûte pas..."[10] That which caused Grandet embarrassment and real chagrin was not the fact that he had to tell his nephew of his father's death, but that he had to apprise him that he (Charles) did not have a cent. The death of a beloved father was not cruel, in Grandet's estimation, but the loss of fortune was the worst calamity that could befall a man. Grandet's imperviousness to family

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[10] Eugénie Grandet, p. 387.

affection is epitomized in the following terse account of something he did unconsciously: "Il chiffra sa spéculation sur le journal où la mort de son frère était annoncée, en entendant, sans les écouter, les gémissements de son neveu."[11]

Only one creature succeeded in extracting a drop of sentiment from the hard heart of Grandet. For big Nanon, his unlovely servant, Grandet felt an affection such as one would feel for a faithful dog who stands by his master and asks nothing in return for his silent, dumb devotion. Looking upon this creature, who never had heard a flattering word and was ignorant of the sweet pleasures that women inspire, Grandet was seized with a sort of impotent, atrocious pity for her and would say to her, "Cette pauvre Nanon!"[12] From this simple utterance Nanon drew her full measure of happiness and it was all that she asked. As avaricious as her master, Nanon was able to live on the slim wages which Grandet gave her and never asked for more. His pity for her cost him nothing: hence, he indulged it and imagined himself because of it to be a very compassionate person.

Seldom leaving his estate, except to go on business trips, Monsieur Grandet soon became an almost legendary figure to the people of Saumur. Knowing very little about him, they imagined all sorts of things about his habits and practices. Everyone was certain that he had a secret hiding-place full

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[12] Eugénie Grandet, p. 296.

[11] Ibid., 365.

of gold where he went nightly to gaze on gleaming yellow piles of money. Some professed to see the gold color reflected in his eyes. Others imagined him closeted in his den, making out receipts, calculating, weighing his money on a pair of scales near his desk, and having at his beck and call a fairy or a demon. In the minds of the people of Saumur, Grandet had ceased to be a man and had become a local tradition.

Père Grandet is an astonishing example of the will-to-power applied to the conquest of money. He is the Nietzschean super-man and as such escapes ugliness in the eyes of his creator. Force of any type was Balzac's ideal--his model was Napoleon--and any man who raised himself above his fellows by the superiority of his intelligence was worthy of admiration in Balzac's eyes. Stupidity was one thing which Balzac could not condone. And so, as a token to Grandet's strength of character, however badly directed it may have been, Balzac endows him with undeniable grandeur. It is this grandeur of character which raises Grandet above Harpagon, the weak and the ridiculous. Never once do we laugh at Grandet or pity him, for he is never weak nor ridiculous. While hating him for his hardness of heart, we cannot help but admire his tenacity of purpose, his self-sufficiency, and his superior intelligence.

Because of his very strength, Grandet, though perhaps a better novelistic character than Harpagon, has less of the human quality about him and is probably further removed from reality than Molière's character. Whereas Molière has ex-

aggerated the weaknesses of the miser, Balzac has emphasized out of all proportion Grandet's force of will and his ability to follow unswervingly the path he had mapped out for himself. In real life, weakness is a more common human quality than strength of character and usually strikes a more sympathetic note in the mind of the reader. Had it not been for the realism of the minutely detailed décor in which Balzac placed Grandet, the miser would hardly have been plausible from the human standpoint.

Artistically Père Grandet is generally considered to be Balzac's greatest character-creation. Critics, steeped in the classic tradition, point to the simplicity of Grandet's nature, to the unity of his every action, and to the harmony between character and milieu as proofs of Balzac's artistry. In keeping with the Greek theory of truth as conceived by the imagination of the artist rather than in the model itself, the picture is an idealized one, depicting the abstract passion rather than the man who possessed it. Portrayed as a monster of avarice, Grandet is a cerebral concept rather than a warm, lifelike character.

Viewed from the point of view of the modernist critics, however, the portrait of Père Grandet appears to be inferior to some of Balzac's later characterizations of the miser. Truth for the modernist is no longer simply an abstract concept, but is based on the observation of a real object. For the observation of that object, the mind is not sufficient,

but must be reinforced by the senses,so that the reproduction of the model will have warmth and life. Any work of art, then, must be true to the nature of the model observed. In this case, the model is a human being. By minimizing Grandet's human qualities and by erecting him into an abstract symbol, Balzac has distorted the real truth of the picture. Grandet is the figment of a vivid imagination, not the reproduction of a model observed by the senses.

Furthermore, the classic principles of composition are not always applicable to the creation of a picture in the modern manner. Certainly Balzac's strict adherence to the principles of simplicity, unity and symmetry tend to distort further the real, observable truth of his portrait of Grandet. As we have already stated, his model was a human being. Human nature is not simple, but exceedingly complex. By reducing all natural instincts within Grandet to one basic drive, Balzac has simplified the miser's nature to such an extent that he appears as a monster,not as a man. Nor does human life go along smoothly as our will directs it, but is full of unexpected conflicts and set-backs. Grandet encounters no conflicts, because no other passion ever challenges his avarice. There are here no surprises, no mystery as in real life. Furthermore, human character is seldom consistent, but changes and develops with the years. Grandet's avarice is so firmly embedded from the very beginning that all possibility of psychological development or change is eliminated

a priori. Grandet never evolves, but remains a static character to his death.

We are so much in the habit of thinking in terms of four plus four that we have forgotten that five plus three produces the same result. Moreover, reared to admire the cold, simple beauty of a Greek temple, we have tended to discredit the artistic merit and appeal of the Gothic cathedral with its unexpected rose windows and its unpredictable gargoyles. Lastly, we have been satisfied to contemplate the placid, maternal face of a Raphael madonna when we might have tried to fathom the Mona Lisa's enigmatic smile. The portrait of Grandet is as symmetrical as four plus four, as simple as a Greek temple and as unchanging as the translucent gaze of a Raphael madonna. In his attempt to achieve the ideal of classic beauty, Balzac sacrificed the even more important principle of real truth.

II

In his characterization of Gobseck, Balzac shows definite progress in the direction of the modernists' concept of truth. From a monomaniac, the miser has evolved into a fairly complex character. Possessed of a dual nature, the miser now experiences a certain amount of psychological conflict. No longer a static personality, the monster of avarice has developed some undeniably human qualities to take away the chill from an unadulterated passion. Finally,

an added interest in ideas gives the portrait a depth which it had lacked before. For these reasons, Balzac's study of Gobseck seems to this writer to be superior to that of Grandet.

In contrast to Grandet's monomania, we are struck first by the dual quality of Gobseck's nature. He is the philosopher as well as the miser and both aspects of his personality are of such force that it would be hard to determine which of the two predominates. According to Altszyler, Gobseck is primarily the Jew and secondarily the miser; that is, his outstanding innate attribute seems to be his intellectual curiosity-that particularly Jewish penchant for analyzing things, beings and ideas. Avarice, acting as an auxiliary, provides the wherewithal for the satisfaction of that curiosity. By increasing his hoard so that he can play the vile usurer, the miser thus can penetrate below the surface of life and find out what really motivates human actions and reactions. When we meet Gobseck at the age of seventy-six, the Jewish philosopher undeniably predominates in him, but we wonder if, in his earlier days, he might not have been first the miser, who adopted this philosophy of life as a justification of and excuse for his innate avarice: then, as the years went by the justification gradually assumed more importance to him than the thing justified.

All readers are agreed that Grandet was one hundred per cent evil, but opinion is sharply divided in regard to the character of Gobseck. Whereas Grandet is depicted as a wholly despicable individual whose hard heart never once felt

the prick of the generous impulse, the picture of Gobseck is not altogether a dark one. Balzac skillfully endows Gobseck with certain impulses and actions which might be interpreted as being demonstrations of generosity or pity, and then lets his readers formulate their own opinions concerning Gobseck's character. Bouvier sees no redeeming features in this Jewish usurer, who "voit tout, sait tout, méprise tout, dépèce tout."[13] Deliberately and coldly enclosing himself in the existence of an automaton, Gobseck sadistically savors the humiliations of other people who implore his aid. With the clairvoyance of the fortune-teller he can even foresee when people will come to him before they themselves know it. He is moved at times by the acting of his clients - hungry artists, people in love and destitute mothers, but never deceived by it. Seated alone before a dying fire, he thinks, "J'entasse, donc je suis."[14]

Bouvier's picture, though true as far as it goes, is not complete and therefore not just. Seillière and Faillettaz seem to have arrived at a more accurate evaluation of Gobseck's character. Faillettaz believes that underneath the vile usurer, Gobseck possessed a great soul, characterized by genuine goodness, honesty, and even generosity. In matters not pertaining to business, Gobseck was worthy of the confidence which his friend Derville placed in him when he said

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[13] Bouvier, p. 44.

[14] Ibid., pp. 44-45.

that he (Gobseck) was "l'homme le plus délicat et le plus probe qu'il y ait à Paris."[15] Seillière agrees with Faillettaz and cites the following incident to prove that Derville's confidence in Gobseck was justified. Appointed as executor of the Restaud estate, Gobseck at first pretends that the Restaud children are penniless. The reason for this bit of deceit is in order that Ernest, the oldest son and only hope of the ruined household, may be reared in the school of hard knocks and thus learn the value of money. Then, when the lad's training is complete and he shows himself to be capable of handling money wisely, Gobseck gives him the fortune intact, although in the eyes of the law he would have had a perfect right to keep the fortune in payment of old debts incurred by the boy's wayward mother.

Though capable of experiencing the sentiment of pity, Gobseck never acted on the impulse of the moment. Ever the sage, he always called in the help of the intellect to direct this sentiment so as to produce the best results. The Restaud affair was not the only example of Gobseck's generosity. Impervious to the pleadings of his aristocratic clients who sought his help by playing upon his emotions, he was not insensible, however, to the needs of honest workers who came to him "sans finasserie."[16] Accustomed to charging from fifty

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15 Gobseck, p. 420.

16 Ibid., p. 423.

to one hundred percent interest on small loans, he asked Derville only thirteen per cent, and that only in order to relieve the young lawyer of all feeling of obligation to him. Thereafter they were still the best of friends. Gobseck took a personal interest in Derville, sent him clients and gave him plenty of good advice.

Though we cannot imagine Grandet as ever having experienced the joys of romantic love, we can conceive of Gobseck as once having known that sweetest of all human emotions. At seventy-six Gobseck was attracted by the charms of the beautiful Comtesse de Restaud, yet did not allow himself to give in to this sentiment. His reaction, however, was that of a man capable of real feeling, who had known it in the past and still remembered it, but who through long years of stoic self-control, had completely cut it out of his life, and now wished he could call it back again. The little that we know of Gobseck's past life and the deep lines of his face bear out this conclusion.[17] Describing his reaction to

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[17] The son of a Jewish woman and a Dutchman, Gobseck had been sent at the age of ten as a cabin-boy on a ship to the Dutch colonies in the Indies, where he had wandered about for twenty years. Here he had come into contact with well-known men of the time, including pirates. Anxious to make a fortune, he had tried devious ways of reaching that end, even going so far as to search for the gold of a celebrated tribe of savages who had lived near Buenos Aires. He had seen at close range the American War of Independence. "Aussi les rides de son front jaunâtre gardaient-elles les secrets d'événements horribles, de terreurs soudaines, de hasards inespérés, de traverses romanesques, de joies infinies: la faim supportée, l'amour foulé aux pieds, la fortune compromise, perdue, retrouvée, la vie maintes fois en danger, et sauvée peut-être par ces déterminations dont la rapide urgence excuse la cruauté....Mais quand il parlait des Indes ou de l'Amérique,...il semblait que ce fût une indiscrétion, il paraissait s'en repentir." Gobseck, p. 386.

the interview with the countess, Gobseck remarked to Derville: "...elle inspirait l'amour....Elle me plut. Il y avait longtemps que mon coeur n'avait battu. J'étais donc déjà payé! je donnerais mille francs d'une sensation que me ferait souvenir de ma jeunesse."[18] Then, a minute later, remembering his seventy-six years and becoming once more the miser, he had cried inwardly, "Paie ton luxe, paie ton nom, paie ton bonheur, paie le monopole dont tu jouis."[19] This is the cry of a man who once had loved, but who, afraid of his emotions, had gradually silenced them in an effort to weave his life into a logical, rational pattern. Now at seventy-six, habit quiets his emotions whenever they emerge again. Had a real crisis come, however, he doubtless would have broken down. It is significant that Gobseck, so far as we know, never underwent the real test which would have proved just how completely he had mastered his emotions.

Gobseck, though a more complex character than Grandet, still retains many qualities of the traditional miser, as well as certain aspects characteristic of the materialistic age in which he lived. Throughout the whole story we are reminded, both by the author's observations and by incidents to substantiate these observations, that Gobseck is "dur, froid et

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[18] Gobseck, p. 394.

[19] Ibid., p. 394.

poli comme une colonne de marbre,"[20] "un homme fabriqué par l'enfer, que rien ne peut attendrir,"[21] "un fier drôle, capable de faire des dominos avec les os de son père,"[22] Like Grandet he is as stingy with his words as with his money and seems to economize everything, even his motions. Always calm and cool, he never raises his voice. When his victims shout, he answers them in sepulchral monosyllables. His way of life is like that of an automaton, so regular is he in his habits.

Like his literary forebears, Gobseck loved to take out his jewels, turn them over and over, and gaze on them with affection. During his lifetime he kept his hoardings well hidden from the view of those about him, but at his death masses of gold and silver were found in the fireplace, great quantities of perishable food, bric-a-brac, furniture, etc. in the adjoining closed-off rooms, 1000-franc notes between the pages of his books and his current business correspondence on his desk. Like Grandet, he hated all who hoped to inherit from him, not being able to conceive of his fortune as ever belonging to anyone else but himself. And true to tradition, he liked to pose as being poor. One day, when he dropped a gold napoleon and a passerby returned it to him, he repudiated ownership of the coin, saying, "À moi de l'or! Vivrais-je comme je vis si j'étais riche?"[23]

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[20] Gobseck, p. 413.
[21] Le Père Goriot, p. 462.
[22] Ibid., p. 262
[23] Gobseck, p. 385.

Even in death Gobseck remained the miser; his avarice survived his intelligence. Thinking he sees his room full of or vivant, he crawls on his knees to the fireplace to gather the gold in his hands. Discovering that he has been the victim of an hallucination, he tries to go back to bed, but is too feeble to move. Derville finds him in this attitude, puts him back in bed and listens to his last wishes. Gobseck dies like an old Roman, in full possession of his faculties, without religion, his thoughts on money.

In his capacity as usurer, Gobseck represents a profession which died out soon after he himself died. The exorbitant interests charged by him indicate the difficulty that one had in obtaining credit during the Restoration period. The private money-lender was a last resort, yet Gobseck's clientèle included the most aristocratic families of Paris and the best-known professional men. He is one of the last of those usurers, who bled their debtors, lived like paupers, hoarded their acquisitions and tried to outdo their rivals in the same trade.[24]

[24] When de Trailles comes to borrow from Gobseck, the latter, already knowing his client's history, refuses to lend to him without security. Gobseck's reason for demanding security is not to protect himself, but in order to put one over on his rivals, Gigonnet and Werbrust, who had lent money without security. Knowing that de Trailles is in such a fix that he will go to any extreme to get ready cash, Gobseck quietly awaits the only security which de Trailles can provide - the jewels of his mistress, the Comtesse de Restaud. When Gobseck finally is in possession of the jewels, he dances like a child, exclaiming to himself: "Ah! Ah! Werbrust et Gigonnet, vous avez cru attraper le vieux papa Gobseck! Ego sum papa! je suis votre maître à tous!" And he glories in anticipation of the time when he will tell his rivals of his gain. See Gobseck, p. 415.

Jealous of the aristocracy who for so many centuries had controlled the nation's purse-strings, they were determined to have their share of the spoils as one last coup against the social class they envied and despised. A few years later this type of lowly usurer, whose practices were encouraged and aided by the political, social and economic conditions of the Restoration period, had evolved into the usurier bon enfant, such as Balzac portrays in the character of Vauvinet. In him the usurer is no longer the solitary miser, living in poverty, but a bona-fide member of a bourgeois society, who lives in a modern apartment, dresses like a serious businessman and rides in a horse-drawn coupé.

Whereas Grandet's avarice had been purely instinctive, this passion in Gobseck is raised from the emotional plane to the cerebral level and becomes the foundation of a whole philosophy of life. To the force of will, which had strengthened Grandet's avarice, is now added superiority of intelligence. So logical is Gobseck's line of reasoning that the reader finds himself condoning the vice which he had earlier deplored. On the whole, however, Gobseck's philosophy is a negative one - that of the cynic and the skeptic rather than the believer. While it serves very well as a justification for the usurer's way of life, it does not tempt the reader to follow it as his own personal guide.

Gobseck's philosophy is that of the skeptic who once had believed and who still would like to believe, but to whom

experience and logic have brought disillusion and disgust. Beneath his sarcastic tirade against humanity lies a nostalgia for the optimism of his youth. Searching for virtue, he had found only the triumph of vice and passion in the life about him. Years of world travel had convinced him that everywhere self-interest is the motivating force of human life. In the extravagance, chicanery and low moral tone of the whole period, he sees the daily confirmation of his cynical philosophy. No wonder he is embittered.

Determined to free himself from the weaknesses of human passion, he adopts the stoic's existence. When we meet him, he has been practicing a solitary ascetism for so many years that life for him has become simply "une habitude exercée dans un certain milieu préféré."[25] Happiness for him consists in the exercise of his faculties applied to realities. So he expends his energies trying to fathom the realities of life.

At this point Gobseck's philosophic thought takes a materialistic turn, by means of which the usurer nicely justifies his disgusting profession. According to this nineteenth-century sage, there is only one material thing whose value is constant enough in an ever-changing world for man to bother going after it; namely gold. "L'or représente toutes les forces humaines."[26] Since the world in general is only a struggle between the rich and the poor for the possession of this great force, Gobseck's sole desire is to

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[25] Gobseck, p. 389.

[26] Ibid. p. 389.

exploit rather than be exploited. "L'or contient tout en germe, et donne tout en réalité".[27] It gives movement to the machine of life.

