

UNDER HOUSE ARREST: WOMEN, NARRATION AND
TRANSGRESSION IN NOVELS OF BALZAC, FLAUBERT AND ZOLA

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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This dissertation studies the narrations of the domestic spaces assigned to nineteenth-century bourgeois women in Eugénie Grandet, and La vieille fille by Balzac, Madame Bovary by Flaubert, and L'assommoir and Une page d'amour by Zola. The female protagonists in these novels are represented in relation to the houses they inhabit, and architectural elements—doors, windows, stairs—stage the boundaries and the tense association between the women and their domestic environments. Since I primarily use phenomenological analysis in this study, I focus on the various narrative perspectives which introduce the reader into domestic spaces meant to remain private.

The narrators, often unnamed but distinctly present in the text of Balzac's Eugénie Grandet and La vieille fille, relate the situation of unmarried, provincial women whose houses embody the possibility of inheritance or the transmission of a fortune. The houses become prisons. Eugénie Grandet submits to the authority of a possessive father, while Rose Cormon loses her autonomy as the owner of her venerable home and submits to the rule of her financially ambitious and vulgar husband. In Madame Bovary, a provincial married woman, caught between domesticity and a desire for a more expansive life, is represented through various narrative focalizations, including the perspective of female neighbors who function as a moral police, watching her every

move. Windows, in this novel, articulate a privileged vantage-point. In L'assommoir, Zola, through a narrative eye that functions as a voyeuristic camera, exposes the permeability of the public and the private spheres in a working-class context; and, in Une page d'amour, he reveals the dramatic strategies of upper bourgeois women to adapt to the stifling interiors of their Parisian apartments. I show in my analysis of these novels how narrators penetrate private domestic spaces, and how efforts on the part of the female protagonists to reconfigure or escape the confinements of the male guardians of the home, result in frustration and failure.

Dedication

To Tony

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Introduction

The literature of French nineteenth-century realism and naturalism features many housebound women. The social and political environments of Balzac's Eugénie Grandet and Rose Cormon, as they struggle against the increasingly repressive patriarchy established in the wake of the Revolution, differ greatly from each other and even more so from Flaubert's Emma Bovary as she languishes in domestic captivity. Written respectively in 1833 and 1836, Eugénie Grandet and La vieille fille view the effects of the Restoration of the Monarchy of 1814 from the perspective of the ever more restricted and bourgeois-dominated régime of Louis Philippe, the so-called Citizen King. First published in 1857, at the height of the Second Empire, Flaubert's novel takes place some twenty years earlier. Zola's Gervaise Macquart (in L'assommoir) and Hélène Grandjean (Une page d'amour) inhabit the Paris of Louis Napoleon but in circumstances that are worlds apart. What these female characters all have in common is an inherited social system that confines them to a domesticity that is well-nigh inescapable. This state of affairs grew directly out of the post-Revolutionary move away from a traditional, elitist, exclusive absolutist sphere toward a rule of laws, established specifically by men, bourgeois men, in a new competitive, masculine, capitalist society which depended for its success on the submission of wives, and their willingness to forgo their own property and their own personal advancement, in the service of what Joan Landes has called the Gendered Republic.¹ However, the domestic arena, although constructed to foster the

notion of the Angel in the House, was from the start an unsustainable Republican ideal, and one that was constantly under siege both from without and within.

After the enormous social upheaval of the Revolutionary era, in the years between 1789 and 1793 there was a brief period in which women participated in public life; this period effectively came to an end when the National Convention decreed all women's clubs and associations to be illegal.² With the establishment of the First Republic, women were increasingly vilified for appearing in public debate. The greatest efforts were made to silence women; attempts by women to apply to women the principles of universal equality resulted in attacks on their character and reputation for daring to seek the civil status accorded to men. Such attacks typically centered on the women's demeanor and dress, as a way of side-stepping their very reasonable requests that there should be the same rights and status for *citoyennes* as for male citizens. In 1790 it was possible, for instance, for Etta Palm to petition the Confédération des amis de la vérité for civil and legal reforms to protect women from domestic violence and in favor of divorce. As the new constitutional compromise between the monarchy and republicanism took hold, the prevailing régime moved away from traditional monarchical authority toward a rule of law, with some success for women; for example, the adoption of marriage as a civil contract and divorce institutionalized on an equal basis for men and women.³ However, it was the implementation of the Napoleonic Code that dramatically changed women's position for the worse. For the majority of women the

increased regulation following the Civil Code of 1804 meant a loss both of power and personal independence. The importance of the rule of law, and specifically the Civil Code's strictures on married women's property, play a very real part in Eugénie Grandet. Although women's public participation had been a major feature of the earlier, more liberal revolutionary period, the severely masculinist, emergent society in 1815 determined to curtail women's activity in the streets, in commerce and in public life generally. The very real effect of the new legislation was women's ever greater seclusion within the domestic sphere.

Balzac's project in La comédie humaine was to portray every aspect of the new society, but he was particularly sensitive to the place of women in the bourgeois order, as we see in such titles as Le contrat de mariage, La femme de trente ans, La femme abandonnée, to mention only a few. Later, Flaubert, in Madame Bovary focuses on a woman confined to the house of a provincial doctor, and Zola, in L'assommoir explores the precarious domesticity of the working-class woman and, in Une page d'amour, the lot of a middle-class widowed mother, which, for all her better material station, is scarcely more fulfilling than that of the laundress.

My concern in this dissertation is to examine how a woman's domestic situation is portrayed in Balzac's Eugénie Grandet and La vieille fille, Flaubert's Madame Bovary and Zola's L'assommoir and Une page d'amour. My approach is twofold: firstly, to show how strongly the woman is identified with her home and defined by the spaces she inhabits, and secondly, to investigate the narrative

techniques used by the authors to describe this domestic spatiality. Since the subject matter of all the works relates to the domestic sphere, the action of the novels takes place primarily in various interior spaces, reflecting women's banishment from public life. While the political or public policy that puts them in their setting is the background to the narratives, the narration, however, inevitably involves a rupture of the very privacy that the bourgeois society was anxious to preserve. The writers bring the readers into the very private space of the middle-class home, or, in the case of L'assommoir, into the hitherto relatively unexamined working-class dwelling, thereby exposing the intimate life of the household to prurient scrutiny.

As my study is phenomenological in its approach, I am particularly interested in the specific angle of vision in domestic architecture, such as windows, doorways and staircases, as the means by which the narrators expose how the private space operates. By phenomenology, I mean the way in which the various texts function by presenting events as apprehended through the consciousness of the narrators, rather than as having any external authoritative validity. In the novels under review, it becomes important to know who is actually and effectively speaking. It is not always immediately obvious who the narrator is, or even whether he or she is reliable. For example, the opening words of Flaubert's Madame Bovary imply a first-person narrative: "Nous étions à l'étude quand il est entré", but, imperceptibly, the text slips into the third person after a few pages. Balzac's omniscient narrators are a hectoring

presence, constantly imposing their world-view on the reader. As Fredric Jameson has pointed out, Balzac's narrator in La vieille fille is heavily invested in the need to persuade his reader.⁴ In this, the earlier author is very far from Flaubert and his avowed effort that the narrator should be like God in the universe, everywhere present but nowhere visible.⁵ For his part, Zola moves ever further from the Balzacian model, claiming for himself a scientific approach: his aim is to expose what *is*, not to moralize or draw conclusions. In a sense, he places a camera in the midst of a particular milieu and allows it to record the various histories of the Rougon-Macquart family; if a cinematic technology had been available he would surely have embraced it. All of the novels under consideration feature women in their confinement in a domestic habitat. Even although the narrators are unidentified, there is never any doubt that they are male; it is always a matter of men looking at women, and no matter what techniques the authors use, the narrators always betray their masculine presence. In every instance the female characters are inextricably linked to the houses they inhabit. Although the individual environments are quite different, whether in provincial backwaters such as Saumur and Alençon under the Restoration, fictional, petit-bourgeois Yonville l'Abbaye, or the working-class Goutte d'Or in Second Empire Paris, the female protagonists are portrayed as inseparable from their domestic status: their fates show the breakdown of the domestic sphere, of the space where a woman is supposed to embody the Rousseauian ideal of a separate idealized feminine space, an ideal that is

unattainable and constantly transgressed by the male presence. The domestic paradise described by Rousseau and so eagerly devoured by women readers of Emile and La nouvelle Héloïse had seduced them into a belief in an idyll of domesticity, while the reality for too many women was very different.

As a mooring for my investigation I have tried to keep in mind Genette's work on the narrator in Figures of Literary Discourse. In his attempt to separate narrative (diegesis) from direct discourse (mimesis) Genette remarks the objectivity of the former and the subjectivity of the latter.⁶ In an effort to identify narrative in its purest state he finds that "the objectivity of narrative is defined by the absence of any reference to the narrator" so that eventually there no longer exists a narrator, the events being set forth chronologically as they occur. "No one speaks here; the events seem to narrate themselves" (139). He further states that : "The text is there before our eyes, without being preferred by anyone . . . none of the information it contains needs, in order to be understood or appreciated, to be related to its source, judged by its distance from or its relation to the speaker or to the utterance" (139). Such purity, it turns out, is almost impossible to sustain in a novel. As Genette says, "There is almost always a certain proportion of narrative in discourse, a certain amount of discourse in narrative." Speaking in terms of a *contamination* within the text he notes that "the narrative elements (within discourse) "generally remain linked to the reference by the speaker, who remains *implicitly present in the background*, and who may intervene again at any moment without this return being

experienced as an intrusion. This becomes particularly relevant in the case of Balzac's Eugénie Grandet and La vieille fille, where the narrator's persona is distinctly palpable although never explicitly revealed. Complete neutrality of the narrator is an unrealistic requirement and the authors, to a greater or lesser extent, exploit this to further their novelistic agenda.

In each of the novels to be considered, Balzac's Eugénie Grandet and La vieille fille, Flaubert's Madame Bovary, and Zola's L'assommoir and Une page d'amour, the narrators describe a dwelling intimately and personally associated with the figure of the heroine. Eugénie Grandet lives out her entire life in a gloomy provincial townhouse whose overwhelming melancholy aspect is more than just the setting for her story. Windows, doorways and staircases feature prominently in this novel: in a rare instance of female observation, Eugénie watches her sleeping cousin through a doorway; in a more typically masculine perspective, her estranged father surreptitiously observes her combing her hair through a window, unaware that she in turn sees him through a mirror.⁷ The male gaze in such tableaux is always controlling, whereas the woman's gaze is usually one of unsatisfied longing -- especially when she is looking out of windows (a scenario that becomes ever more common in both Madame Bovary and Une page d'amour). And some of Eugénie Grandet's most terrifying encounters with her father take place on the staircase or in the passageways behind the more public parts of the home. In spite of her father's most determined attempts to clastrate his women, his daughter's total incarceration

is an impossibility. Even in the Grandet household there is some sociability: precisely because of the fortune that the daughter of the house represents, there is constant social pressure to invade the private space she inhabits.

The Maison Cormon in La vieille fille embodies the changing society from the old aristocratic order, represented by de Valois, to the new bourgeois, industrialized world of Du Bousquier. No analysis of this novel is possible without an understanding of the historical moment that Rose represents and of which she is the avatar. The novel's action is situated at the period of the transfer from Empire to a constitutional monarchy but viewed through the prism of the more recent accession of Louis-Philippe's bourgeois administration. As Fredric Jameson has shown, Balzac, who as a royalist deplores the country's passing to the control of liberal middle-class forces, stages the novel as a political object lesson.⁸ Jameson characterizes the Maison Cormon as an 'architectural monument to the merchant aristocracy' (157). Rose is something of an anachronism, caught in the transitional net: the older merchant aristocracy which she represents, in some ways, has more in common with the traditional nobility of the *ancien régime* than with the emerging age of industrialism and financial speculation. Certainly a woman who, like Rose, was in possession of wealth and property had more personal independence in the older bourgeoisie of the pre-Revolutionary society. As Jameson points out, the text emphasizes the seeming durability of the values embodied in the Alençon townhouse. "Quelle paix! quel calme! . . . rien de transitoire: là, tout semble éternel". In its faded shabbiness

the house still has some prestige in the countryside, but after Rose's marriage it is transformed into a garish, inhospitable testament to the new age which has disrupted the former society. The silly, absurdly uneducated mistress sacrificed what position she had through marriage with a member of the new bourgeoisie of entrepreneurial capitalism.

The use of narrative technique to exploit domestic interiors and urban arrangements becomes much more subtle and skillful in the work of Flaubert. In Madame Bovary, the author's use of multiple narrators and points of view is enacted through the implementation of doors and windows; the narrators in the shifting perspectives are not explicitly identified; instead becoming simultaneously actors in the intrigue as well as the means by which the events are related. While it is a commonplace that Emma is repeatedly pictured as framed by a window,⁹ this framing is not merely a matter of décor but central to the author's conception of her.

Finally, the dwellings in Zola's L'assommoir and Une page d'amour are more than a mere backdrop to the action and have a physical, vital presence as strong as any character. The building where the Coupeau family live is a vertical village, teeming with life. The author's technique is to use a very visual and even photographic approach to his project: the novel is infused with a profusion of photographic allusions and terminology. The camera, which appears to be temptingly neutral, fits well with Zola's Naturalist agenda. However, it is not true that the camera does not lie, for "whatever it sees is determined by the eye

and the hand that control it.”¹⁰ This sits nicely with a phenomenological reading of the novel, privileging as it does the narrator or narrators. Zola himself became an enthusiastic amateur photographer somewhat later in life. Around the time of writing L'assommoir he was associated with the celebrated portrait photographer Paul Nadar, and his close friend Jean-Baptistin Baille wrote his doctoral thesis on optical and photographic lenses. Inevitably, the author conveys a sense of self-conscious intrusiveness in his attempt to infiltrate a social class that had been largely neglected until the time of writing. The result is necessarily voyeuristic and problematic, both on the part of the writer and for the reader. The author's use of a device that attempts to provide an impersonal account betrays his self-conscious embarrassment. Frederick Brown remarks that, “Zola had struggled against the voyeur in him(self) who had on various occasions pictured himself at real and imaginary windows”.¹¹ While ostensibly conducting a pseudo-scientific exposé, the author could almost be said to overstep the limits of decency: the subject matter shocked contemporary readers' sensibilities, dealing as it did with domestic violence, drunkenness, promiscuity and general disorder. However, such attention to slum-life is worthwhile and a suitable topic for the author's grand scheme, since the novel itself has a great deal to say about how the characters who populate the working-class Goutte d'Or have little respect for each other's privacy. Although he tries to be neutral and non-judgmental, the notional presence of a camera implies a photographer/narrator and underscores the very primacy of “seeing” in

the novels. The ways in which the central character, Gervaise, and her satellites in the laundry are observed make it abundantly clear that the observing agent is male, and that woman is the object of specular attention.

In the markedly different environment of Une page d'amour, the reader observes the protagonist H  l  ne Grandjean as would a spectator in the theater. Like Emma Bovary, H  l  ne is portrayed as sitting at the window of her apartment. The divide between her and Paris, or between the reader and the narrative, is like a scrim, recalling the theatrical notion of a fourth or glass wall. This in turn evokes Zola's theory that the world is observed, as it were, through a screen. In a letter to his friend Valabr  gue, Zola outlined his theory of literature which begins, "Every work of art is a window opening onto creation". As Frederick Brown notes, "this proto-manifesto is couched in visual and optical metaphors."¹²

Despite the fact that H  l  ne remains resolutely in the home, dutifully caring for her sick child, it is the fact of her attention to maternal care that opens up (legitimately) the most intimate regions of the home, when she brings in the doctor, who is also her neighbor in Passy, to tend to her daughter. Thereupon, follows the protagonist's initiation into local sociability. As Sharon Marcus points out, the home is not hermetically enclosed but reflects the "visibility and fluidity of all urban space even to the homes and women who, in an ideology of separate spheres, would have been associated with sequestered private space."¹³

In every case, the characters are defined by where they live, a situation that

will be enacted in different ways, whether in the upper bourgeois townhouse of Mlle. Cormon, the petit bourgeois provincial backwater of Yonville l'Abbaye, or in the very working-class Goutte d'Or, or the equally incarcerating Trocadéro in Passy. The boundaries of the domestic spaces described in the novels are often at once ambiguous yet crucial in their importance to the social code of behavior and its hectoring insistence on woman's incarceration. Social status, entitlement to a fortune or the distinct lack of it, make no difference. Yet the home is not sacrosanct, not inviolate, as the architects of the new social order seemed to imply. A society that endeavored to confine women, to remove them from the public forum, created an environment in which the free-wheeling male (de Valois, Du Bousquier, Charles Grandet, Rodolphe, Léon, Lantier) sees the domestic fortress and its nineteenth-century chatelaine as fair game. Local society, whether in the provinces or the capital, exerts its influence to ensure capitulation on the part of the woman to the male-imposed régime. Any middle-class woman who attempts to step outside of this circumscribed jurisdiction subjects herself to censure from the very society that determines her situation: working-class women had somewhat more scope since their need to enter the labor market required them to leave the home. Unfortunately, their forays into the street led to their being perceived by the middle-class male as prostitutes, and all too often, by a self-fulfilling prophecy, they fell prey to their circumstances. In the end, the idea that the home was a refuge proves to be chimerical; rather it becomes a space into which authority obtrudes, under the

banner of defending woman's respectability. The more the home is touted as a haven/heaven inhabited by an angel administering to man's and society's well-being, the more that space is transgressed by the very forces that constructed it.

Then again, there was often a confusion of dwelling space with that of commercial activity, as is seen in Madame Bovary: the sickly citizens of Tostes and Yonville with their snuffles and sneezes are only a partition away from the doctor's living quarters, and the Homais family also live above the shop. Similarly, in the Goutte d'Or the Lorilleux ply their trade from home, and Gervaise and her family live in amongst all the dirty linen of the *quartier*. In every instance, constructing the novel and constructing the house are one and the same: the novel *is* the house wherein the characters live.

1. Joan Landes, Women and the Public Sphere in the Age of the French Revolution, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988) 169-200.
2. Landes op. cit. shows how in the early period of the Revolution women were actively engaged in the Republican debate, attending fraternal societies and the national legislature, signing petitions, participating in demonstrations. (117-121).
3. Landes op. cit. 122.
4. Frederic Jameson, The Political Unconscious, (Ithaca New York: Cornell University Press, 1981) 156. Jameson states: "In Balzac, as the heavily persuasive nature . . . testifies, it has for whatever historical reason become necessary to secure the reader's consent, and to validate or accredit the object as desirable, before the narrative process can function properly."
5. Gustave Flaubert, Correspondance Letter to Mlle Chantepie, 18th March 1857.
6. Gerard Genette, Figures of Literary Discourse, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982).
7. Naomi Schor, Breaking the Chain: Women, Theory and Realist Fiction, (New

York: Columbia University Press, 1985). I discuss Schor's analysis of the significance of the architecture of the Grandet townhouse in my Chapter 1.

8. Jameson, *op. cit.*, 164.
9. Jean Rousset, Forme et Signification, (Paris: Corti, 1964).
10. Luc Sante, Camera Obscura, Introduction. (New York: Bullfinch Press 2004).
11. Frederick Brown, Zola: a Life (New York: Farrar Strauss Giroux, 1995) 118.
12. Brown, *op.cit.*, 117.
13. Sharon Marcus, Apartment Stories: City and Home in Nineteenth-Century Paris and London, (Berkeley and Los Angeles California: University of California Press, 1999) 5.

In The House of the Father: Problems of Patriarchy and Patrimony in Balzac's Eugénie Grandet

*"Charbonnier est Maire chez lui ."*¹ This rather oblique remark, first heard from the *président* Cruchot and reiterated several times throughout Balzac's Eugénie Grandet, is a summation of the issues of property entitlement and power structures within the family that are central to the novel. Written in 1833, the novel, which takes place during the Restoration, dramatizes the situation of an unmarried woman in a society that had undergone many legal and cultural changes since the Revolution of 1789, and particularly since the formulation of the Napoleonic Code in 1804. Increasingly, throughout the many revisions of the Code, women were banished from the public sphere and confined to a life of stifling domesticity. Eugénie's father has sequestered his wife and daughter in a

house whose melancholy aspect clearly reflects their social isolation. Astute and wily, he believes himself to be in full control of their lives and their financial resources, a situation supported by law. However, Grandet's fortune, which he holds onto jealously and zealously, was founded on his wife's dowry and inheritances from her family and can, on her death, be returned to their daughter. Although she has achieved her legal majority, and as such has certain legal entitlements, Eugénie is subjected to every form of social conditioning and duress, the result of which is her eventual complete submissiveness. Even when she is offered the means to take command of her own fate she says, marking the seal of her indoctrination: "Mon père est maître chez lui. Tant que j'habiterai sa maison, je dois lui obéir" (175).

From the *incipit* to the *dénouement* Eugénie is repeatedly and insistently identified with the house: she almost never leaves it, is virtually incarcerated in it, and is defined by her legal status as the daughter of the house. From the opening description, with its reference to cloisters and ruins, to the allusions at the close of the novel to the "maison sans soleil, sans chaleur" as "l'image de sa vie" (213-214), the narrator associates the austerity of the house with Eugénie's conventual existence. The early reference to "le regard pâle et froid d'une personne immobile dont la figure à demi monastique dépasse l'appui de la croisée" (27) prepares the reader for a tale of claustration and self denial. Indeed, the reclusive life of a religious is ever present; Eugénie lives in almost total seclusion and is under constant threat of banishment to the Abbaye at

Froidfond if she disobeys her father. Despite her status as heiress to her father's considerable fortune, she lives in cell-like conditions: like one in a religious order, she is bound to a life of obedience, poverty and chastity. The novel implicitly poses the question: is the extent to which a man is master in his own house, a situation that has grown directly out of Republican misogyny and that has been exacerbated under the Restoration, a reasonable society for women? And Balzac's answer is an emphatic no. Balzac does not propose legal or political reforms to counter this appalling state of affairs, he merely observes and lays open the situation for the reader's consideration. As is typical in the novelistic world he has created in the *Comédie humaine*, he establishes a set of domestic circumstances and allows the action to expose the potential injustice in the prevailing social system without providing recommendations to remedy the situation.² Instead he makes his point and attempts to persuade his reader to see the injustice by means of the narrator's tone.

Despite the reader's expectations, based on the title, Eugénie herself scarcely figures in the first twenty pages or so of the novel. Those pages are given over to a biography of her father: the house of dreary aspect is known in the region as "la maison à monsieur Grandet". Even although we are explicitly informed that his financial establishment began with his marriage, nevertheless, we hear that the house he occupied was his own. Yet, Grandet might well ponder the meaning of "charbonnier est maître chez lui": the legal framework he has striven to satisfy is not watertight, for his daughter has an opportunity on the death of

her mother to enforce restitution of her inheritance because she has come of age and is unmarried. The fact that she does not act upon this legal loophole when her mother does eventually die reveals how effectively she has been subjected to an intense process of indoctrination, and how hostile the world outside would be if she were to pursue her legal entitlement. Grandet has successfully relied on the law to secure his position as master of the household, with total control of his and his wife's combined property. He has further ensured docility from his wife and daughter by holding them in his financial thrall, meting out pitiful allowances while he builds his own secret hoard. When law and economic pressure break down, he resorts to violence. Not surprisingly, his dutiful daughter bends to his will. The father of the house has assumed a position of total dominance over his wife and daughter, both of whom are reduced to abject servility.

The house in Saumur provides a stage on which Balzac can enact a legal anomaly. As Michael Lucey says in The Misfit of the Family, "The Napoleonic Code is one of the material conditions that provides Balzac with his plots."³ Quoting from Balzac's Le Contrat de mariage he points out: "The Code, my dear friend, made women into wards, it considered them as minors, as children. Now how are children best governed? By fear" (33).

This is exactly the position of Eugénie and her mother in the present novel. Despite the fact that Eugénie has already passed her legal majority twice, her father repeatedly refers to her as 'the child' and often uses baby-talk in his

conversation with her. The same is true with regard to the Parisian cousin, Charles, and also to her other would-be suitor, Adolphe des Grassins, both of whom are referred to as children although they are already twenty-two years of age. Yet, Grandet pays great attention to the demands of the law: early on we learn that his acquisition of vineyards in the Saumur area were purchased “légalement sinon légitimement”(31); since he and his wife are legally married, Eugénie is referred to as “la fille unique de leurs légitimes amours”(31-32); when he is transporting his gold he takes care not to make too much noise saying that “les lois de police défendent le tapage nocturne”(128). And, of course, he is very careful to manipulate the legality of the situation when he sets up the convoluted financial details that exploit his brother’s failure.

Lucey very effectively shows how Grandet is pleased to evoke the law and to work within it insofar as it helps him to erect a protective barrier around his household, thereby creating a cocoon he believes to be impenetrable. However, Grandet has neglected to take care of an important condition in the law, that stipulated that, although a woman gave up all control over property on marriage, her unmarried children could, on the death of the mother, exact property due to them. Grandet is outraged when he learns that he may be required, on the death of his wife, to liquidate his assets in order to restore to Eugénie the inheritance from her mother. In theory, such financial provision could confer a measure of independence on the young woman, but the social reality is quite otherwise. Had Grandet married his daughter off by the age of twenty-one, she

would have passed from being *his* chattel to that of her husband. In his desire to keep his fortune intact, by not surrendering his daughter and the dowry that her marriage would necessitate, he has inadvertently opened up a legal loophole. The legal argument is foreshadowed in the letter Grandet receives from his dying brother: Charles' father was looking at a similar situation, in that he had compromised the fortune owing to his son through *his* mother and in respect of which the father is in default. Charles would have had the right to sue his own father, a situation which prefigures the same circumstances when Eugénie's mother dies, although Eugénie does not act upon it.

In his letter to Félix Grandet, Charles' father expresses his regret that he himself has suffered through his inattention to the law and public opinion, in that in marrying his own wife, Charles' mother, he chose to disregard the importance of a legitimate line. Charles' mother was the natural child of a *seigneur* and, accordingly, Charles has no support from his maternal line. Grandet of Paris bewails his lot: "Pourquoi n'ai-je pas obéi au préjugés sociaux? Pourquoi ai-je cédé à l'amour?"(67). Grandet of Saumur has not been guilty of any such sentimentality. He, as the citizens of Saumur are well aware, is at all times cautious and observant of the law, but while he is glad to take advantage of legal procedure when it suits him, he is appalled when he finds that the same law can work against him. By his own lights, Grandet has fulfilled his legal and social obligations: he has married and fathered a child, but he expects to profit from this and when he finds that the law, given certain circumstances, privileges

the independence of offspring, he behaves as if he has been cheated. This then, is the legal drama which is set up as it is understood by the citizens of Saumur, through whose understanding the reader enters the Grandet household.

The spaces within the house have an intimate connection to the penetration of women's privacy and the intrusiveness that the law sanctions and even encourages. Almost the entire action of the novel takes place in the cooper's house in Saumur, and while Eugénie and her mother are isolated, there is, inevitably, some social intercourse. It is through the eyes of those who enter the house that the reader sees just how contemporary capitalist society, in the person of Grandet, controls women. There are several layers of penetration of privacy of the house: the *salle* where tradespeople and guests gather is the most public, but their (and the reader's) entry therein stimulates interest in the more secretive regions, such as the various corridors, stairways and passageways which can be glimpsed, off-stage as it were, from the *salle* and, beyond those, the garden. Also, there are the rather bizarre bedroom arrangements and, most intriguing of all to any visitor to the house, the *tonnelier's* 'cabinet'.

The Grandet *salle* is aptly identified in the text as the theatre of life, in which the action unfolds very much like a stage play. The novel has opened with a lengthy preamble providing a background to what will follow: the events of the evening of Eugénie's twenty-third birthday are dramatically self-contained: the action takes place within the classical twenty-four hour period and honors the

unity of place, which is to say the *salle*, and provides a lively representation of how outsiders view the Grandet household. At the innermost level are the Grandets themselves, the Parisian cousin Charles, and the servant Nanon, who occupy center-stage and inhabit the regions hidden from the public. At the next level there are the six Cruchots and des Grassins who have the right to come calling, and who attain access only to the public part of the house, the *salle*. At a further remove there are the citizens of the town who, although anonymous, also play a narrative role, as it is often through their voices that the narration unfolds. Last of all there is the narrator who, while linked with the citizens, also has a distinct presence of his own. At times the narrator only circulates others' gossip, as in the opening prehistory; elsewhere he addresses the reader as 'vous', sometimes maintaining an ironic distance by which he assumes a more sophisticated persona. In the opening pages the narrator implicitly presents himself as a stranger who has come to Saumur. As the narrator traverses the town, he introduces, collectively, the assorted merchants, vintners and innkeepers who fill in the details of the background of their wealthy neighbor.

A wealth of detail attests to the high degree of interest in the Grandet household: this is very much a small town, and the locals' curiosity knows no bounds. One strategem by which the author provides a personality for the unnamed collective Saumurois is the extensive use of vernacular. This is established early in the novel by the use of such phrases as "voilà un temps d'or"(29), or "il pleut des louis"(29), and will carry well into the text, as, for

instance, when we hear Grandet referred to as 'le bonhomme'(33), etc.⁴ In this way, the narrator provides a measure of authority for the information the reader receives regarding the Grandet *ménage*. Having established a rapport between the stranger/narrator and the citizens, the text becomes focused on the fortunes of Félix Grandet himself. The rustic voices become ever more pressing as the narrator reaches the top of the hill, pulling his eager informants in his wake.

The account provided in the introductory biography relates only what is knowable to the villagers. It is by his reputation that we learn about the cooper, and the account does not go beyond what the villagers have access to. In the absence of hard data, they make informed guesses as, for example, when they assess his wealth by the respect accorded to him by the notary and the banker. To be sure, they speculate about his hoarding, filling in the gaps with conjecture about his secret "cachette pleine de louis" (33). In the company of the stranger/narrator and the villagers, the reader approaches the scene of the impending action by passing through the streets of Saumur until reaching the "maison pâle, froide, silencieuse"(40) with its heavy oak door. There is a doorknocker to announce the arrival of intruders, and a grille by means of which the curious can make their first observation of the interior: the grille is the first of a number of penetrating optical instruments: the presence of a grille conveys the impression of peering into private spaces, and establishes a division between occupant and outsider.

The reader is already among the inquisitive: the *salle* is described in all its

dreariness, and the reader senses the Saumurois' incomprehension at the incongruity between the cooper's wealth and the miserable living conditions of his family. The author's technique, holding the reader in suspense until the narrator can pass from hearsay (the information provided by the Saumurois) to seeing for himself the domestic horror of the interior, is a highly effective means to maintain a distance between the narrator and his eventual subject. The arrival of the Cruchots and des Grassins, who have come to celebrate with the Grandets, effectively opens the house to the reader's scrutiny and provides the author with a stage on which to enact the legal drama which is central to the plot. Both the Cruchots and the des Grassins have a vested interest in the household since each has a son who is a contender for the hand of the young heiress. However, the arrival from Paris of Eugénie's cousin Charles opens up a further level of inspection. In a rather playful sequence, the observers in the household become themselves the observed through the medium of a *lorgnon* which Charles uses to examine the very provincial provincials. The regular guests to the *salle* are fascinated at the sight of this dandy, this peacock in their midst. Mme des Grassins who, for her part, has lost all interest in her game of Loto, "observa tour à tour le cousin de Paris et Eugénie," while the latter "lança de furtifs regards à son cousin" (58). There is a good deal of mutual observation, and after a catalogue of Charles' many extravagances, obviously disapproved of by the other men in the room, there is the following delicious description of the watchers who are themselves being watched:

Maintenant, si vous voulez bien comprendre la surprise respective des Saumurois et du jeune Parisien, voir parfaitement le vif éclat que l'élégance du voyageur jetait au milieu des ombres grises de la salle et des figures qui composaient le tableau de famille, essayez de vous représenter les Cruchot. Tous les trois prenaient du tabac, et ne . . . etc (60)

Now attention turns to the forlorn *toilette* of the guests, seen through the fashionable Parisian lorgnette. Charles' horror is palpable as he turns his eyeglass to survey the room that has been presented as the most luxurious part of the house, and finds it sadly wanting. Like the grille, which provided the first surreptitious peering into the Grandet home, this *lorgnon* is the high-definition instrument of the scrutiny that is going on at all levels of the text. Similarly, the repeated knockings at the door--there are three in the above scene alone--are a highly theatrical device, each one a summons marking a possible invasion of the house with the prospect of abducting the daughter and the fortune she represents. These knockings are indicative of society's intrusive pressure on the space in which Grandet has contrived to isolate his women and his treasure.