Having satisfied his lust for the possession of wealth, Gobseck's chief pleasure now is in using that wealth as a means of seeing into the lives of men. By selling his money like merchandise, cheap or dear as the case demanded, without qualms of conscience, he is able to drink the tears of other people's unhappiness, in order to find out "quel est leur cru."[28] Those who borrow from him can conceal nothing, for his glance is like God's: it pierces into all hearts.

In Altszyler's opinion, Gobseck's enjoyment of the power of gold is not that of one who wants to avenge himself on his personal enemies or control the movements of men in general, but rather that of the spectator, the impartial critic, the analyst - that of a Balzac who would observe a fact in order to draw a general conclusion from it. To a certain extent this interpretation is true. Gobseck did love to watch life unraveling before him and speaks often of his own calm in the face of the disaster he sees around him. He wants us to think that he is the stoic before whom human passions parade, yet over whom "le monde n'a pas la moindre prise."[29] His cold spectator's eye picks up every detail of the Comtesse

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27 Gobseck, p. 390.
28 Les Paysans, p. 243.
29 Gobseck, p. 390-391.

de Restaud's boudoir and interprets what it sees in the cold terms of the costs of maintaining such an establishment. He would have us believe that the spectacle of Maxime de Trailles ruining a whole family leaves him absolutely untouched. Pure curiosity to see how a poor client lives pushes him to go to her house to collect his debt, rather than to accept the money which her porter gives him. These scenes from life, so Gobseck tells us, are just so many diverting spectacles to him - "Hier, une tragédie....Demain, une comédie...,"[30] in which his debtors are so many sublime actors playing for him alone.

The view of Gobseck as the spectator untouched by what he witnesses, is, however, not the complete picture. His pretense of aloofness is largely a pose. Too active a spirit just to sit back calmly and watch the show, he felt compelled to go backstage from time to time and pull the strings himself. Like so many other people of the Restoration period, he loved the power which money could buy. Having cut from his own life the thrills of human emotion, he lived vicariously in the passions of the people whose lives he controlled. Outwardly the cold money-lender, inwardly he glows with pleasure at the sense of power which his wealth gives him. Concerning his interview with the pathetic Comtesse de Restaud, he says, "elle devint mon esclave....Je vis la femme frissonnant de la tête aux pieds, la peau blanche satinée de son cou devint

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[30] Gobseck, p. 398.

rude: elle avait, suivant un terme familier, la chair de poule. Moi, je riais, sans qu'aucun de mes muscles tressaillait."[31] Gobseck was rich enough to buy the consciences of those who caused politicians to act, from their office-boys to their mistresses. "N'est-ce pas le Pouvoir?" he asks. He could have had the most beautiful women and their most tender caresses. "N'est-ce pas le Plaisir?" he asks again. These are not the words of the aloof spectator, but of the uninvited guest who knows too much and with diabolic glee loves to make his hostess squirm.

Moreover, in spite of his efforts to convince us of his inner calm, Gobseck never did achieve the complete impassivity of the stoic. His attitude is not wholly that of the impartial critic. Though too much the sage to stoop to petty personal revenge, he did have one class prejudice which colored his thinking: he hated the rich. In his dealings with an extravagant noble class, he is no longer the simple spectator, for at a lower rate of interest he could have observed life just as well. He is now the underdog, who, after years of struggle, has at last outdone his oppressor and revels in his master's suffering. Gobseck admits that he likes "à crotter les tapis de l'homme riche, non par petitesse, mais pour leur faire sentir la griffe de la Nécessité."[32] Those who were obliged to seek his aid recognized this aspect of Gobseck's nature, but were powerless to combat it.

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[31] Gobseck, p. 395.

[32] Ibid., p. 392.

The dandy, Maxime de Trailles, was speaking the truth when he said: "Vous faites une éponge de moi, mordieu! et vous m'encouragez à me gonfler au milieu du monde, pour me presser dans les moments de crise..."[33] This was Gobseck's way of hitting back at a social class he despised.

Though Balzac's study of Gobseck is a great improvement over that of Grandet in the direction of truth as observed in the model, the picture still is too much on the abstract plane. Gobseck, with all his humanizing qualities, is still a symbol. Still the Nietzschean superman, he is lifted above the ordinary conflicts of human life. As Grandet had personified pure Avarice, so Gobseck represents the Power of Money. For us, as for Derville, "ce petit vieillard sec... s'était changé...en une image fantastique où se personnifiait le pouvoir de l'or."[34]

III

It was not until 1837 that Balzac gave us a picture of a miser who might actually have lived during the Restoration period. In Nucingen we at last are introduced to a man who had weaknesses as well as strength and who knew the meaning of suffering when his avarice came into conflict with the passion of love.

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[33] Gobseck, p. 410.

[34] Ibid., p. 399.

Nucingen, the Restoration banker, represents the third and last stage of the evolution of the miser in La Comédie Humaine. Still retaining many of the characteristics of his literary ancestors, he is, however, much more human than either Grandet or Gobseck and much more a product of the age in which he lived. The harshness of his avarice marks him as the descendant of Grandet, but the anti-social hoarder has now evolved into the socially prominent capitalist, who keeps his wealth circulating as it grows. No longer affecting poverty, the miser now lives in luxury, has a fine carriage, is interested in politics and aspires to the peerage. Justifying his business methods by a materialistic philosophy, Nucingen at times recalls Gobseck, but here the philosophy is a superficial appendage rather than an integral part of his personality. In the accumulation of his fortune, Nucingen evidences a persistence and force of will as great as those of either Grandet or Gobseck, but when another strong passion challenges his avarice, his human weakness is also revealed. Nor has the Restoration miser completely descended from the abstract plane. For those who would search for the symbol beneath the concrete object, Nucingen might well represent the Commercial Genius in Action; but at the same time there is enough concrete reality about the character to satisfy the most severe modernist critic. In this portrait Balzac has achieved a nice blending of the ideal and the real. For these reasons the study of Nucingen is probably the most

artistic presentation of the miser to be found in La Comédie Humaine.

True to tradition, Nucingen, dominated by self-interest, seems devoid of human pity. The son of a Jew, who had become converted for business purposes, Nucingen has inherited from his father a special talent for making money. As one of his colleagues said of him, "quand Nucingen lâche son or,...croyez qu'il saisit des diamants!"[35] This talent, combined with his avarice, turns him into a veritable machine, which, once started running, cannot stop itself. Any business deal is attractive to him provided there is profit in it. What matter if his intimate friends be ruined in the process of his own financial rise; "quel est le chasseur de millions qui s'arrête?"[36] Under the appearance of honesty and the protection of legality, he becomes as slick a criminal as Jacques Colin (alias Vautrin). For the families he has ruined, Nucingen feels absolutely no pity, saying coldly to his wife Delphine: "Je te permets de commettre des fautes, laisse-moi faire des crimes en ruinant de pauvres gens!"[37]

In his dealings with his servants, employees and even members of his family, Nucingen shows himself to be as niggardly as Grandet had been. Delphine tells of how he used his name to dazzle poor contractors, then left them unpaid when they had finished their work. To avoid payment in case

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35 La Maison Nucingen, p. 356.
36 Le Curé de village, p. 25.
37 Le Père Goriot, p. 458.

they brought suit, he sent his capital out of the country. When his wife's penniless father died, Nucingen not only refused to contribute a cent to the funeral expenses or to let his wife attend the funeral, but even prevented her from going to the dying man's bedside, for fear that a generous impulse might come over her. Some years later romantic love temporarily softens this hard heart, but when love has passed, avarice, the first passion which Nucingen had known, comes back with all its force. At Esther van Gobseck's deathbed, while still contemplating the body of the only woman he had ever loved, Nucingen suddenly becomes the miser again and asks the whereabouts of the money he had given her.

Philosophically as well as emotionally Nucingen is a materialist. Though he did not work out a whole philosophic system as did Gobseck, he does propound from time to time certain ideas that recall his literary forebear. Like Gobseck he early realized that money was a great power when distributed in disproportionate quantities. Recognizing within himself a special gift for accumulating money, he determined to be the exploiter rather than the exploited. Secretly jealous of the Rothschild brothers, as soon as he amassed 5,000,000 francs, he wanted 10,000,000. Although he knew that fortunes as large as his were not acquired nor retained amidst the commercial, political and industrial revolutions of the age, without there being great losses to other people's capital, he excused his personal avidity on the grounds that "l'argent

des sots est de droit divin le patrimoine des gens d'esprit."[38] Never hampered by scruples, he always got out of a bad business transaction as best he could, and three times took advantage of public credulity to change the appearance of a deal for his own personal profit. When questioned about the honesty of such procedures, he would reply, as Vautrin had replied, that "il n'y a que des apparences d'honnête homme,"[39] and that he was particularly careful about appearances. In spite of the fact that he carried on his operations under the protection of La Haute Banque, he was no better than the vile usurer. Finance for him was just a form of legalized theft. He raised financial fraud "à la hauteur de la Politique."[40]

Not only in his materialistic concept of life, but also in his business practices was Nucingen representative of the Restoration period. More than any other character in La Comédie Humaine he seemed to "feel" the economic waves of his time and was able to interpret them to his own advantage. He seemed to know just when to buy and sell his stocks, what investments would bring the biggest returns, and how much wine prices would change in the next ten years. The story of his financial rise sounds almost fantastic to us today, but during the Restoration period it was not an uncommon thing. His famous coups, his pretended liquidations, and

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38 La Maison Nucingen, p. 399.
39 Ibid., p. 357
40 Les Paysans, pp. 243-244.

his other questionable business methods indicate how disorganized and unjust was the whole commercial system in France at that time.

A study of Nucingen's financial development gives us a good idea of how fortunes were made and lost during this period. As a young man, having little capital and no notoriety, Nucingen decided to gain fame by means of a scandal. Already established as a sort of petty banker in Strasbourg, in 1804 he made it known that he would not meet his obligations, but would pay off his creditors in questionable stocks which he had on hand. For several months everyone talked about him and he was considered little better than a criminal. But, as he had long ago planned, the stocks increased in value month by month and the enterprise ended up by paying a profit. His credit was thus not only reestablished and reinforced, but he acquired renown for his business perspicacity. People ceased to think of him as a criminal and flocked to have him invest their money.

Strasbourg, however, was not big enough for a genius of such dimensions, so Nucingen came to Paris where he installed himself in a little office in the quarter Poissonnière. There, in 1815, in order that the big city might become acquainted with him, he pulled a similar trick. In the eyes of his Parisian creditors who eventually profitted from this second liquidation, Nucingen passed for "le plus honnête homme du monde." With his own profits from the second coup,

he speculated on the battle of Waterloo, buying wines in 1814 at a low price. From Père Grandet he bought 150,000 bottles of champagne at 1.50 francs a bottle and a similar consignment of Bordeaux at a similar price from another provincial landowner. Foreseeing that wine prices would go up, he kept the stock until 1817-1819, selling the 300,000 bottles at a median price of 6 francs a bottle. This and many other equally successful speculative deals soon made Nucingen one of France's most powerful capitalists.

When public trust in him was at its peak, Nucingen, in possession of vast amounts of money, announced a third liquidation. Investors, offered the usual pacifier, were confident in the eventual outcome of the enterprise. This time, however, Nucingen played the real thief. His method "consiste à donner un petit pâté pour un louis d'or à de grands enfants qui, comme les petits enfants d'autrefois, préfèrent le pâté à la pièce, sans savoir qu'avec la pièce ils peuvent avoir deux cents pâtés."[41] When the worthlessness of the "valeurs fictives" became known, his bankrupt friends and creditors believed, as he wanted them to believe, that Nucingen had ruined himself in order to save an infinitesimal part of their investments, for which noble action they owed him their grateful thanks. In the meantime, Nucingen, more solvent than ever, had invested all his money in an American project far from the reach of the French law courts. Losses

[41] La Maison Nucingen, p. 394.

in this affair were attributed to "natural causes", such as the rise and fall of the stock market, increase and decrease in values, etc. Nucingen was so slick that no one could prove that he wanted to steal from the public he had enriched.

In the description of Nucingen's financial rise we are given a concrete account of the fiscal situation in France during the Restoration. At the head of a private banking business which practiced legal usury on a large scale, Nucingen was one of a group of men who formed La Haute Banque, the credit organization already mentioned in Chapter I. Nucingen's unscrupulousness, though not necessarily typical of that of all big bankers of Paris, was characteristic of the materialistic spirit and low moral tone of French society in general at the time. Moreover, the three liquidations and their respective outcome indicate to what extent the general public was attracted by speculative enterprises. While Nucingen's rapid accumulation of such a huge fortune may seem almost unbelievable, it must be remembered that this was the era of the Rothschilds and the Mallets, real financiers whose fortunes even topped that of Nucingen.

As the Restoration banker, Nucingen was the commercial titan whose genius we are forced to admire. In the field of finance he had no equal for perspicacity. Ever the cold, calculating logician in business matters, he was insensible to the cries of the thousands he had crushed. As a man, however, Nucingen was not impervious to human passion. At the

feet of a beautiful courtesan, the master suddenly became a servile valet. As Esther said of him in a moment of anger, this "caisse fabriquée par Huret ou par Fichet...s'est métamorphosée en homme par un tour de force de la Nature."[42]

Nucingen had known all kinds of love except romantic passion. His money had made available "amour naturel, amour postiche et d'amour-propre, amour de bienséance et de vanité; amour-goût, amour décent et conjugal, amour excentrique,... tout, excepté le véritable amour. Cet amour venait de fondre sur lui comme un aigle sur sa proie...."[43] For the first time he realized that there was something in life more sacred and powerful than gold and he meant to have the thing before he died.

Love converted the baron into a dual personality. By day he was still the loup-cervier, more heartlessly avaricious than ever in his ignoble business affairs; by night he was the humble submissive spaniel, at the beck and call of a capricious mistress. Blinded by love and egged on by Esther's hollow promises, he himself became the prey of other scheming leeches who bled him as pitilessly as he had bled his victims. Madame du Val-Noble, Carlos Herrera (alias Vautin) and the servants (Asie and Europe) all come in for their share of the booty. He who had been noted for his business acumen suddenly became as naive as a schoolboy under the influence of love. What a blow to both his avarice and to his egoism it would have been

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42 Splendeurs et Misères des courtisans, I, pp. 274-275.
43 Ibid., I, p. 84.

had he ever got wind of what was actually going on!

First among the baron's expenditures for love's purposes was the luxurious apartment he had decorated for his mistress. Although this bedid balai (petit palais), as he called it lovingly in his Jewish-German jargon, cost him 200,000 francs in the space of a short two months, he felt sure that, being the initial investment it would be the largest. He had not accurately calculated the needs of an Esther van Gobseck, the most beautiful courtesan in Paris. In her extortions from this old man, she seemed to avenge all the orphans and widows whose fortunes Nucingen had so pitilessly grabbed. By the time of her suicide a few months later, Esther had "touched" the baron to the extent of some 750,000 francs or more.

Knowing of Nucingen's innate avarice and of his stinginess with his legitimate spouse, we are surprised at his sudden prodigality with the obviously-designing Esther. His ancestor, Grandet, had never even known a generous impulse, much less given in to one, and Gobseck had remained predominantly the hard miser to the end. Nucingen, however, is now almost as liberal in his expenditures as he had been avid for gain before. When told by his mistress that a certain Joseph Bridau was a man of talent, the Baron had even gone so far as to pay 10,000 francs for one of the unknown artist's pictures. And, in the name too of love, he practiced the new habit of giving five francs to all the poor people

he met on the streets. As he himself confessed in a long, pathetic letter to Esther, he had changed so much that no one recognized him anymore. It is precisely this change, this subordinating of the great passion of avarice to another greater passion, that makes Nucingen a human being and hence places him above Grandet and Gobseck as an artistic character creation.

It must be remembered that for a man of Nucingen's age and physical make-up, it is much more difficult to have a caprice than to acquire gold. Once it is a question of real love, money means nothing to the millionaire. In comparison to the pleasures of this wonderful new sensation, material benefits appeared of secondary importance to Nucingen. Gladly would the capitalist have given away his whole fortune, if in that way he could have bought the affection of the woman he loved. It is the lover triumphant over the miser, the human being over the symbol, who is revealed in the famous letter to Esther, in which Nucingen speaks as follows: "L'argent n'est rien pour moi quand il s'agit de vous....Eh! bien, si, en vous donnant tout ce que je possède, je pouvais, pauvre, obtenir votre affection, j'aimerais mieux être pauvre et aimé de vous que riche et dédaigné."[44] Unfortunately the Baron's millions were unable to buy the love he sought and the powerful titan of the business-office became pathetically ineffectual in the boudoir.

[44] Splendeurs et Misères des courtisans, I, p, 219.

From the Nucingen who refused to let his wife contribute to her destitute father's funeral expenses, to the Nucingen who gladly satisfied the extravagant whims of his mistress, the miser has come a long way on the road to being a man. The character no longer is a static one, the portrait no longer lifeless. The miser, humanized by love, has at last become sensitive to the inner conflicts which tend to modify a man's very nature. Nucingen in love is as capricious and unpredictable as many people in real life. Will he give in to Esther's demand for another 100,000 francs or will his avarice deny her this gift? That is the question and therein lies the mystery of the portrait which makes it worth looking at again and again.

We had viewed the characters of Grandet and Gobseck with the cold sentiments of admiration and mild disgust. The vile deeds of these men left us almost untouched. But when we look upon Nucingen, we feel a third emotion more potent than the others - that of pity. While admiring the genius of the business-man and despising still the meanness of the miser, we cannot help but pity the lover who cried in his pathetic patois, "...chamais les milionaires ne beufent se vaire aimer tes phâmes."[45] The great works of art are those that move us, not those that leave us cold.

In this study of the miser as a human being the idealistic aspect is not entirely omitted. Nucingen is a

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[45] Splendeurs et Misères des courtisanses, I, p. 292. Translation: "Jamais les millionnaires ne peuvent se faire aimer des femmes."

hero dear to the heart of the Balzac who attached great value to material strength. By endowing the business-man with power and grandeur, Balzac makes of him the idealized commercial genius. Had the portrait ended with La Maison Nucingen, the idealized miser would have been all that we would have known. But to this is added the realistic Splendeurs et Misères des courtisanes, which rounds out and completes the picture. Powerful as the capitalist, important as the lover, idealized as the miser, realistically portrayed as the man, Nucingen is the most perfectly conceived and the most artistically executed of all Balzac's novelistic misers.