The *salle* is where mother and daughter sit all day in the window, occupied with interminable mending. Grandet has effectively disabled them from active participation in his business; even when his wife's signature is required on legal documents she acquiesces without inquiry or demur, a situation which her daughter will come to repeat, demonstrating his power.

In addition to the invited guests, there are other legitimate intruders in the Grandet salon: we learn of the comings and goings of tradesmen who have

slipped in, accompanied by the anonymous narrator. Although unnamed, the various villagers play an important role in the narrative, since they are the voice of public opinion, an influential force in post-Revolutionary society, but one that Grandet has ignored.⁵ Balzac uses his narrator very effectively to bring the public into the fortress Grandet has so carefully constructed. As we have seen from the opening pages, the narrator appears as an outsider who is looking for the cooper's house. He leads the reader through Saumur's narrow streets, accompanied by the citizens of the town who are eager to fill in the background of the family. It is through their voices that the reader learns how Grandet accumulated his vast fortune and of the importance of the money that came to him through his wife's La Bertellière line. The citizens maintain a lively interest in their neighbor's finances; we learn, for instance, that: "La ville de Saumur présuma donc la valeur des économies d'après les revenus des biens au soleil" (32). In the absence of specific financial details, they gauge Grandet's fortune by the perceived deference paid to him by messieurs Cruchot and des Grassins: "Il n'y avait dans Saumur personne qui ne fût persuadé que monsieur Grandet n'eût un trésor particulier, une cachette pleine de louis" (33).

Following Charles' arrival we hear of speculation on the part of the local innkeepers and tradesmen. They all know exactly how much Grandet's servant Nanon earns, and the reader is made aware that this is talked about as she is described as passing for one of the richest servants in the town. By using their input, the narrator has brought the inquisitive villagers right into the

house in order to convey to the reader the horror with which they regard their monomaniacal neighbor. The point of all this rather elaborate construction is to establish a number of different levels of penetration of a family's intimate space. Naturally, the people of Saumur are curious about the Grandets who, although they seem to spend nothing, are well-to-do, which makes them local celebrities.

With the inner space of the house perforce opened up by the arrival of Charles, the action of the plot takes place more and more in the secret and private recesses of the house: the passageway between the parlor and the kitchen, where Eugénie and Charles share their only embrace; the rickety staircase that the young protagonist negotiates so fearfully; and the mysterious *cabinet* which has been partially walled off and can only be accessed through Grandet's own room, entry to which is forbidden, even to his own wife.

As the interest of the text moves into the recesses of the house, Eugénie becomes increasingly associated with the *escalier*, and her father with the *cabinet*. In her efforts to deceive her father and to favor her cousin, the young woman is compared to a Parisienne who helps her lover to escape by means of a silken ladder, an apt metaphor, as it turns out. Rising early on the morning after Charles' arrival, she experiences for the first time the awakening of sexual desire as she contemplates herself in the mirror and finds herself lacking in appeal. Tentatively, she steps out of her bedroom and moves toward the *escalier* leading to Charles' room, but she does not as yet climb the stairs,

resolving instead to tend to her cousin's well-being. However, her father, who rules the house by fear, is on the stairs, rendering it forbidden territory; when she hears her father's footsteps, she runs terror-stricken into the garden. This is the first time that her fear of the father has been made so clear: "pour la première fois, elle eût dans le coeur de la terreur à l'aspect de son père, vît en lui le maître de son sort" (82). Yet, on the same morning when her father is out of the way, and despite her mother's admonition that he is capable of beating them both if he learns of their defiance, she risks going upstairs to the attic, where she cannot resist pausing at the door of Charles' room and listening anxiously. Again, while it is still early morning, she persuades her mother to come with her upstairs, on the understanding that if anyone should knock they will quickly come back down: with trepidation, "le coeur palpitant (elles) montèrent à la chambre de Charles" (103). As her passion increases she becomes more daring, venturing a little further each time, the references to the *escalier* becoming more frequent as they are associated with her burgeoning sexuality. Through the night, when she is unable to sleep, she again climbs the stairs. This time the bedroom door is open and, when Charles opens his eyes and speaks to her, she leaves, feeling at one and the same time, ashamed and yet happy to have approached him. Her sexual arousal is clearly conveyed when we learn that, back in her own room, "elle pût à peine se tenir sur ses jambes" (110).

In her father's absence, she goes three or four times to listen at her cousin's

bedroom door, although she still does not enter, but instead engages in some verbal negotiations about breakfast. This, of course, is merely a pretext to enable her to approach his quarters. In the end, it is in order to avoid confronting her father that she crosses this difficult threshold and enters the space occupied by the young man. At this point the narrative is given through Eugénie's rapturous personification of the *escalier*: "Elle le voyait lumineux, il parlait, il était jeune comme elle, jeune comme son amour auquel il servait" (113). This is not the first time that the *escalier* has been associated with Eugénie. At the very beginning of the action, where the text specifically notes Eugénie's age, reminding us that she has already achieved her legal majority, Grandet very reluctantly repairs a dangerous flaw on the stair. The *escalier* which represents the young woman's sexuality is hindered and hampered by her relation with her father and with his stubborn refusal to admit to her maturity. Later, when Grandet sets about his nocturnal manoeuvres to transport his gold, it is on the stairs that his daughter, wakeful and troubled and thinking only of her beloved, unexpectedly meets her father's gaze which "la glaça de terreur" (128). These are strong words, emphasizing the father's pathological hold over his women, the power he has over life and death. This paterfamilias is not merely *maître chez lui*: he is a tyrant.

Whenever Grandet climbs the staircase it is invariably to enter his *cabinet*. Balzac insisted on this word for the secret chamber where Grandet works like a *niebelung* or an alchemist. In nineteenth-century fiction the *cabinet*

designated a private place. As Emily Apter has pointed out: "Zones forbidden to the opposite sex, such as the man's study or *salle d'antiquités* and the woman's dressing room or *boudoir*, served to render the cabinet a gendering divide within the interior."⁶ This is certainly the case in Eugénie Grandet. Félix Grandet allowed no one, not even his wife, to enter into this partially walled-off space, which can be accessed only through Grandet's own room. Already, in the prehistory at the beginning of the novel, we have heard the villagers speculate on the existence of just such a cubby-hole:

Il n'y avait dans Saumur personne qui ne fût persuadé que monsieur Grandet n'eût un trésor particulier, une *cachette pleine de louis*, et ne se donnât nuitamment les ineffables jouissances que procure la vue d'une grande masse d'or." (33)

Later, when the reader for the first time experiences the tour of the rest of the house and learns of the *cabinet*, the text reads:

Là, sans doute, quelque cachette avait été très habilement pratiquée, là s'emmagasinaient les titres de propriété, là pendaient les balances à peser les louis, là se faisaient nuitamment et en secret les quittances, les reçus, les calculs: de manière que les gens d'affaires, voyant toujours Grandet prêt à tout, pouvaient imaginer qu'il avait à ses ordres une fée ou un démon. Là, sans doute, quand Nanon ronflait à ébranler les planchers, quand le chien-loup veillait et bâillait, quand madame et mademoiselle Grandet étaient bien endormies, venait le vieux tonnelier choyer, caresser, couvrir, cuver, cercler son or. (74)

This description, in explicitly sexual language, of Grandet stroking, caressing his gold is highly fetishistic and prepares the reader for a disturbing impression of an unwholesome and incestuous household. Indeed, the narrator goes on to compare Grandet's attitude as being like a voluptuary, a gambler or a courtesan. In fact, the text never takes the reader into the *cabinet*, so we

only have speculation on the part of the narrative voice about what goes on inside this secret space but it is clearly conceived as a kind of transgressive erotic collecting.⁷

When Grandet emerges in a rare state of excitement from his *cabinet*, after pondering how best to exploit his brother's bankruptcy, he is described as *distrain* and Madame Grandet remarks, "Eugénie, ton père a décidément quelque chose" (111). Yet again, it is when he has just come out of this *laboratoire* (after preparing to remove his gold) that he meets his terror-stricken daughter on the stairs. Here, as before, the reader is not taken into the secret space, but instead learns about it through Nanon, who only hears Grandet pacing around inside. When Eugénie, preoccupied with thoughts of her cousin, decides to investigate, she is panic-stricken at the sight of a bright light emanating from her father's door and the sound of horses preparing for flight. She actually considers fleetingly that the house might be on fire, and that her father may be preparing to abduct her cousin, both of which catastrophes are, in a sense, true. When Eugénie and her father meet on the stairway landing, the *escalier*, which represents her fearful sexual nature and the *cabinet*, which is her father's perverted sexuality, come face to face in a terrifying confrontation. This scene marks a turning point in the reader's understanding of a household that is more than merely claustrophobic, rather, it is one that will increasingly be shown to be violent and incestuous.

We have already learned how the door from the corridor to the cabinet has

been walled up, making it accessible only from the bedroom: the window is barred, the walls thick, there are shutters and, of course, it is kept locked: Grandet locks up everything. This is in contrast to the open and uncomplicated, traditional lifestyle of the other villagers whose houses are described as having nothing that is mysterious. There are monstrous shades of Bluebeard in Grandet's resolute effort to form a protective seal to this most secret space. The text takes care to point out that Eugénie's bedroom is opposite the walled-up door, also, that there is a partition between the quarters of the husband and wife. In fact, the respective rooms of the married couple are more remote from each other than those of Madame Grandet and her daughter.⁸

This very insistent, even obsessive division of the intimate regions of the house draws attention to Grandet's perverted sexuality. Grandet himself appears to be building barriers against his own self-perceived, untrustworthy sexual nature, which he has displaced into a fetish for gold: his identification of Eugénie with his passion for gold is total, and he has no intention of letting either out of his hands. The abounding barriers, so carefully constructed in the house, clearly represent some kind of self-enforced sexual abstinence on the part of the miserly Grandet. He is repeatedly described as miserly in all respects, including his movements and his speech. We learn, for instance, that "il exprimait ses idées par de petites phrases sentencieuses et dites d'une voix douce"(35), and again, "il . . . semblait économiser tout, même le

mouvement”(36).

All of Grandet’s natural desires are suppressed in the furtherance of his monomania, in his case, an excessive lust for gold. In the service of this obsession, Grandet turns his sexual energy into his passion for gold, which in turn identified with his daughter. Balzac had already expounded in La peau de chagrin his philosophy of the importance of conserving the life force of sexual energy, which he sees as a finite commodity that can be expended profligately, resulting in early death, or used wisely, for which the reward is knowledge. Grandet’s characteristic remark: “Je ne sais pas, je ne puis pas, je ne veux pas”(36), recalls the earlier 1831 novel. However, Grandet, who never expends energy rashly, but stalks his prey like a wild beast waiting to pounce, lives to a great old age, which is part of the bargain offered to those who are mindful of the lesson of the ‘peau de chagrin’, but he fails to acquire knowledge, because he has been excessive in one respect, his pursuit of gold.

All talk of a prospective marriage for Eugénie comes from outsiders. In the novel’s opening dialogue it is Nanon who announces that the young girl will surely marry within the year; but Madame Grandet seems to be doubtfully biting her lip when she says, “Je ne vois point de partis pour elle”(47).

Although there is conjecture on Cruchot’s part that “Grandet de Paris envoie son fils à Saumur dans des intentions extrêmement matrimoniales”(71), Félix Grandet is himself never disclosed in any such speculation. On the contrary, he bursts into his daughter’s bedroom (unlike his own, her personal space is not

proof against invasion) like an impetuous lover on the morning of her birthday, to shower her with gifts of gold, saying, "ce sera ton *douzain* de mariage" (47). Since he considers such a gift as "mettre son argent d'une caisse dans une autre" (46), he clearly has no thought of letting go of either his daughter or his gold. Indeed, as marriage is so heavily identified with dowry he, in a sense, sees himself as her bridegroom. Occasionally, Grandet alludes directly to a marriage for his daughter, as when, seeing the Cruchots and des Grassins as the only likely prospects for Eugénie, he says to himself: "Ils sont là pour mes écus. Ils viennent s'ennuyer ici pour ma fille. Hé! Ma fille ne sera pour les uns ni pour les autres" (54). Even when a third prospect appears in the form of Charles, he says he would rather throw his daughter in the Loire than marry her to her penniless cousin. He clearly reserves for himself the prerogative of a husband's right of possession.

Grandet's comments vis à vis his daughter's marriage are often evasive and ambiguous as in the following exchange, which has a sinister ring:

Grandet contempla sa fille, et s'écria gaiement: "elle a vingt-trois ans aujourd'hui l'enfant, il faudra bientôt s'occuper d'elle"
Eugénie et sa mère se jetèrent silencieusement un coup d'oeil d'intelligence. (47)

And again, on the fateful New Year's day when Grandet asks to see his daughter's gold, not knowing that she has given it to her cousin, his tone is wheedling, like an unwelcome seducer's when he says, "Il faut que tu me donnes ton or. Tu ne le refuseras pas à ton pépère, ma petite fille, hein?" (164). And when he continues to talk in terms of her eventual marriage,

saying, "Quand je te marierai, ce qui sera bientôt" (164), there is no mention of to whom.

It is very clear that he equates sexual love with the gold she had from him:

Tu répugnes peut-être à te séparer de ton or, hein, fille? Tu devrais me baiser sur les yeux pour te dire ainsi des secrets et des mystères de vie et de mort pour les écus. Vraiment les écus vivent et grouillent comme des hommes: ça va, ça vient ça sue, ça produit". (164-165)

In talking thus of his gold as a displacement for his daughter, he even conceives his passion in terms of progeny! When Eugénie refuses to disclose how she has disposed of her treasure, in response to her: "C'est un secret inviolable . . . N'avez-vous pas vos secrets?", Grandet says, "Ne suis-je pas le chef de ma famille?"(166), yet another reiteration of "charbonnier est maire chez lui". He is clearly in a state of panic when he realizes she has given her all to another:

Comment! Ici, dans ma propre maison, chez moi, quelqu'un aura pris ton or! . . . Les plus honnêtes filles peuvent faire des fautes, donner je ne sais quoi, cela se voit chez les grands seigneurs et même chez les bourgeois (167).

Such ruminations are sexually highly suspect: Grandet is behaving here like a betrayed lover.

Grandet's propensity for violence explodes when he surprises his wife and daughter in the act of adoring the contents of the casket that Charles has entrusted to Eugénie: the casket is on the bed and the two women are indulging themselves, idolizing the portrait of Charles' mother which provides them with a

mediated version of Charles himself. Grandet is beside himself with excitement at the scene, and what follows is figured in the text as sexual assault. The sight of the gold moves him to voice approbation for what he, at first, views as his daughter's astuteness in securing a return for the favor she bestowed on her cousin. Grandet considers that what is his daughter's is his own for the taking, and he proceeds to wrest it from her. This is described in the most brutal terms and we learn that "Eugénie tremblait de tous ses membres"(180). She protests that the treasure on the bed is held as a sacred trust, a pledge. Her most urgent pleadings have no effect on her father who pulls out his knife to prise the treasure from its setting, grabbing it, and placing it on a chair the better to have at it. His daughter struggles to defend her most precious possession but she is violently thrown onto her mother's bed while her assailant uses his knife to exert his will. Gold, daughter, wife, marital bed, phallic knife are all compressed into a single violent act. On her knees, Eugénie beseeches her father to stop, begging him not to lay a hand on the precious object. In the most specific terms, she protests that it is not his for the taking, that it belongs to another, and, she says: "Je dois la lui rendre intacte." In a further use of the language of defloration she pleads, "Mon père, ne la détruisez pas, ou vous me déshonorez" (181). Only when she threatens self-immolation does he stop just short of penetration.

When it is all over, Grandet goes once again to the *cabinet*, this time returning with a handful of gold coins, which he spills over the bed. The harrowing scene discussed above has been prepared by a number of pointers,

hinting at an ugly, brutish sexuality. Grandet keeps his knife in his trouser pocket. It is described as being made of horn with a coarse blade and he uses it crudely, as when he breakfasts in a standing position. This is in marked contrast to the civilized manners of the beloved cousin, who sits at table and cuts his soft-boiled egg daintily. Charles is the possessor of "le plus joli fusil, le plus joli couteau, la plus jolie gaine de Paris" (59), and he keeps all these magnificent appurtenances in the exquisite repository, given to him by his mother, and which he will entrust to Eugénie. A further indication of Grandet's crude sexuality is the mysterious vein, the *loupe*. Grandet is always touching himself, tapping his pockets to check up on keys, money or knife, stroking his chin. But it is the *loupe* which most directly suggests his displaced sexual excitement. When thoughts of how to exploit his deceased brother's bankruptcy begin to occur to Grandet, the vein on his nose, we are told, seemed to dilate. For him, financial opportunity is like sexual arousal. When Cruchot outlines the means by which Grandet can effect a financial coup, we learn that the *loupe* was a sign of an inner turmoil; he strokes this wen while playing des Grassins off against Cruchot for the favor of representing him in Paris. When he learns that his daughter has given to another the treasure which he believed to belong to himself alone, his wife, who knows him very well, remarks "un mouvement terrible dans la loupe de son mari"(169): it is positively tumescent. At his death it is the sight of the gleaming crucifix that causes his *loupe* to stir for the last time. With such behavior in the home, it is hardly surprising that the narrator has entered the

house with trepidation: Eugénie Grandet is revealed to be an incestuous tale, not in the literal sense, but in its manner of conveying a claustrophobic household, a sense of an unwholesome marriage and inward-turning familial existence.

The inner regions of the house have been discovered to be no domestic haven, no refuge for women, who have no choice but to remain under the rule of patriarchy. Eugénie and her mother remain enclosed in an environment that offers them no personal or social autonomy. There is, however, another space associated with Eugénie that affords her some brief respite from incarceration, but which will ultimately be breached by her father and will come to represent her most extreme disappointment. The garden, which is the part of the establishment furthest from public view, has a strangely ambiguous status in the novel. Although it is the scene of the heroine's romantic idyll with her cousin, it is from the start described in terms of decay. Despite the fact that it is associated with her falling in love, a state normally represented in the spring of life, the episode takes place as winter is coming on and the garden is an overgrown wilderness associated with melancholy.⁹ The features of the garden which are of interest here are the walnut tree, the well, and the connection through a mirror to Eugénie's bedroom.

On the day following Charles' arrival, when Eugénie is up early in the morning and at her bedroom window looking out on the garden, she is said to experience a vague sensation of pleasure, and she is identified with the details of

the countryside and nature. The garden is described as narrow and constricted, melancholy, limited, though not without some appeal. It is autumn and the flowers are fading. In some agitation, she gets up and goes to the mirror where she is said (by the narrator) to regard herself critically as would an author. However, as her love for Charles blossoms and is reciprocated, it is the garden that becomes their trysting place. Madame Grandet is nervous when she sees the young couple together in the garden, fearing her husband's wrath. Eugénie remains confident as long as her father is gone from the house. It is here that the young lovers exchange promises, on Eugénie's part to wait, and on Charles', to return. They sit on the little bench beside the well and remain there until sunset. When they are alone together in the garden for the last time, Charles is about to kiss Eugénie but, terrified, she sees her father at the window and they run indoors where, in the dark corridor, they share their only embrace. They exchange promises of marriage and have already exchanged gifts, tokens of love, so a kind of marriage contract or engagement has been effected between them.

After Charles' departure, Eugénie spends her mornings sitting on the little bench where they formerly sat together, pining for a word from him. Though the garden has been described as enclosed and restricted, for her, its space seems to extend to the future as she looks to the sky. But, in fact, the garden is as far from the house as she will go, except in imagination by means of the *mappemonde* which she has pinned to her mirror and through which she

attempts to follow Charles' whereabouts. The little bench where she sits is underneath a walnut tree, stretching from the garden all the way up to Grandet's quarters, "un immense noyer qui inclinait ses branches jusque sur le cabinet du tonnelier" (78). This walnut tree is mentioned again later when Eugénie is confined to her room and it has become Grandet's habit, since his daughter's imprisonment, to enter the garden:

Le lendemain, suivant une habitude prise par Grandet depuis la réclusion d'Eugénie, il vint faire un certain nombre de tours dans son petit jardin. Il avait pris pour cette promenade le moment où Eugénie se peignait. Quand le bonhomme arrivait au gros noyer, il se cachait derrière le tronc de l'arbre, restait pendant quelques instants à contempler les longs cheveux de sa fille, et flottait sans doute entre les pensées que lui suggérait la tenacité de son caractère et le désir de baiser son enfant. Souvent il demeurait assis sur le petit banc de bois pourri où Charles et Eugénie s'étaient juré un éternel amour, pendant qu'elle regardait aussi son père à la dérobée ou dans son miroir. S'il se levait et recommençait sa promenade, elle s'asseyait complaisamment à la fenêtre et se mettait à examiner le pan de mur où pendaient les plus jolies fleurs. (176)

The big walnut tree seems to connect the garden, a space associated with Eugénie, to the cabinet which is very much Grandet's private, even secret space. There is a circle of connection from the garden with the bench by way of the tree into the bedroom through the window and, seen in the mirror, reflecting back into the garden. The overwhelming impression here is the furtive nature of the mutual observation. It is highly erotic and fetishistic. Symbolically, Grandet has encroached on the space that the young couple had made their own: he has usurped the prerogative of the young lover. This episode, with Grandet in the garden and the young girl in her room, has a distinctly medieval flavor, and one thinks of the many tales of a maiden locked

in the tower, as in the story of Yonéc, told by Marie de France, in which, despite the lady's imprisonment a lover appears, literally out of the blue, in the form of a bird: interestingly, Charles is described, more than once in the text in avian terms, as a peacock and as a phoenix. Certainly, Grandet has imprisoned his daughter in a tower in an attempt to secure her virginity or unmarried state, and he has been at least partially successful in this. In its description of the garden the text itself marks this connection to an earlier period of romance when it alludes to a natural depression, likened to the tombstone of some medieval knight, put there by his widow at the time of the crusades.

Naomi Schor sees in the description of this sunken garden a third alternative to the two caskets which have already figured in the narrative as gifts presented to Eugénie by des Grassins and Charles. In a Freudian reading on the Theme of the Three Caskets, Schor superimposes the scenario familiar from the Merchant of Venice onto Balzac's tale of a father's obsessive attachment to his daughter.¹⁰ Schor's evocation of Shakespeare does not extend to a consideration of Grandet as Shylock, but the tonnelier's anguished cries when he learns that his daughter has absconded with her father's gold bring to mind Shylock's "My daughter! O my ducats! O my daughter!" in Act 2 scene 8 of Shakespeare's play. Grandet resembles Shakespeare's Shylock in locking up his daughter, whom he also identifies with his lust for gold. Both Grandet and Shylock are tyrannical fathers who lock up

their daughters, the latter in a famous play and the former in a novel which, as remarked above, resembles a staged play in its construction of certain key scenes.¹¹

Connected to the spatial identification of the heroine with the garden is the extent to which she is likened to a flower. "Eugénie était encore sur la rive de la vie où fleurissent les illusions enfantines, où se cueillent les marguerites avec des délices plus tard inconnues" (80). When she experiences the profound sense of shock at her father's brutal dismissal of Charles as a marriage prospect for her, we learn, "Les lointaines espérances qui pour elle commençaient à poindre dans son coeur fleurirent soudain, se réalisèrent et formèrent un faisceau de fleurs qu'elle vit coupées et gisant à terre"(87). When her father explains to his daughter the financial dishonor that hangs over Charles she is said to be, "Probe autant qu'une fleur née au fond d'une forêt est délicate, elle ne connaissait ni les maximes du monde, ni les raisonnements captieux, ni ses sophismes: elle accepta etc"(101). However, just as the flowers in Grandet's blighted garden are decaying, faded and withered, so Eugénie's future is stifled by her father's stranglehold on his women's miserable lives.

It is again in the garden that, referring to Charles' departure, the servant Nanon says "Si j'avais eu un homme à moi, je l'aurais . . . suivi dans l'enfer. Je l'aurais . . . Quoi . . . enfin, j'aurais voulu m'exterminer pour lui; mais . . .rin. Je mourrai sans savoir ce que c'est la vie"(158). Nanon understands that the moment was there, the opportunity, and that Eugénie failed to act upon it. She

would have needed to plead with Charles to take her with him. Now she can never escape her father's influence. After the scene described above, Eugénie has become fully submissive, as is seen in her response to Cruchot's advice. Early in her life her father tried isolation, cajolery, promises and gifts to keep her in his domain, but as she matured and became confident that she was loved she attempted to assert herself. When her father realized that she had attempted to escape his jurisdiction he resorted to violence and incarceration, after which she emerges docile and submissive. Grandet has achieved the status of "maître chez lui".

The domestic fortress has been shown to have many weaknesses: the maiden can not be contained in the tower. Grandet believed he had constructed an impenetrable edifice to protect his assets and keep his daughter inviolate, but it was assailed on all fronts; legal, social, financial and affective. The law of the land, in the form of the Napoleonic Code, despite its heavy insistence on women's dependence on men is not proof against every eventuality: Grandet found that the legal wall had cracks in it, every bit as worrisome as the flaw in the stair of his townhouse. Although he has very emphatically isolated his wife and daughter, total reclusion is impossible. It is the presence of the daughter, and the fact that she is the conduit to the cooper's accumulated wealth that brings local society, in the form of suitors, into the household. Public opinion, which has secured a good deal of respect for the successful Grandet, the townsfolk are in awe of his financial acumen,

can be a double-edged sword: all Saumur is scandalized to learn that Grandet keeps his daughter on starvation rations. The many locks and keys, walls and partitions, only serve to heighten public curiosity. Finally, and not least, there is the role of the young woman's desire. When her heart is touched by the presence of her attractive cousin she is motivated toward independent action. Even in the face of her father's tyranny and her own very real fear, she takes steps, tentative at first, to enter into a contract with Charles. At the time of her romance with her cousin she is, for the first time, shown to be assertive, taking the initiative of hospitality and going behind her father's back to provide little luxuries. In her personal development Eugénie is shown to have some potential for autonomy: early in the text she is described in rather masculine terms. Her defiance of her father's wishes are a healthy expression of her move toward adulthood, but, in the end, violence and duress prevail and she is ultimately crushed.

1. Honoré de Balzac, Eugénie Grandet, (Paris: Flammarion, 1964) 50.
2. Deborah Houk Schocket, Modes of Seduction: Sexual Power in Balzac and Sand, (Madison N.J.: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2005)
3. Michael Lucey, The Misfit of the Family, (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2001).
4. Philippe Dufour, "Les avatars du langage dans Eugénie Grandet", Année Balzacienne, 1995.
5. Joan Landes, Women and the Public Sphere in the Age of the French Revolution, (Ithaca, N.Y. : Cornell University Press, 1988) 41-42.
Landes here evokes Habermas and who credits the historical triumph of the bourgeois constitutional and legal order (with) . . . a social product, public opinion. This "opinion was not mere opinion (prejudice or habit). It was the result of deliberation on matters of the "general interest.""
6. Emily Apter, Feminizing the Fetish, (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1991).

7. Anne-Marie Smith-Di Basio, "Le texte de la vie des Femmes" Female Melancholia in Eugénie Grandet Nottingham French Studies, vol 35-36, 1995, 53.
8. Naomi Schor, "Eugénie Grandet: Mirrors and Melancholia" in Breaking the Chain, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985). Schor is more interested in the relationship between Eugénie and her mother, which she finds to be a failure of the passage from the Imaginary to the Symbolic, where the Symbolic is defined in Lacanian terms as presided over by the father and the Imaginary relates to the mother. Schor characterizes Eugénie Grandet as existing at the junction of the Imaginary and the Symbolic. Schor pays attention to the important revelation about the sleeping quarters with the "chambre contigue", "cloisonnée" etc, which she finds to be "reduced to claustrophobically narrow proportions".
9. Anne-Marie Smith-Di Basio, op. cit.
10. Schor op. cit.
11. Graham Robb: Balzac: A Biography, (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1994). Robb points out that in early criticism Balzac was accused of plagiarizing an English play, The Usurer's Daughter. Modern scholarship tends to think this was unlikely since Balzac knew little English. However he almost certainly knew all about Shylock.

Rose Cormon and the House of Glass

In the exposition of Balzac's La vieille fille, a novel that tells the history of the Restoration through the marital ambitions of the various social classes, the narrator remarks that all provincial houses are made of glass. This is an apt assessment in a narrative that purports to figure post-Revolutionary French society through the medium of an ageing spinster, very emphatically connected to the house she inhabits. The comparison to a glass house is particularly appropriate since the novel dangles before the reader a secret that is at the center of the intrigue. Glass houses are not susceptible to secrecy but, in fact,

the motor of the narration depends largely on the extent to which a population, in this case the people of Alençon, impinges on the private life of its leading citizens, invading the home of Rose Cormon, the old maid whose unlikely body is the nexus for the change in direction society is about to take. Her suitors represent the various political factions, each with a vested interest in a marital alliance: the chevalier de Valois stands for the courtly elegance of the *ancien régime*, and Du Bousquier, the more aggressively ambitious *parvenu*, for the opportunistic middle class. A third contender, the romantic poet Athanase Granson, never has a hope of success in a society which, according to the author himself, was "cold, petty and without poetry."¹ The two major competitors for the hand of Mlle Cormon are the subjects of much intrusive speculation. The focus of the present study will be, firstly, a consideration of how much privacy was possible in a community whose members consider they have a stake in a provincial marriage, emblematic of the greater society at large in which they operate. Secondly, I shall look at the ways in which the text insists on the female protagonist's identification with the house and how the evolving democracy strips her of all autonomy in her household while increasingly confining her to it. This investigation will necessitate an assessment of the persona of the narrator or Implied Author.

Before arriving at the ostensible subject, the old maid herself, the narrative approaches the major players who pursue her. The exposition is each time the same: a personal description amplified by an account of the character's living

space. This account invariably takes up the matter of the subject's intimate life and the possibility or otherwise of maintaining privacy. For instance, early on in the account of the chevalier we are told that, "La vie privée de ce vieux garçon était en apparence ouverte à tous les regards, mais en réalité mystérieuse" (57 Flammarion). In the case of the chevalier, the mysterious personal details relate to his seemingly ambiguous sexuality and to his convoluted finances. The method of narration is interesting for the purpose of this study: Balzac, commonly associated with omniscient narration, here has his narrator assume a persona who, while never explicitly identified, is able to move through the various Alençon households, as if he were himself an Alençonnais. In this way he is able to tease the reader, to titillate the imagination, while leaving any complete understanding of de Valois and Du Bousquier an open question until the end of the novel. Unlike the unidentified narrator in Eugénie Grandet, who presents himself as an outsider, guiding the reader through unfamiliar terrain, in the 1836 novel we have the impression that the narrator is a member of the local society, himself part of the circle that frequents the Cormon *soirées*. This narrator draws our attention to the crude allusions to the chevalier's large nose, seeing it as a possible indication of sexual potency. However, the secret remains unresolved and is only alluded to in a furtive, covert way, which suits the narrator's lascivious tone. Similarly, the matter of de Valois' title is left vague and ambiguous, and the subterfuge involved in the settling of his finances is clearly much discussed by his social peers as well as by the young working girls

who share the rooming house in which he lives. The many oblique references to the circulation of gossip go some way to explaining just how the Alençon rumor machine operates. The details of the chevalier's pension are known because of the secrecy to which the chevalier swore the first of his confidants, a sure-fire means of guaranteeing circulation. This ties in well with the notion of the 'maison de verre.' In a small provincial town the private lives of the more prominent citizens are an open book.