IV

Balzac's picture of avarice, however, is still not complete. As he himself said, "les sentiments humains, et surtout l'avarice, ont des nuances...diverses dans les divers milieux de notre société."[46] Grouped around the three main figures already discussed are a number of minor characters representing other aspects of the vice. For a complete understanding of the picture as a whole, therefore, we must examine the smaller figures in the background.

Probably the best drawn of the second-class misers is Grégoire Rigou, the low-born usurer of Les Paysans. Here we are taken into a new milieu and shown a type of avarice un-

[46] Les Paysans, p. 244.

like any we have encountered thus far. Leaving Paris and the provincial town, we now travel deep into the provinces only to discover that among the lower bourgeoisie and the peasantry, avarice also has its roots. Here the vice has no redeeming feature; the miser, no admirable quality. In Rigou shrewdness has replaced superior intelligence, hypocrisy doubles for honesty and self-indulgence takes the place of self-discipline.

Rigou was an ex-Benedictine monk, who, upon his return to secular life, had married the servant girl of the parish priest of Blangy in Bourgogne. As though bent on making up for the years lost in his monastic existence, he threw himself into a life of physical pleasures, determined to squeeze the last drop "du citron appelé le bien-vivre."[47] For the humility of the godly man he had substituted the egoism of the materialist; for chastity, the sensuality of the epicurean; for poverty, the avarice of the usurer; for obedience, the license of the roué; and for honesty, the hypocrisy of the faux-dévot. "Profond comme un moine, silencieux comme un Bénédictin en travail d'histoire, rusé comme un prêtre, dissimulé comme tout avare, se tenant dans les limites du droit, toujours en règle, cet homme eût été Tibère à Rome, Richelieu sous Louis XIII, Fouché s'il avait eu l'ambition d'aller à la Convention; mais il eut la sagesse d'être un Lucullus sans faste, un voluptueux avare."[48]

[47] Les Paysans, p. 244.
[48] Ibid., p. 254.

Coming to Blangy as an unknown, Rigou had to make a place for himself by gaining the confidence of the villagers. This he did by means of a number of hypocritical pretenses. Posing as a man in whom piety still predominated, he made a practice of going to mass, professing to want to be reconciled with the church as soon as he should become a widower. Acting as a sort of father-confessor to the young people of the village, he feigned an interest in their personal affairs and advised them in their personal problems. In order that Nicolas Tonsard might dodge the draft, Rigou suggested that the local pharmacist make a sore on the lad's finger. He also advised Marie Tonsard to let her wayward lover marry someone else, then make it hot for him afterwards. Encountering an adversary in the local priest, who saw through this mask,[49] Rigou convinced many of the villagers that the priest was politically in favor of the crown and opposed to their interests. Soon the perjured monk came to be looked upon as a champion of the people.

In the course of time this sly, crafty, unscrupulous fellow succeeded in getting himself elected as mayor of Blangy, in which position of power he came to understand and to exploit the sad situation of the peasants. A member of a local financial triumverate (made up of Gaubertin, Soudry and Rigou) which had hatred, ability and the command of money as its

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[49] The priest had described Rigou as follows: "C'est un damné qui, pour se rafraîchir, se plonge dans l'iniquité comme dans un bain." Les Paysans, p. 243.

arms, he became "le Loup-cervier de la vallée."[50] By lending money to peasants to buy lands beyond their means, he held oppressive mortgages on half the property of the section. It was said that he had at least 150,000 francs lent out in mortgages for small amounts on large parcels of property. His practice was to advance money only to those who were purchasing at least seven acres of land and who had paid one-half the purchase price as a down payment. Thus, he was never the loser when mortgages could not be met. In his treatment of Courtecuisse we can see how this method worked out. Rigou advertised a choice bit of land known as the Bâchelerie for sale, knowing that Courtecuisse had had his eye on it for a long time. After several years Courtecuisse had saved up enough to buy it. Rigou now took a malicious pleasure in raising the price of the property and in selling it at a profit of fifty percent. Courtecuisse, able to pay only one-half the purchase price, gave Rigou a mortgage for the rest and became another of the usurer's many creatures.

Taking advantage of the ignorance and credulity of the peasants, Rigou further increased his capital by making his debtors do manual labor to supplement the payment of interest. Rigou demanded small payments plus work. His white slaves cut his hay, harvested his crops and stacked his firewood. The peasants did not mind laboring to put off the evil pay-day. They submitted docilely to this corvée imposed by Rigou, think-

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50 Les Paysans, p. 152.

ing it had cost them nothing since they had not put their hands into their pockets. In labor and small interest payments, the peasants sometimes paid more than the original sum borrowed from Rigou.

Like all misers, Rigou was constantly afraid of being robbed. So alive was this fear within him that he arranged the sleeping hours of the occupants of his household so that someone would always be awake to protect his possessions. His wife went to bed at sunset and slept until early morning, at which time Rigou and the servant retired. With the miser's eternal hope of someday finding a ready-made fortune, Rigou favored the plan of pulling down the old Montcornet château, once he and his friends got possession of it, in the hope of finding a hoard of gold hidden there by some past resident.

Unlike the misers we have seen before, however, Rigou was fond of high-living and spared no expense for his own personal comfort. Harsh and cold with everyone else, including his wife, he was "plein de tendresse pour ses jouissances!"[51] His house was the best in the village. In it was every material comfort to satisfy the desires of the extreme sensualist. On his big, wide bed was a soft mattress covered with fine, clean sheets and ample curtains to shut out the draft. His table boasted a change of linen every day and the finest fresh fruits and vegetables to be had. In order that he might always have fresh butter, his wife churned twice a week.

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[51] Les Paysans, p. 244.

While Rigou ate luscious strawberries, grapes, apricots and figs served daintily amid green vine-leaves on white porcelain plates, his wife had to be contented with dried apples served on the bare kitchen-table. While Rigou drank fine old imported wines, his wife was lucky to have a taste from the local stock. While her husband lived like Louis XIV, Madame Rigou was reduced to the rank of servant and drudge, who to satisfy her husband's fastidious tastes was obliged to do all the cooking and laundry-work herself. From the nineteen-year-old servant, who received thirty francs a year in wages, Madame Rigou got little help, for Monsieur Rigou's servants were that in name only. Their duties lay chiefly in ministering to the master's physical needs.

This Épicu-Rigou, as Soudry called him, was not, however, the Rigou who showed himself in public. As clever a hypocrite as Tartuffe, he was careful to disguise his sensuality outside his own house. Those who saw him walking around in shoes of coarse-looking leather did not know that they were lined with the softest lamb's wool; and those who saw him in his rough, coarse coat did not realize that under it he wore a shirt of finest lawn to protect his sensitive skin. Promising to put off mortgage payments, he would seduce innocent farm-girls and peasants' wives. It was said that he had made a harem of the whole valley and had even been known to persecute a twelve-year-old girl of good background, but nothing could be proved against this shrewd old lecher.

It was not long until the whole valley hated Rigou. For some time the wise old peasant Fourchon had been pointing out to the people of the section that Rigou was sucking the very marrow from their bones, but they had not believed him. At last, feeling the pinch of his "griffes d'acier," the villagers began to realize that Rigou never had worked in the public's behalf and that his actions had been motivated by the most vicious type of self-interest. Now, however, they were helpless to fight against him. Rigou had suddenly descended in their minds from the status of a champion of the people to that of a grigou,[52] by which name he became known in the neighborhood. This hatred of the villagers for Rigou is expressed in the following excerpt from a conversation between two citizens of Blangy:

> -- C'est un homme qui me donne la chair de poule quand je le vois, dit madame Vermut.
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> -- Il est tellement à craindre, reprit le médecin, que s'il m'en voulait, je ne serais pas encore rassuré par sa mort; il est homme à se relever de son cercueil pour vous jouer quelque mauvais tour.[53]

There is no grandeur in the character of Rigou. In him we see only the ugly, sensual side of the miser. As such he personifies what Balzac called "la médiocratie," and especially mediocrity as it existed in France during the Restoration period. Rigou is characteristic of his epoque in that he represents the post-Revolutionary attitude of the

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[52] This was a play on the initial of his first name combined with his last name: G. Rigou. Grigou means an avaricious, grasping person, a niggard, a churl, a selfish miser, and a boor.

[53] Les Paysans, p. 305.

lower bourgeoisie toward the aristocracy it had supplanted, as well as toward the peasant class it now pretended to dominate. It was Rigou who did all the planning and scheming to bring about the General Montcornet's downfall, so that he and his friends might come into possession of the large estate and sell it off in small plots to the peasants at a big profit. Moreover, as the blood-sucking usurer who held mortgages on lands which the peasants had bought after the Revolution, he was living proof of old Fouchon's statement that the bourgeois were harsher overlords than the aristocrats had been in the past. This type of usurer disappeared when small property was put on a more solid basis.

In Nicolas Séchard, an illiterate printer of Angoulême, we see still another type of avarice: that which arises when economic circumstances are conducive to the sudden accumulation of wealth. This type of avarice, developing later in a man's life, would seem to us to be of less force than an innate passion, but Balzac depicts it as a passion so strong that it succeeds in crushing out another even greater human instinct: paternal affection. Séchard is a flesh-and-blood Grandet, as harsh and unfeeling with his son as Grandet had been with Eugénie and Charles, but humanized by his insatiable thirst for alcohol and by his mediocre intelligence. Except for his stubbornness of will, Séchard has no redeeming feature in his make-up and Balzac presents him as a wholly unsympathetic

character.

The story of Séchard's business successes is the story of the development of his avarice. By trade he was a printer's ours[54] who made a meager living with his hands. In 1793, when Séchard was about fifty years old, his employer died suddenly, leaving a thriving business which threatened to go to ruin with no one to run it. With his wife's dowry, Séchard bought the printing establishment at half its value from the widow of his former employer and hired a literate assistant. From then on he began to make money, printing all the political decrees as fast as they were issued. By 1819 he possessed the only journal of judiciary announcements in the region and also was the official printer for the police department and the bishopric.

Séchard's avarice began where his poverty ceased. On the day when the printer saw the possibility of making a fortune, "l'intérêt développa chez lui une intelligence matérielle de son état, mais avide, soupçonneuse et pénétrante!"[55] He watched his workers like a hawk and thought up all sorts of economies in his business. From other printers whose business was bad he bought paper at a low price. When someone wanted big lettering, he always explained to the customer that big type was more costly to set up than little type; and when it was a question of small print, he argued that this type was the most difficult to manipulate. Hence, he always

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[54] One who assembled the letters.
[55] Illusions perdues, I, p. 173.

got a good price for his work. Making his adolescent son work in the shop on all his free days from school, he saved the wages of another part-time helper. Even his son's education in Paris cost him nothing, for he got him a job there as a printer's apprentice.

With the prosperity of his business, Séchard's avarice increased. Soon he became insensible to "tout ce qui ne sonnait ou ne reluisait pas or."[56] The first real test came when his son David came home from Paris in 1819 to take over the direction of the family business. Playing the role of the loving father, Séchard made a great fuss over his son's return home: he gave him his arm, had his bed warmed, lighted his fire, etc. Then, after a big dinner during which he tried to get his son drunk, the red-faced old man suggested that they talk business. At once the father-son relationship was severed and David realized for the first time that in his father's eyes he suddenly had become an enemy to be conquered. Where once Séchard had seen in David his only son, he now saw in him a buyer whose interests were opposed to his own. This transformation of a sentiment into personal interest is generally slow, but in the case of Séchard it was as rapid and direct as a flash of lightning.

Séchard's plan was not just to turn over the management of the business to David, but to sell the establishment to him so that he could retire. Such a plan would not have

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[56] Illusions perdues, II, p. 471.

seemed unreasonable had he asked a fair price, but Séchard calculated on making a nice profit. For 16,000 francs he offered his son a business which seemed to David to be worth only about 100 écus. To this sum was added another 14,000 francs for such materials and machines as old wood presses, obsolete letter-type, inferior paper - all itemized with a miser's scrupulousness. Knowing that his father had paid only 10,000 francs many years before for these things, David could not help but cry out in surprise, "Mon père, vous m'égorgez!"[57] Then, there was the rent for the building in which the shop was housed. Séchard meant to collect that regularly, too, yet refused to contribute anything to the necessary funds for continuing the business. As long as the debt remained unpaid, David was to hand over to his father the ordinary interest charges on such a loan. Fully conscious of the injustice of the proposition, David accepted it rather than fight against a father in whom the paternal instinct had vanished.

The heavy debt thrust upon David's shoulders was nothing, however, in comparison to the effect which the whole transaction had on him. During this first discussion after his return home, David experienced the most horrible of humiliations: that of the loss of respect for his father. When he inquired about his mother's dowry, Séchard replied

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[57] Illusions perdues, I, p. 184.

dryly, "La fortune de ta mère,...mais c'était son intelligence et sa beauté!"[58] By this response, David divined his father completely and knew that, in order to obtain his legitimate share of his mother's estate, he would have to become involved in a costly and shameful lawsuit.

Surprised by his son's easy acquiescence, Séchard already pictured himself caressing the 30,000 francs which David was to pay him. Like all such men, he expected other people to be honorable when he himself had been dishonorable. Drunk with the desire to get his hands on the fortune as soon as possible, he haunted the printing-shop to see how business was progressing. When he discovered that David had inherited neither his father's interest nor his shrewdness in business matters, Séchard began to worry about being paid and daily became more severe in his demands.

David's marriage to the attractive, economical Ève Chardon only served to tighten further the tension between father and son. Claiming to be overburdened with taxes and bad harvests, Séchard refused to give his son a monetary wedding-gift, chiding him all the while for having married a poor girl. Séchard had hoped that David would marry a girl with a dowry at least large enough to pay the debt and the back rent due on the shop.

As though the victim of a curse, David was thereafter pursued by misfortune. Many times he was obliged to humiliate

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[58] Illusions perdues, I, p. 186

himself before this man who in the eyes of the law was still his father. None of his pleas for money, however, brought a positive response from the hard Séchard. Soon after David's marriage, his extravagant brother-in-law threw the family into a further debt, at which time Séchard again refused to lend his son any money. Possessing more than 200,000 francs, Séchard allowed David to sell out to a competitor rather than part with a penny of his hoard.[59] Then, when he heard that David was inventing a new kind of paper that would revolutionize the printing industry, his avarice took still another turn. No longer satisfied to sit back and watch other people ruin his son, Séchard became one of David's active persecutors.

Still refusing to pay his son's debts or to lend him money on a usurer's terms, Séchard hastened to go in with David's business competitor to exploit the new discovery. Before investing in the new project, however, the old miser made his son prove that he actually had discovered something worth-while. While David was making his experiments of proof to satisfy his father, Séchard, led by curiosity and greed,

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[59] When David once came to borrow from his father, he said calmly: "j'ai pensé que je pourrais bien trouver chez vous les facilités que j'aurais chez un usurier." Upon hearing his father's refusal to meet even these terms, he said bitterly: "Mon père,...vous m'avez prouvé qu'il n'y avait pas de père dans les affaires..." "Ah!" replied Séchard, "tu te défies de celui qui t'a donné la vie." "Non," answered David sadly, "mais de celui qui m'a ôté les moyens de vivre." Illusions perdues, II, p. 454-455.

went in the capacity of spy to his son's house, where he stayed for some time at his son's expense, his eyes tightly closed to the poverty of the household. There, sometimes really drunk and sometimes feigning drunkenness, he not only closed his ears to Ève's pleadings, but tried to pry out of her David's secret. So strong was the old miser's curiosity that he once tried to force the door of David's laboratory, but was stopped by a faithful servant.

From then on David became the victim not only of Fate, but of his father's persecution as well. Adamant in his refusal to help David, even in behalf of the grandchild for whom he professed a grandfather's affection, Séchard let his son be put in prison, where he knew he could do him no harm. Suspicious of everyone, he was afraid that David, if allowed to be free, might find some means of reprisal. Even when David's honor was thus compromised, Séchard's thought was not to help him, but how in all this embroilment he was to recover the rent due on the establishment. Consulting a lawyer on this point, he now set out to openly persecute his son. David's release from prison came about finally, after he had agreed to sell his invention for a nominal sum to his rivals in the printing-business, who were to exploit it to their own profit. A few years later old Séchard died and his estate amounted to over 200,000 francs, of which 100,000 were found loose in his house.

Papa Séchard's persecution of a gentle son who had done nothing to harm him is a thing hard for us to understand.

David, unable to comprehend a nature so different from his own, did not even try to explain it. Séchard himself had neither the intelligence nor the inclination to fathom his own motives. There was one man, however, who saw through Séchard and that man was the equally rotten and scheming, but perspicacious Petit-Cloud, Séchard's lawyer. When Séchard came to him to discuss the matter of collecting the back rent, Petit-Cloud, with complete frankness, sized up the situation as follows:

> --Je vais vous traduire en bon français vos sentiments, dit l'avoué d'un air moqueur. Tenez, papa Séchard, vous êtes jaloux de votre fils. Écoutez la vérité? vous avez mis David dans la position où il est, en lui vendant votre imprimerie trois fois ce qu'elle valait, et en le ruinant pour vous faire payer ce prix usuraire. Oui, ne branlez pas la tête, ...Vous haïssez votre fils non seulement parce que vous l'avez dépouillé; mais encore parce que vous en avez fait un homme au-dessus de vous. Vous vous donnez le genre d'aimer prodigieusement votre petit-fils pour masquer la banqueroute de sentiments que vous faites à votre fils et à votre bru qui vous coûteraient de l'argent hic et nunc, tandis que votre petit-fils n'a besoin de votre affection que in extremis. Vous aimez ce petit gars-là pour avoir l'air d'aimer quelqu'un de votre famille, et ne pas être taxé d'insensibilité. Voilà le fond de votre sac, père Séchard... 60

Such an explanation of Séchard's personality-change ought to satisfy a twentieth-century psychiatrist.