It is through the person of Suzanne that the reader slips into the chevalier's private apartments. Mme Lardot's house, where de Valois lives, is a repository of dirty linen. More than that, it is a laundry whose provenance is the best houses of the town. This puts the chevalier in a privileged position *vis à vis* the various intrigues of the town, although we are apprised of his discretion: the narrator makes it clear that he never utters a word that would result in his exclusion from any of these households. De Valois likes to encourage the girls to tell the secrets of the households they visit. There is an indulgent tone, both on the part of the chevalier and of the narrator where "les jolies faiblesses" are concerned, and we learn that the townspeople are tolerant of de Valois' own weaknesses. The narrator is not without personality; although anonymous, he speaks directly to the reader, thereby heightening the rather gossipy tone. A number of devices contribute to this effect: a propensity to address the reader as 'vous', as in, "prendrez-vous M. de Valois" (64), "le chevalier avait la voix (qui) vous eût surpris" (57), indicates a kind of precious complicity between narrator and

reader, as does his use of the imperative, “sachez-le” (54), “notez ce point” (60), “croyez-le bien” (67). The many instances of parentheses and exclamation points, “il avait eu des migraines!” (56), “(et il avait de l’esprit!)” (64), highlight a value judgment on the part of the narrator, and reveal a marked absence of neutrality. The very fact of the narrator’s addressing the reader thus implies an “I”, an unidentified character, one able to circulate unnoticed and without drawing too much attention to himself. At times the narrator even announces himself in the first person: “Nous ne donnons pas le chevalier pour un homme accompli; mais ne faut-il point pardonner aux vieux célibataires, dont le coeur envoie tant de sang à la figure, d’adorables ridicules, fondés peut-être sur de sublimes secrets?” (56). Again, the rhetorical interrogative reinforces the sense of a cozy *tête à tête* between reader and narrator. The narrator/author knows his readership, the reference to “femmes légères” makes it quite clear that narrator and reader understand each other.

Fredric Jameson attributes this narratorial stance to the author’s very pressing need to persuade readers, to make them his political allies, as, for example, in the matter of the desirability of the *maison* Cormon.² More specifically, when it comes to describing the husband-seeking Rose, the narrator’s tone is distinctly ungallant, his voice at times dry, detached, in the service of delivering the particular, at times cruel, humor, and the joke is invariably at Rose’s expense. Contemporary criticism found this distasteful,³ but there can be no doubt that a large part of the success of the novel comes

from this sly, behind the hand, leering, jeering misanthropy, or more correctly, misogyny. Local opinion is exemplified by Mme Lardot, owner of the establishment, who is shown to favor the old aristocracy; for her, de Valois is an absolute monarch who can do no wrong. De Valois, himself, often can not resist a wink and a nudge, indicating that he knows more than he is inclined to say. In any case, we learn that as a town Alençon is secretly royalist in its sympathies, a judgment the narrator clearly approves of. While I agree with Jameson's analysis, I find that the narrator's assumed personality enables him to share the prerogative he ascribes to himself with his readers, providing a sense of guilty thrill.

Everything that could be construed as negative about the poverty of de Valois' quarters is redeemed, for the narrator, by the chevalier's fine manners and *savoir-vivre*. Somehow, the representative of the old régime manages to move in genteel society despite living in a domestic environment that the narrator likens to a quasi-brothel, as, for instance, in a number of mentions of "petites maisons", such as when we are told that de Valois is attentive to the "système de la petite maison" (65), and we are already aware that the atelier is a hotbed of intrigues. The chevalier is in the habit of spoiling his "petites chattes" with sweets and trinkets. Further, the parallels cited with such courtesans as la Duthé, Sophie Arnould and a typical model from a Titian painting reinforce the suggestion of a house of ill-repute. Here, as in the rhetorical use of imperative and interrogative, the narrator's use of historical

characters suggests that he knows his readership, for the allusion to celebrity mistresses is the very currency of gossip.⁴ Of course, the maison Lardot is a watered-down, cheapened version of the older aristocratic examples, and the implied comparison of the status of actual historical figures from the *ancien régime* to the working girls who share the chevalier's lodgings is intentionally amusing in its ironic distance.

Similarly, in the background to de Valois' rival Du Bousquier, we learn that in his heyday, of the early days of the Republic, he enjoyed the availability of "petites maisons pleines de maitresses" (71), but the former munitions dealer does not fare so well in terms of social acceptability of his sexual peccadilloes. Again, as with de Valois, the description of Du Bousquier's living quarters is an extension of his personality. However, although Du Bousquier's circumstances are considerably more propitious than those of the chevalier, this time the mix of shabby splendor is portrayed to his detriment; as when we are told: "Comme le temps que représentait du Bousquier, cette maison offrait un amas confus de saletés et de magnifiques choses" (76). As was the case with the chevalier, it is by means of Suzanne that the reader enters Du Bousquier's apartments.

Whereas the narrator provided a detailed account of the physiognomy and clothes of the two main male protagonists, he gives only a sketchy outline of the features of "la belle Suzanne", who is dismissed in a description that resorts to regional type, although her role in the intrigue is crucial. Suzanne is cast as an intermediary who can come and go, influencing events. Her situation as a

laundress is interesting: when, at de Valois' suggestion, she approaches Du Bousquier, she arrives unexpectedly, but nonetheless waltzes into his private quarters with no regard for the servant who stands at the door.⁵ She clearly is used to the more intimate regions of the house, just as she had, in the same way, already burst in upon de Valois in his bedchamber while he was shaving. Even if these men have not actually been her lovers she has been in some less than modest relationship with them and she comports herself in a way that is not consistent with perfect purity where they are concerned. Furthermore, she is not afraid to ask them for money. However, she is also a pawn whom de Valois hopes to use to thwart Du Bousquier's efforts to win Mlle Cormon.

In much the same way, with the introduction of Mme Granson and her son Athanase, the male character is subjected to extensive physical description and assessment of his character. Athanase's portrait is the only one that is sympathetic and Jameson has pointed out that the artist is Balzac himself.⁶ His mother, however, is only discussed in terms of her preoccupation with her son's advancement and how she can facilitate the same. The Granson house is described in dingy detail. Like the women in Eugénie Grandet Mme Granson sits doing needlework with a view of the street. The narrator obviously approves of her dutiful resignation: "...une bonne femme...mise avec une simplicité bourgeoise... la rigoureuse modestie de la pauvreté etc" (84). Athanase, by comparison, is subjected to the usual close examination of his physiology. Once again, as with the previous suitors, the reader is made privy to the precise

income of the household. The fact that each person in the town knows the income and situation of the others ties in with the house of glass metaphor, since speculation about a neighbor's situation is the local sport.

Athanase, also, secured his modest situation through the good offices of his relative, Mlle Cormon. In almost every instance, the men in the novel depend on the intercession of a female for their prosperity. What all the putative or self-styled chevaliers de Valois, alluded to at the beginning of the novel, have in common is that they are without fortune. This lack is exactly what marriage to Rose Cormon would remedy: one way or another they have all suffered the passing of the old régime. De Valois' financial circumstances are precarious, but for Du Bousquier, who has prospered in the post-Revolutionary society, a union with Mlle Cormon represents career and social advancement as he has mayoral ambitions. Indeed, when the narrative does eventually reach Rose Cormon there is an account of her lineage: Rose Cormon's inheritance comes to her through the maternal line. The narrator is careful to point out that the family has long been well-connected; for about a hundred years the daughters have married up, with the result that, 'nulle bourgeoisie ne ressemblait davantage à la noblesse' (94). This distinction is very important for an understanding of the transitional place occupied by the Cormon house in an evolving capitalist society. The mercantile class to which Rose belongs has identified more with the aristocracy and has hitherto enjoyed the privileges of the upper class: the emerging industrial middle-class represented by Du Bousquier has access to wealth but is

often perceived to be lacking in social grace and accordingly is marginalized in local society, we see, for instance, that Du Bousquier is not in the inner circle at Rose's soirées, unlike de Valois he is not included in the dinner party but only in the card-playing, post-prandial part of the evening.

It would seem that a woman is only as good as the situation she can buy her husband. De Valois' assessment of the lot of women in the new society, although directed at Suzanne, is somewhat prophetic for women in general. When he remarks: "Après les bouleversements propitieux viennent les bouleversements dans les mœurs" (67), he suggests that women stand to lose more than they gain in the search for a sentimental match. A little later he remarks in a different connection that "un homme doit arriver à tout par sa femme" (70), which is exactly the situation he and Du Bousquier wish to exploit to their own advantage. Also, when Suzanne states her case to Du Bousquier, hoping to blackmail him over her pregnancy, she is cognizant of the potential bright prospects open to her in Paris. Only his ambition to move into the merchant aristocracy through Mlle Cormon stops Du Bousquier from following through on Suzanne's offer of marriage. In fact, as it turns out, Suzanne will be financially successful and an excellent conduit to success for a socially aspiring male.

Even while drawing attention to the flagrant injustice suffered by women in the post-Revolutionary period, Balzac's writing is never polemical. Rather, he is merely an observer of the contemporary scene. His assessment is on the mark,

but by using the means of irony and caricature he highlights the absurdity of the point society has come to. By making his characters into types (there is no psychological development of the heiress or her two eager suitors, they are more like cartoon figures) he provides an ironic distance between reader and narrator, narrator and author. Naomi Schor speaks of how Balzac's "exposure of the ideological fault lines of his society constantly belies his explicit conservative politics."⁷ Still, the narratorial voice by means of its heavily insistent tone, clearly is motivated in the direction of a desire to return to pre-Revolutionary values. Notwithstanding the Revolution, the picture painted is of a very stratified society, one where the participants have a new set of rules to learn to negotiate. In a lengthy preamble to what was the fifth episode of the serialized original version there is an assessment of contemporary provincial life:

En France, dans presque toutes les préfectures du second ordre, il existe un salon où se réunissent des personnes considérables et considérées, qui néanmoins ne sont pas encore la crème de la société . . . Ce salon mixte où se rencontrent la petite noblesse à poste fixe, le clergé, la magistrature, exerce une grande influence. (92)

At such times the narrator does not speak in the conspiratorial tone used when he is present in the living quarters of the various characters or in the drawing room, mingling with the other guests, when the action of the narrative unfolds. Rather, in such interpolations he becomes a more impersonal informant, providing the background to events. The strength of Balzac's writing is the insightful observation he brings to his project. Although he almost certainly found the direction society was moving in to be deplorable, his narrator's ironic

stance enables him to avoid making obvious political judgment.

When the narrative finally comes to the central character, that of Rose Cormon herself, the description of the house is very lengthy, and although the old maid is the ostensible subject of the novel, the reader has to wait throughout many pages to learn about her: there is nothing of her person, neither physically nor her character at this stage, which in fact took up an entire issue of the original serialized version. (La vieille fille was the first *roman feuilleton* to be published in France.) There is a telling instance where both de Valois and Du Bousquier are pictured climbing the stairs to the entry of the house, each thinking of the suitability of the hôtel; one sees it as appropriate for a peer of the realm and the other as the residence of the mayor of the town. It is the house that inspires their covetousness rather than the woman. When the narrator does get around to her person the 'portrait' is rather a caricature, emphasizing her big feet and generally large size, at one point even referring to her as an elephant with wings. Whereas the features of de Valois and Du Bousquier require to be decoded in terms of a pseudo-science, those of Rose are totally lacking in subtlety. It is a flat portrait, emphasizing and making explicit her naiveté.

The house is not a bourgeois private space of the sort that Joan Landes has shown to be emerging in the post-Revolutionary society, rather it is a meager copy of an eighteenth-century salon.⁸ However, those who frequent the *maison* Cormon are emphatically not aristocratic, not intellectual, as they would have

been in the *ancien régime*: we learn that they never read, resist new ideas from the capital, and exist in a state of blissful ignorance. They are distinctly bourgeois, even petit-bourgeois. The distance between the soirées at the Maison Cormon and those of an aristocratic or intellectual salon is as wide as that between the light-of-virtue Suzanne and the famous courtesans discussed above. Those who frequent Mlle Cormon's salon use her home like a piece of public property: we hear how they often do not even wait for the hosts to appear before they begin their card-playing and other sociable activities. When the narrator describes them leaving at the end of the evening he likens their homeward return to a Parisian "sortie de spectacle". But such a *sortie* would be from a public domain, such as a theater or restaurant, while the Alençonnais avail themselves of their neighbor's home as if it were their own. They come and go through their hostess' home as if it were a public thoroughfare. They take their right of entry as much for granted as Suzanne does the right to flounce into the private bedchambers of de Valois and Du Bousquier. The text specifically refers to the regulars as "personnes qui avaient le droit d'entrer chez Mlle Cormon *comme chez eux*" (149). Clearly, for the local population, Mlle Cormon and her uncle the Abbé are public figures with little right to privacy. However, in common with the aristocratic salons of an earlier period, the hotel Cormon does have the advantage of exercising a great influence on local society: this influence is summed up: "Épouser Mlle Cormon, c'était régner sur Alençon" (101).

Several times the narrator observes Mlle Cormon in the act of observing herself as, when on the eve of her departure for Prébaudet and, pining for the arrival of a suitable suitor, she takes satisfaction in the sight of herself dressed as the mistress of the house awaiting her guests. Her self-contemplation finds reinforcement in the frame, as it were of a mirror, of the house which is the visible symbol of her desirability. A brief reflection of her person bedecked in finery is followed by a lengthy appraisal, through her own eyes, of the salon, the boudoir, the dining room, her elegant furniture and tableware. At a later date, as she hastily prepares to return to Alençon, she catches sight of herself in a mirror. The mirror is an old one which is losing its mercury and throws back an unflattering reflection, provoking the fear that she is becoming ugly. Back at home she sets about the excessive preparations to beautify the house with the attention that a young bride might give to her toilette and trousseau. The house is the mirror she prefers to look into in order to see herself in the most becoming light. Even there she experiences cause for concern. On the eve of the arrival of de Troisville, when she looks into the mirror that is her house and sees its faded splendor, she fears that her would-be suitor might be unfavorably impressed by the age-worn furnishings and she inevitably makes the connection to herself: "elle craignit que le cadre ne vieillît le tableau" (149). The metaphor of the mirror is made explicit in the comment: "Si ces antiquités allaient jeter sur elle un reflet de vieillesse" (149). The very thought makes her shiver with horror. There is even a sense of a playful evocation of a fairy tale:

Rose is like a Snow White figure, longingly awaiting the arrival of a prince, consulting a 'mirror mirror on the wall'. The episode concludes with her desire to remodel her setting "par un coup de baguette de fée" (149).

Rose's return to Alençon, in order to make her house as attractive as possible for M. de Troisville, is related at a frantic pace. For her, the state of the house is equated with her toilette and wedding night preparations. The reopening of the house is ceremoniously described: The large green door is said to be closed "en signe de deuil" (144). Without the lady of the house it is a non-place and the regular company is dispersed. Again, her ungainliness is emphasized in the comic account of her emergence from the carriage, like a bulky package being lifted by a crane and swung to the ground. Once she has alighted, however, she regains her composure and surveys her domain with satisfaction. At this stage in the tale she is competent and purposeful. The ensuing description of the preparations for the arrival of de Troisville, who is presumed to be a bachelor, leaves no doubt in the reader's mind of the prurient sexual innuendo indulged in by the narrator. Filled with a sense of purpose and galvanized into action at the prospect of an attractive match, Rose is seen figuratively rubbing her hands with glee as she considers how "il faut voir à coucher M. de Troisville" (146). Rose's attentions in the matter of the bedding of her guest are rendered comic by the insistent references to her *embonpoint*. The author/narrator does not miss his mark; when intimate scenarios are applied to persons who are less than glamorous, titillation is risible. The reader joins the Alençonnais in an unedifying

enjoyment of Rose's diligent but ill-conceived efforts to procure a husband.

There can be no doubt that Rose hopes the bed she purchases for her guest will be her marriage bed. The list of possible bedchambers in which to lodge him moves closer and closer to her own quarters: the green room is considered too close, acceptable to lodge a bishop but dangerously near for a suitor; her uncle's room is indecently bare; finally she decides on her boudoir with the proviso that, if necessary, the indelicately close green room can be pressed into service. The text expressly states that in her capacity as hostess she treats her guest as a beloved suitor, (*un amant chéri*) (155). Her uncle, the *abbé* is completely taken aback by the transformations in the house. He had no idea what was going on.

In the matter of the confusion of Rose with the house she inhabits, the text makes playful use of misunderstandings between the characters. It is already well established that Rose identifies herself with the house as much as her suitors do: accordingly, when de Troisville remarks that it is his desire to find a dwelling just like the one he finds himself in at Alençon, Rose immediately interprets this wish as tantamount to a declaration of love. The game played by the narrator continues right up to the climax of her deception; when de Troisville explains to the chevalier that he has come to Alençon in search of a house, the reader is aware that for Rose this still applies to her person, and the next words "il me la faut grande," can equally apply to her. The crashing disappointment comes in the final "pour loger ma famille" and the object of her attention is revealed to be a married man (157). In fact, the guest is so lacking in interest in

his hostess that he fails to detect her naiveté and propensity for misunderstanding. She regularly misinterprets vocabulary, wondering about *rapport* and *confortable*, unsure whether they apply to herself or to the environs. However, when she says: “La ville se réunit précisément chez moi” (154) it is true both literally and figuratively, and thus politically, since her person is the embodiment of a moment in history. It is in this sense that Jameson’s analysis of La vieille fille as a political allegory peopled by “symbolic narratives of class representatives or ‘types’ ” makes sense.⁹

In a novel set in a social environment where the people of the town have a strong vested interest in the status of its leading citizens, it is not surprising that rumor becomes the source of misinterpretation on the part of Rose, leading to the high comedy that is abundant in the text. Rose Cormon’s house has a cultural and, perhaps even more importantly, an economic status and significance for the people of Alençon. The scene has been carefully prepared for the major set-piece of writing in which the reader is first exposed to the circulation of rumor. The guests are all already apprised of Suzanne’s interesting condition and Du Bousquier’s role in the matter but, “Les gens de province possèdent au plus haut degré l’art de distiller les cancans” (125). What follows is a representation of the circulation of rumor as a gathering storm, musical in its delivery and performative in its effect.¹⁰ The success of the high comedy of this episode depends on the increasingly high-spirited jollity of the guests, who are ‘in the know’ at Du Bousquier’s expense, as both he and Rose are completely in

the dark. The musical metaphor is marked in the vocabulary, *piano*, *rinforzando*, gathering force through the *concert* until it reaches a *forte*. The chevalier de Valois is referred to as “le plus habile chef d’orchestre”, and we are told that “l’ouverture de ce cancan fut magnifique” (132). The humor has a knockabout, farcical quality, culminating in the punning conclusion to the scene with a riff on the many innuendoes on the theme of *père*, *père sévère*, *père vert* etc (134), in which the dinner guests can hardly contain their merriment as they enjoy Du Bousquier’s fall from favor.

The author uses a similar technique to show the increasing momentum as the word passes from door to door and household to household in the telling of the news of Rose’s hasty flight from Prébaudet on her learning of the arrival of a possible marriage prospect. This return is relayed at a galloping, frenzied pace, sharply in contrast to the very regular, unchanging routine up to that point. The race against time in the lashing rain, at the risk of sacrificing the mare Pénélope, establishes a life-or-death urgency which is comically mock-heroic. A little later, as preparations progress, there is a virtuoso passage describing a kind of jungle telegraph in which the rumor machine speculates on the fortunes of the intended bridegroom with much conjecture on the matrimonial bed. Also, we see the villagers following in the *cabriolet de poste* in de Troisville’s wake. They hang around as he dismounts, and it is through their observation that we learn of the groom Jacquelin offering the postillon a drink. However, the curious onlookers have their access to the spectacle effectively breached when Jacquelin pointedly

and firmly closes the big door.

Balzac's narrator's privilege enables him to show how the tradesmen of the town are excluded from the inner workings of the household and then take the reader into the more intimate reaches of the Maison Cormon. The narrator of La vieille fille can move freely through Rose's quarters and it is at his beckoning that the reader is invited to share that privilege. When Mlle Cormon's marital expectations are foiled, the guests, far from being genuinely sympathetic to her disappointment, are seen to enjoy her embarrassment; on the servant's removal of the special liqueurs offered to a bachelor but not to a married man, we learn that: "Tous ces petits détails furent remarqués et prêtèrent à rire" (158). It is typical of the narrator's wry understatement when he remarks dryly that one of the six ladies who had accompanied the inconvenienced Rose into her bedchamber (together with the opportunistic Du Bousquier) returned to the drawing room to report that the hostess was much improved. Well, there clearly was no need for such a large delegation but they couldn't stay away. The narrator, the characters and ultimately the reader all participate in the *Schadenfreude*. The rumor machine is well-oiled by such events and the narrator points out that the women in the salon circulated and embellished the tale and the very next day "pendant toute la matinée, les moindres circonstances de cette comédie couraient dans toutes les maisons d'Alençon, et, . . . Elles causaient un rire universel." The defeated subject of the hilarity declares herself "la fable de toute la ville" (159-60).

De Valois seeks to manipulate the rumor machine for his own ends, believing that if he puts the word out that his engagement to Mlle Cormon is a *fait accompli*, she will be prevailed upon by her uncle and her confessor to accept in order to avoid a scandal. As he works out his scheme, the chevalier calculates the financial advantage to himself in the form of Rose's assets in real estate and her income. The eventual engagement between Rose and Du Bousquier provides more material for the efficient gossip machine: the local population, who clearly see their future inscribed politically in the marriage, break into rival factions, the *Incrédules* and the *Croyants*. After all, they have a stake in the marriage: following Du Bousquier's sweeping of the *ménage* like a new broom, the saddler is disappointed by the purchase of a new carriage from Paris as he loses the expected business from repairing the old one, the servants Jaquelin and Josette cannot marry before their mistress. For their part, the tenants fear an increase in their tithes when they see the installation of luxurious furnishings in the household. The narrator's remark is well taken when he says that the provincial society believes less in an active economy with a good deal of turnover than in "un stérile entassement". It is a matter of great disappointment to the Alençonnais that the ceremonies are conducted hastily and discreetly as they miss out on expected festivities. The townspeople can be quite cruel. Mme du Ronceret rushes to tell Rose, recently returned to town, of the death of Athanase, thereby throwing some gall in her honey pot. In referring to the newly-wed Mme Du Bousquier as "la vieille fille", the narrator has held his fire

before revealing what the reader suspected all along: that her seemingly dynamic husband is impotent. When we learn that Suzanne avenges herself on the town by declaring that Rose will remain a maid despite her marriage we can be sure that her outburst is repeated far and wide.

Towards the end of the novel, the allegory with history becomes patent, reading like a tumbling, crumbling edifice. Fredric Jameson marks this passage as the most explicit connection of the fiction to the contemporary régime.¹¹ The impotent Republic prevails over the valiant aristocracy as the emasculated monarchy of Louis Philippe takes over. The narrator's allegiance becomes ever more pointed as he shows the avatar of the nobility disintegrate in the defeat of de Valois. In a final insult, it is an aggrieved harlot who betrays the aristocratic chevalier as a libertine and the townspeople are quick to transfer their calumny onto him. There is a massive shift of allegiances from the salon Cormon to the d'Esgrignon household. So, in a laughable way, the situation in the country is mirrored in the local provincial arena. It is made laughable by its pettiness as allegiances are redrawn. Jameson has shown how the main characters are represented as 'types' of the various social factions and the action a *de facto* history lesson. It remains to show how the house and Rose's connection to it fare in the changed political climate effected by the direction taken when Rose opts, albeit against her own desires, for the energetic, aggressive Du Bousquier. It would seem that her choice, precipitated by events outside her control, depended on a momentary decision: just as when she was pictured on her return

from Prébaudet, poised between the carriage and the porte cochère, we see her tumbling into the arms of her servants, the upholders of her house who are there to catch her, so in the most important decision of her life she takes a leap of faith and trusts in the fates that her choice will be a wise one, but it is not fortuitous. It is the genius of the text that right up until the very moment of Rose's choice the reader feels that her fate is in a state of suspense that could fall in either direction but in fact the ground has been carefully prepared with the seemingly effete representative of the ancien régime ousted by the efficient, yet impotent Du Bousquier.

As the novel draws to a close we learn of the sacrifices Rose makes in order to be a 'good wife' as instructed by her religious adviser and as dictated by custom. To begin with, she gives up her fidelity to the notaire Choisnel, and she marries in the church that she had previously avoided as being too republican. Du Bousquier's first act after marriage is to take over his wife's income. The house is torn apart in the service of modernism or progress. The Abbé de Sponde is ousted from his comfortable quarters in his declining years, which surely was a sorrow to his good-hearted niece; even his beloved trees have been razed to the ground. The narrator drives home his point that the domestic upheaval parallels the national, social picture; mention of "canaille impuissante" reveals the narrator/author's political position.

The changes that her new husband makes in the house are indicative of the loss of independence suffered by its erstwhile mistress. Unmarried, she was an

imperious if benign presence. After her marriage, all that is left to Rose is the care and management of her household linens, in which we can see the beginning of the bourgeois marriage. Interestingly, Balzac at this point uses the same word *ilotisme* (181) that he used for Eugénie Grandet and her mother, to describe the state to which Rose is reduced. As Mme Du Bousquier, she is figured now as “cette brebis craintive” and we hear of her “soumission d’esclave” (192). The alterations to the household décor are just the thin edge of the wedge. Just as women’s position deteriorated generally in the time frame of the novel, Rose capitulates at every turn, justifying every departure from her former ideals by the encouragement of her new confessor, the Abbé Couturier, to do everything she can to please her husband. When we learn that “L’intérieur de la maison révélait le fournisseur du Directoire” (180), we are left in no doubt of the narrator’s disapproval of its poor taste. Balzac’s assessment is psychologically correct when he has the townspeople start out by being scandalized and discomfited by the new arrangements, but they finish up becoming accustomed to the new style and finally imitating it.

An ever-present theme in the novel, as elsewhere in the Comédie Humaine, is the long arm of social pressures on determining marriage. Mme Granson tells Rose that she ought to exert a positive example and social influence by refusing to admit du Bousquier to her salon until he is safely married. In fact, marriage is touted as the answer to all difficult or doubtful situations. At the climax of the narrative, Rose faints and is carried to bed by Du Bousquier, resulting in his

seeing her in a state of undress. When Rose laments the laughing stock she knows she has become in the town, her maid advises her to marry at all costs in order to avert public censure and ridicule. Mlle Cormon understands immediately and implicitly that “un prompt mariage était le seul moyen d'imposer silence à la ville” (160).

We first learn of the disappointment in the intimate life of the couple through the suspicions of the uncle Sponde. One indication is the replacement of her congenial at-homes by stylish balls with profane music. “Puis, le système politique de ce grave salon fut lentement *perversi*” (181). Also, Sponde detects in Du Bousquier an *imperial* air.

The description of Rose, married yet still innocent, is significant for the way in which it is relayed, which is to say that it is through the observations of Rose's satellites. We learn that during the first years of her marriage, Mme Du Bousquier took on the knowing, artful look common to young newly-wed women in the first flush of marital intimacy. The narration, in the approach to this remark, sets up a picture of the couple who have retreated to the fireside of the “chambre, si longtemps déserte” (182). The effect is of a withdrawal from public view. There is a suggestion that what the reader learns is the fragmented conversations overheard by servants, as for instance, regarding Du Bousquier's ‘reasonable’ justifications offered to his wife for each new forfeit, amplified by speculations on the part of her former associates. The change in her demeanor and the revelation that “le sang ne la tourmentait plus” (182) is perplexing to the

Incrédules, who hold the marriage to be invalid.¹¹ Berthier, in a note, maintains that the narrator goes as far as he reasonably could to suggest that, although her marriage may have been unconsummated, Rose has been initiated to the pleasures of some level of sexual gratification. Given her absurd lack of understanding of the facts of reproduction, this begins to seem plausible. For the present purposes, this narration is interesting because it eschews, for whatever reason, the need to be omniscient.

For Du Bousquier women are only a conduit to success: he passes through the house as he passes through the woman. He makes changes in the house to suit himself and he expects his wife to change to suit him. In this he is no different to his class and the law, and the changing *moeurs* of the century support this position

The various aspects of Rose's allegiances are connected to the house as much as to her person, as can be seen when after her uncle's death she reflects on how he would have resented the "changement des doctrines propitieuses et religieuses de la maison Cormon" (187). We have already seen how she adopts the religious preferences of her husband. Now that they are married, the house is referred to as Du Bousquier's and we learn that his salon is closed to the chevalier and to all who repudiated the match between himself and Mlle Cormon. Formerly the members of her inner circle, they are now removed from her company and from her house. It is only in justifiable defiance (following the death of the abbé) that Rose accompanies her friend Mlle Armande into

forbidden territory and she pays dearly for incurring her husband's displeasure. By the end of the tale, incarcerated in the Maison du Val Noble, Mlle Cormon is brought very low. The narrator describes her existence in terms of slavery and animality. " Elle eut alors une soumission d'esclave, et regarda comme une oeuvre méritoire d'accepter l'abaissement dans lequel la mit son mari" (192). Elsewhere she is referred to as *bestiotte*. Deprived of company, children and connubial affection she resorts, we are told darkly, to the most severe religious practices. There has been an indication earlier that she was prepared to dabble in self-abuse and it seems certain that the narrator is hinting at the effects of sexual frustration.

There is much sport in the form of deliberate understatement, as in the passage alluding to Rose's somewhat laughable attempts at coquetry: the mention of the efforts of two hunchbacked seamstresses "qui ne manquaient pas de goût" (110) to dress Rose damns them, and her, with faint praise.

Such interpolations as Athanase's lustful pondering of Mlle Cormon's 'corsage', mockingly described as 'deux timbales de régiment' are self-consciously comic. Athanase, as the latter-day romantic is as much a target as is Rose. Elsewhere the put-downs are legion: while at the same time designating M. de Valois as the most brilliant ornament in Rose's salon, the chevalier is described as 'cette vieille ruine . . . peignée comme le saint Jean d'une procession' (126). When Rose's guests are assembling for dinner the scene is set by means of a series of cozy exchanges between the *convives* and the servants, only to be concluded with a

terse put-down: "Du Bousquier n'était pas invité" (123).

Disrespectful, best describes the narrator's point of view. But the disrespect he assumes is what guarantees the deliciously wicked complicity he successfully engages with the reader. At the same time there is a quite remarkable amount of psychological insight: Rose, with all her innocence, regrets of the chevalier "qu'il ne soit pas un peu libertin" (126). In this de Valois has seriously miscalculated and misses his moment. Similarly, for all her preposterous naiveté Rose speaks from the heart and speaks true when she ponders "expliquez-moi comment une femme est libertine en préférant un homme à un autre?" (137) This is on the occasion when she also shows herself to be of a loving spirit in her desire to give generously to the pregnant Suzanne. For all the jeering irony in the novel, there are moments of genuine warmth.

The narrator's pious call at the end of the book for a better education for women rings rather false. In a way, La vieille Fille is a comic, ironic, satiric counterpart to the more sentimental Eugénie Grandet: the corresponding addendum at the close of the earlier work comes over as an unconvincing sop to its heroine's distressing fate. Whereas the tone of the earlier novel is sententious, even sanctimonious, the later work is marked by cruel irony. In both novels the female protagonists are virtuous, helpless victims, robbed of all autonomy.

Rose Cormon's tragedy was that she bent her head and acquiesced to the forces of society, allowing them to deprive her of such status and power as she

had been brought up to expect. In this she had little or no choice. Swept along on a tide of change, she is a casualty of a system the author sees as hostile to the individual, a system that depersonalizes its members. The style of the narration, preferring to convey the author's world view through the use of types rather than psychologically developed characters, is an effective means to describe the evolving dehumanization of individuals under the new economic order. There is no personal growth in any of the main characters. The description of the Maison Cormon when the reader first approaches it emphasizes its unchanging character. But by the end of the tale it is the house that has been completely changed: Rose, despite everything that has occurred, is still in the same condition as at the start; de Valois has disintegrated into a shambling figure; only Du Bousquier charges recklessly into the future, oblivious of the deterioration he imposes.

The house, so strongly identified with its mistress, the very foundation of her desirability, is no longer her own. Having made many sacrifices in the interests of bourgeois marriage, Rose, as a wife, is herself sacrificed to the new social order. Reduced to a figure of fun, she has become the butt of gossip in a town that once looked up to her, seeing in her the embodiment of a timeless way of life. No longer the Queen on a chessboard that accorded her power, she has fallen to the status of a pawn in the name of progress.

1. Peter Brooks: "An Oedipal Crisis", A New History of French Literature, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1989) 650. Brooks cites Balzac's La duchesse de Langeais.
2. Fredric Jameson: The Political Unconscious, (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1981) 156.
3. Philippe Berthier, in a note to La vieille fille, (Paris: Flammarion, 1987) 106-112).
4. Philippe Berthier, in a note Flammarion op.cit. 86.
5. Sharon Marcus: Apartment Stories, (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University

of California Press, 1999).

6. Jameson op. cit.
7. Naomi Schor: "The Scandal of Realism" in A New History of French Literature op. cit. 659
8. Joan Landes: Women and the Public Sphere In the Age of the French Revolution, (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1988).
9. The Political Unconscious op. cit. 80 Jameson sees the vision of history which informs La vieille fille as "a binary opposition between aristocratic elegance and Napoleonic energy, which the political imagination seeks desperately to transcend, generating the contradictories of each of these terms, mechanically generating all the syntheses logically available to it, while remaining locked into the terms of the original double bind. Such a vision is not to be taken as the logical articulation of all the political positions or ideological possibilities objectively present in the situation of the Restoration, but rather as the structure of a particular political fantasy, as the mapping of that particular "libidinal apparatus" in which Balzac's political thinking becomes invested. . . (which) allows us to construct . . . this particular libidinal apparatus or "desiring machine" which is Balzac's commitment to history." 48
Speaks of "in the case of Balzac, the generation of an overt and constituted ideological and political "value system" out of the operation of an essentially narrative and fantasy dynamic."
10. Jameson: The Political Unconscious op. cit.166-167
11. Berthier remarks a figuration of Rossini's *calumnia* in Barbier de Seville in the notes to the Flammarion edition (362).

Between the Window and the Hearth: Emma Bovary and the Moral Police

"Entre la fenêtre et le foyer, Emma cousait"¹

In Forme et Signification Jean Rousset discusses the privileged status of the window in Flaubert's Madame Bovary: the window represents a kind of degree zero at which interior and exterior converge; Rousset shows how the window can

convey a sense of the disjunction between *rêverie* and reality, also how the novelist is able to use the window as a device for seamless narration from different points of view². However, the window has another function: it is emblematic of the fine line of respectability. In provincial Normandy during the Restoration, dutiful married women remain firmly within the domestic sphere, their domain is the *foyer*: the zone outside the window, the street, is dangerous territory, the site of the prostitute and therefore a threat to bourgeois stability. In Madame Bovary the heroine, or perhaps one should say anti-heroine, is repeatedly depicted close to a window, while her righteous female neighbors and would-be persecutors are ensconced behind lace curtains, the better to spy on the perceived transgressor of bourgeois values. Emma by contrast is in full view, framed by chic yellow curtains, potted plants, dressed *à la chinoise*, or in "une robe de chambre tout ouverte" (120).

Rousset's discussion is primarily concerned with the matter of shifting points of view and since his 1962 publication there have been many analysts who have contributed to an understanding of the shifting narrators of the text. The present study will further the quest to know "*qui parle*" in any given segment of the novel, and will therefore be primarily concerned with an examination of the implied narrators. Secondly, an examination of the distinction between '*fenêtre*' and '*foyer*', and the link that the author surreptitiously makes with contemporary perceptions of prostitution. Since this discussion focuses greatly on the identity of the narrators, the significance of the subtitle of the novel, Moeurs de

Province, will be central to the third part of this chapter³. The narrators of the history tell as much about themselves as they do about the recent events in Yonville l'Abbaye, upon which they are eager to converse. The same narrators are themselves characters in the novel, people of the town who, though unidentified, comment on the local *cause célèbre* of the doctor's wife who incurred enormous debts, and ended by committing suicide. 'Moeurs' has many meanings, and the subtitle here provides a significant clue in the decoding of the novel. The late eighteenth century saw the official instigation of a 'bureau de mœurs' or moral police, whose duty it was to control prostitution. In provincial Yonville, however, the villagers are the self-appointed custodians of morality and family values. Finally, we can see that Flaubert provided a *décor*, or ambiance of brothel types and prurient sexual innuendo, not to persuade his readers of any personal moral agenda, but rather to enable his fictional narrator/ characters to speak in their own voices, thereby revealing their own petty bourgeois prejudices.

I. Flaubert's Implied Narrators.

Rousset's work is illuminating in demonstrating Flaubert's technique when he talks about the circularity of the points of view, and his work has spawned many fruitful attempts to discern *qui parle* in the various modules of the final text. Many commentators have advanced the understanding of the multiplicity of points of view, an innovative technique in Flaubert's groundbreaking novel. The main concern here is to emphasize the dual, reflective nature of perception as it

is expressed in the title of the work: much has been said about the author's decision to favor Madame Bovary over such other possibilities as Emma Bovary or Emma Rouault, but the complete title is Madame Bovary: Moeurs de province. The conundrum is figured right in the opening sentence of the novel; what appears at the outset to be a first-person account dissolves into a seemingly third-person narrative after the introductory pages. Indeed, the very first word '*nous*' prompts the question, who speaks? Ostensibly it is a fellow classmate of Charles, but then again it could be a number of the same. Some commentators, such as Tony Tanner in Adultery in the Novel⁴ and Eugene Gray in "Emma by Twilight: Flawed Perception in Madame Bovary",⁵ seem to consider that the opening narrator in the classroom is a single voice: others like Henry Weinberg in "The Function of Italics in Madame Bovary"⁶ discern a throng of participants. There is no doubt that, in the novel as a whole, the reader is given the opportunity to see many points of view. The purpose, contained in this dubiety, is to provide through certain set-pieces, such as the opening schoolroom scene, a sense of a clamor of voices all at once. The same problem shows up at the opening of Part II of the novel, when the Bovarys move to Yonville. Gray declares the initial description of Yonville to be a 'moving vantage point of a traveler passing through the town'(239). One could equally suggest that it is the pompous style of Homais in a letter responding to Charles' inquiries about the newly vacant practice. Weinberg suggests that it could be any of a number of Yonvillais.

In the opening scene in the schoolroom, the celebrated example of Charbovari's absurd cap reads like an artifact that would be impossible to recreate: one suspects it would not stand up to any attempts to reproduce it three dimensionally (62). The author, or is it one of the implied narrators, describes it as "une de ces coiffures d'ordre composite" and follows up with an enumeration of the hodgepodge of styles contained in the unfortunate piece of headgear. This in turn is followed by a number of pieces of highly specific geometrical attributes of the cap. Since, clearly, such details could be neither closely observed nor reliably remembered, it would seem that Flaubert is trying to convey the effect of a plethora of voices all pressing forward at once, eager to be heard, each with its own version of what took place. We are given an explicit clue in the phrase 'd'ordre composite', which could just as well apply to the account we are reading. In fact, that is the procedure of the entire narration of the book: a composite retelling of the tragic downfall of the Bovarys by everyone who came in contact with them. Each of those present on Charles' first day at school has something to say about his discomfiture, and the ludicrous cap is a concretization of his awkwardness. The passage ends on a more conciliatory note. When, after the unrelenting itemization of the elements of the cap, we have "Elle était neuve; la visière brillait" (62), it sounds like the more tolerant input of the teacher himself. Right at the outset of the novel the author establishes what will become ever more noticeable as the book progresses-- that, in an attempt to understand the tragic death of the main character, we will

hear from the many people who had access to her, just how they perceived her and her husband. The effect is rather like that of a trial or perhaps a public hearing after a sudden death, which is after all what has just occurred. Much has been written about Flaubert's claim that the author should be like God in the universe, everywhere present but nowhere visible, yet although he uses his characters as his implied narrators, the author is none the less discernible standing behind them. As Rousset says, "La main de Flaubert est toujours visible" (119). There must, of course, be an organizing principle standing above and beyond the individual accounts. If the analogy of a court hearing holds, then we must listen to the implied narrators as witnesses and find in Flaubert the recorder or judge of events.

Having assigned himself such a role, the author maintains an ironic distance, encouraging his witnesses to betray their own weaknesses even as they believe themselves to be revealing the fall from grace of their haughty neighbor. The lengthy description of Charles' first wife is a good example of this. The whole account is marked by a lack of respect: for the most part she is referred to disparagingly, and the reader has the impression that the narrators did not think much of her. She is dryly introduced as the widow of a Dieppe *huissier*, forty-five years of age and in possession of an income of twelve hundred *livres*. More tellingly, the reader does not learn her given name until the end of the chapter. Up to that point she is referred to as 'Madame', 'elle', 'sa femme', 'la bru'. Let us examine a few examples: Quoiqu'elle fût laide, sèche

comme un cotret, et bourgeonnée comme un printemps, certes madame Dubuc ne manquait pas de partis à choisir" (70). The seemingly respectful use of 'madame Dubuc' is disingenuous in the context. Whoever is speaking is poking cruel fun at the unappetizing bride that Charles' mother has chosen for him, as can clearly be seen by the use of vernacular (cotret) and the rather snide remarks about her appearance. Next we learn that Charles had hoped to enjoy more freedom as he moved into his new state but when we learn that "sa femme fût le maître" (70), what we hear is the scornful voice of the maid. If there is any doubt about this we need only pay attention to the list of recriminations that follows; what he should and should not do or say, all of which come into the category of information which only someone on the inside could know, and it is well established that the narration only goes where a narrator has entry. The use of the informal 'la bru' would again suggest the voice of the maid, but in the representation of the wife's reaction to the presence of a daughter in the house that Charles is attending, we can discern the voice of Madame Bovary senior, especially since we know that she did visit the new household and that relations were strained. "Mademoiselle Rouault, élevée au couvent chez les Ursulines, avait reçu, comme on dit, une bonne éducation, qu'elle savait, en conséquence, la danse, la géographie, le dessin, faire de la tapisserie et toucher du piano. Ce fut le comble!"(77). When on the last page of this episode we learn that her given name was Héloïse the effect is highly comic: just to point up the joke, the name is repeated three times. One can imagine that contemporary readers

must have laughed out loud at the association of this harridan with one, in fact two, of literature's most romantic heroines. The author/recorder of events can almost be heard wheezing gleefully in the background. What is interesting and innovative, however, is the economy with which the author has achieved the effect of conveying a narrative while simultaneously portraying the speakers, not by resorting to explicit description but, as it were, performatively.

The same effect is to be found in the description of the wedding in chapter IV, which also features an assortment of narrators willing to comment. The festivities are related according to the interests of those speaking. This episode is remarkable for its sliding away from the couple, and is most interesting for what is omitted. Indeed, it seems to be more about everyone else than about the newly-weds, which is why we hear so much about the food, the gifts, and the adherence to tradition. This chapter might be the clearest example we have so far of the implied narrators betraying themselves, showing us more about themselves than they do about Emma and Charles. The wedding scene at Les Bertaux shows very well that the relations all want a piece of the action, they all have a stake in the union. About the couple themselves we learn relatively little since they are of only secondary interest to our narrators, and Charles and Emma are merely glimpsed standing apart from the assembled guests. The bride's romantic wish to marry by candle-light at midnight is brushed away in an aside at the end of the previous chapter. The occasion is not really about Emma, or Charles: it is about their fulfilling society's expectations. Once again, here, we

can infer who is speaking. Weddings are a wonderful occasion for participants to let themselves down badly and the Bovary nuptials are a superb example of this. This is no idealized rustic idyll: two families are coming together, and it is a marvelous opportunity for each to regard the other side disparagingly and to criticize the arrangements. Nobody is satisfied. The *pêle-mêle* nature of the festivities is apparent from the start: the young couple had surely made their own plans and hoped for a dignified celebration, but from the minute the farm vehicles come tumbling into Les Bertaux the forty-three guests take over the scene and mark it with their own stamp. The descriptions of the clothes and the carriages reveal that the guests are eying each other carefully, each side appraising the other, jealously insisting on their rightful places at table. Complaints are made subtly: "il n'y avait point assez de valets d' écurie" (86), is the truculent guest's objection to having to do work. The use of exclamation marks, "Et les chemises sur les poitrines bombaient comme des cuirasses! (86)" screams out that the observer sees himself as superior to the others. The criticism of Emma's dress "trop longue"(87) is almost certainly the tight-lipped testimony of the new mother-in-law who, we learn, "n'avait pas deserré les dents de la journée" (89).

II. The Function of Windows and Doorways.

The author has to find a way to signal his technique to the reader, a way of directing perception, in order that the reader might be privy to the same point of view as the narrators. A device Flaubert uses in the service of this strategy is to

have his changing narrators observe a given scene through a window, doorway, or some other vantage point. An early example of this is when a servant arrives from Les Bertaux to fetch a doctor to attend to Père Rouault's leg. This incident takes place during Charles' marriage to his first wife. There are few glimpses of marital intimacy in a book which, even so, was the subject of censorship and litigation, but the reader does enter into the bedroom in part I chapter II, only because the messenger is so lacking in social grace that he rushes in where discretion would hold him back. The result is a scene of some rather comic 'pudeur'. There is much to be said about this passage:

Une nuit, vers onze heures, ils furent réveillés par le bruit d'un cheval qui s'arrêta juste à la porte. La bonne ouvrit la lucarne du grenier et parla quelque temps avec un homme resté en bas, dans la rue. Il venait chercher le médecin; il avait une lettre. Nastasie descendit les marches en grelottant, et alla ouvrir la serrure et les verrous, l'un après l'autre. L'homme laissa son cheval et, suivant la bonne, entra tout à coup derrière elle. Il tira de dedans son bonnet de laine à houppes grises une lettre enveloppée dans un chiffon, et la présenta délicatement à Charles, qui s'accouda sur l'oreiller pour la lire. Nastasie, près du lit, tenait la lumière. (71)

First, it is very clear that the domestic space figured here is well and truly enclosed--witness the locks and bolts, also the presence of a maid to stand between the master and mistress and the outside world. What breaks down the privacy of the home is the professional capacity of the inhabitant. The reader has already heard how Charles' first wife keeps her ear to the wall when he is examining female patients. In this case, the intruder carries a letter, which enables him to cross the threshold of the establishment even although it is

outside working hours. The barrier of the servant is similarly overcome because of the lack of education and decorum on the parts of both the maid and the servant who has come to fetch the doctor. This gauche behavior marks the actors as very provincial; the actions of the stolid yokel are recounted in a plodding style, and we are exposed to every step of his progress. Later in the novel we will experience Emma's sense of exasperation at the lack of finesse of her maid. After the scene at la Vaubyessard, where servants only put in a discreet appearance in order to facilitate the smooth running of the household, she fires her incompetent maid, the same one who breached the privacy of the marital boudoir in Charles' first marriage, replacing her with another whom she hopes to educate in her own ways and who will, after Emma's death, perpetuate the lifestyle which Emma has begun. Further, we might add that the very presence of ill-trained domestics ensures the breach of privacy--after all, it is thanks to Nastasie and the messenger that the reader's appetite for prurient detail is whetted. The final sentence of the piece, as so often in this novel, puts the ironic seal on the incident: "Madame, par pudeur, restait tournée vers la ruelle et montrait le dos"(71).

Thus the stratagem of the crossing of physical, architectural and social barriers effectively guides the reader where he may go. The reader rarely enters directly into the mind or consciousness of the protagonists, but rather, has to share what was observable to some eyewitness.

Similarly, during the wedding charivari the same technique leads the reader

only as far as the observer can see. The guests have no respect for the boundaries of privacy, and a fishmonger cousin of the bride would happily breach the sanctity of the matrimonial chamber: "(il) commençait à souffler de l'eau avec sa bouche par le trou de la serrure, quand le père Rouault arriva juste à temps pour l'empêcher" (89). Thus the narrative takes the reader all the way up to the keyhole of the bedroom: the reader's gaze is effectively blocked at the same point as that of the intrusive wedding guest. This is narratologically significant in two respects; it controls what the reader can access and it neatly reveals the fragile nature of the preservation of domestic privacy.

But it is with regard to Emma that the window is constantly evoked. Early in the relationship between Charles Bovary and Emma Rouault the young widower returns to Les Bertaux to initiate his courtship of the daughter of the house: the reader enters the farmhouse with Charles, sees the scene through his eyes, and the narrator informs the reader that "les auvents étaient fermés"(81). Emma is explicitly described as being "*entre la fenêtre et le foyer*" (81), and she is occupied in that most conventional of female tasks, needlework. At this point in the story Emma is out of sight, concealed from prying eyes, as befits her situation. However, in a rigorously controlled society, any situation where a man and a woman find themselves alone is potentially fraught with sexual tension, particularly in a domestic environment. We have already seen an example of this when, for the first time, Emma is depicted at the window: "Il la trouva debout, le front contre la fenêtre"(75), which is immediately followed by an

incident that is remarkable for its erotic and rather comic content, i.e. the fumbling to retrieve Charles' *cravache*. We are still seeing Emma through Charles' eyes and the scene reinforces her association with respectable domesticity. A further use of a threshold emphasizes her demure virtue when we are assured that she does not "dépasse le perron"(76). Nonetheless, there have already been many indications of her sensuality. On the occasion when she is described as between the window and the hearth, however, Charles is legitimately present as he has been invited by Emma's father. Emma is for the moment decidedly on the side of the foyer. As the account of her marriage unfolds, she will be seen to move progressively toward the window.

When we learn how, early in their married life, "elle se mettait à la fenêtre pour le voir partir"(93), we can be pretty sure that we are perceiving Emma through the rather anxious eyes of the neighbors. At this point in the story bourgeois convention is nervously appeased: the bridegroom goes off to work, the bride shows herself reasonably demurely at the balcony, and then closes the window and retreats into domesticity. For the moment, the window references are still innocent and the reader continues to wish the young couple well. This will be contrasted later, when she is perceived as a slovenly bawd at the window. "Elle portait une robe de chambre toute ouverte, qui laissait voir, entre les revers à châle du corsage, une chemisette plissée avec trois boutons d'or"(120). This, in the afternoon no less! And again at the time of her first illness in Tostes, "elle suffoquait, ouvrait les fenêtres, s'habillait en robe légère"(127). All of this is very

firmly put forward as a mark of her discontentment. The considerable detail regarding her attire, which follows the above remark, is testament to the prurient attention that is focused on her. When, following the ball at La Vaubyessard, she sits at the open window (114) it seems like an attempt to break out of her stifling existence.⁷

The instances of her being observed at the window come thicker and faster after the move to Yonville l'Abbaye. Immediately after her arrival she is seen in the morning: "Elle était en peignoir. Il (Léon) leva la tête et la salua. Elle fit une inclination rapide et ferma la fenêtre"(150). The incident describing her visit to the wet-nurse marks a distinct shift in how she is perceived: she sets out alone, but will be joined 'en route' by Léon Dupuis. The reader is expressly informed that it was noon and "les maisons avaient leurs volets fermés"(156); however, by evening the whole town is talking about their "promenade à deux" and the mayor's wife declares that "Madame Bovary se compromettait"(156). A picture is beginning to emerge of a claustrophobic society, one in which there is little hope of keeping oneself to oneself. The reference to the "volets fermés" places the virtuous matrons decidedly behind their lace curtains, the better to spy on their neighbor; it is through their prying eyes that we observe Emma. Respectable women are behind the window, invisible, firmly in the 'foyer'. But Emma has ventured out into the street, into the zone reserved for men, and what is worse, she is in the company of a man. Again, when she first goes out riding with Rodolphe, we are told that she looked up to the window to see her

maid and her child: domesticity and duty are markedly behind the curtained windows but Emma is moving beyond the confines of respectability. Here too, when she rides back into town we learn that "on la regardait des fenêtres"(228); she is risking comparison with a 'fille publique.' The reader can understand that when the self-righteous Yonvillais are at the window it is in order to criticize the transgressor. When Emma is at the window she is perceived as one who puts herself on display. This episode is given a good deal of space and detail which must reflect the extent to which the new doctor's wife's behavior has been discussed, gone over, by the people of the town. This impression is immediately strengthened in the next chapter: "Dès les premiers froids, Emma quitta sa chambre . . . Assise dans son fauteuil, près de la fenêtre, elle voyait passer les gens du village sur le trottoir"(161). Thus she is moving closer to the window, dare one say the 'trottoir'? and Léon is specifically in the street: "Le jeune homme glissait derrière le rideau. . . Mais, au crépuscule. . . Souvent elle tressaillait à l'apparition de cette ombre glissant" (162).⁸

Emma is once more at the window (175) when she embarks on her flirtation with religion, which comes to nothing just as her flirtation with Léon has come to nothing. Emma comes to religion very much in the same way that she approaches sex. As her discontent increases we see her move away from the *foyer* toward the *fenêtre*: After her somewhat lassitudinous spiritual search Emma returns home :

Le jour blanchâtre des carreaux s'abaissait doucement avec des ondulations. Les meubles à leur place semblaient devenus plus

immobile et se perdre dans l'ombre comme dans un océan ténébreux. La cheminée était éteinte, la pendule battait toujours, et Emma vaguement s'ébahissait à ce calme des choses, tandis qu'il y avait en elle-même tant de bouleversement. Mais, entre la fenêtre et la table à ouvrage, la petite Berthe était là, qui chancelait sur ses bottines de tricot et essayait de se rapprocher de sa mère pour lui saisir, par le bout, les rubans de son tablier. (180)

The paragraph begins in the vague, languorous tones, which are descriptive of Emma's dreamy state, which, as it so often does, ends with a rude awakening. Stylistically, this is typical and significant in terms of what Flaubert is attempting to accomplish. The first part of the paragraph is filled with vagueness; with the use of the imparfait, and of words like 'blanchâtre', 'ondulations', 'semblaient', 'ombre', ténébreux'. Then the phrase "la cheminée était éteinte" is like a punctuation and we see Emma jolted out of her rêverie by the very real, very immediate presence of her domestic responsibilities. "La cheminée éteinte" tells us that she retains almost no illusions about marriage and domesticity. The *cheminée* is simply another way of saying the foyer or the hearth/home. But with a few words the author shows us how hard it is for her to move away. Little Berthe stands between the window and the hearth, pulling her mother homeward. The reader is beginning to get the idea that the 'fenêtre' represents debauchery and the 'table à ouvrage' stands for feminine duty and domestic incarceration.

Again, after Léon's departure for Rouen we hear ". . . elle remuait délicatement ce foyer près de s'éteindre"(189) as part of a discussion about her vanishing voluptuous desires and her sterile virtue. At the scene of her farewells

to Léon she is described as having “la figure posée contre un carreau” (185), and also as, “s’appuyant de l’épaule contre la boiserie”(184)--if she is not at the window she is certainly up against the wall. In the section which follows, Léon moves quite naturally, quite according to society’s expectations, into a world of actresses, intrigues, the opportunity to try on for size a *vie de bohème*, all of which is viewed as a rite of passage, a moral right for a young man. Not so for the woman. I do not wish to suggest that Flaubert is here making a moral judgment; rather it is the way that society perceives wifely behavior, and therefore the author makes his narrators speak out of their own mouths. The actual separation of the two, for now innocent, lovers is replete with window references. When Léon leaves for Paris he looks back at Emma’s house:

“Il s’arrêta, et il se cacha derrière un pilier, afin de contempler une dernière fois cette maison blanche avec ses quatre jalousies vertes. Il crût voir une ombre derrière la fenêtre, dans la chambre; mais le rideau, se décrochant de la patère comme si personne n’y touchait, remua lentement ses longs plis obliques, qui d’un seul bond s’étalèrent tous, et il resta droit, plus immobile qu’un mur de plâtre.” (185)

Emma, having allowed her admirer to depart, feels virtuous and entitled to indulge herself, as we see in the passage which begins, “Alors les mauvais jours de Tostes recommencèrent”:

Elle s’acheta un prie-Dieu gothique, elle dépensa en un mois pour quatorze francs de citrons à se nettoyer les ongles; elle écrivit à Rouen, afin d’avoir une robe en cachemire bleu; elle choisit, chez Lheureux, la plus belle de ses écharpes; elle se la nouait à la taille par-dessus sa robe de chambre; et, les volets fermés, avec un livre à la main, elle restait étendue sur un canapé dans cet accoutrement. Souvent, elle variait sa coiffure: elle se mettait à la chinoise, en boucles molles, en nattes tressées; elle se fit une raie sur le côté de la tête et roula ses cheveux en dessous, comme un homme.

Elle voulut apprendre l'italien. (190)

She has not yet 'sinned' but she is moving ever closer to the window: she has dressed for the part, framing herself in a certain décor. The section describing this is almost a handbook for the various ethnic types catered to in a brothel; the prie-Dieu gothique catering to a preference for a certain quasi-religious fetish; her coiffure, à la chinoise, for an oriental taste; her futile attempts to learn Italian an attempt to evoke a Mediterranean type.⁹ Just in case the reader might have forgotten that what we are privy to is the judgment of the villagers, we are explicitly reminded here in connection with her "airs évaporés" that this is "le mot des bourgeoises d'Yonville" (191), who are ever-present even when not explicitly identified.

She is again figured in the window when she first encounters Rodolphe.

Emma était accoudée à sa fenêtre (elle s'y mettait souvent: la fenêtre, en province, remplace les théâtres et la promenade), et elle s'amusait à considérer la cohue des rustres, lorsqu'elle aperçut un monsieur vêtu d'une redingote de velours vert. (193)

This is a pivotal point in the narrative since it marks the beginning of her foray into sin. The references to the theater and the promenade are noteworthy since these are both locations popularly associated with 'loose women'. Also, one might add that in addition to going to the theater to see, people (women especially) go to be seen, and Emma's neighbors are increasingly remarking her propensity for display. More importantly for the present argument, the scene contains elements of a vice-charged incident--witness the careless yet deliberate way Rodolphe leaves money with Emma, the way he is carefully eyeing her

throughout the incident. As he leaves the doctor's house Rodolphe is watched by Emma, so she is still at the window, thereby framing the episode between windows. In fact the subtle shift of perspective in mid-sentence is interesting and suggests a certain loucheness:

Puis il déposa trois francs sur le coin de la table, salua négligemment et s'en alla.

Il fut bientôt de l'autre côté de la rivière (c'était son chemin pour s'en retourner à la Huchette); et Emma l'aperçut dans la prairie, qui marchait sous les peupliers, se ralentissant de temps à autre, comme quelqu'un qui réfléchit. (195-196)

At the end of the chapter Rodolphe exclaims, "Oh! Je l'aurai!" (197)

It is interesting to compare this interview with an earlier one between Emma and the haberdasher Lheureux (167). I refer to his first visit to her home: the incident is set up as occurring at nightfall, a circumstance that heightens the dubious familiarity he assumes. The text insists on his ingratiating manner:

Une pauvre boutique comme la sienne n'était pas faite pour attirer une *élégante*; il appuya sur le mot. Elle n'avait pourtant qu'à commander, et il se chargerait de lui fournir ce qu'elle voudrait, tant en mercerie que lingerie, bonneterie ou nouveautés; car il allait à la ville quatre fois par mois régulièrement . . . Et il retira de la boîte une demi-douzaine de cols brodés.

Madame Bovary les examina.

-- Je n'ai besoin de rien, dit-elle. (168)

She is pleased with her exercise of the woman's right to refuse. Lheureux, for his part is positively salivating as he continues:

Alors, (il) exhiba délicatement trois écharpes algériennes, plusieurs paquets d'aiguilles anglaises, . . . le cou tendu, la taille penchée, il suivait, bouche béante le regard d'Emma qui se promenait indécis parmi ces marchandises. De temps à autre, comme pour en chasser la poussière, il donnait un coup d'ongle sur la soie des écharpes, dépliées dans toute leur longueur; et elles frémisaient avec un bruit léger en

faisant, à la lumière verdâtre du crépuscule, scintiller, comme de petites étoiles, les palettes d'or de leur tissu.
 --Combien coûtent-elles?
 --Une misère, répondit-il, une misère; mais rien ne presse; quand vous voudrez; nous ne sommes pas des Juifs!
 Elle réfléchit quelques instants, et finit encore par remercier M. Lheureux, qui répliqua sans s'émouvoir:
 --Eh bien! Nous nous entendrons plus tard; avec les dames je me suis toujours arrangé, si ce n'est avec la mienne, cependant!
 Emma sourit.
 --C'était pour vous dire, reprit-il d'un air bonhomme, après sa plaisanterie, que ce n'est pas l'argent qui m'inquiète...Je vous en donnerais, s'il le fallait.
 Elle eut un geste de surprise.
 --Ah! fit-il vivement et à voix basse, je n'aurais pas besoin d'aller loin pour vous en trouver; comptez-y! (168-169)

What the two encounters have in common is the possibility for predatory males to overstep the limits of domestic privacy because of professional privilege. Lheureux importunes Emma under the pretext of plying his haberdashery trade; Rodolphe opportunistically exploits his legitimate visit to the doctor's office. Mary Orr draws attention to the fact that Lheureux calls at a twilight time.¹⁰ Eugene Gray also associates Emma with dusk: "Flaubert's predilection for shadowy settings in Madame.Bovary . . . indicates that his conception of Emma includes as an essential component the crepuscular décor. Emma is in fact a creature of darkness, most active at night and shunning the bright light of day."¹¹ Gray stops short of saying that Emma is a woman of the night but I would suggest that it is not Flaubert who hints at this but his narrators. They are drawing attention to the nocturnal tendencies of their wayward neighbor. As Orr points out, when Lheureux importunes Emma he is clearly lustful. Emma repulses him, but only for the time being. Orr is explicit

about Lheureux, about his “words of alleged generosity, the giving of money to a woman. Their double meaning and innuendo is the traffic of prostitution” (Orr 80). Orr finds Tanner’s account of Lheureux to be a “limp interpretation”. I would agree: in fact all the men in Yonville to a greater or lesser degree approach her with something of the license that men assign themselves on entering the brothel, this despite her status as a married woman and despite the fact that they all have a nervous stake in the institution of marriage. Most importantly, the connection between sex and money is very much to the fore. Note Lheureux’ words: “je me suis toujours arrangé avec les dames, si ce n’est pas avec la mienne, cependant”. He remarks that he would not have to go far to find a way of advancing money to her. This is followed by a tentative reference to the debauches of the innkeeper le père Tellier, so the tenor of the conversation is not innocent.

Even, or perhaps especially, in marriage, the link between money and sex is ever-present. When le père Rouault reflects on whether or not to offer his daughter to Charles, he reflects on the economics of marriage in the matter of the minimal dowry which he expects to pay, so woman is, as always, the currency driving the bargain. (Dowry has also figured greatly in the account of Charles’ first marriage). When Emma’s father wants to signal his daughter’s acceptance of Charles’ proposal, the opening of a window completes the deal. Is it stretching my argument too far to suggest that Rouault figuratively puts his daughter in the window? To return to Lheureux, as Orr says, “His manipulation

of the silky fabrics, female garments and sensuous ornaments, is designed to fit women into the sexual-erotic stereotypes of the prostitute, so that he can achieve the arousal which would be called into question in actual congress with a real one, and for which he would have to pay. (Orr 82) Everything points to a sexually charged encounter.

Indeed all the men in Yonville could be said to regard Emma lustfully. It is noticeable that in Part I of the novel relatively few of the characters are specifically named; it is only after the move from Tostes to Yonville that the villagers are clearly identified, and even then, to a large extent, it is the male characters who are named and developed, the females being relegated to such roles as housemaids or lumped together and only mentioned peripherally, as with Mesdames Tuvache and Caron. After the first interview with Lheureux, Emma feels pleased with herself that she has been virtuous, that she has resisted Lheureux' blandishments -- she retreats to the foyer with her needlework while Léon fumes with frustrated desire, but her domesticity is feigned--we are told that she conveniently grabbed the stitching work in order to prepare a scene. While she plays the part of the good wife and mother, the reader is left in no doubt of the opinions of her neighbors: "Elle déclarait adorer les enfants . . . ses caresses d'expansions lyriques, qui, à d'autres qu'a des Yonvillais eussent rappelé la Sachette de Notre Dame de Paris" (171). As her dalliance with Rodolphe progresses she is again drawn to the window, specifically at his bidding: "Rodolphe jetait contre les persiennes une poignée de

sable . . . Charles avait la manie de bavarder au coin du feu" (235). The marital home, whose sanctity society urgently requires to uphold, is thus violated: the husband is still firmly at the fireside, it is the wife who is delinquent. This is followed by instances of the adulterous couple's trysts in the consulting rooms down below the living quarters, yet another example of the dangers of mixing commerce with domesticity.