Had Nicolas Séchard, after 1793, kept on as a lowly printer's ours, he probably never would have become a miser and David probably never would have lost a father. Continuing the life of poverty he had always known, he might never have

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60 Illusions perdues, II, pp. 440-441.

realized what material benefits he was missing. Séchard's avarice was not innate, but a product of the times which emphasized the importance of the material above everything else. In a man of higher intelligence, avarice developed late in life might have come into conflict with paternal affection, but it would never have crushed out the paternal instinct entirely. In a man like Nicolas Séchard, however, who was not smart enough to measure values and choose between them, avarice, with its material satisfactions, became such a powerful force that it annihilated all other sentiments.

La Baudraye of Sancerre represents still another aspect of avarice in still a different milieu. Of noble birth, he depicts that lust of the provincial aristocrat for lands and social position which will put him on a par with his Parisian cousins. He is not the hoarder who likes to contemplate his gold, but rather the accumulator who would use his earnings to buy fine old châteaux and government sinecures with nice titles attached. This type of avarice can be explained in the case of La Baudraye. Lacking both physical and mental strength, he could not hope to use either charm or wit as a means of climbing socially. Therefore, he would have to buy the social position which he desired more than anything else in the world.

An avorton, Jean-Athanase-Polydore Milaud de la Baudraye,

sickly from birth, owed the fact that he was now alive to his habits of monastic regularity, to his economy of movement and to the bracing air of Sancerre. By following a set plan of conduct, from which his debility would not allow him to depart, he was to appear one day to have a strong character. Years of self-discipline, imposed as a health measure, had taught him to sublimate and hide his emotions until now he appeared to be a silent, dry, cold, inscrutable little old man. Nothing seemed ever to ruffle his exterior calm; only in his eyes could one see occasionally the signs of a smouldering hatred or unrequited desire.[61]

La Baudraye married, not for love, but in order to have an heir who would carry on the name which he himself intended to make socially illustrious. His selection of a wife was made on the basis of her social position and her ability to make a good appearance. In exchange for this, he offered the La Baudraye name, with which no local family could refuse to ally itself. Thus, when Jean Polydore de la Baudraye was married to the beautiful and accomplished Dinah Piédefer, the whole town considered it a good match.

Tranquil and outwardly sweet, like all who follow a set plan of conduct, La Baudraye appeared to make his wife very happy. He never crossed her; let her do all the talking

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[61] When his wife began paying attention to a visiting journalist from Paris, La Baudraye would look upon her with "des regards d'une froideur venimeuse qui démentaient ses redoublements de politesse et de douceur avec elle." La Muse du département, p. 96.

in public, "et se contentait d'agir avec la lenteur, mais avec la ténacité d'un insecte."[62] Soon after their marriage, his wife recognized in him "la froideur polaire des avares de province en tout ce qui concernait de l'argent."[63] La Baudraye kept Dinah to the strictest economy in household expenditures and in her toilette. It was as though she were throwing herself against a heart of bronze, nicely covered over with the cotton-batting of soft manners. She tried to inspire fears and jealousies in this little man, but found him always enveloped in the most insolent tranquility. This mute indifference baffled and frightened her. She could not understand "l'égoïste tranquillité de cet homme comparable à un pot fêlé, qui, pour vivre, avait réglé les mouvements de son existence avec la précision fatale que les horlogers donnent à leurs pendules."[64] Finally, she decided that her husband must be socially ambitious, for he had been to Paris a number of times and each time had returned with a better social sinecure. In a few years La Baudraye had become successively receveur, maître des requêtes, officier de la Légion-d'Honneur and commissionnaire royal.

Dinah's guess in regard to her husband had been right. La Baudraye did have social ambitions and all his actions were directed to that end. In his marriage contract he had exacted

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62 La Muse du département, p. 71.
63 Ibid., p. 78.
64 Ibid., p. 79.

a promise from the Cardinal to use his influence in La Baudraye's behalf with the Président du Conseil. Moreover, by lending money to poverty-stricken Parisian noblemen, he secured, in exchange for these services, royal favor and governmental sinecures with nice salaries. After his marriage, La Baudraye used his wife's admirers to help him in business and social affairs. Finally, at the age of sixty-four, he achieved the things he had spent a lifetime struggling for: the title of count, a sumptuous town-house at Paris presided over by a charming wife, two children, the acquaintanceship of other peers, a fine carriage and a certain social standing.

In the incomplete sketch of old Hochon of Issoudun, the miser is portrayed in a more favorable light than in most of the preceding studies of this social type. Though his wife considered him the greatest miser in town, Hochon actually was no more avaricious than a lot of other penny-pinching provincials in France at that time. His avarice harmed no one, for he did not practice usury or dishonest business procedures. Moreover, in his contacts with the Bridau family, he showed himself to be capable of a semi-disinterested action.[65] His advice was always sound, for he was an astute observer

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65 When the Bridau sons were trying to get possession of a legal inheritance which had been taken over by an imposter, Monsieur Hochon advised them in their legal procedures and took an active interest in the case, although he himself expected no monetary profit from the affair. However, Hochon was anxious to cut short the stay of this family in his home, and a quick settlement was the best way of hurrying their departure.

and possessed good judgment in legal and financial affairs. Too much interested in people and events to be a whole-hearted miser, his stinginess never reached the magnitude of a real vice.

Hochon belonged to that category of men who, in the midst of a heated conversation, will lean over to pick up a pin, stow it away behind their coat-lapel, and continue talking all the while. He also was a string-saver and carried bits of it rolled up in his pockets, dispensing it for household use as it was needed. Like many other people who care less for style than durability, he complained of the inferior quality of modern cloth, while pointing out that his suit-coat had lasted only ten years. And like many provincial heads of families, he ran his household on the principles of strict economy, keeping the keys to the wine and flour cellars, and measuring out the daily portions himself.

When the Bridaus came to visit the Hochons, Madame Hochon apologized to her guests for the frugality which her husband imposed on the whole household. She said to Joseph Bridau sorrowfully, "Tu feras carême ici, tu ne mangeras que ce qu'il faut pour vivre, et voilà tout."[66] During his first dinner at the Hochons', Joseph discovered the meaning of what his hostess had said. Coming down to dinner, he saw old Hochon cutting the bread, one slice for each guest. After the meal had begun, Joseph, a healthy lad in his early twenties

[66] La Rabouilleuse, p. 442.

with a good appetite, asked for more bread. Monsieur Hochon got up from the table, took a key from an inner coat-pocket, unlocked the closet behind him, brandished a big loaf of bread, cut ceremoniously another thin slice. This he cut in two, put on a plate and silently passed to the young painter. Joseph took half of the slice and understood that he was not to ask for more. On another occasion when Madame Hochon asked the servant to bring in fruit to regale the guests, the servant answered in dismay: "Mais, madame, n'y en a plus de pourri,"[67] and they were obliged to eat the good fruit. In defense of Hochon, it must be explained that a common provincial practice in frugal households was to eat the spoiled fruit first, so that none would be wasted.

A great deal of what might pass for miserliness in Hochon was largely a result of years of habit. Reared in a provincial milieu where economy had to be practiced in order to make ends meet, he had kept on in these same frugal habits long after his income would have warranted a change to a more luxurious way of life. Now, at eighty-five, habit dominated his actions and reactions. When the Bridaus came into his home for an extended stay, he expected to continue in his accustomed way of life, treating his guests as members of the family and making no exceptions of them. Hence, when his wife suggested that he go counter to habits established for over half a century, it must have been quite a shock to him. He

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[67] La Rabouilleuse, p. 441.

certainly was too old to be expected to change his ways at this late date. Had he been a hardened miser, he would not have taken in the poverty-stricken Bridaus in the first place.

Hochon's closeness with his wife might seem to be indicative of his avarice, but here again habit and custom can explain this aspect of his character. Although Madame Hochon professed to have lived fifty years with her husband "sans avoir entendu vingt écus ballant"[68] in her purse, she had enough for the necessities of life. As a provincial housewife, she was not accustomed to luxury and her needs were not great. Her house was comfortable and she dressed respectably. Furthermore, in cases of extreme need she had a way of bending old Hochon to her will: she threatened to make a will. By this means she gained many concessions from her husband. Never was she made to live in extreme poverty, as the wives of Grandet and Rigou had been forced to do.

Real avarice in Hochon, therefore, is shown less in his actions than in his way of thinking. In one of his idées fixes he demonstrated the attitude of the miser. Although fifteen years older than his wife and already advanced in years, he still hoped to inherit from her and saw himself one day in possession of all her property. It was not that he looked forward to being a widower, as had Rigou, but he did want to get his hands on her money, and that could come about only at her death. Probably if he could have visualized

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[68] La Rabouilleuse, p. 442.

what the fulfillment of his wish actually would have entailed, he would have been less anxious to become a big property-owner, for avarice does not seem to have killed Hochon's affection for his wife, as it had in the case of Rigou.

One of the most interesting of Balzac's minor characters is Élie Magus, the Jewish collector of fine pictures. He had two great passions which, strange to say, were not in conflict with each other. He loved beautiful pictures and his daughter Noémi. People who saw him living in squalor and who knew of the large fortune he possessed considered him the hardest of misers. What they did not know was that, unlike the ordinary miser, he was liberal in the indulgence of his two other passions. His daughter's apartment was sumptuously decorated and her every whim satisfied, while he himself was known to spend great sums for pictures which he particularly fancied. Grandet had been avaricious for gold, Gobseck for power, Rigou for sensual pleasures and La Baudraye for social position. Élie Magus was avaricious for art. As he grew older, this mania was almost pushed to the point of madness.

Élie Magus was a Jew who came to Paris from Bordeaux. Having accumulated a large fortune by buying and selling diamonds, laces, pictures, curios, clocks, sculpture, etc., he had retired from business in 1835 and now devoted himself exclusively to the satisfaction of his two passions. Magus

loved only original paintings and went to sales all over Europe in search of them. As he grew older, his artistic tastes became more and more refined, like those permitted only to kings with lots of money at their disposal. A shrewd trader, he had accumulated a stock of pictures almost unrivaled among the private collections of Europe.

Élie's masterpieces, like the children of princes, were lodged on the second floor of a magnificent town-house which he had bought for a song and had had restored. Heavy Venetian brocade portières hung at the windows and imported rugs covered the floors in the rooms where the gold-framed pictures were hung. On the rez-de-chaussée was the apartment of Noémi and the two Jewish servants, as well as a sort of work-shop where the pictures were framed by the best known picture-framer in France. High up in the third-story mansard two small, poorly-furnished rooms, "sentant la juiverie,"[69] served as the master's domicile, where he continued to live in the squalor he had always known.

Less suspicious by nature than Grandet had been, Magus had little fear that his treasure or his daughter would be stolen, and traveled afar without worry. He had made ample provision against the possibility of marauders trespassing on his property. The concièrge of this "hôtel muet, morne et désert"[70] was a faithful, but formidable-looking Polish Jew named Abramko. For the services of this monster-like man

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69 Le Cousin Pons, p. 143.
70 Ibid., p. 143.

with Herculean strength, Magus paid a good salary which regularly increased 200 francs a year. Abramko adored his master as Sancho Panza adored the Don. Always on watch, he never opened the door to anyone without first having looked at the caller through the grilled window. As an added precaution, Magus kept three ferocious watchdogs to nab any thieves who might jump the wall and try to get in the back way.[71]

When we meet Magus, he is about seventy-five years old and still in good health. Doubtless his good health is due to the regularity of his existence. For years he had followed the same schedule of getting up at daybreak, eating a frugal breakfast of bread rubbed with garlic, then spending the morning walking around among his treasures, dusting everything with care. Next he visited his daughter in her apartment, where he "s'y grisait du bonheur des pères."[72] In the afternoon he would journey through the Parisian galleries, attending sales and viewing expositions. After a meager dinner, he retired.

This man, ordinarily cold in his reactions,"s'échauffait à la vue d'un chef-d'oeuvre, absolument comme un libertin,

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[71] These dogs, kept in all day, were given nothing to eat. At night they were stationed, two outside the house and one in the large room on the ground floor, where their food was put on top of a stake. Anyone who came in was considered by the animals to be a threat to their food, which was not brought down to them until the next morning. Once a thief tried to get in and the bull-dog bit off his foot and ate it.

[72] Le Cousin Pons, p. 145.

lassé de femmes, s'émeut devant une fille parfaite, et s'adonne à la recherche des beautés sans défauts. Ce Don Juan des toiles, cet adorateur de l'idéal, trouvait dans cette admiration des jouissances supérieures à celles que donne à l'avare la contemplation de l'or. Il vivait dans un sérail de beaux tableaux!"[73] When a masterpiece was for sale, life perked up for Magus: he had a coup to make, an affair to settle, a battle of Marengo to win. In order to secure a new acquisition he would try out every ruse he knew already or could concoct on the spur of the moment. On Magus's map of Europe, the masterpieces of art were marked, and in the big art centers he had his spies and cohorts who for a percentage kept him posted on buying possibilities. Sometimes he ran across a bargain quite by chance, as when Cousin Pons was about to die. Upon seeing the tiny paintings in the Pons collection, Magus eyes filled with tears. Delirious with admiration, he forgot his cupidity and offered La Cibot a higher price than necessary, for she was ignorant of their value. His desire was not to resell the pictures at a profit, but to add them to his own collection, where he could look at them every day. "Si je désire ces toiles," he told her, "c'est par amour, uniquement par amour de l'art, ma belle dame!"[74] When it came time to pay for the pictures, however, Magus dipped into his bag of misers' tricks and pulled out enough excuses, so that he finally got the pictures for less than he

[73] Les Cousin Pons, p. 142.
[74] Ibid., p. 168.

had bargained for.

On the whole, the picture of Magus is a sympathetic one. Frugal with himself, he was, however, generous with his daughter whom he genuinely loved. Money as such meant nothing to him, though he maintained a large fortune so as to be able to satisfy his passion for paintings. His practice of haggling over prices is probably less a miserly trait than that of the race to which Magus belonged. His avarice certainly was not of the active, destructive type, as had been that of Grandet, Gobseck and Rigou. In fact, it would almost seem from this portrait that Balzac approved of cupidity, if the thing coveted were of artistic merit. It must be remembered, however, that Balzac himself was a collector of works of art.

In the portrait of Pierre Graslin, the rich banker of Limoges, we are given one of the most sympathetic treatments of the miser to be found in La Comédie Humaine. No new aspect of avarice is represented here, but coupled with it in Graslin is an undeniable generous streak. This latter trait was especially noticeable in the expression of his mouth which announced "une bonté cachée, une âme excellente, enfouie sous les affaires, étouffée peut-être, mais qui pouvait renaître au contact d'une femme."[75] For a number of years prior to and just after his marriage, Graslin gave up his miserly habits. He maintained a luxurious establishment

[75] Le Curé de village, p. 26.

and prided himself on his lavish gift of jewels and rare flowers to his future wife. Had Véronique been of a more positive nature, she doubtless could have kept him in this path indefinitely and eventually have stifled the passion of avarice within him. Unfortunately, however, she was of a docile, submissive, uncomplaining nature, and when Graslin found that he could wrap her around his little finger, he went back to his old avaricious ways.

By dint of hard work, good business transactions and frugality in his manner of living, Pierre Graslin had risen from a poor clerk to the richest banker in Limoges. During the early years of his financial rise he did not spend forty sous a day and went around dressed like his second commis. So few connections had he with society, that it was said he had not offered so much as a glass of water to anyone in twenty-five years. When he passed in the street, people pointed him out, saying, "Voilà monsieur Graslin!" - that is to say, there is a man who came to Limoges without a penny and acquired an immense fortune.

Desiring to marry a wealthy girl of good social position, Graslin had a big house built and for a few years appeared to live in luxury. A year after his marriage, however, to the docile Véronique, who brought him a large dowry, he began cutting expenses, quickly returning to the miserly ways he had given up momentarily for the purpose of marrying well. The coachman was discharged; a cook replaced the chef;

the luxurious furniture was stored; and the living space in the house reduced to several rooms. To the tranquil Véronique, who asked for nothing, Graslin gave nothing beyond the regular allowance for household expenses. And in order to do away with the expense of feeding the exotic birds which he had earlier bought to please his wife, he let them die of hunger.

The intimacies of married life were quite indifferent to Graslin. He saw in his wife only the 750,000 francs she had brought him. In public he never failed to praise her, for he thought her both accomplished and undemanding. She in no way hampered his coming or going; "il pouvait entasser écus sur écus et s'épanouir dans le terrain des affaires...."[76] It was quite a shock to him, therefore, to discover that this exemplary creature was giving liberally to charity and to the church from the household budget. Comparing notes with the cook, Graslin learned that the house could be run on 1,000 écus and he cut the budget accordingly.

By nature Graslin was quiet, speaking little and going straight to the point when he did speak. Possessed of a strong will, he seemed to be able to surmount almost any obstacle once he set his mind to it. In spite of his prudence, however, he became involved in bank failures in 1830. Unable to bear the thought of losing a fortune of 3,000,000 francs acquired through forty years of work, he went to pieces physically and died in 1831, leaving many creditors. It took all of Graslin's

[76] Le Curé de village, p. 48.

fortune to pay off his debts, but Madame Graslin's dowry was left intact.

In a complete study of the miser in La Comédie Humaine some mention should be made of the symbolic character, Maître Cornélius. In this work (Maître Cornélius) there is no attempt to make the character or the décor realistic. The main character is treated as the traditional miser and the scene is purposely laid in the fifteenth century, so that the author can let his imagination play freely. Maître Cornélius, as the supposed superintendent of finance under Louis XI, represents avarice carried to the point where it finally turns against itself. The fantastic solution to the tale is the ideal solution to all misers' tales, but unfortunately life is not always as just in its punishment of wrong-doers as the novelist is in his punishment of evil characters. In his other studies Balzac aims to portray the miser in human life; in this study, he deals with the abstract quality of avarice.

Maître Cornélius possessed a fabulous fortune which he guarded with great care. Specially-made locks on his doors, ferocious watchdogs around the house, and honest apprentices watched his treasure day and night. In spite of these precautions, however, money and gems disappeared periodically and each apprentice was accused of the theft. During the course of the trials, one of the accused men died in prison

of worry, another confessed to the crime he did not commit in order to avoid torture, and the others were hanged on slim circumstantial evidence. But no one could tell where the stolen things had been hidden and they never were found.