Emma's descent is not without some remission, but again this is expressed figuratively: when she is reminded of her girlhood home-life she evokes a picture of herself at the fireside: "Comme il y avait longtemps qu'elle n'était plus auprès de lui, (Rouault) sur l'escabeau dans la cheminée" (240). This is quickly followed by a mention of the "ruche à miel sous sa fenêtre" (240), honey being indicative of sweetness, seduction and the promise of future happiness, in which she is profoundly deceived. In the struggle between *fenêtre* and *foyer* she is at this point briefly impelled toward the home. After a description of warm domesticity, "le feu brûlait, elle sentait sous ses pantoufles la douceur du tapis etc" (240), she succumbs to an excess of motherliness, embracing her daughter, and is willing to favor her husband over her lover. This will also be doomed to disappointing failure. But when she reverts to infidelity she becomes more careless, more susceptible to criticism in the town: "elle eut même l'inconvenance de se promener avec M. Rodolphe, une cigarette à la bouche comme pour *narguer le monde* . . . quand on la vit, un jour, descendre de l'Hirondelle" (260). In her scandalous dress and behavior she has now moved into the realm of the street

and is even described in her profligacy as arranging her apartment and herself, "comme une courtisane qui attend un prince" (255).

By the time of her liaison with Léon, Emma has abandoned the foyer and domesticity and moved into a shadowy demi-monde. The opening of Part III chapter v again shows her at the window; in preparation for her weekly excursions to Rouen "elle se mettait devant les fenêtres et regardait la Place"(334). By now it should be well established that we learn this through the eyes of those who are watching her; we can be sure that if they don't know exactly what she does in town every Thursday, they are quite certain she is up to no good. The imagery and vocabulary become ever more condemnatory, and specifically ever more insistent on her as a fallen woman. The paragraph beginning "Quelque chose de vertigineuse . . ." (336) is interesting in its demonstrative account of her downward trajectory into vice. The diligence is hurtling, careering downhill, as is Emma. From here on she is increasingly reckless and she is described thus: "elle se penchait des deux mains par le vasistas"(336) in her eagerness to participate in this *Babylon*! Once there, "elle marchait les yeux à terre, frôlant les murs, et souriant de plaisir sous son voile noir baissé." She is now characterized as placed firmly in the street; indeed, we are told that she went through "les ruelles sombres. . . C'est le quartier du théâtre, des estaminets et des filles" (336). She meets Léon, "sur le trottoir, . . . Elle le suivait jusqu'à l'hôtel" (337).

The means of conveyance, which takes her to her rendez-vous, is of course,

the *Hirondelle*. A number of indications suggest that this name for the diligence was carefully chosen by the author as part of his design to point up somewhat obliquely the perception, on the part of the Yonvillais narrators, that their wayward neighbor was little better than a common whore. This need not be read as the judgment of the author, rather it is part of the linguistic coinage of the narrators. These are the terms in which they express their disapproval, and it is crucial to their self-perception that they should condemn any woman who transgresses the social moral desideratum. The epithet *hirondelle* has two associations with prostitution: when, during the nineteenth-century, the moral police made ever more stringent attempts to control prostitution, they imposed many restrictions on the women as they plied their trade. These ranged from an acceptable dress code to requirements that the prostitute should not be visible, and therefore the *lupanar* typically had 'volets fermés', as can be seen in many contemporary *gravures*. However, these restrictions were constantly flouted.

According to an anonymous pamphlet in Zimmerli library: Les Prostituées à Paris:

Les fenêtres doivent être constamment closes, garnies de vitres dépolies ou de persiennes fermées par des cadenzas.

L'obligation du gros numéro et de la lanterne subsiste encore en principe. Mais on accorde assez facilement des dispenses, et la plupart des lupanars chics n'ont plus aujourd'hui qu'un numéro de dimensions ordinaires, ils affectent un air discret et évitent le plus possible de se signaler à l'attention du passant." (25)

"Elles ne peuvent, à quelque heure et sous quelque prétexte que ce soit, se montrer à leurs fenêtres, qui doivent être tenues constamment fermées et garnies de rideaux." (29)

There is clearly a great deal of anxiety about the sight of a woman at the

window, and this is well and truly applicable to the Yonvillais. The same work describes the measures taken in the surveillance of prostitution. In addition to the official brigade there are some plainclothes agents. "Ils (la police des moeurs) surveillent ainsi plus facilement les racoleuses et les hirondelles, autrement dit les femmes qui font la fenêtre" (34).¹² A further mention tells of "Une autre 'hirondelle' , déjà plus ingénieuse, installé sur le rebord de sa fenêtre une caisse où elle sème des plantes grimpantes. . . .Ça fait "remarquer": this is exactly how Emma and Léon are described as they tend their cacti on their respective verandas in the early time of their mutual attraction.

There is another connection between 'hirondelle' and prostitution: As in many cities, in medieval Alsace the area abutting the Cathedral was a known haunt of prostitutes. A 1997 publication De la Prostitution en Alsace: histoires et anecdotes tells of the statue de la Muenschterschwalwe, "la fameuse hirondelle de la cathédrale de Strasbourg. 1280/1300. Cette ribaude aux seins dénudés illustre un aspect important de la conscience historique regionale...l'image de l'hirondelle de la cathédrale." Consequently, in Strasbourg the prostitutes were popularly referred to as *hirondelles*. I believe that the author, through these coded references, is signaling to the reader that the narrators communicate to each other in nuanced innuendo that their neighbor is a loose woman.¹³

As Emma progresses in sin, attending masked balls in questionable company, and staying out all night, she leaves the foyer far behind. The association between money and sex becomes ever more pronounced. The showdown with

Lheureux makes this clear:

Elle le supplia; et même elle appuya sa jolie main blanche et longue sur les genoux du marchand.

--Laisse-moi donc! On dirait que vous voulez me séduire!

And then --

--Ce n'est pas amusant, je le sais; personne, après tout n'en est mort, et puisque c'est le seul moyen qui vous reste de me rendre mon argent . . . (272-273)

Lheureux here clearly suggests that she should prostitute herself. The most explicit linking of money and sex in the novel, however, is the interview with maître Guillaumin. It is here that we learn that Emma's maid has been complicit in her mistress' intrigues. We have already learned that she helped her mistress to hide the bailiff in the attic, and now we hear:

Elles n'avaient, la servante et la maitresse, aucun secret l'une pour l'autre. Enfin Félicité soupira:

--Si j'étais de vous, madame, j'irais chez M. Guillaumin. . .(375)

There follows a scene remarkable for its evocation of the melodramatic:

the woman brought low pleads with the wicked representative of

bourgeois hypocrisy:

Il tendit sa main, prit la sienne, la couvrit d'un baiser vorace, puis la garda sur son genou: et il jouait avec ses doigts délicatement, tout en lui contant mille douceurs. (377)

This unedifying scene finishes with Emma's withdrawal, saying:

--Vous profitez impudemment de ma détresse, monsieur! Je suis à plaindre, mais pas à vendre! (378)

What has been until this point merely suggested, covertly implied, is now made explicit. The silent communication between the mistress and maid is a subtle

use of the technique that has been in use throughout the novel: there is much more implied than a simple suggestion from the servant to facilitate the payment of her mistress's debts. What we see here is that there has been all along a tacit understanding that the men in the town have been waiting to pounce, and both mistress and maid have been fully aware of it. The chapter ends with a resounding punctuating use of language: "Elle partit donc vers la Huchette, sans s'apercevoir qu'elle courait s'offrir à ce qui l'avait tantôt si fort exaspérée, ni se douter le moins du monde de cette prostitution" (382).

The entire scene of the 'saisie' has a good deal in common with other literary accounts of the sale of goods after the death of a courtesan. One thinks of La dame aux camélias and also Nana. We have surely learned enough of the mentality of the narrators to have a sense of their *Schadenfreude*: a woman who betrayed the sanctity of the foyer, of domestic duty, and who is profligate with money deserves all she gets. The enumeration of all the little vanities that her neighbors so begrudged her, "jusque dans ses recoins les plus intimes" (369), the detailing of the luxuries that mattered so much to her self-esteem are evidence of their prurience and their resentment.

III. Moeurs de Province

The title an author chooses is very important: One might ponder why the author chose of Madame Bovary instead of, say, Emma Bovary or Emma Rouault. Equally, the subtitle "Moeurs de province" is significant. 'Moeurs' has

a number of meanings: superficially, the subtitle suggests that the novel is about provincial manners in the style of the more familiar epithet 'comedy of manners'. Then again, it could refer to provincial morality; there is no question that the book concerns itself very much with perceived sexual misconduct and, of course, it was famously the subject of litigation when it first appeared in 1857. The allegations of immorality are of no concern here, except to say that while there is little or no description of sexual activity, we can be quite confident in asserting that the book's major preoccupation is with sexual behavior, and with the anxious insistence on the part of the narrators that the society they represent requires the submission of females to the existing legal and social convention. Indeed we could say that sexuality is present on almost every page, the book throbs with implicit sexual references as demonstrated above. Ernest Pinard, the prosecutor in the obscenity case, was himself the author of a work of pornography and perhaps was a more astute literary critic than he has been given credit for.¹⁴

However, there is another meaning of the word *moeurs*, which I think, is of interest here. The anonymous text (Zimmerli) Les prostituées à Paris has the following to say about *moeurs*.

Dans l'argot des prostituées de bas étage et des souteneurs, les agents des moeurs s'appellent tout simplement: *les moeurs*. Ils sont bien, pour ce monde-là, une incarnation vivante de la morale, c'est à dire de quelque chose de très ennuyeux, qu'on respecte par force, mais qu'on voudrait bien voir à tous les diables.

Among the professed aims of this body, are 'de défendre l'honneur des familles

contre les pièges que lui tend journellement le proxénétisme.” The citizens of Yonville l’Abbaye are the self-appointed custodians of domestic morality and I hope to show that in the subtitle of his novel Flaubert attributes to his secondary characters the dual function of narrators and of moral vigilantes.

I have already discussed above the extent to which Emma is the cynosure of prying eyes and have demonstrated that it is her female neighbors who see themselves as the custodians of virtue in the town. The town itself is a claustrophobic environment in which there is little room for anonymity. The very sketch which Flaubert penned in illustration of the town reinforces the impression of its enclosed inward-looking nature. It is impossible to live there and not have every action, every embarrassing mis-step be seen and commented upon by those who have assigned themselves the role of a moral police force. We are left in no doubt of the stifling proximity in which the characters live. Home life is only nominally private. In the Bovary household, doubling as it does as business space, we learn that “L’odeur des roux pénétrait à travers la muraille, pendant les consultations, de même que l’on entendait de la cuisine les malades tousser dans le cabinet et débiter toute leur histoire” (91). That was the house in Tostes, but similarly in Yonville, we learn at the incident of the botched operation on the clubfoot how Hippolyte’s cries were heard from the *Lion d’or*, how the mayor’s wife did not budge from the window and Charles has only to peer through the blind to see the removal of the amputated leg. Emma cannot even practice the piano without the reader being told that “le vieil instrument

s'entendait jusqu'au bout du village si la fenêtre était ouverte" (101). There is no escaping the constant gaze of those who would persecute and take pleasure in a haughty neighbor's downfall. It is Mesdames Tuvache and Caron who watch Emma as she tends her cacti at the window, waves to her departing husband, watches her lover approach, all framed by the yellow curtains so essential to her self-image, and it is those self-same matrons who spy on her in her final distress when she approaches the *percepteur* Binet to ask for money. Early in the novel there is an effective illustration of the unrelenting pressure of the prying gaze of the peasantry when, at the ball at la Vaubyessard, a servant breaks two windows: "au bruit des éclats de verre, madame Bovary tourna la tête et aperçut dans le jardin, contre les carreaux, des faces de paysans qui regardaient" (112). Even when she briefly believes herself to be removed from her humdrum origins she is brought back to earth and reminded that she is one of them.

Mme Bovary senior also reveals herself to be a member of the *moeurs*: constantly putting pressure on her daughter-in-law, she attempts to influence Emma's moral behavior. She alternately finds her son's wife to be too extravagant and refined for her station, then too slovenly and neglectful. On several occasions she criticizes Emma for her lack of religion, always a favorite ploy of would-be guardians of public morals, and for her failure to control the sexual proclivities of her maid. But the most trenchant intrusion, the most forceful restriction that she can inflict is to curb Emma's reading. Moral police

always seek to impose censorship and in this Mme Bovary *mère* is no exception:

--Sais-tu ce qu'il faudrait à ta femme? reprenait la mère Bovary. Ce seraient des occupations forcées, des ouvrages manuels! Si elle était, comme tant d'autres, contrainte à gagner son pain, elle n'aurait pas ces vapeurs-là, qui lui viennent d'un tas d'idées qu'elle se fourre dans la tête, et du désœuvrement où elle vit.

--Pourtant elle s'occupe, disait Charles.

--Ah! Elle s'occupe! A quoi donc? A lire des romans, de mauvais livres, des ouvrages qui sont contre la religion et dans lesquels on se moque des prêtres par des discours tirés de Voltaire. Mais tout cela va loin, mon pauvre enfant, et quelqu'un qui n'a pas de religion finit toujours par tourner mal.

Donc, il fut résolu que l'on empêcherait Emma de lire des romans. L'entreprise ne semblait point facile. La bonne dame s'en chargea: elle devait, quand elle passerait par Rouen, aller en personne chez le loueur de livres et lui représenter qu'Emma cessait ses abonnements. (191-192)

In acting thus Mme Bovary senior merely concurs with the official, legal status quo. Under the Code Civile the married woman has no more rights than an imbecile or a minor; she is emphatically not an independent person. In her frustration that she can not prevail, Emma's mother-in-law even evokes the official police: "N'aurait on pas le droit d'avertir la police, si le libraire persistait quand même dans son métier d'empoisonnement?" (192) ¹⁵

There is yet another mother in the novel who vociferously enunciates the fears of the social group: Madame Dupuis, mother of Léon, has no compunction about writing to her son's employer to share with him that Léon is involved with a married woman:

. . . la bonne dame, entrevoyant l'éternel épouvantail des familles, c'est-à-dire la vague créature pernicieuse, la sirène, le monstre, qui habite fantastiquement les profondeurs de l'amour, écrivit à maître Dubocage, son patron, lequel fut parfait dans cette affaire. Il le tint durant trois quarts d'heure, voulant lui dessiller les yeux, l'avertir du gouffre. Une telle intrigue nuirait plus tard à son établissement. Il le supplia de rompre, et,

s'il ne faisait ce sacrifice dans son propre intérêt, qu'il le fit au moins pour lui, Dubocage! (363)

The use of *style indirect libre* makes it quite clear that we are not listening to the opinion of the author but to that of the character. It also effectively conveys the complicity of society in overstepping the limits of privacy and the law. Young Dupuis would have every right to tell his mother and his employer to mind their own business, but in fact he weakly capitulates. Madame Dupuis has evoked the sanctity of 'family life', Dubocage reminds his employee of the risks to his future career; together they are unstoppable in their drive to protect the foundations of bourgeois stability, which is to say, money and the family unit.

Although these condemnations have been delivered in the voices of the characters who hold the views that the reader is exposed to, it is possible to discern the amused ironic detachment of the author, often by the use of hyperbole, as in the above example. The over-excited vocabulary, *sirène*, *monstre*, is actually risible in the circumstances. After all, nothing worse has happened than that a pimply student has engaged in a dalliance with a woman who is scarcely a serial adulteress. The author's technique effectively summons up a picture of an army of prohibitionist mothers rising up to defend small-town provincial mores: *mœurs de province*.

But it is in the person of Binet that the author displays his most biting sarcasm, figuring the *percepteur* as a bumbling officer of the moral police. The tax-collector Binet is pure caricature, a laughable portrait of a Keystone cop with

his helmet that keeps falling down over his eyes while he is on maneuvers at the Comices. The first time we meet him in the *Lion d'or* we learn from Madame Lefrancois that, "Son pareil n'existe pas sur le terre pour l'exactitude" (139); punctuality is always a requirement for the constabulary. Homais describes him as "un ancien carabinier qui est percepteur" (139), after which we are treated to a long physical description of his clothes which sound like a uniform including: "en toute saison, des bottes bien cirées qui avaient deux renflements paralleles, à cause de la saillie de ses orteils" (139) the absolute clinching cliché about the police is to draw attention to their big feet! Just in case we missed the joke the author has him remark in response to Homais' inquiries about Léon that (il) "n'était point payé par la police"(182).

Binet also spends time at his window and he has a hobby that we can well imagine the Yonvillais find bizarre:

Parmi les fenêtres du village, il y en avait une encore plus souvent occupée: car, le dimanche, depuis le matin jusqu'à la nuit, et chaque après-midi, si le temps était clair, on voyait à la lucarne d'un grenier le profil maigre de M. Binet penché sur son tour, dont le ronflement monotone s'entendait jusqu'au Lion d'Or. (164)

In response to the lovesick Léon, Binet says Léon needs more distractions:

--Moi, à votre place, j'aurais un tour.
 -Mais je ne sais pas tourner, répondit le clerc.
 --Oh! C'est vrai! faisait l'autre en caressant sa machoire avec un air de dédain mêlé de satisfaction. (183)

There are two, perhaps three major analyses of Binet to consider here. The first, David Williams, "The Role of Binet in Madame Bovary" (Romanic Review 1980) sees in the tax-collector's pursuit of a repetitive pastime a placing by the author

of himself at the center of the novel, rather in the manner of artists who feature themselves internally in their own work. Williams likens Binet to a mass producer of clichés/images and his technical facility to that of a master craftsman/writer who is Flaubert, constantly refinishing pointless work.¹⁶ This argument is unconvincing, especially if we apply Brombert's assessment of Flaubert as always questing "after a higher more general truth". Brombert refers to Flaubert's "mystical velleities", remembering his desire to write an "exalting book".¹⁷ Art for Flaubert was equated with mysticism and Williams fails to make the case that the, as I see him, comic Binet, was in any way an alter ego for the author. Tony Tanner's analysis in The Novel of Adultery (1979) comes closer to the mark when he says that 'Binet's hobby is solipsistic, masturbatory.'(257)¹⁸ Mary Orr goes further than this when she says that "male masturbatory activities 'pervade' this society through *all* those who circulate its money".¹⁹

None of these commentators has picked up the extent to which the characterization of Binet contains all the elements of farce, including mistaken identity. When Emma comes across Binet in a 'hide' as she returns from her early-morning tryst with Rodolphe, it is high comedy: Emma is in a nervous condition, anxiously watching attic windows for possible spies when, "elle crut distinguer tout à coup le long canon d'une carabine qui semblait la tenir en joue" (232). It is a jolt, and she almost imagines herself at gunpoint in the person of the upholder of the moral police. It is also comic because the *carabine* is a

crude sexual symbol and since the *percepteur* has already been effectively made ridiculous, the idea of his arresting her is pathetic. Further episodes featuring Binet continue to make fun of his appearance, his helmet once again down over his eyes, his nose red. The point is that the townspeople see him as a harmless pervert. Birdwatching of this sort is a comic stock-in-trade and one can almost imagine the mockery of the villagers at the idea of his hiding in a barrel. We can imagine the Yonvillais, wondering behind the backs of their hands, just what he is getting up to in there at such an ungodly hour, or just what he is getting up to as he sits in the window working his 'tour'. Everything he says confirms his plodding banality: He saw a play once; it was about the seduction of a young girl, standard melodrama for the time. All this just confirms our picture of Binet. When Emma approaches him *in extremis* their mutual embarrassment is palpable, excruciating:

Il était seul, dans sa mansarde, en train d'imiter, avec du bois, une de ces ivroireries indescriptibles, composées de croissants de sphères creusées les unes dans les autres, le tout droit comme un obélisque et ne servant à rien; et il entamait la dernière pièce, il touchait au but? Dans le clair-obscur de l'atelier, la poussière blonde s'envolait de son outil, comme une aigrette d'étincelles sous les fers d'un cheval au galop; les deux roues tournaient, ronflaient; Binet souriait, le menton baissé, les narines ouvertes et semblait enfin perdu dans un de ces bonheurs complets, n'appartenant sans doute qu'aux occupations médiocres, qui amusent l'intelligence par des difficultés faciles, et l'assouvissent en une réalisation au-delà de laquelle il n'y a pas à rêver. (379)

And then as he walks up and down, "Il se caressait la barbe avec satisfaction". Binet, like Emma is often featured sitting at his window and, as with her, it is often a lit window.

There is much in the text that associates Emma with a crepuscular gloom. Closely allied to this are a number of references to a light in the window. The red light, is of course, the most obvious and well-known index of a house of ill-repute. Flaubert's text does not go quite as far as to place a *lanterne* explicitly, but there are many mentions of Emma at a lit window, and such associations with display do not stop with the ill-fated heroine. The pharmacist Homais, who also has a penchant for self-display, is presented through the medium of his shop window. He can be said to prostitute himself, in a sense, and we should remember that he is in infraction of the law. Binet also has a light in his window as he sits there playing with his 'tour'. We might well remember that he also is a minor fugitive from justice. When all three come together in the pharmacist's shop Binet is described as "éclairé par la lumière du bocal rouge"(233). It might not be too much to suggest that he also is fingered by the red light of whoredom.

Finally, one should consider Emma's milieu, the environment she has created for herself and which is presented to the reader through the filter of her neighbors' perception. The following quote comes from La prostitution contemporaine:

Les filles des maisons de première catégorie se lèvent vers dix ou onze heures du matin.
 Les soins corporels sont incessants et minutieux. Elles se baignent très fréquemment, presque toujours à domicile . . .
 Elles déjeunent à la fourchette, en peignoir, vers onze heures du matin. Elles passent la journée à préparer leurs toilettes, à causer, à fumer des cigarettes; quelques-unes font de la musique: on trouve un piano dans toutes ces maisons.

Celles qui savent s'occuper font des broderies, des modes, des brimborions, des fleurs; très peu lisent . . .
 On sera peut-être étonné d'apprendre que les rares prostituées sachant lire ne s'adonnent pas à la lecture des ouvrages licencieux; elles recherchent plutôt des romans contenant des scènes tragiques, capable d'exciter de vives émotions.

Emma fits every single aspect of the generalized description in Taxil's book.²⁰ We have heard how, as she became increasingly reckless, she would descend from the Hironnelle openly smoking cigarettes "pour narguer le monde"; she dallies with playing the piano; her reading matter, though copious, is not serious. The description of her, filtered through the perception of the Yonvillais corresponds very closely to the above:

Elle dépensa en un mois pour quatorze francs de citrons à se nettoyer les ongles; elle écrivit à Rouen, afin d'avoir une robe en cachemire bleu; elle choisit, chez Lheureux, la plus belle de ses écharpes; elle se la nouait à la taille par-dessus sa robe de chambre; et, les volets fermés, avec un livre à la main, elle restait étendue sur un canapé, dans cet accoutrement. Souvent elle variait sa coiffure, elle se mettait à la chinoise, en boucles molles, en nattes tressées; elle se fit une raie sur le côté de la tête et roula ses cheveux en dessous, comme un homme. (190)

It is possible to detect in this passage something of the tedium and languor of the harem or brothel in off-duty hours. Naturally, Emma does not see herself in this light but to her neighbors, and to her mother-in-law, these are signs of her increasing voluptuousness. It is also worth remembering that an early precursor of Emma was a prostitute: Marie in Flaubert's Novembre had a lot in common with Madame Bovary and she, too, is often figured in the window.

By very subtle means a picture is compiled of a small-town scarlet woman.

Unlike Balzac, Flaubert does not put himself into the account by stopping the action to embark on lengthy explanations of what his characters thought.

The impression that is being built up is of a group of self-righteous persecutors. It would not be their style to come out and accuse their neighbor in blunt terms. Rather, through their pursed lips they convey their disapproval by innuendo, and this is done by drawing attention to Emma's demeanor, her appearance and her associates. The very banality of her foray into vice is a large part of her tragedy.

La Prostitution contemporaine also discusses the kind of lovers that a superior class of prostitute favored and, indeed, law students are the most common. In addition to her actual lovers, the only men who make love to her are her husband, Rodolphe and Léon, she is surrounded by a number of minor characters who have something in common with some typically louche brothel hangers-on.¹⁶ The minor characters I want to consider now are the *perruquier*, the organ grinder and Justin.

The *perruquier* is a shadowy minor character who is first presented in Tostes. There is an indication that Emma and the hairdresser are kindred spirits. Like her, he laments his situation and dreams of owning a shop in a bigger town. He spends his day "à se promener en long, . . . et attendant la clientèle"(125). One can well imagine that the virtuous and thrifty housewives of Tostes scarcely frequent the beauty parlor; that luxury belongs in the realm of sin in the big city, in a shadowy demi-monde. His present premises are mentioned as having

pictures of women with dyed hair stuck on to the window, and as being in close proximity to the cabaret. His dream is to have a business near the port and the theater. All of these are likely 'red-light' locations. In fact the *perruquier* does turn up later in Rouen, and Emma spends a good deal of time in his shop when she is well into her foray into vice.

Another shadowy figure who corresponds to a type associated with the underworld of prostitution is the organ-grinder. This itinerant shows up from time to time. In case there is any lingering doubt in the mind of the watchful reader, we are told that he appeared "derrière les vitres de la salle", i.e., in the street while Emma is at the window: "L'homme faisait aller sa manivelle, regardant à droite, à gauche, et vers les fenêtres"(126).

Justin also corresponds to a familiar type of brothel hanger-on. The 'maisons closes' usually had such a boy who would run errands. By making himself useful to his glamorous neighbor in just such a way, Justin is able to indulge his romantic and sexual fantasies: he is pictured brushing her shoes, and longingly regards her very feminine undergarments as her maid does the ironing.

Far from being sensationally scandalous this is all rather pathetic. It is the very ordinariness of the characters that makes the story poignant. Mary Orr has suggested that in fact the Bovarys, unlike the socially engineered marriages we have seen in Balzac, were a love match gone wrong.¹⁶ This ties in with Jean Rousset's observation that in the passage dealing with Charles' student days, Flaubert, in a sense, confuses Charles with Emma.²¹ Certainly, he uses the same

technique that we have remarked many times of a character being observed while seated at a window, a *topos* more commonly associated with Emma. Also, the sense that he is being caught in an attitude of *rêverie* puts him in the same condition as Emma. They are both dreamers. The description of Charles during his student days, while living in Rue de Robec, follows his downward trajectory, missing classes and hospital rounds, acquiring a taste for the cabaret, *le jeu*, and finally sex. This all has a Hogarthian flavor: a series of images which culminate in his abject return to his home town and family. Except, of course, that as a *roué* he is spectacularly unsuccessful--his transgressions were so minor as to be pathetic. What is interesting is that his inept Rake's Progress prefigures Emma's Harlot's Progress: although she pays the ultimate price for her forays into vice she is scarcely to be considered a 'fallen woman' and she has profited neither financially nor has she been personally fulfilled by her misdemeanors. Like Charles returning to his village after his fall, so at the end, when she can no longer sustain her deceit, Emma descends into the environment that she cannot escape.

1. Gustave Flaubert, Madame Bovary: moeurs de province, (Paris: Flammarion, 1986) 81.
2. Jean Rousset, Forme et signification, (Paris: Librairie José Corti, 1962).
3. Gérard Genette, Seuils, (Paris: Editions du seuil, 1987) 56.
Genette suggests that subtitles are very important. Although he cites Madame Bovary as an example, he does not discuss what the importance might be in this case.
4. Tony Tanner, Adultery in the Novel, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982).
5. Eugene Gray, "Emma by Twilight: Flawed Perception in Madame Bovary". Nineteenth Century French Studies Vol 5, 1977, 239.
6. Harry Weinberg, "The Function of Italics in Madame Bovary". _____
Nineteenth Century French Studies, Vol 3 1975, 97-100.
7. Liga Lusic, "La Chaleur et la Serre Chaude dans Madame Bovary" Nineteenth Century French Studies 1982, 17-125.
8. Mary Orr, Madame Bovary: Representations of the Masculine, (Bern: Lang, 1999).
9. Alain Corbin, La prostitution à Paris au XIX^e siècle, (Paris: Seuil, 1981) 111.
10. Mary Orr, op. cit. 80
11. Eugene Gray, op. cit.
12. Les Prostituées à Paris, Anonymous. Zimmerli Library.
13. Gabriel Braeuner, De la prostitution en Alsace, (Strasbourg- Illkirch: Le Verger, 1997).

14. Dominick LaCapra, Madame Bovary on Trial, (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1982
15. Carol Rifelj, "'Ces tableaux du monde': Keepsakes in Madame Bovary" Nineteenth Century French Studies Vol 25, 360-385. 1997 gives an excellent account of the eroticisation of Emma's reading.
16. David Williams, "The Role of Binet in Madame Bovary" Romantic Review 1980
17. Victor Brombert, The Novels of Flaubert (Princeton University Press. 1966
18. Tanner op. cit.
19. Orr op. cit.
20. Léo Taxil, La Prostitution contemporaine: étude d'une question sociale. Paris. 1884_
21. Rousset Forme et signification op. cit. 112-117

**The Laundry in the Camera Obscura: Narrative Techniques in
L'Assommoir**

"Voyez ce qui passe devant nous en ces photographies"¹
Barbey d'Aurevilly

In a public wash-house in a working-class district of Paris during the Second Empire, a young woman, recently arrived from the provinces and finding herself abandoned by the father of her children, engages in an unseemly brawl. Nothing is sacrosanct in this environment; the women who bring their soiled linen to the *lavoir* spend their entire lives in an atmosphere of hard work, violence, drunkenness, back-biting and general lack of privacy. Gervaise Macquart, the hapless protagonist in Emile Zola's L'assommoir, longs only for the opportunity to be able to live decently and bring up her children well. She says:

Mon idéal ce serait de travailler tranquille, de manger toujours du pain, d'avoir un trou un peu propre pour dormir . . . Aussi (d')élever mes enfants . . . et de ne pas être battue.² (Flammarion 84)

Despite her efforts to realize her dream of such a clean little nest, she will eventually be overpowered by her circumstances. The wash-house where she tangles with her nemesis is figured in the text as a living, breathing entity driven by the steam engine (*machine à vapeur*). In its pulsating,

vital energy the wash-house is a microcosm of the *quartier* itself, and the episode of the public fight contains all the elements of misfortune that will befall her. Already in this early scene we see how the women work, the only man present is a voyeur who enjoys the spectacle of so much female nudity and does nothing to defuse the violence. There are indications of the immoderate drinking that will infect Gervaise's household; the young housewives have bottles of wine with them while they work. And her children who will soon be dispatched from their home are only fleetingly present. The privacy that the bourgeoisie jealously construct to contain wives and children is a luxury well beyond the reach of the working classes.

Yet there are many similarities between the characters of Emma Bovary and the laundress Gervaise in L'assommoir, and in the construction of the novels which tell their sad histories. For instance, there are correspondences between the series of three 'lovers' that each of the women has: Charles, Léon, Rodolphe in Flaubert's novel yielding to Lantier, Coupeau, and Goujet in the seventh of Zola's Rougon-Macquart series. Of greater interest for this study is the fact that both women are shown in three distinct residences: Emma is shown at les Bertaux, later at Tostes and lastly in Yonville l'Abbaye. Gervaise's story unfolds in the domestic spaces first of the Hotel Boncoeur, followed by her first home with Coupeau, rue Neuve de la Goutte d'Or. Finally, the greater part of the novel takes place in the 'grande maison' of the rue de la Goutte d'Or. Whereas Emma Bovary lived out her life in the provinces and in a bourgeois setting, Gervaise

Macquart inhabited a working-class neighborhood in the capital city at a time of massive immigration from the countryside. As Jacques Dubois has referred to L'assommoir as "le roman des demeures successives de Gervaise"³ and since Zola famously remarked that "to know the house is to know the woman", I will examine in this chapter Gervaise's relation to the domestic spaces.