For two years Maître Cornélius had lived alone in the house with his old sister. Because of the terror he inspired throughout the populace, he had no friend but the king, no associates but Jewish money-lenders and noblemen who came to borrow money from him. One day, a young nobleman, disguised as a peasant, offered himself as an apprentice, with the secret plan of using Maître Cornélius's house as a means of getting into the house next door where his sweetheart was imprisoned. Again Maître Cornélius was robbed and the new apprentice accused. Having influence with the king, the young nobleman demanded a fair trial. During the course of the trial it was discovered that Maître Cornélius was a sleep-walker and that he had been stealing from himself all these years. Awake he had no recollection of what had occurred in his somnambulant state and hence did not know where his jewels were hidden. The only solution to this puzzle was to have someone watch him during his sleep to find out where he had put the jewels.

At this point Maître Cornélius's mental conflict began. Distrusting everyone, he was afraid to allow anyone to watch his nocturnal walks. He was not even sure that the king's conscience would be dependable where such a large sum was

involved. From now on he spent his days looking for the jewels and gold in all the cracks and crevices of the house and grounds - in the walls, the roof, the foundations of the house and in the gardens. In order that he might not go to sleep and repeat his robberies, he took drugs, weakening his physical resistence. "...tout à la fois le voleur et le volé, n'ayant le secret ni de l'un ni de l'autre [il] possédait et ne possédait pas ses trésors: torture toute nouvelle, toute bizarre, mais continuellement horrible."[77] In his duel with himself lay his own slow suicide. At last, unable to endure any longer the horrors of the punishment he had created for himself, he slit his own throat with a razor. After his death the treasure was found and, so they say, used to pay the costs of the beginning of the famous château, Chenonceaux.

V

As we can surmise from the preceding discussion, Balzac's panoramic picture of avarice is the most complete view of that vice to be found within the novelistic medium. In La Comédie Humaine Balzac presents the varied aspects of avarice from almost all points of view. He treats the vice abstractly and as a vital force in the life of his day; he shows how it had penetrated all social classes and all milieux; he paints it as a complex urge as well as just a

[77] Maître Cornélius, p. 269.

simple dominant passion; he presents it in conflict with other great passions; he shows it in its destructive as well as its harmless manifestations. In his examination of the miser as a social species, Balzac has combined the thoroughness of the laboratory technician with the human interest of the family physician. Some idea of the completeness of Balzac's analysis of avarice can be had by perusing the following table:

A. Various general aspects of avarice discussed:

1. Traditional aspect - Grandet.
2. Avarice of the household miser - Hochon.
3. Avarice as the enjoyment of a philosophy of life - Gobseck.
4. Avarice in conflict with romantic love - Nucingen.
5. Avarice as the outgrowth of material circumstances- Séchard.
6. Avarice for art - Magus.
7. Avarice for social position - La Baudraye.
8. Avarice subservient to sensuality - Rigou.
9. Avarice turned against itself - Maître Cornélius.
10. Symbolic aspects:

    a. Pure Avarice - Grandet
    b. Power of Money - Gobseck
    c. The Commercial Genius in Action - Nucingen
    d. Provincial Mediocrity - Rigou

B. Social Classes represented:

1. peasantry - Séchard
2. lower bourgeoisie - Rigou, Magus
3. middle bourgeoisie - Grandet, Gobseck, Hochon, Graslin
4. upper bourgeoisie - Nucingen
5. lower nobility - La Baudraye

C. Milieux represented:

1. Paris - Gobseck, Nucingen, Magus
2. Provinces:
   a. Anjou - Grandet
   b. Angoulême - Séchard
   c. Berry - Hochon, La Baudraye
   d. Limousin - Graslin
   e. Bourgogne - Rigou

D. Aspects of avarice peculiar to the Restoration period:

1. Practice of usury - Gobseck, Rigou
2. Capitalistic trends - Nucingen
3. New attitude of lower bourgeoisie toward the peasantry and toward the dethroned nobility - Rigou
4. Effect of materialistic spirit on individuals - Séchard
5. Buying of titles and government sinecures - La Baudraye

Chapter III

Balzac's Presentation of the Miser

Balzac's method of presenting his characters nearly always follows a stereotyped formula. First, the character is mentioned in conversation; next follows a description of the house in which he lives; next, a detailed picture of his physical appearance; finally, a few words about the mental make-up of the character. All of these things converge to create a single impression. Balzac believed in the deterministic quality of milieu and shows how environment brings out certain character traits and tends to sublimate others. To create milieu he engages in a minute description of the material objects which explain an event and condition a character. A follower of Gall and Lavater, he also believed that a man's exterior appearance is a good index to his soul state. As a recent critic puts it, "Balzac fut le seul dans ce genre de description, dans cette faculté de donner rien que par la composition extérieure, l'illusion de la réalité agissante."[1]

Nearly all of Balzac's misers resemble one another, for in his manner of presentation he tends toward type descriptions rather than individualization. Certain stock similes

[1] Altszyler, Hélène, La genèse et le plan des caractères dans l'oeuvre de Balzac, Paris, 1928, p. 57.

are applied to nearly all the misers; certain facial characteristics seem to be present in all; and there is a striking similarity in the abodes of these men who love money to excess. By simply making a compilation of the descriptive phrases applied to two or more of Balzac's misers, one would have an accurate description of any one of them. Let us examine more closely some of the stock devices which Balzac uses in portraying this particular social type.

Balzac is particularly fond of comparing his misers to animals of the feline group, reptiles, birds of prey and insects. La Baudraye is described as having eyes "fins et calmes comme des yeux de chat;"[2] Rigou is called "un de ces chats-tigres dont tous les pas ont un but;"[3] Grandet's business methods are compared to the ways of a tiger stalking his prey; and mention is frequently made of a miser's griffes d'acier. In Gobseck we recognize one of those "crocodiles qui nagent sur la place de Paris";[4] and in Grandet, a boa who goes off quietly to digest his meal of gold. Mention is made of Rigou's condor-like nose and of his "patience d'insecte;" La Baudraye is described as a formicolée, - a term coined by Balzac, which we assume is some sort of horrible insect that feeds on other insects; and Grandet, Gobseck, Nucingen and Rigou all belong to the species loup-cervier.

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2 La Muse du département, p. 71.
3 Les Paysans, p. 304.
4 Preston, Ethel, Recherches sur la technique de Balzac, Paris, 1926, p. 211, quoting from Illusions perdues.

A comparison of Balzac's descriptions of the ten misers discussed in Chapter II of this thesis, shows that the miser type is distinguished by the following general characteristics:

A. Physical appearance:

1. Bald head or thin, scraggly gray hair:

a. "Sa tête casi chauve."[5] - Rigou

b. "Sa tête chauve...mais ceinte de cheveux grisonnants."[6] - Séchard

c. "la tête chauve."[7] - Magus

d. "Les cheveux...étaient...d'un gris cendré."[8] - Gobseck

e. "Ses cheveux jaunâtres et grisonnants."[9] - Grandet

2. Small, bright, calm, piercing grey (or occasionally yellow) eyes:

a. "Ses yeux grisâtres."[10] - Rigou

b. "Ses petits yeux gris...conservaient leur esprit."[11] - Séchard

c. "...brillaient deux yeux gris,...deux yeux avides, deux yeux vifs qui allaient au fond du coeur."[12] - Graslin

d. "Ses yeux avaient l'expression calme et dévoratrice."[13] - Grandet

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5 Les Paysans, p. 250.
6 Illusions perdues, p. 176.
7 Le Cousin Pons, p. 146.
8 Gobseck, p. 383.
9 Eugénie Grandet, p. 286.
10 Les Paysans, p. 250.
11 Illusions perdues, pp. 175-176.
12 Le Curé de village, p. 25.
13 Eugénie Grandet, p. 286.

e. "Jaunes comme ceux d'une fouine, ses petits yeux." 14 - Gobseck

f. "l'oeil brillant comme celui de ses chiens."[15] - Magus

g. "un regard lucide, pénétrant et plein de puissance." 16 - Maître Cornélius

h. "des yeux d'un gris bleu, fins et calmes."[17] - La Baudraye

3. Big, long nose, either pointed or bulbous at end:

a. "Son nez, gros par le bout."[18] - Grandet

b. "son nez pointu était...grêlé dans le bout."[19] - Gobseck.

c. "son nez très-long, pincé du bout."[20] - Rigou

d. "son nez avait pris...la forme d'un A majuscule."[21] Séchard

e. "un nez retroussé."[22] - Graslin

f. "le nez en obélisque."[23] - Magus

4. Yellow, tanned, leathery, blotchy complexion:

a. "Son visage était...tanné, marqué de petite vérole." 24 - Grandet

b. "elle (sa face) ressemblait à du vermeil dédoré."[25] Gobseck

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14 Gobseck, p. 383.
15 Le Cousin Pons, p. 146.
16 Maître Cornélius, p. 227.
17 La Muse du département, p. 71.
18 Eugénie Grandet, p. 286.
19 Gobseck, p. 383.
20 Les Paysans, p. 250.
21 Illusions perdues, p. 175.
22 Le Curé de village, p. 25.
23 Le Cousin Pons, p. 146.
24 Eugénie Grandet, p. 286.
25 Gobseck, p. 383.

c. "petit homme jaune."[26] - La Baudraye

d. "à teint jaune."[27] - Hochon

5. Thin lips:

a. "ses lèvres n'offraient aucune sinuosité."[28] - Grandet

b. "les lèvres minces."[29] - Gobseck

c. "La bouche...à lèvres minces."[30] - Rigou

d. "La bouche démeublée."[31] - Magus

e. "Ses lèvres minces."[32] - Maître Cornélius

f. (La bouche) "serieuse et serrée."[33] - Graslin

6. A pointed chin:

a. "Le menton menaçant et pointu."[34] - Magus

b. "La partie inférieure du visage avait de vagues ressemblances avec le museau des renards." 35 - Maître Cornélius

B. Habits:

1. He speaks seldom and only in a soft, sweet voice:

a. "peu causeur."[36] - Graslin

b. "il ne faisait jamais de bruit....la douceur de sa voix." 37 - Grandet.

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26 La Muse du département, p. 70
27 La Rabouilleuse, p. 431.
28 Eugénie Grandet, p. 286.
29 Gobseck, p. 383.
30 Les Paysans, p. 250.
31 Le Cousins Pons, p. 146.
32 Maître Cornélius, p. 228.
33 Le Curé de village, p. 26.
34 Le Cousin Pons, p. 146.
35 Maître Cornélius, p. 228.
36 Le Curé de village, p. 24.
37 Eugénie Grandet, p. 286.

c. "sa conversation restait mono-syllabique....Cet homme parlait bas, d'un ton doux, et ne s'emportait jamais." 38 - Gobseck

d. "silencieux comme un Bénédictin en travail d'histoire....parlait doucement sans jamais s'emporter." 39 - Rigou

e. "le silencieux La Baudraye....Doux comme tous les gens qui suivent un plan de conduite." 40 - La Baudraye

f. "parlant peu."[41] - Hochon

g. "le regard des hommes habitués au silence!"[42] - Maître Cornélius

2. He economizes his movements:

a. (Il) "semblait économiser tout, même le mouvement." 43 - Grandet

b. "A l'imitation de Fontenelle, il économisait le mouvement vital." 44 - Gobseck

c. "cette économie de mouvement que Fontenelle prêchait." 45 - La Baudraye

3. He is regular and conventional in his habits:

a. "Ses actions, depuis l'heure de son lever jusqu'à ses accès de toux le soir, étaient soumises à la régularité d'une pendule." 46 - Gobseck

b. "des habitudes d'une régularité monastique."[47] - La Baudraye

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38 Gobseck, pp. 383-384.
39 Les Paysans, pp. 254-255.
40 La Muse du department, pp. 66, 71.
41 La Rabouilleuse, p. 431.
42 Maître Cornélius, pp. 227-228.
43 Eugénie Grandet, p. 286.
44 Gobseck, p. 384.
45 La Muse du département, p. 58.
46 Gobseck, p. 383.
47 La Muse du département, p. 58.

c. "observateur des formes comme un Oriental."[48] - Hochon

d. "la discipline ecclésiastique."[49] - Rigou

e. Grandet's regular habits in regard to lighting the fires in the house, etc.

C. Type of dwelling:

1. An old, cold, damp, dark house:

a. "cette maison pâle, froide, silencieuse....murs épais, humides." 50 - Grandet

b. "Cette maison...est humide, sombre."[51] - Gobseck

c. "vieil hôtel."[52] - Magus

d. (Cet appartement)"vieux, humide et sale."[53] - Graslin

e. "cette froide maison."[54] - Hochon

2. Sad, silent and melancholy as a convent:

a. "le silence du cloître....la vue inspire une mélancholie égale à celle que provoquent les cloîtres les plus sombres." 55 - Grandet

b. "À ce triste aspect....la maison a jadis fait partie d'un couvent." 56 - Gobseck

c. "cet hôtel muet, morne et désert."[57] - Magus

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48 La Rabouilleuse, p. 431.
49 Les Paysans, p. 255.
50 Eugénie Grandet, pp. 289-290.
51 Gobseck, p. 384.
52 Le Cousin Pons, p. 142.
53 Le Curé de village, p. 20.
54 La Rabouilleuse, p. 435.
55 Eugénie Grandet, p. 275.
56 Gobseck, p. 384.
57 Le Cousin Pons, p. 143.

Just what was Balzac's purpose in thus typing his characters? The answer to this question is to be found in the Avant-Propos of La Comédie Humaine. As Cuvier had done with the zoological species, so Balzac hoped to be able to classify and describe the various social species. Observation had shown him that certain characteristics tended to be present in nearly all avaricious people. By noting these similarities he was able to reconstruct the miser type. The above-mentioned traits are those which he found to be peculiar to the miser, as differentiated from some other social type, such as the lawyer, the idler, the poet, the misanthrope or the priest.

Using these stock traits, then, as the basis for his characterizations, Balzac then proceeded with the process of individualization. Realizing that, except in rare instances, the social species, like the zoological species, varies according to its environment, he achieved differentiation between the various members within the species by placing them in different social milieux and different geographical regions. Certain group tendencies tended to be accentuated or minimized according to the variations in milieu. For example, Séchard, the hoarding peasant who lives in Angoulême is easily distinguishable from Nucingen, the extravagant Parisian bourgeois, though both of them are misers and both have traits peculiar to that social type.

Further differentiation among the various individuals

within the social species arises from the varying nature of the conflicts which they encounter. Among animals the struggle is purely physical and hence relatively simple. In man, however, intelligence renders the conflict much more complicated. By showing the clash between great passions, between passions and circumstances, and between ideas and instincts, Balzac indicates further how the group tendency is modified and changed within the individual. The miser who falls in love with Esther van Gobseck is quite a different sort of person from the miser who begat this girl's own mother.

A third way in which Balzac individualized his type characters was to show what traits of other sociological species were to be found within the miser group. Man, unlike the animal, is a composite social species. A dog is always a dog, and cannot be crossed with a cat or a rabbit; but a miser may be also a beggar, a poet, or an artisan. In rare instances, as in the case of Grandet, a man may be predominantly a miser, but more often he has characteristics of a number of different social species. By juggling these various group traits, Balzac was able to get a number of different combinations and thus vary the miser type. Séchard is a printer and a drunkard, as well as a miser; Nucingen, a capitalist, a politician and a lover; Rigou, a sensualist, a politician and a usurer; and Élie Magus, a good father and an art-collector.

Thus, by a skillful blending of stock characteristics with individual variations, Balzac succeeded in classifying the miser as a social type, while creating at the same time many unforgettable individual characters.

II

How true to life are Balzac's misers? How faithful to miser nature is his composite portrait of avarice? How nearly did he succeed in fulfilling his aim to recreate the life and spirit of his age? For nearly a century the critics have concerned themselves with these questions, but have come to no unanimous decision. In this thesis, we shall not attempt to settle these questions, but we shall examine some of the varying opinions of the critics, of the public, and of Balzac himself, in order to arrive at as just an evaluation of his works as possible.

Literally speaking, the literary realist is he who looks upon life with an unprejudiced eye and records just what he sees. Complete objectivity, however, cannot be attained by a human being, for all sorts of preconceived ideas, emotional stresses and circumstances tend to color and often to distort one's interpretation of life. Moreover, the novelist can record only a small portion of what he beholds and his selection of details is necessarily conditioned by his own emotional responses to his environment. Hence, we shall not

expect to find complete objectivity in Balzac's works. We can, however, discover to what extent prejudice and preconceived ideas may have influenced his interpretation of what he saw, and from this come to some conclusion as to how nearly accurate was his representation of life during the Restoration and the July monarchy.

Three things kept Balzac from being a pure objectivist: his moral aim as a novelist, his personal experiences with the social types he was describing, and his idealistic, romantic nature. In order not to become a mere "amuseur de gens," every writer, so Balzac believed, should "moraliser son époque!"[58] As the chronicler of a transition period, Balzac could not record without comment. Too many people in real life were rendering vice attractive; he, as the writer, would have to try to stem this tide of immorality by pointing out to the public the error of its ways. "Je pense," he wrote, "que l'écrivain, quand il peut avoir l'oreille du public, produit un grand bien en faisant réfléchir son lecteur, mais il faut conserver le droit de lui parler et de s'en faire écouter, on ne le garde, le droit, que de la manière dont on l'a conquis, en amusant."[59] He would be a literary Napoleon, accomplishing with the pen what the military leader had failed to accomplish with his sword.

The moralist, Balzac added, should go even farther

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[58] Faillettaz, p. 81, quoting Balzac.
[59] Altszyler, p. 235, quoting Balzac.

than simply to point out the evils of life. His work should be constructive as well as destructive. He should direct the reader's thought along certain channels which he, the writer, had already tried out and found to be the right way. As a tutor of men, the writer should have settled opinions on morals and politics, and these opinions should find their way into his works. In the Avant-Propos to La Comédie Humaine Balzac names Religion and Monarchy as the two ideas which dominate his work and back to which ideals he shall attempt to lead the Restoration reader, temporarily led astray by the forces of republicanism and materialism. His method of teaching, however, is a negative one. Balzac paints a society without ideals and says to his reader, "Behold!"