L'assommoir opens with a description of the young mother of two at an open window as she anxiously surveys the street below in search of her recalcitrant lover. Once again, windows abound in this novel but their function is quite different from that in Madame Bovary, although they have an important role in guiding the reader's perception. As in the case of Madame Bovary, it is important to understand exactly whose version of events is on view in L'assommoir. It is noticeable that Gervaise herself is present, on stage as it were, in almost the entire range of the action. There are only three passages of any significance where she is not physically present and these are quite late in the narrative: Coupeau's protracted pub crawl in chapter viii, the tragic history of Lalie Bijard chapter x, and the section where Nana moves out in chapter xi. In the first half of this very symmetrical book there are only two narrative voices: that of Gervaise herself, through whose eyes we see, as well as that of the anonymous third-person narrator. It is significant that in the first half of the book Gervaise is always present, not so in the latter half. This narrative technique persists and reaches a high point in the scene of the idyll with Goujet which, interestingly enough, takes place in the open air, a privileged location in

this otherwise mainly indoor novel. In chapter vii, which is given over entirely to Gervaise's fête and which marks the crisis and the real beginning of the *déchéance* of the Coupeau family, a plurality of narrative voices jostle for attention. This is marked by an increase in the use of both the *style indirect libre* and the vernacular.⁴

Zola's Naturalist agenda required impartiality on the part of the narrator and his self-imposed brief was to provide an accurate portrait of a *milieu*. As Ian Gregor says in The Moral and the Story, Zola "is not proposing the philosophical 'This had to be'; but the sociological: 'This was,' and the measure in which it was typical is its most important aspect."⁵ Thus, under the guise of disinterested scientific inquiry the author voyeuristically appropriates the right to invade the most private regions of an entire social class. This voyeurism extends to the readership: the working-class models for the *dramatis personae* of L'assommoir, with the dubious exception of Lantier, were certainly not readers, who, as David Baguley points out, are distinctly bourgeois.⁶ The novel thus enables the literate, middle-class reader to enter a domain that would otherwise be closed, to see, in fact, how the other half lives. Nowhere is this more true than in the scenes describing Coupeau's *delirium tremens*, itself filtered through the prurient gaze of the medical establishment as represented by the doctors in the hospital, then through Gervaise's grotesque retelling, which passes to the inhabitants of the *quartier* and finally to the readers. In a very real sense, Gervaise, whose story the novel is, is the vehicle by which the reader enters into the slum world.

It is through Gervaise's eyes that the reader perceives the world of the Goutte d'Or, a point of view that is set up at the very beginning of the novel. As the novel begins we do not merely see with her eyes, we watch her seeing through an aperture, in this case a window. Her perception is at once accurate and distorted; we are specifically told that her eyes are veiled by tears and further that it is still not quite daylight; also that the lantern outside her window bothered her and upset her vision. While she is watching, dawn breaks over the city and she begins to see clearly and thus to understand her situation.

Zola's quest for scientific disinterestedness required him to establish a narratorial system that would ensure maximum objectivity. The naturalist imperative was to show rather than tell. Had cinema been available it would almost certainly have been an ideal option, and the opening sequences of the present work have a cinematographic flavor. Unlike the narratorial 'set-up' used by Balzac, as discussed in the previous chapters, the method used by Zola eschews the use of a narrator/persona acting as a guide, in favor of a more imagistic approach, dropping the reader into the action, as it were, *in medias res*.

In this respect, Zola's attempts to allow the narrative to reveal itself have more in common with Impressionist painting or theatrical representation, and a number of commentators have interpreted L'assommoir in such terms. In "L'assommoir: une destructuration impressionniste de l'espace descriptif", Patricia Carles suggests, with some justification, that Zola's very pictorial work

shares much of its technique with the Impressionist painters.⁷ In contrast say, to Balzac's evocation of the Maison Vauquer, with its "descriptions frontales et exhaustives . . . posant les masses sombres qui encadrent l'espace avant de nous faire pénétrer au centre du tableau en suivant les lignes de fuite d'une perspective classique parfaitement disciplinée" (118), Carles likens Zola's work to that of Caillebotte or Vuillard, by installing the observer at a window, exactly the position of Gervaise as the novel opens. According to Carles, Zola, in common with the Impressionists, likes to show more than one aspect of a subject and at many different times; one thinks for instance of Monet's Haystacks. She demonstrates persuasively that Zola portrays three different views of the table for Gervaise's fête, shown at different times of day and under different light. Carles suggests that Zola understood that more than one angle of vision could be acceptable as truth, and this Impressionist technique fits well with the social relativism in play in Zola's novelistic project. As Carles says, "Zola affirme la relativité des tempéraments modifiés par le milieu"(119). She is also interesting on the "vue plongeante," as from the Colonne de Vendôme, and Coupeau's view of Paris from the roof where he works. Since Zola was an interested and active promoter of the Impressionist agenda, it seems reasonable to accept that he kept their methods and ideology in mind in his own writing. However, in the same period a new medium was emerging which would also be interesting to him; photography was arguably still in its infancy and, although Zola did not take it up as an amateur until some ten or eleven years after writing

L'assommoir he almost certainly pondered the artistic possibilities of the new technology.

While bearing in mind the importance Carles ascribes to the triple portrait of the table set up for Gervaise's name day festivities, we might consider the specifically timed instances of Gervaise's looking out of the window as the story begins. Gervaise's views from the window of the Hotel Boncoeur are documented at two a.m., again at five o'clock when she awakens, and at eight when she finally gives up, providing the reader with three different representations from the same vantage point. The insistence on time, angle of vision and a lens-like aperture suggests strongly that the resulting tableau is akin to a photographic exposure.

Mary Jane Evans Moore discusses Gervaise in this opening scene in theatrical terms.⁸ "As she waits for Lantier, she sees the *stage* on which most of her story will be *played* out, and the workers on their way to Paris--her *co-actors and the chorus of her tragedy*" (my italics). In this interpretation Gervaise, at her window, is likened to a spectator in a *loge* watching the scene of her own drama. Compelling as it is, the theatrical interpretation yields to a photographic one because of the explicit references to a distorting optic, i.e. that her eyes were veiled by tears. Whether one considers the analogy to be theatrical or photographic there is in each case an implicit voyeurism into a private world. The assertion of a photographic bias need not exclude a theatrical one: Roland Barthes in Camera Lucida suggests that the traditional art with which he finds

photography to have most in common is, in fact, theater.⁹

Zola had long been preoccupied with problems of perception: in the letter to Valabrègue (1864) he outlined his "screen theory":

Toute oeuvre d'art est comme une fenêtre ouverte sur la création; il y a, enchassé dans l'embrasement de la fenêtre, une sorte d'Ecran transparent, à travers lequel on aperçoit les objets plus ou moins déformés, souffrant des changements plus ou moins sensibles dans leurs lignes et dans leur couleur. Ces changements tiennent à la nature de l'Ecran. On n'a plus la création exacte et réelle, mais la création modifiée par le milieu où passe son image.¹⁰ (Correspondance 375)

He even explicitly refers to "lentilles, concaves ou convexes, (qui) déforment les objets chacune dans un sens." Of the three screens which he identifies, Classic, Romantic and Realist, Zola prefers the latter although, while attesting to its impartiality and fidelity, he admits that it too has limitations, a position which is entirely consistent with his desire to produce truthful reportage. Indeed, his methodology, based on the careful preparation of *dossiers*, reflects his experience in journalism. Nevertheless, as he is preparing a novel, and not a sociological document, it is the creative artistic element that is the mark of accomplishment. The aim to provide a version of reality through "des images aussi fidèles qu'un Ecran peut en donner"(379) sits well with a kind of photo-journalism, which is what the author may have been attempting to achieve, and does achieve very successfully. In its early days photography shared the same inferior status in relation to painting that journalism had to creative writing, although the practitioners of both necessarily work with many of the same demands.

In L'assommoir there are many instances of windows, always coupled with reference to the intensity of light coming through them. At the opening of the second chapter Gervaise and Coupeau are sitting in the dram shop owned by old Colombe and once again the reader shares the laundress's visual perception. This is the first time we learn of the distilling apparatus which has such a sinister presence throughout the novel. Specifically, we learn that it is in a "cour vitrée". Soon after this there is a lengthy paragraph in which Gervaise surveys the busy street outside and we are reminded that she sees it through the windows (79). The reader has a strong sense of Gervaise's heightened visual perception; after all, she has only recently come to Paris from the countryside, and the vibrant activity makes a great impression both on her and on the reader.¹¹ As in the opening chapter, the window is evoked very early in the narration, as its role is crucial to the impression that the author wants to convey. Indeed, in many ways, the novel could almost be said to begin in the second chapter, the first being more like a preamble; a number of characters, such as Lantier and Mme Boche appear only to disappear until much later in the novel, when Gervaise and Coupeau have moved into the Grande Maison. The author's re-use of the same technique, that of allowing the reader to follow Gervaise's perception through a window, reinforces the point of view that he has already established in the opening chapter.

Another key scene, this time in chapter v, is set up with an explicit reference to a window and the light streaming in. Gervaise is in her shop in the tenement

building:

A cette heure, le soleil tombait d'aplomb sur la devanture, le trottoir renvoyait une réverbération ardente, dont les grandes moires dansaient au plafond de la boutique; et ce coup de lumière, bleui par le reflet du papier des étagères et de la vitrine mettait au-dessus de l'établi un jour aveuglant, comme une poussière de soleil tamisée dans les linges fins. Il faisait là une température à crever. On avait laissé ouverte la porte de la rue, mais pas un souffle de vent ne venait. (184)

The scene that is being established is the passage that marks the beginning of Gervaise's moral decline when her husband comes into the laundry and presses his drunken attentions on her in front of her employees. This important scene is carefully set up to be very visual, with many references to light, so essential in early photography. The open door is the aperture through which the street, which is to say the prurient gaze of the observer, is enabled to penetrate into this very intimate scene.¹² A kind of a hush surrounds the scene which heightens the sense of a surreptitious presence, a scopophilic intrusion. Photography often has an undercurrent of the pornographic, because the viewer is enabled to observe without being actually present. This is, of course, exactly the situation provided by a novel. The early cameras, with their hooded photographer, are especially suggestive of the furtive. It is precisely because the scene described above is informal, naturalistic and, indeed, like a candid photographic shot that the viewer/reader finds it irresistible.

Of the many other instances of windows literally throwing light on a scene one should mention at this point the telling of Coupeau's accident. When the roofer falls, the tableau is established in a manner that is highly theatrical. The

picture of Coupeau pirouetting high above the street brings to mind a circus acrobat or tightrope walker or an *entr'acte*, a novelty act high in the flies of the theater. What is interesting here is that the incident is shown in a double perspective: both from the street, where a terrified Gervaise watches with her heart in her mouth, but also by an anonymous spectator: Coupeau is in conversation with the street below:

Dans la rue de la Nation, large, déserte, leurs paroles, lancées à toute volées, avaient seulement fait mettre à sa fenêtre une petite vieille; et cette vieille restait là accoudée, se donnant la distraction d'une grosse émotion, à regarder cet homme, sur la toiture d'en face, comme si elle espérait le voir tomber d'une minute à l'autre. (159)

And again; "En face, la vieille n'avait pas quitté sa fenêtre regardant l'homme, attendant"(160) until, when he falls, "la petite vieille, comme satisfaite, fermait tranquillement sa fenêtre" (162). The anonymous watcher is, in a way, like the disinterested reporter that Zola aspires to be, registering personal tragedies, documenting the sad minutiae of his realist/naturalist enterprise, while in the process achieving the unedifying status of an intruder. The significance of the window is that in this very visual novel the writer/reporter seems to be more like a photographer. In an age which already had succumbed to a sensationalist press, witness the scene in Colombe's Assommoir when Lantier is reading the newspaper and the illiterate Coupeau asks for some gory stuff, a murder perhaps (315), the implicit photographer/reporter who lingers with his lens at the ready is waiting for a happening, a photographic scoop. His existence is justified, valorized by disaster. The windows that recur so insistently are the lens through

which we view the action. More than half a century before Isherwood wrote Goodbye to Berlin Zola is effectively saying, "I am a camera."

Zola took up amateur photography, beginning in 1887, but with his wide-ranging interests in science and the arts he had occasion much earlier than this date to ponder the intricacies of the nascent technology, very much in vogue in Paris at the time. Indeed, it was around the time of writing L'Assommoir, published in 1876, that he became friendly with the famous nineteenth-century pioneer of portrait photography Paul Nadar. Such photographic technique is particularly well suited to the Naturalist project and there is a proliferation of photographic allusions and vocabulary in this novel. For instance, important scenes that were instantly captured in the frame of a window flooded by light are worked out, developed in a *chambre noire*, as when Coupeau, who has been jovial and bantering in his pursuit of Gervaise during the day, comes to her in a feverish state: "à une heure du matin, dans la *chambre noire*, à la clarté fumeuse d'une chandelle qu'ils oubliaient de moucher, ils discuteront leur mariage" (93). His protestations that she might "rouler sur les trottoirs, être laide, fainéante, dégoûtante, avoir une séquelle d'enfants crottés" (93) are in fact proleptic, a glimpse into the future so precise as to be photographic. Tentative yet insistent, Coupeau's premonitions are like snapshots waiting to be developed.

However, it is in the description of the tenement itself, the *grande maison*, that a photographic metaphor becomes more apparent. From the outset the

description of the tenement emphasizes its verticality:

Gervaise. . . examinait la façade. Sur la rue, la maison avait *cinq étages*, alignant chacun à la file quinze fenêtres dont les persiennes noires aux lames cassées, donnaient un air de ruine à cet *immense* pan de muraille. . . La maison paraissait d'autant plus *colossale* qu'elle *s'élevait entre deux petites constructions basses*, chétives, collées contre elle; et, carrée, pareille à un bloc de mortier gaché grossièrement, se pourrissant et s'émiettant sous la pluie, elle *profilait sur le ciel clair, au-dessus des toits voisins*, son énorme cube brut . . . Mais Gervaise regardait surtout la porte, une *immense* porte ronde, s'étalant jusqu'au deuxième étage, creusant un porche profond, à l'autre bout duquel on voyait le coup de jour blafard d'une grande cour. (87)

And later when she enters the building:

Et là, au seuil, *elle leva de nouveau les yeux*. A l'intérieur, les façades avaient *six étages*, quatre façades régulières enfermant le vaste carré de la cour. C'étaient des murailles grises, mangées d'une lèpre jaune, rayées de bavures par l'égouttement des *toits, qui montaient toutes plates du pavé aux ardoises* sans une moulure, seuls les tuyaux de descente se coudaient aux étages, où les caisses béantes des plombs mettaient la tache de leur fonte rouillée. Les fenêtres sans persienne montraient des vitres nues, d'un vert glauque d'eau trouble. . . Du *haut en bas*, les logements trop petits crevaient au-dehors lâchaient des bouts de leur misère par toutes les fentes. *En bas* desservant chaque façade, une porte *haute et étroite*, sans boiserie, taillée dans le nu du plâtre creusait un vestibule lézarde, au fond duquel tournaient les marches boueuses d'un *escalier* à rampe de fer; et l'on comptait ainsi quatre escaliers, indiqués par les quatre premières lettres de l'alphabet, peintes sur le mur. Les rez de chaussée étaient aménagés en immenses ateliers, fermés par des vitrages noirs de poussière : la forge d'un serrurier y flambait . . . Gervaise lentement promenait son regard, *l'abaissait du sixième étage au pavé, remontait*, surprise de cette énormité, se sentant au milieu d'un organe vivant, au coeur même d'une ville. (88)

As she comes out of her reverie Coupeau remarks: "C'est toujours loué *de haut en bas*" (88). (Italics and underlines are mine: italics indicate verticality, underlining marks window/lens).

What are we to make of this tall, vertical construct with its many darkened

windows? Whereas Gervaise's initial impression is conveyed to us as in its view from without, the second time she visits the Grande Maison, that is, when she and Coupeau visit the Lorilleux who live on the sixth floor, staircase B, what we are shown is the view from within, consistent with Zola's belief that hostile forces attack his characters both externally and internally. This time we hear:

Coupeau lui cria en riant d'empoigner ferme la rampe et de ne plus la lâcher. Elle leva les yeux, cligna les paupières, en apercevant la haute tour creuse de la cage de l'escalier, éclairée par trois becs de gaz, de deux étages en deux étages; le dernier, tout en haut, avait l'air d'une étoile tremblotante dans un ciel noir, tandis que les deux autres jetaient de longues clartés, étrangement découpées, le long de la spirale interminable des marches. (95)

In addition to the verticality, what is now emphasized is the darkness and the dizzying spiral staircase which is in every sense disorientating to Gervaise. Here Zola is evoking a *camera obscura*; not the small box-shaped variety which many artists used as an aid to perspective (although I do believe that is what is suggested by the *chambre noire* noted above), but the architectural version by means of which the outside world can be drawn into the construct and photographically represented. Such constructions are typically tall, as is the *grande maison*, and are situated at a great height, the better to provide a vantage point from which the surrounding environment can be assimilated. They are rather more an expression of optical phenomena, having more in common with an observatory than with a conventional camera. Jacques Allard seems to remark the same effect in Le chiffre du texte when he refers to Gervaise as she surveys the street from her laundry as being in "son atelier-observatoire".¹³ The

setting for L'assommoir is in just such a high location near the Butte Montmartre and this, coupled with the height, darkness and verticality of the Grande Maison, can be interpreted as a device which relates the characters to their wider environment. The same can be said of the Colonne Vendôme which figures in the Coupeaus' wedding-day festivities. The wedding party views the whole of Paris from the top of the Colonne, but at this point they have emerged from the dark spiral staircase and are outdoors.¹⁴ In the case of the Grande Maison the city is sucked into the box-like structure at the price of privacy, a privacy that was still possible for Gervaise when she lived in the more traditional accommodation of the Rue Neuve. Repeatedly in the Grande Maison there are references to shutterless or partly shuttered windows (see underlined passages above). Depending on how much light can penetrate these apertures, the reader/voyeur can see with varying clarity into the various apartments and observe the activities occurring therein.¹⁵

Even in Gervaise's more optimistic assessment of the Grande Maison when she returns again to view it from the street, we hear again of partially obscured windows, this time obscured by dirty rags: "Parmi les loques pendues aux fenêtres des coins de gaieté riaient" (89). Yet even here we find an intrusive penetration through a lens on which a shutter is about to fall: "A presque toutes les croisées ouvertes, sur le fond de la misère entrevue, des enfants montraient leurs têtes barbouillées et rieuses, des femmes cousaient, avec des profils calmes penchés sur l'ouvrage" (89).

On the occasion when Coupeau takes Gervaise to visit the Lorilleux and she experiences the interior of the Grande Maison for the first time, it is doorways rather than windows that provide a photographic frame: "Au premier étage, Gervaise aperçut, dans l'entrebâillement d'une porte, sur laquelle le mot: *Dessinateur*, était écrit en grosses lettres, deux hommes attablés . . ." (96). She sees the names of the occupants on cards pinned to the doors, and the lives on view are represented in an unremittingly negative way; sordid domestic brawling, dreary family portraits, reinforcing the guilty sense that the reporter/narrator and the viewer/reader are entering where they should not go. The little notices pinned to the doorways have a curious designation 'carte de visite'. At the time of Zola's writing it was a popular indulgence, especially among young working-class women to have cheap photographic miniatures taken; these were known as 'cartes de visite'.¹⁶ The mini-portraits of the neighbors which Mme Lorilleux provides are exactly such photographic prints in verbal form. As before, the portraits are all unsympathetic in tone and content: Mme Lorilleux' accounts are of drunkenness, unpaid debts, failing personal finances, evictions, unwanted pregnancies and speculations that a neighbor will end up as a prostitute. However it is in the entry to the Lorilleux' lair that the photographic technique is most intensely applied. As Coupeau and Gervaise approach, the passageways become increasingly dark, and as they enter, the first experience is of a dazzling light:

Une vive clarté s'étala sur le carreau. Ils entrèrent.
C'était une pièce étranglée, une sorte de boyau, qui semblait le

prolongement même du corridor. Un rideau de laine déteinte, en ce moment relevé par une ficelle, coupait le boyau en deux. (97)

What follows is a description of the interior. When the young couple breach the curtain Gervaise is dazzled by the brightness of the light, and it is only with difficulty that she makes out the form of her reluctant hostess. Arguably, what we are exposed to here is a *de facto* representation of an early camera, with its necessary accoutrements of curtain, string and flash. Even Coupeau's exclamation "C'est nous," which emerges from the darkness has the ring of a photographer's "Smile please". As the pair descend the stairway, retracing their steps, we learn that:

A cette heure, l'escalier dormait, désert, éclairé seulement par le bec de gaz du second étage, dont la flamme rapetissée mettait, au fond de ce puits de ténèbres la goutte de clarté d'une veilleuse. Derrière les portes fermées, on entendait le gros silence, le sommeil écrasé des ouvriers couchés au sortir de table. Pourtant, un rire adouci sortait de la chambre de la repasseuse, tandis qu'un filet de lumière glissait par la serrure de mademoiselle Remanjou, taillant encore avec un petit bruit de ciseaux, les robes de gaze des poupées à treize sous. En bas, chez madame Gaudron, un enfant continuait à pleurer. Et les plombs soufflaient une puanteur plus forte, au milieu de la grande paix, noire et muette. (105) (My emphasis)

The shutter has dropped on the lens and the photograph is sealed inside the box. After the play of light and dark, images yield to sounds as silence and darkness finally descend.

In her first visits to the Grande Maison, Gervaise is shown straining to look upwards; toward the end of the novel when she is defeated in life, she is relegated to the uppermost part of the building. In a marvelously imaginative piece of writing, Zola has her looking down into the courtyard where she once

stood in the freshness of youth: it seems to her that she sees herself as she then was. This can be viewed as the inversion of an image that occurs in a *camera obscura*, but Zola uses it as a way of reversing time.

Finally, I should mention the 'gravures coloriées' which Goujet has on the walls of his room. Some commentators have seen in Goujet an idealized self-portrait of Zola.¹⁷ These visual images are an indication that the author is a little apprehensive that his novel might be regarded as a 'tabloid' representation with all that such a designation conveys of inside story and sensationalism. The very name Coupeau suggests that his characters are like cardboard cutouts. Zola is sometimes subjected to this charge and it is true that his novels are not psychological but rather sociological, the characters are types rather than individuals.

Alain Busine discusses Zola's work in photographic terms; however he restricts his discussion mainly to La curée and does not consider L'assommoir. Although La curée pre-dates L'assommoir by about six years Busine finds already in Zola's work "ces photographies virtuelles, que produit, que développe si souvent le texte zolien . . . on y remarque . . . énormément de pièces obscures, de chambres noires où s'effectuent des opérations déjà éminemment photographiques. . . il adopte souvent un mode de fonctionnement proprement photographique."¹⁸ For the portrayal of the *milieu* of the proletariat during the Second Empire, the techniques of photography provided the author with a very effective means of voyeuristic penetration.

* * *

Like a camera, the narrator's instrument is trained, relentlessly, ruthlessly, on an enclosed community, one that exists within the wider urban milieu, yet is isolated from it. A large part of the attraction for contemporary readers of this novel must surely have been a reflection of their curiosity and prejudices about working-class women. Despite the fact that Zola's characterization of Gervaise is overwhelmingly sympathetic, and that he claimed that she was the finest of his creations, there can be no doubt that the author succumbed to a certain amount of male middle-class self-indulgent speculation about women of her class. It is probably impossible to overestimate the degree of anxiety felt by the typical bourgeois nineteenth-century Parisian male regarding sexual relations with such women, whom they regarded as their social inferiors. Although he was by background middle-class, Zola knew poverty at first hand because of his engineer father's early death. He and his mother lived in the very part of Paris described in L'assommoir, so he was well placed to understand the slum mentality. The incidence of venereal disease, rampant in a society where prostitution proliferated, both in its officially sanctioned capacity and in its many unregistered expressions, was responsible for the ambivalent attitude toward *grisettes*. On the one hand, free-wheeling young men of Zola's class who had access to education, money and freedom wanted to believe that any young working girl was fair game; on the other, they feared the consequences of any such intimacy. This confusion of repugnance and fascination in a book about the

'low', such as L'assommoir, extends to the contemporary middle-class readership who, given the novel's immediate commercial success, were surely drawn to and repelled by a novel which was exclusively about the lower echelons of society.¹⁹ Unlike the more usual nineteenth-century practice of highlighting differences through the use of contrasting examples, as for instance the descriptions at the beginning of Germinal point up the disparity between the living conditions of the mine workers and the proprietors, this novel contains no characters from society's upper ranks. All the characters belong to the same world which emphatically is not that of its readers. Despite the author's avowed intentions of scientific impartiality, his own prejudices are never far from the surface and are those of his class. His position is exactly that discussed by Peter Stalleybrass and Allon White²⁰ who say of an English social historian that "his attempt at social analysis (was) inseparable from his scopophilia". The prevailing contemporary prejudice was that the *grisette* was oversexed and predatory, while in reality she was most likely to be exhausted by overwork and conditioned by her circumstances to a matter-of-fact acceptance of sexuality. Although Gervaise, in her early twenties, already has two children when Lantier abandons her, she is certainly not sexually reckless, and her later lapses are due to a kind of desperation rather than to any personal licentiousness.

The Grande Maison is a vertical village in which many of the denizens combine their living space with working quarters: this is an arrangement already seen in Madame Bovary, where Charles holds his surgery on the

premises where he and Emma also live. This is quite different from the situation in the more bourgeois building featured in Zola's Pot-Bouille. This confusion of work and living space is not conducive to privacy. The bourgeois ideal favors separation of spaces for different functions, with rooms for sleeping, eating, socializing; but paramount is the distinction between home and work. In the Rue Neuve, Germaine and Coupeau are relatively protected from the hurly-burly of urban working-class life but, when they open up shop and move into the Grande Maison, their household becomes part of a larger, looser institution in which they have less control over their domestic privacy. Jacques Allard²¹ and Jean Borie²² have shown how, even in the relative privacy of the Petite Maison, there are cracks in the wall that attempts to ensure this intimacy. Allard makes a good case, in Le chiffre du texte, that even in the comparative security of the Rue Neuve, in the little nest that Gervaise so much desired, the couple are subjected to the intrusions of their family and neighbors. Allard persuasively locates the first rupture in the fragile protective layer of privacy at the time of Nana's birth. He neatly links the natural rupture of Gervaise's confinement with the social consequences of the event: we can see that the young couple would prefer to be alone but it is impossible to resist the forces of society; their relatives think that they have the right of entry and the neighbors, in the persons of the midwife and the concierge, seize the opportunity, under the guise of being helpful, to penetrate into the protected space of the young family. Gervaise resents the concierge for taking advantage of her situation to pry into

drawers and cupboards; the midwife is quite happy to accept payment and a glass of wine although she didn't really do anything, since Gervaise had already delivered alone and had even prepared her husband's supper despite her labor pains. Indeed, the assembled extended family treat the birth of its newest member as a social occasion, quite forgetting about the exhausted mother and child while they endlessly regurgitate superstitious old-wives' tales and discuss the latest lurid goings-on of the *quartier*.

In contrast to this, the scene of Coupeau alone with his wife and new daughter is touchingly intimate. It is exactly those most intimate relationships that cease to belong to private individuals and become public property as soon as they are announced. Birth, marriage, death, the means of earning a living-- particularly in Gervaise's case when she aspires to be an employer of labor-- all throw the individual into a public arena even, and sometimes most especially, in the most fervently defended space, the family home. In an overcrowded and enclosed society such as Zola describes, the most scathing censure comes from those one lives closest to. Just as surely as Emma Bovary knew she was being observed at her window by her bourgeois neighbors, Gervaise is aware of the futility of her attempts to conceal her poverty from those around her. Any myths that the poor help each other are given no credibility in the Goutte d'Or.

Already at the beginning of chapter iv the reader can see how in an admittedly good-natured way, the young Coupeaus are the subject of discussion among their neighbors: in the passage beginning "Ce furent quatre années de

dur travail" (141), the narrative voice is clearly that of the neighbors, and they know a very great deal about Gervaise's personal business, including how much is owed after the wedding expenses. They also speculate about how much the newly-weds make and spend, and they know all about the items that are purchased and which are on credit, which second-hand. The key to Gervaise's state of mind and her personality at this stage in her development is clearly indicated by her delight in her new home: Gervaise never was very comfortable about the prospect of living in the Grande Maison so coveted by her husband. The location of the little house appeals to her exactly because it represents "pas de voisines, pas de cancans à craindre, un coin de tranquillité" (142). Gervaise has already learned from experience that life's disappointments are rendered many times more bitter by the humiliation involved in public scrutiny of misfortune: it was bad enough to be abandoned by her lover, but it was made much harder by persistent questioning from busybodies like Mme Boche and the scorn of the laundresses at the *lavoir*, for whom her travails were only an amusing diversion. Gervaise has reason to reflect that hell is other people, a situation that persists throughout; when she and her husband give up their boutique to the Poissons the greatest humiliation comes from the neighbors who took the opportunity to taunt them: "on les agaçait, on s'émerveillait exprès devant eux sur les embellissements de leurs successeurs. Ils parlaient de l'état de saleté où les Poisson avaient trouvé les lieux" (365).

The invasion of relatives and others following Nana's birth is in fact only one

in a series of life's festivities recounted in the novel, the first of which is the wedding. When first Coupeau pays court to Gervaise there is no doubting her sincere reluctance to commit to a man. Life has taught her to be cautious and she is fearful of the future. When she agrees to marry Coupeau her instinct is to keep matters as simple as possible. The first resistance comes from Coupeau himself, who "se battait joliment l'oeil du quartier" (107), so the contract has immediately shifted from the couple themselves to society at large. From here on the number of institutions they have to satisfy is endless: first there is the legal requirement, which in fact in their case is completed so rapidly they almost wonder if it really happened; in addition to the cost of the license, it seems they were obliged to contribute four sous apiece to the poor. Then, although they do not attend church or claim to be believers it seems that they will not consider themselves properly married unless they have a nuptial mass. Once again, money is an issue, as is the hasty ritual, which has few associations for the couple. In addition, there are sartorial requirements, so Coupeau gets new tailor-made clothes which they cannot really afford. Along the way they encounter other wedding groups, more sumptuously attired, making them painfully aware that whatever they do they can never measure up to the social standard. And of course they would not be properly wed without a real gold ring, the acquisition of which is the largest single expense itemized. The catering requirements go predictably awry; Coupeau's original assertion of "quelque chose de tout simple"(107)-- a picnic, no music or dancing, not too

much to drink, a simple meal costing five francs a head--turns into a bacchanal. In order to meet all this expense, Coupeau borrows first from his boss and then from his brother-in-law, while the bride-to-be works overtime. The extra work involved in preparing for the big day leaves the couple exhausted, and all in an effort to satisfy the hordes of relatives and friends, who would clearly be affronted were they not included and who all have something to say about the arrangements. Are they satisfied? Not a bit of it-- Mme Lorilleux even goes so far as to complain that they should have held the wedding on the date of her choosing. None of this was what the bride intended or even wanted, she merely acquiesced to the forces of convention. We should not be surprised about this; for she has already described herself at the very beginning of the novel as too eager to please for her own good.

If we return now to the night of Nana's birth we find that the newly delivered mother is scarcely consulted in the decision to have an official baptism. The discussions leading up to this are tossed around between the Lorilleux, Coupeau and his mother, and all that the new mother can do is to consent dumbly. Clearly, what the christening is about is a party; the new parents and the baby are not even mentioned in the welter of information about who brought what and how much they paid for their gifts. The hospitality imparted by the young couple is totally taken for granted: the guests have taken over, the occasion was really for them. Interestingly, when the focus of attention does come back to Gervaise, we learn through her own viewpoint of their exemplary neighbors, the

Goujets, who are first introduced into the story as guests at the baptism. Goujet and his mother manage to remain relatively shielded from the pressures of social life but, this is not necessarily for the good.

During the time of Gervaise's rise to the height of her achievement as an employer we learn of the many instances of her hospitality. She is generous to a fault and certainly to the detriment of her business enterprise, sending bottles of wine to the Boches after the signing of the lease on the shop despite their cool and unfriendly demeanor; and providing coffee for her employees and even to all comers in the shop. At this time, she is giving in to the need to please others beyond her immediate dependents; and she has given up her original claim to need nothing more than "travailler tranquille, de manger toujours du pain, d'avoir un trou un peu propre pour dormir, élever (ses) enfants . . . et de ne pas être battu" (84). All of which is not to say that her ambition is ill-founded, since society requires her to look to the future and she cannot retreat into seclusion. Like everyone else she is part of a social organism. Only the Goujets have succeeded to some extent in remaining outside of social pressures. Mother and son live in relative isolation, having little to do with their neighbors, saving their money, working and keeping to themselves. Gervaise was genuinely impressed by their seemingly wholesome lifestyle but the reader is eventually left to ponder the sterility of the Goujets' situation. Participation in society is necessary and usually unavoidable. When Gervaise sets herself up in the boutique she becomes a player in the social game. In the Rue Neuve Gervaise

and Coupeau had maintained a home, and their domesticity was relatively protected, but when they live and work in the boutique, far from being protected from prying eyes, they are on constantly on display. However, by the time Gervaise comes to plan her name day fête she no longer merely capitulates to the pressure of the neighborhood, she actively and willingly pursues it. It was inevitable all along--she has become like those around her.