Balzac's personal experiences with usurers and money-lenders precluded an impartial literary treatment of this social group. According to Faillet^az, the fact that Balzac was always in debt gave birth to a bitterness which falsified his judgment and distorted his idea of human nature. The thought of a fortune which continually escaped him and not others, plus his repeated business failures, must have made him envious of and bitter toward all those connected with the business world. Always obliged to flee creditors and convinced of his own innocence, he ended up by seeing criminals in them and a martyr in himself. Hence, Balzac's view of the miser who practiced usury or who had a big fortune

cannot be accepted as entirely accurate.[60]

Emotionally Balzac was not constructed to look upon life objectively. In spite of his apparent conservatism, he was a revolutionary at heart, with all the idealism and inner fire that characterizes this type of personality. As Bouvier states, "un révolutionnaire n'aurait pas dépeint plus âprement que lui les ravages du vice, de la débauche, de l'argent, dans les classes dirigeantes."[61] If a Restoration reader had wished to accept as exact Balzac's picture of the aristocracy and of the magistrature, he would have had every reason to conclude "qu'l faudrait chambarder tout cela."[62] The pessimism which pervades La Comédie Humaine is that of the idealist who would change existing conditions, not of the realist who is willing to accept them as they are.

Furthermore, Balzac is an incurable romanticist. The personal element is always apparent in his work. In his portraits of individuals is revealed his worship of force

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60 See Faillétaz, pp. 141-143. Seillière, on the other hand, believes that Balzac's close association with the business world, however unpleasant it may have been for him personally, tended to form in him an exact judgment of human nature, rather than a falsified one. See Seillière, E, Balzac et la morale Romantique, Paris, n.d. p. 68. Zola also held this opinion. We, however, are inclined to agree with Faillétaz that human nature is not as dark as Balzac painted it in some of his portraits of the miser. After all, if one were to observe human nature from the point of view of the creditor, what kind of a view would he have of the man of genius who did not bother to pay his debts?

61 Bouvier, p. 32, note I.

62 Ibid., p. 32, note I.

and energy; his work as a whole exhales a deep sympathy for the exploited and the oppressed. These two sentiments: admiration for the strong individual and pity for the weak masses, further tend to prejudice his judgment of human nature.

Balzac himself considered his work realistic. In fact, so real did his characters become to their creator that he often confused them with living people. A story is told which may or may not be true, but which illustrates well this very point. It is said that once when Jules Sandeau was telling Balzac about the illness of his sister, Balzac suddenly interrupted him with the remark: "Revenons à la réalité. Qui va épouser Eugénie Grandet?"[63]

Reality for Balzac, however, meant more than that which strikes the eye. In addition to the exterior facts of life, there were the causes behind those facts. For every tear, for every frown, for every sudden smile there was a reason, and Balzac meant to fathom that reason to arrive at the real truth. Moreover, reality was not only individual, but collective; instincts and passions existed not only in the soul of a single person, but within the bosom of a whole society. For Balzac "l'art qui reflète la réalité des faits et la vérité des mobiles n'est autre chose que le drame de l'univers, le choc de ses instincts et de ses passions, le conflit entre le mal et le bien, la comédie humaine."[64]

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[63] See Paul Bourget's introduction to Cerfberr and Christophe, Répertoire de la Comédie Humaine de H. de Balzac, Paris, 1893, p. v.

[64] Altszyler, pp. 225-226.

Literary reality was not to be confused with historical accuracy. Balzac had no desire to retell known facts, for only in rare instances did nature attain to the conditions imposed by art. Facts as such were inartistic and apt to be merely apparent and phenomenal, rather than fundamentally true. Whereas the historian was obliged to take the facts as they came, the artist was to select only those circumstances and descriptive details which could be woven together into one harmonious whole. His job, as the novelist of manners, was to pick up where the historian had left off - to recreate the spirit of the times. French society would be the real author; Balzac would simply be the secretary. By painting graphically costumes, houses, furniture, and interiors, by showing private life, by drawing up an inventory of vices and virtues, by analyzing passions, by portraying characters, by selecting outstanding incidents of social life, by composing types from observing homogeneous characteristics, he would be able to reconstruct an age. His work would have its geography, its genealogy, its persons, its things, its facts, its social classes, its professions, its politics and its wars - in short, a whole world of its own. To avoid the fault which most novelists of manners committed: that of repeating old portraits, Balzac would show how "chaque état s'est renouvelé," how each profession had changed and how social types had developed. Balzac's world, though perhaps not identical with recorded

historical fact, would, he thought, be just as real, just as alive and just as true to the spirit of his age as that which actually existed.

To the general public the society created by Balzac in La Comédie Humaine was so realistic that readers criticized Balzac for any variation, however, slight, from historical fact. So accurate were his pictures of social types that readers imagined they saw their friends or well-known public figures depicted therein, and they resented even changes in names or slight alterations in character. As a self-defense measure, Balzac appended footnotes to some of the later editions of his works, in which he defended his practice of taking liberties with fact. At the end of a later edition of Les Paysans, he expresses himself on this point as follows:

> Une fois pour toutes, il (the author) répond ici que ses inexactitides sont volontaires et calculées.... Toucher à l'histoire contemporaine, ne fût-ce que par des types, comporte des dangers. C'est en se servant, pour des fictions, d'un cadre dont les détails minutieusement vrais, en dénaturant tour à tour les faits par des couleurs qui leur sont étrangères, qu'en évite le petit malheur des personnalités....
>
> On viendra bientôt nous prier de dire dans quelle géographie se trouvent La Ville-aux-Fayes, l'Avonne et Soulanges (places mentioned in Les Paysans). Tous ces pays et ces cuirassiers vivent sur le globe immense où sont la tour de Ravenswood, les Eaux de Saint-Ronan, la terre de Tillietudlem, Gander-Cleug, Lilliput, l'abbaye de Thélème, les conseillers privés d'Hoffmann, l'île de Robinson Crusoë, les terres de la famille Shandy, dans un monde exempt de contributions, et où la poste se paie par ceux qui y voyagent à raison de 20 centimes le volume. 65

65 Les Paysans, p. 390, note.

In the eyes of the critics, however, the realism of Balzac's novels is open to question. Léger says that, although Balzac modeled his novelistic characters on real persons, like all realists, he forced reality. Léger seems to object to the novelist's use of "parties d'histoire" as a means of creating character, for these composite pictures are usually not in accord with historical accuracy.[66] Bellessort and Saintsbury, two more dependable critics than Léger, admit that Balzac's greatest characters are not always true to life, but they do not consider this lack of realism to be an artistic fault. Bellessort's opinion on this point is as follows: "Ce (his greatest characters) sont bien des monstres au sens étymologique du mot, des démonstrations, des avertissements de ce que peut faire d'une énergie humaine tel instinct ou telle volonté, libéré de toute contrainte, affranchi de toute mesure. Ils appartiennent à cette famille de créatures anormales dont la nature ne produit ordinairement que des esquisses et des ébauches et que seul la génie amène à la perfection."[67] In his preface to the English edition of Balzac's collected works, George Saintburg makes this comment: "In part no doubt, and in great part, the work of Balzac is dream-stuff rather than life-stuff, and it is all the better

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66 See Preface to Léger, Charles, Balzac mis à nu, Paris, n.d., p. xiv.

67 Bellessort, p. 305.

for that."[68]

Accepting the philosophic definition of the word "real",[69] Stendhal and Faillétaz insist upon the intrinsic reality of Balzac's works. The whole truth, so Faillétaz affirms, is not to be found "chez les économistes, ni chez les historiens," but in the novel form, where causes and motives of apparent facts can be indicated, as well as the facts themselves. While admitting that not all of Balzac's characters live and that many of his really great characters are imperfectly molded, Taine believed that Balzac had grasped the truth because he had grasped the whole. Oscar Wilde claims that Balzac created life, rather than copied it. Bourget, developing this idea and combining it with Philarête Chasles's idea of the quality of the voyant in Balzac, credits Balzac less with having observed the society of his own day than with having contributed to the formation of a new one. He points out in substantiation of his argument that many of the characters in La Comédie Humaine were truer to life in 1860 than in 1830-1850, when they supposedly lived.

Of the varying critical opinions concerning the realism of La Comédie Humaine, that of Hippolyte Taine, expressed nearly fifty years ago, seems to this writer still to be the

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[68] See George Saintsbury's introduction to The Works of Honore de Balzac, New York, 1901, p. xliv.

[69] "Existent as a thing, state, or quality;...fundamental and ultimate, as opposed to merely apparent or phenomenal; intrinsic and of the essence, as opp. to nominal or relative." Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, Fifth edition Springfield, Mass., 1939, p. 827.

most accurate. The following excerpts from Taine's long essay seem to be a just evaluation of Balzac's great work:

> ...comme il (a character) devient réel! avec quelle précision et quelle énergie il s'implante dans le souvenir et dans la croyance! comme il ressemble à la nature, et comme il fait illusion! - Car telle est la nature; les détails y sont infinis et infiniment déliés; l'homme intérieur laisse son empreinte dans sa vie extérieure, dans sa maison, dans ses meubles, dans ses affaires, dans ses gestes, dans son langage; il faut expliquer cette multitude d'effets pour l'exprimer tout entier. Et, d'autre part, il faut assembler cette multitude de causes pour le composer tout entier....
>
> S'il est si fort, c'est qu'il est systématique; ceci est un second trait qui complète le savant; le philosophe en lui s'ajoute à l'observateur. Il voit, avec les détails, les lois qui les enchaînent. Ses maisons et ses physionomies sont des coquilles sur lesquelles se moule l'âme de ses personnages. Tout se tient en eux; il y a toujours quelque passion ou situation qui les fonde et qui les ordonne tout le reste. C'est pour cela qu'ils laissent une empreinte si forte; chacune de leurs actions et de leurs parties concourt à l'enfoncer; quoique innombrables, elles s'assemblent pour un effet unique....
>
> - Bien plus et bien mieux, il y a toujours quelque grande idée qui sert de centre à sa fable. Il a le tort de l'annoncer, mais il ne trompe point en l'annonçant. Non seulement il décrit, mais il pense. Il n'a pas assez de voir la vie, il la comprend....
>
> ...C'est donc être exact que d'être grand: Balzac a saisi la vérité parce qu'il a saisi les ensembles; sa puissance systématique a donné à ses peintures l'unité avec la force, avec l'intérêt la fidélité. 70

This brings us back to the three questions posed at the beginning of part II of this chapter. How true to life are Balzac's misers? How faithful to miser nature is his composite portrait of avarice? How nearly did he succeed in

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70 Taine, Hippolyte, Nouveaux essais de critique et d'histoire, Paris, 1896, pp. 69-72.

fulfilling his aim to recreate the life and spirit of his age?

In the details of external appearance and the description of the milieux in which the misers lived, Balzac's portraits are scrupulously accurate. The interpretation of these exterior details and the concept of character, however, undoubtedly are colored by Balzac's prejudices against the moneyed class in general. Because of his romantic, idealistic nature, moreover, Balzac tended to exaggerate the characters he was depicting. Grandet and Gobseck, monsters of force, are distortions of the truth. His moralistic aim also probably caused him in many cases to present only one side of the picture. Surely Grandet, Rigou, Séchard and La Baudraye in real life would have had some endearing qualities, yet Balzac, in order to show what a devastating evil avarice was, depicted only the unlovely side of these men.

In conclusion it may be said that Balzac's composite picture of avarice, as a vice widespread in Restoration society, is true to the essence of truth, although some of the individual portraits are exaggerated purposely for artistic or moralistic reasons. By classifying the various social types, by describing nearly all social milieux and by showing the influence of certain modes of thinking on society, such as the materialistic spirit, Balzac succeeded admirably in fulfilling his aim to recreate the life and spirit of his

age. La Comédie Humaine may not be as accurate as the historian's account, but it is infinitely more real in that it comes closer to painting the whole picture.

Chapter IV

The Character of the Miser in Balzac and Galdós

During the last quarter of the nineteenth century the great Spanish writer, Benito Perez Galdós, published a series of novels in which he attempted to present a panoramic view of life in contemporary Spain.[1] His literary aim was so similar to that of Balzac and his treatment of his subject matter so realistic that critics have called him often "the Balzac of Spain."[2] A great admirer of the French novelist and sensitive to the artistic currents of his day, Galdós undoubtedly was influenced by the author of La Comédie Humaine, though he stoutly denied any conscious imitation of other authors.

In his portrait of the avaricious Torquemada,[3] Galdós must have been inspired, at least subconsciously, by Balzac's composite study of the miser. We know that he had read Eugénie Grandet while on a visit to Paris in 1867 and that this book greatly enriched his notions about the art of fiction. After that he began collecting Balzac's works and

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1 Fortunata y Jacinta, a four-volume work written in 1886-1887, portrays life in Madrid between 1868 and 1876, with special emphasis on the Restoration period. The other novelas españolas contemporáneas, written between 1881 and 1895, cover the period from 1875 to 1895.

2 See p.131, note 4.

3 Don Francisco Torquemada is first introduced as a minor character in Fortunata y Jacinta. Later, Galdós devoted a series of four separate novels to a detailed psychological study of this character. The titles and dates of the Torquemada series are as follows: Torquemada en la hoguera, 1889: Torquemada en la cruz, 1893; Torquemada en el Purgatorio, 1894; and Torquemada y San Pedro; 1895.

probably was familiar with the whole of La Comédie Humaine.[4] Moreover, since the Spaniard by nature is not stingy, as the Frenchman is inclined to be,[5] Galdós probably did not base his characterization of the miser solely on observation. Though Torquemada may have been modeled partly on the usurers of Galdós's acquaintance, the concept of the character as a whole must have come either from the author's imagination, from some other literature, or from both.[6] Finally, the many resemblances between Torquemada and Balzac's misers could hardly have been purely coincidental.

It would be difficult to determine to just what extent Galdós was influenced by Balzac, especially since no actual imitation took place. We can, however, point out similarities in the lives and works of these two men, which might throw some light on the question .

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4 In his Memorias Galdós writes as follows: "I made frequent stops at the bookstalls which there [in Paris] are really boxes exhibited along the quais on the Seine. The first book which I bought was a small volume of Balzac's works, one franc, Librairie Nouvelle. With the reading of that little book, Eugénie Grandet, I unfasted myself on the great French novelist, and on that trip to Paris and on those that followed I completed the collection of eighty odd volumes which I still preserve with religious veneration." See vol. X (Memorias) of the Obras inéditas, Madrid, 1930, p. 39.

5 As Balzac himself once remarked, "L'Espagnol est généreux!" See Altszyler, p. 169, quoting Balzac.

6 It is significant that there are no misers in Spanish literature before the nineteenth century, with the exception of the priest in the second chapter of Lazarillo de Tormes.

I

In his novelas contemporáneas Galdós depicts an era in Spanish history (1868-1895) that closely resembles in spirit and tone the Restoration period in France. Worn out by the Carlist wars, Spain had exhausted her idealism. By a slow process of infiltration from northern Europe, liberalism had seeped into politics and religion,[7] destroying faith in the nation's time-honored institutions, yet offering no inspirational force to replace those of monarchy and Catholicism. With the growth of the republican spirit, the powers of the aristocracy as a ruling class began to decline and by 1875 the bourgeoisie had taken over the yoke of both political and social supremacy. Although Spain did not go through an industrial upheaval like that which shook France in 1848, the expansion of industry wrought some changes in her system of national economy. As small businesses were gradually crowded out by large commercial interests, capitalism gained a foothold in Spain. This new economic system was conducive to the rapid accumulation of wealth and everyone was eager to get his full share of the booty. In all phases of life the materialistic spirit was apparent, for here, as in France a generation before, society "casi ha hecho una religión de las materialidades decorosas de la existencia."[8]

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[7] The unorthodox philosophy of the German Friedrich Krause was particularly popular in Spain at this time, as was English liberalism.

[8] Torquemada en la hoguera, p. 17.

As a result of the increase in liberalism and the expansion of industry, Spanish society itself underwent some important transformations. Chief among these social changes was the decline of the aristocracy and the rise of the bourgeoisie to a position of honor and power. "Era...la época en que la clase media entraba en lleno en el ejercicio de sus funciones, apandando todos los empleos creados por el nuevo sistema político y administrativo, comprando a plazos todas las fincas que habían sido de la Iglesia, constituyéndose en proprietaria del suelo y en usufructuaria del presupuesto, absorbiendo, en fin, los despojos del absolutismo y del clero, y fundando el imperio de la levita."[9] Typical of a whole group of business-men of his day is the case of Don Baldomero Santa Cruz, a bourgeois cloth merchant of Madrid who sired the main male character in Fortunata y Jacinta. Inheriting the business from his father, who in the preceding era had built it from a small shop into a thriving industry, Don Baldomero continued for twenty years the traditions of the house, then retired to live on his earnings. With the growth of the business came social contacts with the upper bourgeoisie and even the titled nobility. Though just one generation removed from a humble shop-keeper, Don Baldomero, had he wished it, could have bought a marquisate and mingled with princes, as did many of his social-climbing compatriots.

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[9] Fortunata y Jacinta, I, p. 58.

After the death-blow which it received during this period, Spanish aristocracy languished into a decline from which it never rallied. This "árbol viejo y sin savia, no podía ya vivir si no lo abonaba...el pueblo enriquecido."[10] In a last effort to sustain itself, "la nobleza esquilmada busca el estiércol plebeyo para fecundarse y poder vivir un poquito más."[11] By 1870 many of Madrid's best families had been obliged to marry their daughters to rich merchants, who were happy over the chance to climb socially. Society no longer was divided into three homogeneous units, but had suddenly become one great polyglot mass.