Gervaise's fête is the high point of her career and comes exactly in the center of the novel. Although her financial status is by now precarious she seems to have lost all semblance of self-determination. Not only does she allow herself to be talked into an expensive celebration by her satellites, she is hell-bent on showing the neighborhood and her in-laws that she doesn't do things by halves. At the same time, she hides her poverty from view by concealing the goods headed for the pawnshop in Maman Coupeau's apron. There are many allusions in this chapter to makeshift and rather futile attempts at concealment. We learn, for instance, that the Lorilleux cover their window on fat days rather than share what they have. On the occasion of the name day fête, despite the warm evening, Gervaise closes the door so as not to be in full view of the street. The windows of the laundry room, hung with white muslin, give the impression of a chic restaurant. Even before Coupeau throws the door open, inviting the entire Goutte d'Or to the festivity, we are aware that the eyes of all are upon them in the person of the watchmaker whose perspective is given by the narrator. Coupeau eventually crosses the street to offer him a bottle of wine. Neighbors

are at their windows, the whole street is suffering vicarious indigestion. The scene is cleverly represented by alternating viewpoints of those without and within. The revelers lose their self-conscious embarrassment:

La société, lancée, n'avait plus honte de se montrer à table; au contraire, ça la flattait et l'échauffait . . . elle aurait voulu enfoncer la devanture, pousser le couvert jusqu'à la chaussée, se payer là le dessert, sous le nez du public, dans le branle du pavé. (266)

Eventually, we learn that "une fraternité s'établissaient avec la rue" (266).

It's all about making an impression, some like Gervaise trying to look as if they have more than they actually do, and others like the Lorilleux feigning poverty in order to hold on to what they do have.

By the time of Maman Coupeau's funeral, Gervaise and her family are facing eviction but she has totally sold out to the forces of social pressure. Mme Lorilleux is probably right when she accuses Gervaise of trying to *épater le monde*. For Gervaise, as for Mme Lerat, the need to *se montrer propre* seems to outweigh the necessity for self preservation. As with the wedding the church is deemed a social necessity in the form of a Mass and a smart hearse. Once again, Gervaise has to borrow from Goujet. For the local inhabitants it is an opportunity yet again for social platitudes and gruesome talk: there is the need for the right clothes; there are arguments over meager possessions, and superstitious traditions, such as keeping a candle burning by the bedside, are deemed indispensable. By the time of the final festivity, Nana's communion, there is virtually no attempt at dignity, just the numb keeping-up of people who have been bludgeoned by circumstances.

In certain scenes the narrative depends on the presence of an observer who may or may not be the narrator but whose presence is essential for the piece to be effective. There is a pivotal scene in chapter v in which Coupeau comes home the worse for drink, into a workroom where the girls are in a state of undress, due to the excessively warm weather. The scene is carefully set up to be drowsily arousing. A number of factors contribute to the effective description of intimacy invaded. Firstly, the very nature of the business that Gervaise is in is one that involves a literal airing of dirty linen. The soiled garments of the *quartier* and their owners are discussed by the laundresses in the crudest of terms. Gervaise and her workers are contaminated by the dirt which they are employed to combat. Their *métier* is made doubly insalubrious by the fact that the business of dirty laundry goes on in the midst of the Coupeau family's living space. When Gervaise lived in the Rue Neuve and worked outside the home her domesticity was relatively protected. Further, we learn that, because of the sultry temperature, the door has been left ajar, exposing the girls to the inquisitive eyes of three men as they watch from across the street. The presence here of the drunken Coupeau provides the charge, the voyeuristic thrill; we are expressly told that he refused to go to bed, promising instead to keep quiet in the corner amidst the female flesh. The scene is rendered yet more titillating by Gervaise's hanging of makeshift blinds:

Alors, on fut très bien dans la boutique . . . On serait cru *dans une alcôve*, avec un jour blanc, enfermé comme chez soi, loin du monde, bien qu'on entendît, derrière les draps, les gens marchant vite sur le trottoir; et l'on avait la liberté de se mettre à son aise. Clémence retira sa camisole.

(191)

Evidently, the anonymous male observers in the street have only a thin partition between themselves and the delectable spectacle of Coupeau, literally between the sheets with his wife's scantily clad assistants. The scene that was so carefully set up to be languid and soporific turns ribald as Coupeau becomes more amorous and has to be banished to bed to sleep it off.

In a parallel but more sympathetic passage, the blacksmith Goujet is also described lingering in the midst of the young laundresses. This scene begins by establishing a distinctly unthreatening, rather cozy domestic atmosphere:

Il y avait un coin dans la boutique, au fond, où il aimait rester des heures, assis sans bouger, fumant sa courte pipe. Le soir, après son dîner, une fois tous les dix jours, il se risquait, s'installait; et il n'était guère causeur, la bouche cousue, les yeux sur Gervaise, ôtant seulement sa pipe de la bouche pour rire de tout ce qu'elle disait. Quand l'atelier veillait le samedi, il s'oubliait, paraissait s'amuser là plus que s'il était allé au spectacle. (198)

It then goes on to show the working girls as they work long, hard hours. The narrator provides some very attractive description of the atelier in the July heat, as the laundresses leave the door open although they have loosened their clothing. Here, however, there is no dirty talk and the narratorial voice is complimentary, respectful: "Elles avaient une peau fine, toute dorée dans le coup de lumière de la lampe" (199). Goujet's installation is described in peaceful terms: he enjoys the sight and smells of the *atelier* and there is a soporific quality as he enjoys the quiet atmosphere, all of which contrasts sharply with Coupeau's disorderly presence.

Autour de la boutique, les maisons voisines s'endormaient, le grand silence du sommeil tombait lentement. Minuit sonnait, puis une heure, puis deux heures. Les voitures, les passants s'en étaient allés, Maintenant, dans la rue déserte et noire, la porte envoie seule un rai de jour, pareille à un bout d'étoffe jaune déroulé à terre. Par moments, un pas sonnait au loin, un homme approchait; et , lorsqu'il traverse le rai de jour, il allongeait la tête, surpris des coups de fer qu'il entendait, important la vision rapide des ouvrières dépoitraillées dans une buée rousse. (199)

Many of the elements present in this cameo echo the earlier description of a man ensconced amid the working girls: the summer heat, the open door, the ineffectively screened windows, the laundresses *en déshabillé*. This time the tone is gentler, more sympathetic since Goujet is discreet and does not press his attentions on Gervaise nor on the assistants. Still, it is the appearance of a man in the street that brings the scene into sharp focus and we understand that the more lusty men of the Goutte d'or would cast a doubtful eye on Goujet's nocturnal presence.

At other times in the novel the observer whose presence heightens the tension of important scenes is the child Nana. Here the focus of her attention is the bed. The bed, or the act of going to bed plays a very important role in this novel. Jacques Allard²³ has drawn attention to how deftly Gervaise and Coupeau transform their sleeping quarters in the Rue Neuve into a pleasant dining space. Allard sees in this act of prestidigitation a respect for social and domestic order. However, Gervaise's bed will become soiled, invaded, and eventually depleted. Small wonder that Nana who loves beds, the larger and more comfortable the better, will become the possessor of some of the most

sumptuous beds in all literature when she moves into the novel of her own name.

In the passage which describes the infant Nana witnessing Lantier's seduction of her mother, the reader is given a double perspective: of Nana observed and at the same time observing:

...le visage de Nana apparut à la porte vitrée du cabinet, derrière un carreau. La petite venait de se réveiller et de se lever doucement, en chemise, pâle de sommeil. Elle regarda son père roulé dans son vomissement; puis, la figure collée contre la vitre elle resta là, à attendre que le jupon de sa mère eût disparu chez l'autre homme, en face. Elle était toute grave. Elle avait de grands yeux d'enfant vicieuse, allumés d'une curiosité sensuelle. (322)

We know that we are seeing her from the other side of a pane of glass because we are expressly told this, and we have a brief description of her in her nightdress. At the same time our gaze is directed by what she sees; we watch with her as Gervaise and Lantier slip out of sight. Then our gaze is again reversed to take in her inquisitive eyes. In this incident, which is strategically placed at the close of chapter vii, Zola very skillfully pulls off a clever piece of writing which is akin to a photographer taking a photograph into a mirror while concealing himself and his camera from the finished shot. Nana is again depicted as spying through the glass door as Maman Coupeau lies dying: "Nana ne se genait plus, la nuit, pour aller guetter en chemise par la porte vitrée"(343). From this point on Nana will move into the beds of her grandmother and of Lantier. The very walls of the family home had been torn down in order to accommodate Lantier: the invasion of the domestic space that began with the

invasion of dirty linen and gossiping neighbors is now complete.

In keeping with the photographic, even cinematographic, techniques employed in the unfolding of the narrative, the telling of Gervaise's last promenade is revealed in a kind of shadow-play, a technique which was also in vogue at the time, and the description of Coupeau's end in the hospital is conveyed as an ironic representation of the *rayok* or 'little paradise.'²³

The episode dealing with Gervaise's promenade is entirely set in a twilight, followed by darkness lit by gas. Her detailed itinerary as she moves through the *chaussée de Clignancourt*, the *Boulevard de Magenta* and the *rue du Faubourg Poissonnière* provides a sweeping view of North Paris as night falls, which has a great deal in common with the *Panoramas* popularized by *Daguerre* earlier in the century, panoramas which placed the reader in the same position in which a spectator would occupy in such a visual representation. Gaslight is specifically mentioned several times, setting up a kind of shadow-play or magic lantern effect. "Dans les flamboiements du gaz, après la journée finie, montait la sourde revanche des paresseuses et des noces qui s'éveillaient" (464). As Gervaise moves through the *quartier* she recalls her life in that part of Paris, each of the locations being in turn lit up like a still photograph, effectively linking time and place. When we learn that "dans le brouillard d'ombre fumeuse qui tombait, les becs de gaz s'allumaient" (466), the function of the gas lamps is to light up theatrically the places of night-time entertainment. The *Assommoir* of *Père Colombe*, itself, is described as like a Cathedral at High Mass. There is a good deal of shadow-

play. Of the prostitutes whom Gervaise watches in order to learn, we hear that “elles sortaient de l’ombre, avec une lenteur vague d’apparitions; elles passaient dans le coup de lumière d’un bec de gaz” (468). Perhaps the most arresting example of this shadow-play is when she catches sight of her own shadow:

Quand elle approchait d’un bec de gaz, l’ombre vague se ramassait et se précisait, une ombre énorme, trapue, grotesque tant elle était ronde. Cela s’étalait, le ventre, la gorge, les hanches, coulant et flottant ensemble. Elle louchait si fort de la jambe, que, sur le sol, l’ombre faisait la culbute à chaque pas; un vrai guignol! (469)

As the scene continues, the images represented increasingly take on the melodramatic tones of a woman brought low, always somewhat in the manner of a peepshow, consistent with the sense of self-conscious voyeurism on the part of the author and which extends to the reader.

The use of such theatrical terminology as ‘guignol’ evokes low boulevard entertainments. This is particularly evident in the telling of Coupeau’s final hours in the Sainte Anne hospital. Because this entire novel is an exercise in revealing a sector of society almost entirely neglected previously, the author has chosen to represent it in a very visual, pictorial way. There is relatively little dialogue, Zola largely favoring throughout the technique of *style indirect libre*: often the brief instances of direct speech are like captions or subtitles accompanying the pictures. This works well, especially since the novel does not really have a psychological dimension, it fits the author’s agenda better to be descriptive rather than analytic. Zola’s Naturalism includes a fascination with popular entertainment and the representation of Coupeau’s terminal alcoholism uses a

technique similar to that of the Russian *rayok*, with which Zola may have been familiar through his friendship with Turgenev. Rayok was a kind of peepshow display popular in nineteenth-century Russia. The term means a little paradise, though this was often used ironically. The 'little paradise' refers to the uppermost circle of the theater or music hall where the poorest patrons sat, exactly as it did for French audiences. Typically it would feature various tableaux with a narrator who is rather like a carnival barker providing a satirical commentary. Such fairground attractions are essentially cheap thrills and inherently voyeuristic. Zola certainly was interested in the exploitative value for literature of such entertainments; and an early short story of his, "Celle qui m'aime", (1864) set in a fairground, features a young man who is lured into a booth by the promise of seeing his heart's desire. In fact, the customers line up to look into a window, wherein there sits a *grisette* who blows kisses to the customers. The subject matter is interesting for its voyeuristic nature, and the setting suggests the possibilities for literature offered by such a device.

Every time Gervaise goes to Sainte Anne to visit her husband we are told that she has to climb the stairs, like a spectator in the upper reaches of the theater. The description of the frenzied, writhing Coupeau *in extremis* is reported in terms that suggest the carnivalesque. His shouting and singing is "une engueulade continue de carnival"; and again, "Coupeau dansait et gueulait. Un vrai Chienlit de la Courtille"(480-481), recalling the popular fair which took place in Montmartre at the beginning of Lent.

Coupeau parlait d'une voix saccadée. Pourtant, une flamme de rigolade lui éclairait les yeux. Il regardait par terre, à droite, à gauche, et tournait comme s'il avait flâné au bois de Vincennes, en causant tout seul.

--Ah ! ça c'est gentil, c'est pommé . . . Il ya des chalets, une vraie foire. Et de la musique un peu chouette ! Quel Balthazar ! Ils cassent les pots là dedans. . . Très chic ! V'la que ça s'illumine; des ballons rouges en l'air, et ça saute, et ça file! . . . Oh ! Oh ! Que de lanternes dans les arbres! Il fait joliment bon ! Ça pisse de partout, des fontaines, des cascades, de l'eau qui chante, oh ! d'une voix d'enfant de chœur . . . Épatant les cascades !
(482)

Voyeurism is rampant as the novel draws to a close. The doctors are clearly fascinated by Coupeau's antics but can indulge their curiosity in the name of scientific inquiry. When Gervaise returns to the Grande Maison she puts on a show for the neighbors who vicariously enjoy the peepshow she has witnessed. Elsewhere Coupeau is referred to as "un vrai polichinelle", he thinks he sees dancing bears, a circus parade of lions and panthers. The imagery of the carnival recurs over and over again.

In Rabelais and his World which is so revealing about the use of the lower classes and the carnivalesque, Bakhtin refers to the novel as essentially a "multiplicity of styles".²⁴ In L'assommoir there are instances of low theater, burlesque and even *rayok* as well as a kind of photo-journalism. Zola's novel about low types at the bottom of the social ladder during the Second Empire provides a portrait of a class for whom privacy is an impossible luxury, living as they do literally piled on top of each other in the tenement. As readers we are fascinated. Zola has achieved for a working class district in Paris what James Joyce hoped to do for Dublin in Ulysses; he gives the impression that if the entire locale were obliterated it could be reconstructed from the novel. It is because

this portrait is so intimate, so compelling, that as readers we feel a little ashamed, as if we had eavesdropped or acted as interlopers where we had no right to go.

1. Barbey D'Aurevilly, "L'Assommoir par M. Emile Zola". Le Constitutionnel, January 29, 1870.
2. Emile Zola, L'assommoir (Paris: Flammarion, 2000).
3. Jacques Dubois, "Les refuges de Gervaise": Pour un décor symbolique de L'Assommoir", Les cahiers naturalistes Vol 30 1965, 106.
4. Robert J. Niess, "Remarks on the Style Indirect Libre in L'Assommoir", Nineteenth Century French Studies Vol 13 1974, 126.
5. Ian Gregor, and Brian Nicholas, The Moral and the Story (London: Faber, 1962).
6. David Baguley, "Rite et tragédie dans L'Assommoir", Les cahiers naturalistes, 1978, 80-96.
7. Patricia Carles, L'Assommoir: une destructuration impressionniste de l'espace descriptif", Les cahiers naturalistes Vol 63 1989, 117-125.
8. Mary Jane Evans Moore, "The Spatial Dynamics of L'Assommoir", Kentucky Romance Quarterly 1982, 10.
9. Roland Barthes, Camera Lucida (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981).
10. Emile Zola, Lettre à Valabrègue 18th August 1864 in Emile Zola, Correspondance (Montréal: Les Presses de l'Université de Montréal, 1978).

11. Joy Newton and Basil Jackson, "Gervaise Macquart's Vision: A Closer Look at Zola's Use of Point of View in L'Assommoir", Nineteenth Century French Studies Vol ii 1983.1 314. Newton and Jackson point out that many of the Rougon Macquart novels open with an outsider coming to a new place, e.g. Etienne in Germinal. It is also interesting that these authors slip into a photographic vocabulary, as when they refer to Gervaise as recording a "series of snapshot-effect images of working class life".
12. Jean Borie, Zola et les mythes, ou De la nausée au salut, (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1971).
13. Jacques Allard, Le Chiffre du texte: Lecture de l'assommoir, (Grenoble: Presses universitaires de Grenoble, 1978).
14. Moore, op. cit. Moore sees the staircase as a symbol of sexual intercourse and likens the progress up and down the tower as foreshadowing the course of Gervaise's marriage. More interesting here is that Moore points out that the wedding party are "frightened or disappointed, and come down in a wretched ill humor".
15. Luc Sante, Camera Obscura, (2004) Sante has this to say about *camera obscura*: "In the nineteenth century . . .they were in effect early cinemas, and their attraction did not immediately wane with the rise of motion pictures, since their images possessed the advantage of being in color and at least potentially spontaneous. The vogue had its voyeuristic aspect; popular humor capitalized on the device's ability to catch illicit couples cavorting together, like an instrument of the paparazzi."
16. Encyclopedia Britannica, Vol 25 766.
17. Sylvie Thorel-Cailleteau, "Un regard désolé: naturalisme et photographie", Les cahiers naturalistes Vol 66 1992.
18. Alain Busine, "Les chambres noires du roman." Les cahiers naturalistes Vol 66 1992, 243-267.
19. Peter Stalleybrass and Allon White, The Politics and Poetics of Transgression (Ithaca, N.Y. Cornell University Press, 1986) 4-5. Stalleybrass talks about ambivalence to the 'low', which simultaneously reviled and desired. He relates this "constitutive ambivalence around the slur and the domestic servant in the nineteenth century" to the disposal of 'waste', c.f. Bernheim in Figures of Ill Repute.
20. Stalleybrass and White op. cit. 130.
21. Allard, op. cit.

22. Jean Borie, op. cit.
23. Francis Maes, A History of Russian Music Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002; 89 and 369.
24. Mikhael Bakhtin, Rabelais and his World, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984).

The Staging of Bourgeois Domesticity in Zola's Une Page d'Amour

Like Emma Bovary in *Yonville l'Abbaye* as she pines for a more exciting life, or like Eugénie Grandet and her mother dutifully occupied in household mending, Héléne Grandjean in Zola's Une page d'amour spends much of her time gazing out of the window of her bourgeois apartment. Like Gervaise in L'assommoir she is a single mother, recently arrived in Paris from the South, although Héléne's circumstances are very different from those of the laundress protagonist in the author's previous novel. The subject matter of this eighth book in the Rougon-Macquart series is less controversial than that of its immediate predecessor. As is the case with her literary forebears, Héléne Grandjean is portrayed as a prisoner of her domestic environment, and the text which tells the sad story of her single experience of passion closely identifies her with the space she inhabits. The fact that her living conditions are materially better than those of any of the other heroines in the present study in no way means that she is

emancipated: societal pressures in the Second Empire leave her with nowhere to go but marriage or, in her case, remarriage.

The authors of Madame Bovary and Eugénie Grandet and La vieille fille together with Zola, have concerned themselves with the place assigned to women in post-revolutionary society, but among them Zola would seem to come across as the most sympathetic. Whereas in Madame Bovary almost all the developed characters apart from Emma are men, the female roles being confined to servants and neighbors lumped together in composite groups, in Une page d'amour it is the men who are given the least authorial attention. In addition to the protagonist herself, Hélène's various satellites, including her daughter Jeanne, Mme Juliette Deberle and her sister Pauline, and even the servant Rosalie, by contrast, are closely observed and their creator uses them as representatives of the different stages of life and of social class: through their experience Zola seems to be reflecting on woman's lot. All of the women in his fictional universe are emphatically linked to their domestic quarters.

The bourgeois apartments described are repeatedly referred to as stifling. The opening paragraph of the novel establishes the heavy furnishings of a desirable, contemporary dwelling of the well-to-do middle-class citizen: the rich velvet hangings at the window and around the bed, the polished wood armoire, the chiming clock. The seeming tranquility is deceptively seductive since this comfortable home is in fact a sickroom that contains a sick child. Zola opted to set this particular novel in a décor that his readership would find acceptable to

their sensibilities. L'assommoir had outraged critics and public alike by its depiction of squalor, and the author may have hoped to redress the balance by inviting subscribers, particularly female readers, into the kind of home they themselves would find acceptable to live in; even going so far as to titillate their senses with the chance to enter, novelistically, a chic Parisian dwelling. Just as an earlier generation of young women identified with the adulteress of Yonville, finding her to be beautiful and tragic, and failing because of their own romantic leanings to respond to her tedious banality and her serious shortcomings, so in 1878 might female readers have taken Zola's book at face value and found nothing more than a superficially attractive *mise-en-scene*, missing entirely the unsatisfactory foundation on which this seemingly bourgeois ideal was constructed.

On finding herself widowed and a stranger in Paris, Hélène has been helped in the setting up of her new household by the Abbé Jouve and a M. Rambaud, two brothers who had been friends of her late husband. It was they who found her new quarters and chose the rather heavy furnishings. The reader is told that at first Hélène liked the luxury of her setting, but that when she had moved in, the brothers had taken care of everything and she had suffered from the imposition of M. Rambaud's taste. In fact it is not really her home at all, since it has been constructed to contain her by a man who wants to make her his wife. The many instances where the atmosphere is described as *étouffant* suggest an oppressive environment.¹ In the scene where Deberle first attends to the

neurasthenic Jeanne, he remarks on the stuffy atmosphere, insisting that the window be opened. It is almost as if Jeanne were dying of bourgeois incarceration. The apartment seems to become more and more stifling whenever the Abbé and Rambaud are around, indicating their well-meaning attempts to confine Héléne in bourgeois marital captivity. For instance, at one of the regular Tuesday supper parties we learn that "dans la salle à manger on étouffait un peu"(121). It is on this occasion that Héléne senses that "l'air n'était pas le même", and she begins to realize that the brothers have an ulterior plan: the Abbé is concerned to sound her out, to know if she will be receptive to Rambaud's proposal. Abbé Jouve appeals to her regard for her health and that of her child in urging her to remarry. When he complains that she is too cloistered for her own good or that of her daughter, he implies that she could fall into mischief despite her virtue, that she needs a man to keep her on the straight and narrow. To her protestations that she considers she has nothing to complain about, the priest responds: "Sur cette pente de la solitude et de la rêverie, on ne sait jamais où l'on va" (123). Rather like the priest in Eugénie Grandet, he argues on the grounds of a woman's duty to marry and not in terms of her happiness or fulfillment. Whenever the atmosphere becomes increasingly heated, as on the occasion of the Abbé's plea on behalf of his brother, Héléne needs to throw open a window, despite the storm that is raging outside.

Héléne inhabits this very confining space that a man has assigned to her but is constantly drawn to the window, where she spends her days. Although

Rimbaud is affable and eager to please, he already behaves as if he were in his own home, which of course he hopes it will be if H el ene will consent to marry him. Even the maid has been installed at the Abb e's behest.

Despite her tendency to remain indoors, H el ene flourishes in the open air. When she visits la M ere F etu we learn, "elle entrait avec la fra cheur et la paix du passage des Eaux dans ses v tements"(78). She enjoys the coolness and the quietness of the *ruelle*, which is described in terms reminiscent of the countryside. The first thing she does on entering M ere F etu's apartment is to open the window, "pour renouveler l'air"(78). Whenever her early life in the south is evoked she is outdoors, as on the occasion when she meets her first husband. It is as if the open air is her natural element and marriage, motherhood and domesticity have driven her indoors. Seemingly fearful of the world, she remains in her own house as a means to preserve her respectability. We often hear of her pride in the orderliness of her life. Also, she is inclined to acquiesce to others' expectations and demands, as can be seen by her being married at a very early age, a union which seems to have been without her volition: the text simply says, "Puis on les avait mari s" (97). She experienced no passion for her first husband but married him despite his family's disapproval. Seeking refuge in respectability, she slips easily into the comfortable niche which the brothers, Jouve and Rimbaud, have set up for her. It doesn't seem to occur to her that she is being lured into the kind of bourgeois female dependence epitomized by the household of her neighbors and landlords, the Deberles. By

her tacit acceptance of society's norms she allows herself to be coerced into a role.

If H el ene's living quarters are stifling, those of her privileged neighbor, Juliette Deberle, are much more so: each time that H el ene enters the maison Deberle we learn of the stuffy, hothouse atmosphere. There are many rich velvet hangings, and although there are flowers everywhere somehow this does not convey an impression of freshness, but rather one of oppressive fetidity.² When the reader first sees into the Deberles' very *haut bourgeois* salon it is through H el ene's eyes: "il faisait tr es chaud, une chaleur  egale de calorif ere"(61). Whenever there is any hint of the outdoors, as for example when some little sparrows make a frightful noise, Mme Deberle's reaction is to shut it out: "(elle) alla tirer le store de tulle brod e d'une fen etre"(62). At the end of Juliette's first at-home, a guest who will stay for dinner removes her shawl and her hat because "On  touffait dans le salon" (68). It is also noticeable that the women who frequent the Deberle salon are always fanning themselves. Juliette's father opens the window immediately on entering; in fact, the men in this environment are constantly throwing open windows. They have access to the world, to Paris, and thus they can remain at large. The domestic atmosphere is one of confinement, but it is a *cadre* that men have created for the married woman.

The little Japanese pavilion in the Deberle garden is literally a hothouse where the middle-class doctor's wife blossoms in a forced environment. Even the garden is represented as an outdoor adjunct to the interior of the house: "ce

jardinet parisien, que l'on balayait comme un salon" (83). Invited to avail herself of her neighbors' garden, Hélène, who thrives in the open air but who seems to seek refuge indoors, finds that, "elle pouvait se croire dans un salon; et la vue seule du ciel, lorsqu'elle levait la tête, lui rappelait le plein air et la faisait respirer largement" (131). It is as if the garden allows her to breathe while remaining a safe haven, since it contains elements of both indoors and outdoors. A large part of the appeal to the women who spend time in the pavilion is that it is hidden from view. This is not something to be taken for granted; the garden with the pavilion may be a little retreat, a paradise protected from prying eyes, but the specter of the outside world watching is never very far away: in the following passage Juliette refers to another pavilion in the neighborhood.

On en vint à parler d'une femme qui habitait un petit pavillon en face, et chez laquelle il se passait vraiment des choses. . . Hier, j'étais à la fenêtre, reprit Juliette et j'ai parfaitement vu cette femme... Elle ne tire pas même les rideaux...C'est d'une indécence! Des enfants pourraient voir ça. (85)

This is just one of many reminders that the sanctity of the home is not inviolate.

Nowhere is the stifling atmosphere of the middle-class home more keenly felt than in the *bal d'enfants* organized by Juliette Deberle. This *spectacle*, which occupies a significant part of the narrative, can be read in two ways. Uncritical readers might simply enjoy the colorful representation of this successful high point of the social season in suburban Passy. In a sense, the reader is taken to the ball and can participate vicariously in *le monde*. However, the episode has a

sinister aspect, highlighted by the insistence on the enclosed, suffocating atmosphere. Part 2 chapter IV, which recounts the ball, brings the reader into the hotel Deberle through the front door. A liveried servant opens the door to admit the rainy afternoon air with each tiny costumed guest. In the salon the blinds have been shut and the curtains so tightly drawn that not a flicker of light can penetrate, creating an artificially lit space. When Hélène and Jeanne, dressed *à la japonaise*, make their entrance into this carefully contrived stage set, they are momentarily dazzled as they pass from the chilly exterior into the overheated atmosphere, where “cette odeur du salon où dominait la violette les étouffaient un peu”(143). Their entry is in fact a theatrical entrance but one which takes them unawares: they did not realize that they were being precipitated onto a stage, into the glare of a spotlight, into a performance that has been conceived and prepared by Juliette Deberle. Costumes, lighting, make-up, masks and wigs, curtains--all contribute to the impression of a theatrical piece.

We are explicitly told that little Lucien, who is hosting the event dressed as a bewigged Louis XV marquis, has been rehearsing his part all week. He performs the honors as each tiny shepherdess and soubrette steps into view, to the exclamations and applause of the adults, who occupy chairs arranged facing the spectacle. The women are seated while the men are clustered at the back, making the whole effect that of a crowded theater. As if to emphasize the theatrical impression, there follows a performance by marionettes. The adult

scenario, that of a society ball which has been represented on a small scale by the children, is now re-presented in miniature in the form of a puppet theater. Of course, the story of Polichinelle is much more violent than the society portrayed within the scope of the present novel, but it is noticeable that the children accept the conventions, even as they extend to domestic violence. The quadrille also confirms the impression of children pressed into adult roles: "ce carnaval de gamins. Ces bouts d'hommes et de femmes qui mélangeaient là, dans un monde en raccourci, les modes de tous les peuples, les fantaisies du roman et du théâtre" (151).

Most emphatically in this production, "les petites filles restaient les reines" (145). The narrator has itemized various little girls as they arrive, whereas the boys are introduced in batches, as Polichinelles, Tyroliens, Ecosais. It is all about putting the female on display for the enjoyment and perusal of the little men. On such occasions and by such means the children learn the roles they will take up in adult life. Lucien, of course, chooses Jeanne for his partner, his little bride, as it were. Later, at another piece of theatrical pageantry, Jeanne's funeral, he will replace her with another miniature, doll-like beauty. The entire episode of the children's ball serves to show how social and gender roles are reinforced from an early age.

When the 'beau Malignon' belatedly arrives at the ball he exclaims: "quelle drôle d'idée d'avoir tout fermé!" (147) And again, "il en revenait toujours à la singulière idée qu'on avait eue de fermer les persiennes", declaring that one

would believe oneself to be in a *caveau*. Yet again: "On étouffe . . . Je vais respirer" (151), he says, as he opens wide the door of the salon, in yet another example of men's claustrophobia in the space they establish for women.

In fact, from the very beginning, every glimpse the reader has of Juliette Deberle's existence has been in terms of a reference to the theater. On the first morning that Hélène calls on the Deberle household, intending to thank Henri for his professional care, she finds a very animated Juliette in mid-conversation about a performance she had attended at the Vaudeville the previous evening. Juliette is clearly enraptured by what she saw and by the world of actors in general. In describing the art of the actress Noémi she remarks, "L'effet a été prodigieux"(61). And indeed, theatrical effect is what she constantly strives to achieve in her own life. Her home, which arguably should be a retreat, a haven from the outside world, has become a stage set on which she enacts the role that society has assigned her.³ Nothing in her education or upbringing has prepared her for any other endeavor. Juliette is a typical product of her class and education, and the text makes an excellent case that she has very little room to develop beyond the frivolous entertainments and sociable pursuits that occupy her. However, there is an aspect of her propensity for theatricals that is potentially subversive. She is, in fact, more intelligent and creative than many of the men she meets, and she has used her home as a resource for her talent as a director. In this she recalls the clever women of an earlier age who held salons and staged dramas. This was exactly the state of affairs so deplored by

Rousseauist revolutionaries.

A little later than the date of the present novel, Zola wrote some articles in *Le Figaro* in which he specifically criticized the cloistered education of women, arguing that the suffocation of girls within narrow lodgings led directly to hysterical dizzy spells. This would certainly apply to Jeanne, who is very confined in her mother's apartment.⁴ Juliette's sister Pauline, although still very much a child, is being groomed and prepared for the same lifestyle as her older and 'successfully' married sibling, even, one might say, put out to tender on the marriage market. Perhaps most frightening of all is that Juliette's situation, because of the high level of material comfort, would be viewed as enviable, as the very best that a woman could attain. This is exactly the world that Rambaud is preparing for H el ene. Rambaud belongs to the same social set as the Deberles; he is wealthy, and he clearly has a specific role in mind for the statuesque H el ene as his wife.