Spanish pride, however, could not be swept away overnight, and many aristocratic families found the new pill hard to swallow. Others, though, fell right in with the materialistic spirit of the age and were content to give up the abstract ideal for concrete comfort. A good example of the various aristocratic attitudes toward the question of intermarriage is to be found among the three remaining members of the poverty-sticken Águila family, to which the low-born Torquemada allied his destiny. Rafael del Águila, the blind brother of Torquemada's wife, is the last remnant of the past, clinging tenaciously to the ideal of family honor and preferring to die rather than give it up. He considers his sister's marriage as a shameful selling of her body, as the vilest form of family degradation. Doña Cruz, his elder spinster sister, seems to bridge the two eras. Several years

[10] Torquemada en la cruz, p. 123.
[11] Torquemada en el Purgatorie, p. 290.

earlier she had opposed Rafael's marriage to a rich banker's daughter because the girl's grandfather had been an humble storekeeper. Now, however, she is the instrumental force in bringing about the marriage alliance between her own sister Fidela and the rich but lowly prestamista. In Fidela we see the attitude of the future: that life at any cost is the most important thing of all.

Where once the possessors of the nation's wealth had been aristocratic families, the little man was now coming into his own, and, because of his aptitude for things commercial, he soon was able to crowd out the idle nobleman both financially and socially. Downtrodden for so many years, the pueblo was quick to take advantage of "la ley del siglo, por la cual la riqueza inmueble de las familias históricas va pasando a una segunda aristocracia, cuyos pergaminos se pierden en la obscuridad de una tienda, o en los repliegues de la industria usuraria."[12] Freed from the social and financial bonds which for centuries had prevented the exercise of his initiative, the servant now revealed his ability to surpass his former master in the business of making money. While the Águila sisters, last remnants of an old noble family, were obliged to live in the ugliest poverty, their former servants were now living in ease. Ramón, once a kitchen boy, had got rich in the wine business, while one of the former waiters now had a railroad restaurant, a house in Vallodolid and a

[12] Torquemada y San Pedro, p. 39.

brewery of his own. Symbolic of the impotence of the aristocracy at this time is the hopeless ranting of the blind, eternally idealistic Rafael, who refuses to give up his principles of honor. Helpless and penniless, he is obliged to seek refuge in the home of a former housekeeper who is now in a position to care for her master.

At this time money seemed to grow on trees and almost any energetic fellow could make a good living. As one of the characters in Fortunata y Jacinta remarked to a young man just starting out in business, "Madrid está por explotar,"[13] and "con un poco de trastienda y otro poco de farsa y mucho anuncio, mucho anuncio, negocio hecho."[14] Not only was it possible to accumulate a fortune "con el sudor del frente," as Torquemada claimed to have gotten his, but the smart man could speculate on the price of gold and the lucky man could play the stock market or the lottery, if he wanted to take the risk. Don Baldomero increased his income by his dickerings with La Bolsa and by his luck in the national lottery, while his friend Moreno calculated on making a clean-up by selling his gold out of the country.

With all the wealth that circulated in Madrid at this time, however, the situtation of the poor was worse than ever before. The number of beggars who flocked the streets of Madrid had appreciably increased. Although the government had established a Monte de Piedad, where hard-hit workers

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[13] Fortunata y Jacinta, IV, p. 38.
[14] Ibid., IV, p. 9.

and destitute women could pawn their personal effects, there were no laws for the protection of the poor against unscrupulous exploiters. The slum sections swarmed with money-lenders and charlatans, who capitalized on the ignorance and credulity of these helpless creatures. No one seemed interested in doing anything about "la monstruosa inequidad con que se distribuye y encasilla el metal acuñado."[15] It was every man for himself in "esta sociedad envilecida por los negocios y el positivismo."[16]

Such was the situation in Spain during the last third of the nineteenth century. Bigotry and immorality were threatening to undermine the whole nation. The materialistic spirit had effected a reversal of society's sense of values. While maintaining a false sense of pride, society had lost its sense of shame. Appearances counted for more than honor and virtue. A man's worth was now judged by the size of his income. It seemed that Spain at last had become the victim of a disease which had attacked the whole of Europe: "mal de la época....la fiebre de los negocios."[17]

To save the country from national atrophy, Galdós believed that the Spaniard would have to be aroused from his state of apathy. This could best be brought about, not by

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15 Torquemada en el Purgatorio, p. 17.
16 Torquemada en la cruz, p. 270.
17 Ibid., p. 227.

political upheaval or the sudden reform of institutions, but by an appeal to the individual to take an active interest in Spain's social, political and moral welfare. As an aid to the rebuilding of the national conscience, Galdós considered it his duty as the novelist to stimulate within his readers a renewed interest in the real values of life.

Because of his personal contact with the world just described, Galdós was well qualified to write the saga of a materialistic era. Constantly preoccupied with the money problem in his own life and often obliged to do business with usurers, he had a good idea of the importance of money as a social and economic factor. Although Galdós was neither a high-liver nor a social climber and although he was the best paid Spanish writer of his day, his expenses always exceeded his income. The victim of a sexual pathology, he became involved in a number of unfortunate situations which made quite a drain on his earnings. A number of times he had to pay large sums of money to the women who had gratified his passion and his literary royalties were not sufficient to fulfill all these financial demands.

When Galdós was twenty-eight years old, his father died and the young man had to think of supporting himself from then on. Like Balzac he had studied law, but did not wish to pursue it as a profession and so turned to literature as his means of livelihood. Both the public and the press were slow to applaud this new literary star and his first

novels[18] were not financial successes. With the publication of Trafalgar in 1873, Galdós's fame as a novelist was established and his Episodios nacionales became the most popular Spanish books of the period.

Galdós directed a great deal of energy toward getting his works published in special editions and in foreign translations. In 1881, needing money badly, he decided to get out a special illustrated edition of the Episodios nacionales. It was a risky project, but because of the fact that he himself created many of the illustrations and that many of his friends subscribed for the set, the project did not end up as a complete financial failure, as had Balzac's publishing enterprises, although Galdós made little profit out of it.

By 1890 Galdós was almost bankrupt and was forced to seek the aid of money-lenders. He had to borrow money to build his home in Santander, and this, plus the persistence of his pathological weakness, had exhausted not only what funds he had on hand, but advanced royalties on his books as well. Undoubtedly one of the reasons, though probably not the chief one, for his turn to the drama in 1892 was his precarious financial situation. During the next seven years he produced ten plays, some of which were popular with the public, but even the triumps of Realidad (1892), La de San Quintín (1894) and

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[18] La Fontana de Oro (1868) and El Audaz (1871).

the dramatized version of Doña Perfecta (1896) did not overbalance the financial failure of the other seven plays.[19] When in 1896 the demand for immediate action became acute, Galdós decided to take an extended tour of the provincial centers. This trip did much to increase his fame, but it still did not fill his empty coffers.

About this time another debt was added to Galdós's already heavy financial burden. Because of strained relations with his publisher, Cámara, which had ended in a law-suit, Galdós bought out Cámara's interest in the publishing business for 82,000 pesetas and set up shop for himself. By putting on a big advertising campaign, he soon tripled the sales of his books, but these profits still were not enough to pay off the large debt incurred, plus the running expenses of such a large enterprise. As Galdós himself said, the more books he sold, the less money he earned.

In 1898 Galdós began another series of the Episodios nacionales, hoping that future sales of these popular works would equal or even exceed those of the past. Within three years he had produced ten new volumes, but sales receipts were not as large as he had anticipated. From 1911 until he died in 1920 he periodically tried to get himself named for the Nobel prize, partly for the honor involved in receiving such an award and partly because he needed the stipend that went with it. Only in death did Galdós at last find release from the debts which had throttled him for the better part of his adult life.

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[19] Galdós attributes the short run of at least one of these plays (Los Condenados, 1894) to a claque which his enemies organized against him.

II

As we can see from the foregoing discussion, the late nineteenth century in Spain was a period particularly conducive to the development of avarice. The Spanish miser portrayed by Galdós, however, was no longer a pure type character, dominated by a single instinct, distinguished by certain stock mannerisms, and incapable of progress. He had evolved far beyond Harpagon and Grandet into a complex personality whose avarice was in conflict with other desires. In another age, Torquemada might have remained the traditional miser who hoarded gold for the pure pleasure of possession, living in the beggar's squalor and dying like a dog. But Torquemada was unable to resist the influence of the nineteenth century, with its emphasis on luxurious living and social position. The miser is no longer a static character. From the metaphysician whose "egoísmo se sutilizaba en la idea pura del negocio," who adored "la santísima, la inefable cantidad, sacrificando a ella...las necesidades del cuerpo y de la vida,"[20] he has developed into the positivist who enjoys the material benefits of life.

The years 1851-1868 mark the apprenticeship of Don Francisco Torquemada in the art of making money. Starting out as a lowly prestamista who lends small sums at large rates of interest, he soon saves enough to buy a miserable tenement house and now adds rent-collecting to usury as a

[20] Torquemada en la hoguera, p. 17.

means of increasing his hoard. His victims, we are told, include "hombres de más necesidades que posibles; empleados con más hijos que sueldo; otros ávidos de la nómina tras larga cesantia; militares trasladados de residencia, con familón y suegra de añadidura; personajes de flaco espíritu, poseedores de un buen destino, pero, con la carcoma de une mujercita que da tés y empeña el verbo para comprar las pastas; viudas lloronas que cobran del Montepío civil o militar y se ven en mil apuros; sujetos diversos que no aciertan a resolver el problema aritmético en que se funda la existencia social, y otros muy perdidos, muy faltones, muy destornillados de cabeza o rasos de moral, tramposos y embusteros."[21]

During this apprentice period Torquemada dressed poorly, affected poverty and ran his household with the strictest economy. A fitting companion for such a man was Doña Silvia, his first wife, as avaricious as he and as disreputable in her appearance. The kitchen provisions, kept under lock and key, were dispensed in frugal amounts by Torquemada himself, who made all the purchases as well. Once he even got up at midnight to search for hidden food in the kitchen. Without the extra supplies which Rama, the servant, smuggled in from another house where she worked, the family would not have had enough to eat.

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[21] Torquemada en la hoguera, p. 10.

Toward 1870, however, a change occurs in Torquemada's mode of life. Encouraged by the example of some of his neighbors in the barrios bajos, Don Francisco moves into a larger apartment, becomes more particular about his appearance, buys his wife a fur coat, and furnishes the children's rooms with real luxury. Meat and vegetables now appear on a daily menu which formerly had known no other variety than bread and dry beans. From the pueblo Torquemada has now risen to the middle-class, and glories in his newly-acquired social standing. Now known as a proprietor and landlord, rather than as a miserable money-lender, he walks with a surer step, speaks louder, and dares to sustain an opinion of his own in the cafe tertulias. A further balm to his vanity is found in his son, Valentín, a sort of mathematical genius.

But all is not rosy in any life, and one fine day Doña Silvia dies. At her death Don Francisco mourns the loss of a good household financier more than the loss of a beloved companion. Then, Valentín falls sick of spinal meningitis and the doctors despair of his recovery. In an effort to bribe God to intervene in Valentín's behalf and effect a cure, Torquemada embarks on a campaign of local philanthropy. His charity, however, is not heartfelt and hence does not touch God. After his son's death, Don Francisco moves into a smaller apartment in one of his own tenement houses and there surrounds himself with a heterogeneous collection of furniture and objets d'art. Because God has failed him, he renounces religion and

reverences only science, particularly the mathematical sciences at which his son had excelled.

The next step in Torquemada's development is his marriage to Fidela del Águila, a poverty-stricken girl of noble birth. His reason for marrying her is threefold: she is rich in domestic virtues, a hard worker, a good manager and economical; she is from a fine old Madrid family and Torquemada can use her as a social stepping-stone; his son's spirit has advised him to remarry, so that he (Valentín) may have life again. Torquemada takes over the management of the Águila business affairs and the Águila sisters, particularly Doña Cruz, take over the social training of the vulgar prestamista.

To effect a transformation in a creature innately opposed to violent change, Doña Cruz appeals to Don Francisco's amour-propre. Now it is time, she argues, to present yourself before society, not as "el prestamista sanguijuela, que no va más que a chupar y a chupar, sino como un señor de su posición."[22] One should live in a manner befitting his income; the millionaire should not live like a pauper but like the capitalist that he is. Hoarding is anti-patriotic; the wealthy man is obliged to keep his money circulating for the prosperity of industry and the nation as a whole. And so, Don Francisco Torquemada embarks upon a new way of life.

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[22] Torquemada en la Cruz, p. 52.

At first the changes are of minor importance, such as giving up garlic, modulating his raucous voice, wearing his coat to dinner, learning what to do with his hands, buying new clothes of the latest cut and improving his conversational abilities. It makes him feel good to wear a coat "hermeticamente cerrada" like that of the caballero Donoso and bolsters up his self-confidence to be able to speak a correct sentence. In the matter of speech change, Torquemada shows a particular aptitude, beginning first by learning to distinguish the correct word from the corruption (oculista for óptico), then by borrowing phrases from the conversations of his elegant acquaintances (me atengo a la lógica de los hechos), by learning the meaning of abstract words (maquiavelismo), and finally by mastering a whole handful of useful allusions and latinisms. When at last he is able to speak of Penelope's web and Damocles's sword, he can hold his own in any social gathering. The climax of this social training comes a few years later when he gives his famous banquet speech. Stringing together deftly a lot of phrases borrowed from the conversations of his acquaintances and culled from the newspapers, he holds forth for nearly an hour. For this magnificent "serie no interrumpida de vaciedades,"[23] as he calls it, he receives an ovation.

In matters pertaining to the administration of his income, however, Don Francisco is not so easy to lead. Reared

[23] Torquemada en el Purgatorio, p. 283.

in poverty and accustomed to living frugally, he sees little justification for the enormous expenditures which Doña Cruz proposes. It is true that their small apartment will have to be redecorated and enlarged to accommodate the larger family, but the acquisition of a carriage seems to be an unnecessary luxury when there are hired hacks available. Hence, when Cruz suggests that they move to a twenty-three-room apartment in the best section of town, Torquemada balks. In an outburst of anger he replies first of all with a flat refusal. Then follows a process of indirect persuasion on the part of Cruz. Torquemada ponders, finally accepts the proposal, and eventually ends up by telling his friends that it had been his idea in the first place.

It is a losing battle for Don Francisco, though. With each new change his ire increases and his hatred for this dominating woman becomes more intense. Aware of his intellectual inferiority to her, he resents the fact that his social and economic rise have been due to her efforts. No longer master in his own house, which seems like a "jaula de oro" to him, he finds his only oasis in the streets. It is a defeated man who says, "Esta vida es un purgatorio para mí, y aquí estoy penando por todos los pecados de mi vida."[24] Yet he keeps on going, becoming successively a senator, a marquis, and finally the owner of the biggest château in Spain, the palacio de las Gravelinas. This is the highest point in Torquemada's social

[24] Torquemada en el Purgatorio, p. 167.

development.

With the death of Fidela soon after the acquisition of the château, the process of Torquemada's retrogression begins. Deprived of the one person who had made life bearable and acted as a sort of buffer between him and Doña Cruz, he can stand the situation no longer. Throwing off at last the yoke of Cruz's domination, he becomes master in his own house, exercizing his authority with the savagery of an animal. Gradually, he takes on again his vulgar ways. Broken in body and spirit, in one last effort to recapture the happiness of bygone days, he runs away from home, goes to a restaurant in the popular quarter, gorges on beans and brandy, and suffers an attack of acute indigestion from which he never recovers.

Now that we have an idea of the conflicts which composed his life-story, let us look more closely at the various aspects of Torquemada's appearance, personality and character. We first meet Don Francisco Torquemada in Fortunata y Jacinta at the home of Doña Lupe, his friend and early business associate. Physically he is unattractive, not only because Nature had been stingy when she fashioned him, but also because he appears to be a hypocrite. His face "tenía ciertos rasgos de tipo militar con visos clericales."[25] This ecclesiastical air is further enhanced by an affected meekness and sweetness, by insincere gestures and by hypocrisy in his tone of voice. A grillwork of thin hair, harmonizing with the gray of his scraggly moustache,

[25] Fortunata y Jacinta, II, p. 120.

covers his greasy, scaly head. Worst of all, he has a sweaty handshake.

When we first see Don Francisco we are struck by the untidiness of his appearance: his shirt collar is dirty, his lapels greasy, his coat frayed at the edges, his trousers baggy and unpressed, and his shoes squeaky. Yet, with it all, there is a bit of the dandy in him even at this time. Like a child who likes to dress up in other people's clothes, he struts about proudly in finery that once belonged to his high-born debtors. Just notice his stickpin with the magnificent pearl. That once belonged to the Marquesa de Casa-Bojío! And do you see his striped shirt? It was imported from the United States! Of course, these acquisitions were not made to his order and often did not fit. Look at his trousers, for instance. Why, they come half way up his legs when he sits down! But what matter all these minute details to a man who has a long gold watchchain to dangle before your eyes?

Don Francisco, like Père Grandet, had a number of pet remarks and favorite jokes which he liked to recite on all occasions. Regardless of how much money he was making, he always complained about the times, which were always "muy malas, pero muy malas." If anyone accused him of being a millionaire, he would deplore the disproportion between his miserable earnings and his hard labors. A facetious man, he carried in his conversational packsack a stock of quips about the weather. When it was pouring down rain, he would say:

"How atrociously dusty it is!" or, on a hot, dry day: "What a snowstorm we are having!" Only his wife and Doña Lupe laughed at these remarks.[26]

Intellectually Torquemada was extremely limited, being incapable of understanding any concept beyond the realm of the material. Pretending to believe in reincarnation, he actually did not know the meaning of the word. What he did believe was that Valentín would one day be reborn in the form of a second son. Moreover, his concept of God was that of a primitive being. He pictured God as the Avenger who had sent Valentín's illness as a punishment for his own misdeeds. Least of all could he comprehend the meaning of true charity, always thinking in terms of the returns on his money invested religiously. Though he was perfectly willing later on to buy his way into Heaven, his sacrifices never really came from the heart. The closest he ever came to a mystical experience was his nightly communication with his dead son, and even this communication ceased after the birth of the second Valentín. In all of these interpretations we recognize the wishful thinking of the egoist who cannot see beyond the concrete world.

One of the two great passions of Torquemada's life was his love for his son. Valentín was a sort of child prodigy whose mathematical talents would have put the precocious Pascal to shame. Torquemada worshipped him as a god, con-

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[26] Fortunata y Jacinta, II, p. 348.

sidering him a sort of supernatural being entrusted to him by special privilege. After Valentín's death, Don Francisco built an altar to his memory and communed nightly with the departed soul. The spirit of Valentín, appearing to him in dreams, comforted and advised him. Don Francisco's fanatic affection for his son was based as much on pride, however, as on the paternal instinct, for Valentín exalted his father's ego. Whenever the boy's professors lauded his accomplishments, Torquemada inwardly gloated over the fact that he had engendered this rare being. Hence, when Valentín died, it was a blow to Torquemada's vanity as much as anything else, for he had lost the thing that made him feel superior. The satisfaction that he took in putting on a pompous funeral for his son reveals the extent of his vanity and the shallowness of his affection.

Most constant and powerful of all Don Francisco's passions, however, was his love of money. Long before being a father, he had been a miser. Indeed one would say that "tiene la avaricia metida en los huesos y en el alma."[27] Unlike most people possessed of such a vice, he not only knew of its existence within himself, but frankly admitted that he liked being a miser. "Me da la gana de serlo,"[28] he said, and his avowed bello ideal was to amass a fabulous fortune. In his childlike philosophy of life, avarice was not considered a sin nor money an entity of fixed value.

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27 Torquemada en el Purgatorio, p. 32.
28 Ibid., p. 279.

Like the Baron de Nucingen, Torquemada not only had a great desire for money, but an unusual talent for making it. Cognizant of this gift, he soliquizes as follows: "...soy un bendito, y no sirvo más que para combinar el guarismo y sacar dinero de debajo de las piedras... Ese talento no me lo quita nadie."[29] Beginning as a humble money-lender, he became successively a landlord, a dealer in stocks, a lottery winner, and finally an opulent capitalist. His was the Midas touch.

Don Francisco's interest in business affairs persisted as long as he lived, even after his mind and body had become enfeebled by the ravages of disease. It was a consolation to him when things went wrong. The day after his beloved son's burial, upon opening his eyes in the morning he was consumed again with the fever to get back to work. When Rama brought in his morning chocolate, he was already at his desk, deep in figures, doing the thing that gave him "santísima gana." And when he himself died, he was still thinking of money affairs in spite of Don Pedro's efforts to convert him. His cry, "conversión," is thought to refer to debt, rather than to the soul. Even the priest sees in his last word not the penitent sinner, but the hardened miser.

Had Torquemada possessed an ounce of altruism he could have increased the capital of many other people without diminishing his own. Except for a few of his closest friends, however, he refused to take over the business affairs of other

[29] Torquemada en el Purgatorio, p. 93.

people. If occasionally a generous impulse did cross his mind, "no fué más que un relámpago, un chispazo sin intensidad ni duración bastantes para producir explosión en la voluntad."[30] And so he kept on piling up millions, heedless of the misery and sorrow that it was causing other people.

Torquemada did have a conscience, however, and in this respect he differs from all the other misers of literary history. During his short-lived period of philanthropy before Valentín died, he once gave a beggar his old coat. From time to time after that the thought passed through his mind that he should have given away his good coat and kept the used one for himself. After Fidela's death, when Gamborena, the priest, was trying to instil within him the concept of true Christian charity, the problem of the coat came up again. Gamborena suggested that he give his wealth to the poor. Don Francisco, ever the miser, still could conceive of charity only in terms of its benefits to him personally. He would give away his beloved gold only on the condition that such an act would assure his entrance into the kingdom of Heaven. Up to his very death his avarice was in conflict with his conscience. Fear of Hell finally moved him to bequeath one-third of his property to the church, but he never did comprehend the meaning of unselfish giving.

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30 Torquemada en la cruz, p. 49.

III

As we read the Torquemada series, we are struck by many details which remind us of Balzac's misers. In appearance, in demeanor, in habits, in financial development and even in some of the actual events of his life, Torquemada resembles his French literary ancestors. From Gobseck he may have inherited his thin, scraggly gray hair, his fondness for pretty words and phrases, his pseudo-philosophic turn of mind and his mania for collecting objets d'art; from Rigou, his hypocritical, ecclesiastical air; from La Baudraye, his affected meekness and sweetness; from Grandet, his tendency to minimize the size of his fortune and his dislike for especialistas who charged big fees; and from Grandet or Hochon, his early habit of dispensing personally the household provisions.

The story of Torquemada's financial development is quite similar to that of Gobseck and Nucingen. At first he is the hoarder, living in squalor and increasing his pile by means of usury. A little later he evolves beyond this stage into the accumulator and becomes the post-Restoration capitalist. As Nucingen, by dint of his innate money-making talents and good luck, soon became the biggest business-man in Paris, so Torquemada in the same way became Madrid's leading capitalist. Both were connected with private banking concerns; both made money on the stock market; and both eventually used their financial influence to buy political and social position.

Torquemada, as a result of Dona Cruz's efforts, even climbed a step higher than Nucingen on the social and political ladders, for he rose to be a marquis and a senator. Rising higher, however, Torquemada fell harder than the Parisian capitalist. So far as we know, Nucingen never did go through a process of retrogression.

These resemblances of Galdós's character to the misers of Balzac, however, are not proof enough of the latter's influence on the former. It must be kept in mind that many of the above-mentioned details were a part of the stock and trade of miser literature, not merely of Balzac's misers. In the portraits of misers drawn by Plautus, Molière and La Bruyère we also find many of these stock traits. Gray, thin hair, a hypocritical air, affected meekness, a mania for collecting, pretended poverty and household frugality are stock traits of the traditional miser and were not invented by Balzac. Moreover, the methods used by the traditional miser for accumulating gold would depend on the opportunities available at the time in which he lived. Hence, the similarity of Torquemada's business methods to those of Gobseck and Nucingen are not necessarily due to Balzac's literary influence, but more likely to the fact that Torquemada was submitted to environmental influences similar to those which conditioned the French capitalists. Therefore, in order not to do Galdós an injustice, we may attribute many of the similarities in character portrayal of Torquemada and Balzac's

misers to mere coincidence.

It does not seem quite so probable, however, that coincidence can explain the resemblance of Torquemada's death scene to those of Gobseck and Grandet. Just before he died Gobseck had a vision. Believing that he sees his room filled with or vivant he drags himself from his bed and goes to the fireplace to gather the metal in his hands. Derville finds him still on his knees when he comes in. Similarly Torquemada just before his death had a dream in which gold played a major role. He sees before him a small door made of hundreds of precious coins and wants to enter that door. The arrival of the priest arouses him from his dream. Certainly, too, the tone, if not the actual circumstances, of Torquemada's and Grandet's death scenes are quite similar. Both of these men die with the thought of money on their minds. Grandet has his gold all spread out before him; Torquemada's thoughts are on a fine new scheme for converting the national debt. Finally, as Gamborena administers the last sacrament, Torquemada feebly cries out, "conversión," but the meaning of this word is as ambiguous to the attending priest as Grandet's final lurch for the crucifix had been. Did Torquemada's "conversión" refer to that of the soul or of the national debt? Did Grandet seize the cross because he wanted to kiss it or because he was attracted by the gold of which it was made? In neither case is the mystery solved, but both Balzac and Galdós leave the impression that avarice persisted in both characters to the

very end, "the ruling passion strong in death."

In their general concept and treatment of character, however, we notice a number of striking differences between Galdós and Balzac. Balzac's conception of the miser is that of the logical-minded Frenchman, Galdós's, that of the erratic Spaniard. Balzac's study is reasoned, carefully studied, and unified; Galdós's study is spontaneous and diffuse. Grandet is the cerebral creation of an idealist; Torquemada, the flesh-and-blood offspring of a realist.

Always preoccupied with the idea of painting an artistic as well as a life-like portrait, Balzac often sacrifices reality to artistic unity. Too much the synthesist, he has a tendency to over-simplify human character. The French novelist sees man as a fairly simple organism dominated by one pure instinct, such as avarice, paternal love, romantic passion, or filial affection. The force of this dominant instinct is so great that psychological conflict is reduced to a minimum. Aided by a strong will, the fictional character pursues a straight-forward course of action directed by his passion. Surmounting all obstacles along the way, his passion becomes so powerful that finally the character, by reason of his superhuman strength, is converted into a dehumanized monster. From the real world the novelistic character has ascended to the abstract world into a cold, cerebral concept. Grandet is not a miser, but Avarice personified.

Galdós, on the other hand, conceives of human character as being very complex. A close analysis of human nature has taught him that man's actions are directed, not by one or even two simple, pure instincts, but by many conflicting instincts which are always at odds with one another. Galdós stresses the conflicting elements within human personality. To the force of will, which in Balzac's personnages reinforces the dominant passion, Galdós opposes the force of other instinctive impulsions which tend to weaken a dominant passion. In order that his avarice may stand all the more in relief, Grandet's affection for his daughter is painted as being lukewarm and his conjugal tenderness as being almost non-existent. In Torquemada, avarice is shown as the predominant drive, but a genuine paternal love and an affection for his wife have softened its devastating force. Of course, the Torquemada who submits to the domination of a woman he hates lacks the grandeur of a Grandet whose will is sovereign, but he is infinitely more warm, passionate and human than Balzac's creation.

In their treatment as well as in their concept of character, Balzac and Galdós reveal racial differences. There is a studied quality about Balzac's composition which is not found in Galdós's works. Balzac, as we have seen in Chapter III, follows a set formula in presenting his characters. Every detail contributes to the unity of the impression that the author wishes to establish. Grandet's house, his physical

appearance, his dress, his habits, his conversation and his actions all mark him unmistakably as a miser. In Galdós, however, the effect is much more diffuse. Torquemada does not look any more like a miser than like a doting father or a prodigal capitalist; his house, decorated under Cruz's supervision, does not bespeak the master's love of hoarding; nor does Torquemada's famous banquet speech in any way mark him as a miser. One has the feeling, as he reads the Torquemada series, that Galdós must have described what he felt and observed, and that he did little synthesizing as he went along or revising afterwards. His picture has the varied quality of real life.

In still another respect we notice a difference in the French and Spanish points of view. Balzac belies his French heritage in his love of generalizations, in his tendency to categorize his characters, and in his consideration of man as primarily a member of a social group and only secondarily as an individual. Galdós, on the other hand, ultra-individualistic like most of his compatriots, shies away from type characterizations, believing that human nature in recent years has become too multiple and varied to be pigeon-holed. Moreover, within society as a whole the tendency toward uniformity has done away with distinctions between social classes, professional groups and moral types. Galdós explains his theory as follows:

> Reconozcamos que en nuestra época de uniformidades y de nivelación física y moral se han desgastado los tipos genéricos, y que van desapareciendo, en el lento ocaso del mundo antiquo, aquellos caracteres que representaban porciones grandísimas de la familia humana, clases, grupos, categorías morales. Los que han nacido antes de los últimos veinte años recuerdan perfectamente que antes existía, por ejemplo, el genuino tipo militar, y todo campeón curtido de las guerras civiles se acusaba por su marcial facha, aunque de paisano se vistiese. Otros muchos tipos había, clavados, como vulgarmente se dice, consagrados por especialísimas conformaciones del rostro humano, y de los modales, y del vestir. El avaro, pongo por caso, ofrecía rasgos y fisonomía como de casta, y no se le confundía con ninguna otra especie de hombres....Todo eso pasó, y apenas quedan ya tipos de clase, como no sean los toreros. En el escenario del mundo se va acabando el amaneramiento, lo que no deja de ser un bien para el arte, y ahora nadie sabe quien es nadie, como no lo estudie bien, familia por familia, y persona por persona. 31

Hence, Torquemada is depicted as an avaricious individual who lived in a materialistic age, not as the traditional miser.

Although Balzac, in his many character sketches, attempted to portray the whole miser, his study is not as complete as Galdos's single portrait. One aspect of human nature is entirely omitted in Balzac's presentation of this character type, namely, spiritual conflict. It is unbelievable that, even in a materialistic age, a man reared in a Catholic country could have gone through life without questioning the morality of his way of life, yet such is the case of Balzac's misers. Never once does the fear of eternal punishment stay a grasping hand; never is a conscience pricked by the spectacle of another's poverty. Immersed in the present with its material

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31 Torquemada en el Purgatorio, pp. 72-73.

gains, Balzac's misers have completely forgotten the life to come with its spiritual benefits. It is not that Grandet and Gobseck are atheists or even unbelievers, but, as Derville pointed out, they are indifferent rather than incredulous. Galdós, however, in the last book of the Torquemada series, devotes a great deal of space to the spiritual conflict within the miser and shows how materialism had corrupted his views of religion. Underneath his avarice, Torquemada has a conscience that manifests itself in times of crisis. He never does settle in his own mind the question of the coat he gave to the beggar. For several months before his death he makes a real effort to understand Gamborena's reasoning in regard to certain Biblical concepts, but he can picture God only as another business-man with whom he has to compete. Torquemada's desire to enter the kingdom of God is genuine and heart-felt, but his avarice blinds his vision and he never sees the way. Though it has extinguished all generous impulses with him, avarice has not succeeded in annihilating Torquemada's conscience.

To the exterior approach to character which Balzac emphasized, Galdós added the interior, or psychological, approach and thus inaugurated in Spain a literary vogue which remained popular on into the twentieth century. By the liberal use of descriptive detail, Balzac puts his monsters in a realistic <u>cadre</u> that makes them plausible to the reader. Galdós, on the other hand, depends less on the

description of externals and more on a consideration of the characters' psychological struggle to give the impression of reality. By means of soliloquies, dreams and thought analyses, he shows us the complete personality, not just that small part of a character which appears on the surface. Particularly effective is his analysis and narration of Torquemada's thought processes during the various crucial periods of his life: during Valentín's sickness and death; when he was contemplating marriage with Fidela; and in his final delirium. To the realism of things, with which Balzac's works are filled, Galdós adds the realism of thought and emotion.

As a composite study of the vice of avarice, Balzac's panoramic picture is more comprehensive than that of Galdós, but Torquemada is probably the most complete and the most realistic picture of a single miser to be found in any literature.

Chapter V

Conclusion

If it would seem that Balzac, by making avarice the most widespread vice in La Comédie Humaine and the miser the most important character type in his novels, has laid undue stress on the materialistic aspects of human life, it must be remembered that he was attempting to portray as realistically and as artistically as possible an era in French history, "où, plus qu'en aucun autre temps, l'argent domine les lois, la politique et les moeurs."[1] A product of the Restoration period both temperamentally and by personal experience, Balzac knew and understood his age so thoroughly that he was able to reproduce novelistically the spirit as well as the external features of that epoch. In his portraits of the miser he shows most clearly the materialistic spirit at work within the individual.

In Père Grandet we are introduced to a sort of Nietzschean superman, whose will-power, applied to the conquest of money, has erected him into a creature of more than human strength and grandeur. Dominated by a single, unadulterated passion and undergoing no psychological conflict, the character does not develop, but remains static throughout the book. Largely a type characterization, Grandet lacks

[1] Eugénie Grandet, p. 367.

individuality. The process of synthesis has here been carried so far that what the picture may gain in artistic unity, it loses in reality. As one reads the story of Grandet, he has the feeling that Balzac had a point to make and selected his details accordingly, instead of reproducing life as he saw it before him.

The portrait of Gobseck has a little more warmth in it than that of Grandet. By indicating the dual quality of Gobseck's nature, (he is both a miser and a sage) Balzac shows some of the conflicting elements within human personality. The picture is still too abstract, however; symbolic of the power of money, Gobseck is still too strong a character to be perfectly true to life.

In his study of Nucingen Balzac establishes a nice balance between the real and the ideal. Because of the psychological conflict which his love occasions, Nucingen is plausible from the human standpoint, while his exceptional business talents mark him as an idealized capitalist, who might have followed in Grandet's footsteps, had he not been humanized by love. Representing both the strength and the weakness within human character, he is the most artistic as well as the most realistic of all of Balzac's characterizations of the miser.

The seven other misers discussed in Chapter II round out the general picture of avarice as depicted in <u>La Comédie Humaine</u>. In order to show the many nuances of that passion,

Balzac indicates how avarice varies according to social, professional and geographical milieu and how other conflicting passions may weaken its devastating force.

Because the social group meant more to Balzac than the individual[2] his characterizations tend to be typed rather than individualized. In this respect he demonstrates the French tendency toward generalization. Furthermore, in his effort to achieve artistic unity, he sometimes sacrifices reality. Though some of his most famous single portraits of the miser are distortions of observable truth, his composite picture of the vice of avarice is the most accurate and complete treatment of that passion in any literature.

The evolution of the miser as a literary type, however, did not stop with Balzac. Later in the nineteenth century the Spanish writer Galdós approached this subject from still another angle and added some new elements to the general picture. Whereas the interpretations of Molière and Balzac had been largely the logical, unified, generalized characterizations that one would expect of the Frenchman, Galdós in his study reveals the diffuseness, the spontaneity and the individuality of the Spaniard. To the picture of the miser begun by Molière and greatly amplified by Balzac, Galdós adds

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[2] In his Avant-Propos he says: "Aussi regardé-je la Famille et non l'Individu comme le véritable élément social." Avant-Propos, p. xxxi.

not only a new approach, but also a new concept of character. Much more the analyst than the synthesist, he shows the complexity of human nature and stresses the psychological conflict among man's many sentiments and desires. Spiritual conflict, an aspect of the miser omitted in the earlier studies, is given a place of importance in Galdós's work. Avarice still is the dominating passion within the miser, but here it is modified and softened by paternal love and conjugal affection. Departing from the traditional interpretations of the past, Galdós makes Torquemada an individual who is vitally alive.

From Harpagon to Torquemada the miser has come a long way. From an idealized concept he has developed into a human being; from a static type character, into an individual whose future evolution is still unpredictable; from a creature driven by one simple instinct, into a personage torn by numberless conflicting urges. Treated in the comic vein by Molière, the miser appears as a ridiculous character in whom avarice is a weakness. Balzac, on the other hand, goes to the opposite extreme and shows the grandeur of the miser made strong by his passion. Both concepts are exaggerations of the truth. It remained for Galdós, in the character of Torquemada, to indicate both the weaknesses and strengths which accompany a great passion in real life and to strike a happy medium between the ideal and the real in his portrait of the miser.

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