There are other examples of Juliette's association with theatrical artifice and display. Her conversation with 'le beau Malignon' regarding the same Vaudeville performance of 'la petite No emi' centers on the effectiveness of realism; its success is attested by the fact that a spectator fainted, demonstrating how the line between reality and artifice is blurred for the women who succumb to its allure (61). Young Pauline is not considered mature enough to attend such performances despite the fact that her marriage is being assiduously pursued. Another example of Juliette's penchant for theatrical representation is on the

morning of her projected assignation with Malignon. When H el ene comes to try to dissuade her friend from ruining her life she finds her, not nervous and apprehensive as she had supposed, but in fact rehearsing a play. Juliette is totally self-possessed as she directs the women of her circle in a performance of Musset's *Caprice*, a piece of bourgeois theater on the subject of marital infidelity. Although Juliette protests that she is no actress, it is quite obvious that she is a natural and highly accomplished one: reading the role of the absent leading man, she slips deftly into the vocal inflexions and mannerisms of the part. The impression of the salon as a stage whose sole purpose is to display the lady of the house is reinforced when, pausing in their rehearsal, the amateur actresses discuss the arrangement of the room, which they transform into an actual stage set. The unexpected arrival on the scene of Henri, who is eager to seduce H el ene, completes the fusion of reality and artifice. Again, when H el ene calls on Juliette on the day following the latter's abortive foray into infidelity, she finds her looking pale and contrite, "comme une h eroine de drame" (305). There is a delicious irony in Madame Deberle's begging her friend not to betray her to her husband who, she fears, must already know everything since he came home late the night before in an agitated state. The reader knows that this is because he had just seduced H el ene in the very bed that Malignon had prepared for his wife. Juliette has, in fact, become so immersed in the role she has taken on that she no longer realizes that she is merely playing a part.

At one level one might read the episode of the *bal d'enfants* at face value

and see it merely as a delightful spectacle, but on the death of Jeanne the *obsèques*, conceived, directed and choreographed by Juliette, descend to the level of the grotesque. The depiction of the funeral has a great deal of the maudlin sentimentality associated with Victorian novels, but it is elevated by some psychologically insightful authorial intervention. Juliette, no doubt, believes herself to be assisting her bereaved friend, but the narrator's ironic stance makes it quite clear to the reader that she is indulging in an excessive display of grief. "Elle pleura, elle eut un de ces coups de passion qui la mettaient en l'air pendant quarante-huit heures. Ce fut un désespoir bruyant, hors de toute mesure" (330). She makes a lot of effort, hastening to spread the sad news and busying herself with elaborate preparations, but the narrator's voice leaves no doubt that the project is for her own gratification. "Son rêve était d'avoir un défilé de petites filles en robe blanche. Il lui en fallait au moins trente"(330). Although she does not realize it she is still enacting a theatrical performance. As she occupies herself with designing a backdrop with flowers and draperies she reflects, "Ce serait charmant". The whole pageant is presented rather more like a wedding than a funeral, complete with white dresses, veils, bouquets and hopes that the weather will be fine for the special day.

And of course Jeanne, ostensibly the center of attraction, has little or nothing to do with it: although dressed like a little bride, she is shut up in her coffin and remains out of sight. There are many reprises of the *bal d'enfants*: once again

Lucien plays the part of a little marquis receiving his guests, once again it is all about the little girls as they are paraded in their pretty dresses while the boys are referred to in an aside as “quelques garçons, en redingote, tachaient de noir cette purété” (332). Just in case we were in any doubt, the text makes it clear: “Lucien, puisque sa petite femme était morte, en cherchait une autre” (332). Juliette’s sister Pauline who is about to be married, although repeatedly shown as still a child, is as excited as if she were attending a ball. One wonders how the children can be so acquiescent in this production which is so self-consciously staged, but clearly they learn their social roles early, and ritual and pageantry play an important part in their formation. The point of the pretty dresses, the elaborate décor, is to reinforce the social mores which preserve male authority and keep women confined. The prize the little girls learn to aspire to is the admiration of men, the opportunity to be a bride. The price is their total surrender to a life of domestic incarceration. Although described as flighty, Juliette Deberle has some real strengths; she is active and energetic, but the only scope for her talents is in sociable pursuits and voluntary fund-raising, which keep her out of public life. ‘Le beau Malignon’ by contrast, is an idle dilettante, but because he is a man he has access to the whole of Paris.

Another space which is reserved for women, and which is also responsible for social control, is the church, as demonstrated in the episode dealing with the celebrations of the month of May. Like the Deberle salon, the church is overheated, and for the purposes of the *fête de Marie*, filled with heavily scented

flowers. Juliette is said to be every bit as at home in this environment as in her own living room, despite the fact that we know that she is not devout. The church displays all the appurtenances of theatricality: music, special lighting effects, costumes, props. Apart from the clerics who run this particular show, only women are present. When H el ene and Jeanne have to press their way through the pews, "les d evotes ne voulaient pas se d eranger et (les) toisaient, furieuses"(169), and when Pauline speaks out of turn during the service she incurs the wrath of "deux d evotes"; French makes this distinction (of gender) more subtly than is possible in English. During the service H el ene is afraid her daughter might be ill, but Jeanne is simply stagestruck: "L'enfant, tr es blanche, les yeux humides, comme emport ee dans le torrent d'amour des litanies, contemplait l'autel"(172). Elsewhere she is "en extase": as she contemplates the statue of the Virgin mother surrounded by flowers, "il lui prenait un frisson." As they are leaving the church, when Pauline specifically asks if she has never been to the theater, Jeanne cannot believe it could be any more beautiful than what she has just experienced. On a later occasion, when Henri comes to collect his wife and H el ene from the church, he is described as "tr es grave, (il) avait la mine correcte d'un mari qui venait chercher ces dames chez Dieu, comme il serait all e les attendre dans le foyer d'un th eatre"(176).

The church as institution, as Zola portrays it, uses all its resources to affect the emotions of its female adherents. H el ene also succumbs to the seductive atmosphere, overpowered by the incense, the organ, the singing of the choir.

Aroused by Henri's protestations of love, she has been shaken in her resolve to live virtuously, to maintain the orderly respectability that she had previously maintained. Even as she vows to avoid temptation, she submits in sensual terms: "les voix ronflantes des chantres, à quelques pas d'elle, l'empêchaient de réfléchir; elle ne trouvait rien, elle s'abandonnait au bercement du cantique, goûtant un bien-être dévot"(170). During the priest's homily she hears his words intermittently as she comes and goes, almost in a swooning state. As the priest intones his sermon celebrating the Virgin mother, the very image of chastity, wifedom, maternity, Hélène vows to be content simply to be loved, to love without professing it, to be in fact pure, chaste, like the Virgin mother. When the priest has finished, Juliette's assessment that "il parle très bien" shows that she responded to the event much as she did to the production at the Vaudeville; in both cases she admires the performance. Hélène and Jeanne, perhaps because they are uninitiated, going rarely to church and never to the theater, react like the lady who fainted in the balcony when la petite Noémi died so convincingly.

At the final stage of the episode of the *mois de Marie* Jeanne is thrown into paroxysms when she observes workmen dismantling the flowers and statue. Seeing them thus, effectively 'breaking the set' in theatrical terms, sends her into an almost catatonic state. There are many intimations of her impending death: she feels the chill of the church like a shroud. It is worth mentioning that this rupture of an illusion is like her understanding of the puppet master at the

children's ball, pulling the strings to create an illusion. In the end Jeanne was not taken in by the show; she saw that it was all controlled and manipulated by a man. Similarly, as represented as an institution run by men with an agenda to keep women in their place, the church has created an illusion. Seeing through the illusion puts Jeanne into a state of shock.

Having settled (temporarily at least) for an unconsummated love, Hélène comes to depend more and more on the sublimated satisfactions she takes from religion:

En entrant dans l'église chaude, toute braisillante de cierges, c'était une sensation de mollesse et d'apaisement, qui peu à peu devenait nécessaire à Hélène. Lorsqu'elle avait eu des doutes dans la journée, qu'une anxiété vague l'avait saisie à la pensée d'Henri, l'église le soir l'endormait de nouveau. Les cantiques montaient, avec le débordement des passions divines. Les fleurs, fraîchement coupées, alourdissaient de leur parfum l'air étouffé sous la voûte. Elle respirait là toute la première ivresse du printemps, l'adoration de la femme haussée jusqu'au culte, et elle se grisait dans ce mystère d'amour et de pureté, en face de Marie vierge et mère couronnée de ses roses blanches. Chaque jour, elle restait agenouillée davantage. Elle se surprenait parfois les mains jointes. Puis, la cérémonie achevée, il y avait la douceur du retour, Henri attendait à la porte." (175)

The purpose of so much theatricality in the church as represented here is to provoke a catharsis to arouse passion, but also to provide the means to sublimate it. We learn that "la petite église semblait être venue comme pour calmer et préparer la passion. Hélène s'était tranquilisée d'abord, heureuse de ce refuge de la religion où elle croyait pouvoir aimer sans honte"(179). In this way, institutionalized religion plays a part in maintaining a social order that keeps women firmly in their place. In the pursuit of respectability and in her concern

to maintain order in her life, H el ene constantly seeks refuge, and attempts to escape from temptation.

The church is emphatically a feminine preserve. Henri meets the women as they come out of the service and only enters in order to get closer to H el ene. He has been on the *trottoir*, smoking a cigar while he waits for them: the street, the *trottoir*, all of Paris, is a masculine domain (except for the prostitute). On the single occasion when the women attempt to bring little Lucien along to the church service he behaves so badly that thereafter they leave him at home!

H el ene uses the church during the time of her repressed passion as a refuge:

H el ene s' etait tranquilis ee d'abord, heureuse de ce refuge de la religion o u elle croyait pouvoir aimer sans honte; mais le travail sourd avait continu e, et quand elle s' veillait de son engourdissement d evot, elle se sentait envahie, li ee par des liens qui lui auraient arrach e la chair, si elle avait voulu les rompre. (179)

Similarly, the apartment she inhabits in Passy has been a refuge. But it is respectability that is the ultimate refuge from her more passionate nature. In the apartment she needs to survey Paris from the open window; on coming out of church she needs Henri's presence. Their promenades in the open air, as H el ene and Henri return from church with Jeanne, tie in with her need to breathe in the open air. Theirs is an open-air love.

A further example of a d ecor provided for a woman by a man is the love nest so carefully designed by Malignon for his rendez-vous with Juliette Deberle. We first see this apartment through H el ene's eyes, although it must be said that neither she nor Juliette is favorably impressed by it. On learning that her friend

has an assignation, H el ene allows her imagination to run and she pictures in her mind, "un appartement d elicious, avec des tentures  epaisses, des fleurs, de grands feux clairs br ulant dans toutes les chemin ees" (243). In her r eve she slips into the fantasy that, not Juliette and Malignon are installed in this romantic retreat, but herself and Henri. The reality is a disappointment: H el ene finds the boudoir to be in very bad taste. "On sentait l a une tentative de s eduction blessante dans sa fatuit e. Une modiste aurait succomb e tout de suite"(253). Once again we are told that she feels stifled and suffocated in this environment. When, inadvertently, she stumbles into the undecorated rooms of the apartment, what she sees is the backstage, the sordid reality behind the meretricious illusion. Malignon, for his part, seems quite pleased with the effect he has created. As he waits for Juliette to arrive we see him assiduously closing the curtains, adjusting the lighting, stepping up the heat in the place, despite his professed distaste elsewhere for such arrangements.

In the opening of this section, Part three chapter IV, a distinct change of point of view occurs. Up to this point in the novel there has been not a single scene without H el ene: until then everything that has been shown falls within her perspective. In the remaining episodes the reader will have access to the interior thoughts of certain other characters. In this case we see Malignon alone in the apartment, moving furniture around, fussing with candles; the impression is very much like the opening of a play, perhaps very much like the one Juliette has just been rehearsing. H el ene's bursting onto the scene throws

the action into a state of bedroom farce: the husband's arrival is imminent, the guilty wife cannot find her clothes, lights have gone out creating havoc; as all grope in the dark; the adulterous pair are obliged to depart into the wings, where Juliette is disgusted by the backstage disorder, and noises are heard offstage as the *fiacre* carries them from the scene. Juliette liked neither the setting Malignon has created for her nor the role he expected her to play. An incompetent Romeo who attempts to construct a space in which to contain a woman, Malignon would surely be equally inept as a husband in setting up a household.

* * *

Hélène zealously protects her orderly life, guarding her respectability as if driven by some great fear. At times her instinct for self-preservation, her marked reluctance to succumb to worldly desires suggest that she has reason to distrust passion, even though the text makes it clear that until meeting Henri she was untouched by it. For instance, when at the children's ball she attempts to remove herself from Henri's advances she escapes into a side room where the daylight blinds her. Her instinct is to preserve her respectability and the orderliness she prides herself on. On arriving, alone, back in her own bedroom she is alarmed:

"En haut, dans sa chambre, dans cette douceur cloîtrée qu'elle retrouvait, Hélène se sentit étouffer. La pièce l'étonnait, si calme, si bien close, si endormie sous les tentures de velours bleu, tandis qu'elle y apportait le souffle court et ardent de l'émotion qui l'agitait. Était-ce sa chambre, ce coin mort de solitude où elle manquait d'air? Alors, violemment, elle ouvrit une fenêtre, elle s'accouda en face de Paris.

(154)

Similarly, when she declines in a somewhat violent manner Jouve's suggestion that she should remarry, she herself is taken aback by her own passionate reaction: "elle comprenait enfin la gravité de son mal, elle avait l'effarement de pudeur d'une femme qui sent glisser son dernier vêtement"(125). Her need for self-preservation leads her to turn away from the world and any risk of close personal associations.

The narration suggests that Héléne is fearful she might tumble into the abyss of disfunction or even insanity. There are oblique revelations, in the novel, of her family history: her mother seems to have been a melancholic who was often sick and never left the house, her father committed suicide, her grandmother is a hysteric, incarcerated in an asylum--any or all of these circumstances might account for her extreme caution, her obsessive self-protection. She perpetuates this situation to an alarming degree in her shielding her daughter from the outside world.

It is somewhat beyond the scope of my present concerns but in Une page d'amour the mother/daughter fusion is at least as unhealthy as in Eugénie Grandet. Enconced in bourgeois comfort in Passy, Héléne rarely goes out: we learn she has only been to Paris three times in eighteen months; unlike Juliette she never goes to the theater and she is markedly distrustful of novels. Perched high above Paris, she inhabits a kind of fortress which she believes to be impenetrable. Seated at the window reading Ivanhoe, the one novel she is

drawn to, she allows her thoughts to run to passionate love, an experience she has not yet known, despite having been married. It is significant that we are told that the episode she is reading, in which Rebecca, like H el ene, sits at the window of a fortress-like edifice, relates the attack on the ch ateau. However, the walls of this particular fortress are about to be breached, or better, have already trembled at the onslaught of sexual attraction.⁵ In fact, the window where she sits looking out at Paris is like what is called in the professional theater a 'fourth wall'. The views of Paris that punctuate each of the five parts (or acts) are mostly hazy. The window performs the function of a scrim, a divide, between H el ene and Paris or between the reader and the narrative.

We have already remarked how H el ene avoids all social life, how she seems to be afraid of the kind of contact that might shake her well-ordered existence. The problem for the novelist is how to make a virtuous character interesting and, while insisting on her impeccable conduct, Zola nonetheless wants to relate a tale of passion. As Hemmings points out, Zola means passion not only in the sense of sexual attraction but also of suffering.⁶ There is no doubt that H el ene Grandjean suffers a great deal as she follows her trajectory from devoted motherhood through passionate attachment to a man, first chastely, then voluptuously, to devastation at the loss of a child, and finally to her capitulation to society's expectations by marrying a 'good and honest man' for whom she feels little more than friendship. The artifices the author uses to entangle his protagonist, seemingly against her more rational impulses, sometimes verge on

the saccharine. She is almost too good, only going out on charitable endeavors which, as it happens, fortuitously show her in a good light in front of Henri. She also resolutely avoids Juliette's society when she fears that she might thereby encourage her friend's husband in his amorous pursuit of her. However, right at the beginning of the novel it is through inadvertence that she is drawn into the very kind of situation she has been at pains to avoid. Like a Racinian heroine, she finds tragedy even as she strives to act virtuously.

At the beginning of the novel it is for the best of reasons that she leaves the safety of the cocoon she has built around herself to go out into the dark streets, for her child is ill, perhaps dying. The scene where she enters the home of Dr. Henri Deberle has a good deal in common with Charles Bovary's first call to the home of Emma Rouault; although the situation is reversed, in both cases the motivation and the justification for the breach of domestic privacy is professional in nature. This is heaven-sent for an author concerned to titillate and tantalize his female readers who will inevitably identify with the heroine. The beauty of the contrivance is that no one need feel any guilt: H el ene acts in good faith, she acts virtuously in seeking help for her sick child, but in doing so she brings an attractive man into her most intimate quarters. It is a familiar device used somewhat cynically by Jane Austen, so many of whose heroines are enabled to penetrate the living space of the beloved by catching chills. Likewise, in Bronte's Wuthering Heights, when Catherine catches cold, she has to stay at the Lyntons. The end result is the

same: the space of the beloved can be inhabited blamelessly, responsibility is removed from the woman and the female reader can bask in self-indulgent identification.

In this instance, despite the solemn and genuine pretext for invasion, i.e., Jeanne's illness, the narrator takes care to linger over some quite salacious details, making the reader very aware that a man and a woman are alone, late at night, in the woman's bedroom. It is the very stuff of a kind of inverted female pornography, containing all the trappings of seduction but stopping well short of serious physical contact. Both Henri and H el ene are in a state of semi-undress: more than once we are told that Henri, who has had to pull on some clothes in haste, self-consciously attempts to hide his bare neck; H el ene is several times shown with her shoulders bare, her shawl having slipped. With her naked arms and her hair tumbling in disarray she is portrayed as inhabiting a highly erotic bedroom disorder. The description of her most intimate garments littered on the floor is even more tantalizing: the doctor has to pick up her underwear as he negotiates the clothing scattered on the floor. "Une odeur de verveine montait du lit d efait et de ces linges  epars. C' etait toute l'intimit e d'une femme violemment  etal ee"(55). The sentence is tellingly ambiguous and metonymic: the woman's effects might be what is violently cast around the room. It can equally be read as saying the woman herself is spread out, on display.

The narrator takes pains to suggest that the participants in the scene are

unaware of each other's nudity; when Jeanne in her agony pulls away her mother's shawl and unbuttons the doctor's jacket we hear, "Ils ne s'en aperçurent point. Ni l'un ni l'autre ne se voyait" (53). Although the text describes Hélène as "oublieuse de tout, n'ayant plus que la passion de son enfant" and Henri as "ne songe(ant) pas davantage à son veston ouvert" (55), clearly the narrator notices this and makes a point of relaying it to the reader. The intention is surely to produce a self-indulgent frisson. The very fact that this highly intimate scene takes place in the opening section suggests that the writer is attempting to catch the readers' prurient interest. It is almost a promise of more exciting details to come. Effectively, the heroine's bedroom has been invaded not only by the doctor but by the narrator and the readers. Once the crisis has passed, Hélène begs the doctor to remain, even after she has sent her maid to bed! We learn that Henri stays until daybreak even though his work is completed, allowing the two of them to engage in low-voiced conversation. So, within a legitimate framework they have been enabled to spend the night together and the reader has enjoyed a secret, vicarious thrill.

At the close of this opening episode the narrator permits the two to assess each other physically. Saying that the doctor had not actually looked at the mother until then, the text tells us that he now cannot take his eyes off her. Through his eyes we learn of her Junoesque beauty:

Mais ce qui étonnait le docteur, c'était la nudité superbe de cette mère.
Le châle avait encore glissé, la gorge se découvrait, les bras restaient

nus. Une grosse natte, couleur d'or bruni, coulait sur l'épaule et se perdait entre les seins. Et, dans son jupon mal attaché, échevelée et en désordre, elle gardait une majesté, une hauteur d'honnêteté et de pudeur qui la laissait chaste sous ce regard d'homme, où montait un grand trouble. (57)

For her part, Héléne observes Henri:

Comme elle le regardait, elle s'aperçut à son tour qu'il avait le cou nu. Et . . . cet espace, tout à l'heure immense, semblait se resserrer." (57)

However professional the doctor's behavior, and however modest the mother's demeanor, they are both now acutely sensitive to each other's disheveled attire. Jeanne, who is placed emphatically between them, will be the opportunity for a number of other overnight visits. The fortress has been well and truly breached.

By the same token Héléne is able to invade Henri's living space. She has already done so in order to solicit his professional help, but on the second approach it is to thank him for services rendered, which she feels to have surpassed normal expectations. Her initial hesitancy indicates that she is aware that she might be entering dangerous territory, overstepping the limits of legitimate commercial activity. The text does purport to take the reader inside her mind, to expose her motivations. This is somewhat at odds with Naturalist precepts, according to which the novelist is made up of an observer and an experimenter.

Almost the entire discussion so far has applied to the observations available to the narrator. The role of the experimenter is rather more problematic. In Apartment Stories Sharon Marcus cites Zola as saying in Le Naturalisme au théâtre (1881) "the novelist is nothing more than a clerk who does not permit

himself to judge and to make conclusions . . . he simply displays what he has seen".⁷ This works quite well while the narrative approaches characters such as Juliette--the text never goes inside her mind, and the reader can only know her from what she does and says, never by what she thinks. This is even more true of her husband. The reader never really knows how genuine Deberle is. We never get inside his head; he might be as Mère Fétu says, "un peu coureur". My approach throughout this study has been phenomenological and as such is concerned with how much the narrator can tell, and how much the reader can know. Naturalism's self-avowed scientific approach of observation and experimentation makes it particularly susceptible to "reader response" theories. Because the phenomenological reading obliges the reader to follow the perception of the narrator, there are inevitably gaps in what the narrator can provide. Typically, the narration is filtered through the consciousness of a protagonist. As pointed out above, in this case it is through the narrator's observation of Hélène, and the text only very occasionally moves out of her purview.

For as long as the Naturalist's agenda is concerned with observation the narrator's role is relatively secure. However, as Marcus points out, citing Zola's Roman expérimental: "the experimenter appears and initiates the experiment, by which I mean that he causes the characters to move (fait mouvoir les personnages) within a particular story." As Marcus notes, "The existence of an experimenter who had to merge with the work before any observation could take

place clearly undermined the exteriority of the observer and the corresponding interiority of the text." I have already mentioned above the possibility of more than one reading of the episodes of the children's ball and Jeanne's funeral. In those instances the narrator keeps just enough distance to allow an ingenuous reader to accept the descriptions exactly as the participants in them do.

However, the narrator is never entirely neutral and the author, who may or may not be the narrator, is sometimes less, sometimes more visible. In the case of the *bal d'enfants*, it is Hélène's surprise at finding herself propelled into an unexpected *milieu* that provides the jolt that betrays the narrator's discomfort in the face of what is superficially a delightful set- piece.

In his persona as experimenter, the narrator's own position is much more in evidence; this is very noticeable in the discussion of religion. The description of Hélène's absorption into religious devotion, which is presented as genuine and understandable, could pass as falling into a category of writing that was prevalent in the popular literature of the time, were it not for some authorial imposition that projects the narration onto a quite different level. The action of the novel takes place during a period that popularized the romanticization of female visionaries such as Bernadette of Lourdes (1858) or the children in Pontmain (1871). This carried through to Theresa of Lisieux though she was a little too late to be a good example.⁸ Certainly, Zola was interested in such phenomena, as he was to use the story of Bernadette in his later writing. Contemporary female readers might well have indulged in some vicarious

mystical or spiritual identification with Jeanne in the celebrations of the 'month of Mary'. However, the presence of Mère Fétu and the revelation of her feigned and exaggerated piety betray the narrator's distrust of such feminine submission to religion, revealing the author's agenda, which is that women's confinement in bourgeois respectability is a situation that has been socially engineered.

There are other gaps between what the narrator is able to show and what the reader may take from his account. For instance, at the very end, when we learn that Hélène has married M. Rambaud and that Juliette and her husband have a new daughter, Mère Fétu drives a wedge into Hélène's heart when she says of Henri: "Il était un peu coureur, personne ne disait le contraire. Des dames de Passy le connaissaient bien." This is an example of the doubtful authority of the text, since Mère Fétu is scarcely a reliable witness.

Again, it is hard to know quite what to make of the following quote: Hélène has succumbed to Henri in Malignon's apartment:

Dans l'effacement de tout ce qui l'entourait et de ce qu'elle était elle-même, le seul souvenir de sa jeunesse demeurait encore, une pièce où il faisait une chaleur aussi forte, un grand fourneau avec des fers, sur lequel elle se penchait; et elle se rappelait qu'elle avait éprouvé un anéantissement pareil, que cela n'était pas plus doux, que les baisers dont Henri la couvrait ne lui donnaient pas une mort lente plus voluptueuse. Lorsque, tout d'un coup, il la saisit entre ses bras, pour l'emmener dans la chambre, elle eut pourtant une anxiété dernière. (279)

This might refer to some adolescent awakening that she is wary of and has spent her life avoiding. She is very afraid of passion, fearing the disruption to her comfortable orderly existence. What is interesting from the point of view of analysis of the text, is that this fear is kept under wraps, leaving the reader to

conjecture what has not been made explicit. There is no doubt that Hélène keeps Jeanne confined, ostensibly for the good of her health, but she may also be afraid to let her daughter into the adult world.

The most hopeful space for women to occupy seems to belong to the servant Rosalie. Her kitchen is described as being the brightest and sunniest room in the entire apartment, so filled with light that she has to put up a curtain in the afternoon. There is no doubt that she is more mistress of her kitchen than Hélène is of her household. When Zéphyrin comes to pay court to her she takes special care to make her space gleam: “jamais elle n’avait fait sa cuisine aussi belle. Une mariée aurait pu y coucher, tout y était blanc comme pour une noce” (113). She takes charge of her own environment, into which she will receive her young man in a way that the middle-class women seem unable to do. Like Juliette, she also puts herself on display but in a setting of her own devising: “tirant à demi le rideau de cotonnade, ménageant un jour de boudoir, elle attendait Zéphyrin au milieu du bel ordre, dans une bonne odeur de thym et de laurier” (113). Rosalie is shown as being confident in a way that her mistress is not. Her future is sanctioned by relatives, the community from which the two have come, and even, we learn, “monsieur le curé le permet” (108). Her role is depicted as secure, and she knows exactly how to handle her man, mothering him, attending to his health and well-being. This is in contrast to Juliette Deberle’s existence as a social butterfly, with all the dangers inherent in her lifestyle. The life that Juliette has is probably the best that Hélène can hope for

in marrying M. Rambaud. When H  l  ne first encounters Z  phyrin, who comes armed with a letter of introduction from Rosalie's aunt, she seems doubtful, fearful perhaps about bringing an outsider, a male into her home. Also, she takes seriously the moral welfare of her young maid, but it becomes clear that the two, although young and lusty, are totally reliable. It is with some fascination that H  l  ne spies on their activities, only to be reassured that all is well.⁹ Rosalie and Z  phyrin also depend for their union on the sanctions of family, society and church but somehow the prognosis looks more promising. There are indications that the society that sponsors their union is concerned for the well-being of the couple. Juliette's marriage, which by the prevailing standards represented a good match--we have heard that her father-in-law was wealthy and her husband is successful--leaves her with nowhere to go except frivolous pursuits. We see enough of the attentions surrounding the finding of a husband for Pauline to be quite sure that Juliette's marriage was similarly arranged. H  l  ne's first marriage took place somewhat haphazardly, without the blessing of her future in-laws. The young servant Rosalie and her soldier thus hold the tentative promise of a more hopeful outcome.

1. The recurrence of the word *étouffant* is almost too much to document. Beginning in Part 1 chapter I with Deberle's remark that Jeanne "a besoin de l'air" (52). All of the spaces the women inhabit are overheated. We learn that in Juliette's home "on étouffait dans le salon" (68). Similarly the love-nest prepared by Malignon is suffocating warm as is the church during the Marian celebrations.
2. When Jeanne first accompanies her mother to the Deberle salon, she suffers from the heavy perfumes of the flowers, they are described as "lourds et violents". Also we learn that she regards the room with suspicion, "méfiante, avertie de vagues dangers par son exquise sensibilité." See Bram Djikstra, Idols of Perversity: Fantasies of Feminine Evil in Fin de Siecle Culture, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).
3. Sharon Marcus, Apartment Stories: City and Home in Nineteenth-Century Paris and London, (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999).
4. Referring to Zola's articles written for Figaro about the cloistered education of women, Marcus states, "in them he argued that the suffocation of girls within narrow lodgings led directly to hysterical dizzy spells" (181). This applies directly to Jeanne. He also claimed that their inferior education made them prone to adultery in the manner described of Juliette.
5. Jean Borie, Zola et les mythes, (Paris: Seuil). Borie specifically mentions that any wall will have a chink in it (131).
6. In Le Roman expérimental 1879, Zola lays out his theory of the novel, in which he explains that the best model he can draw on is medical science. "Si la méthode expérimentale conduit à la connaissance de la vie physique, elle doit conduire aussi à la connaissance de la vie passion. Elle est intellectuelle."

7. Apartment Stories op. cit.
8. Maria Warner, Alone of All Her Sex: The Myth and the Cult of the Virgin Mary. (New York: Knopf, 1976).
9. Brian Nelson, "Zola and the Ambiguities of Passion: 'Une Page d'amour'", Essays in French Literature, Western Australia, 1973. Nelson points out that Rosalie and Zephyrin's relationship is only partially identified with a pure healthy eroticism. I agree when he says that "they indicate only the beginnings of a solution to the problem of sexuality in Zola." (18)

Conclusion

The novels by Balzac, Flaubert and Zola I have analyzed in this dissertation represent the situation of women in the domestic sphere in the context of the changing political systems of Republic, Monarchy and Empire. Although, prior to the Revolution of 1789 very few women, indeed very few people, enjoyed legal protection or the advantages of property or suffrage, the Napoleonic Civil Code of 1804 institutionalized women's inferior status. One striking aspect of this was the clausturation of bourgeois women in the model household. As Joan Landes has pointed out, Montesquieu had already, in the eighteenth century, identified the problem of what can happen, not only when women are too free, but also if they are too suppressed: "the challenge is to discover their proper place."¹ Like the harem women in Les lettres persanes, nineteenth-century wives have been segregated from the masculine world of politics, commerce and public life, but just as Montesquieu's Usbek's reliance on a violent régime under a eunuch ultimately failed to control his women's behavior

(and may even have contributed to it), so did the rule of law in the form of the Code fail to withstand the pressures of modern life. In a way it is surprising that it remained effective as long as it did.

While the Napoleonic Code legitimated a highly competitive industrialized society run by men for men, the very ideal of the domestic woman on which it established its moral basis, proved over and over again to be vulnerable to social pressures both from the outside and from the women themselves. Placing the lady in the modern-day tower, her domestic arena, simply made it easier for men like Rodolphe Boulanger in Madame Bovary to know where to find her and assault the edifice from without. Fortune-hunters like the suitors of Eugénie Grandet and Rose Cormon launched their attack in the very spaces conceived to guard against them.

In some cases the confusion of domestic space with commercial activity facilitated a breakdown of the ideal conception of the feminized home. Emma Bovary's husband conducts his medical practice from the house, the working-class Gervaise Coupaud runs a business from her living quarters. Moreover, professional men, like doctors and lawyers, always had access to the domestic interior. Thus, Hélène Grandjean's doctor enters her sacrosanct maternal space and becomes her lover. Additionally, the increase in sociability as the population moved into a period of urban expansion meant that women sought gratifications beyond merely running the household and family efficiently. All of the female protagonists in the novels under review start out by being virtuous and anxious

to please their menfolk and eager to fulfill society's expectations. But their world does not stop at the front door: the world is pressing in.

The strictures imposed by the Napoleonic Code were very far-reaching. As we have seen, women of all social classes suffered through the increase in masculine prerogative. In the earlier period of Restoration of the Monarchy, a woman's lot was determined by financial motives. Far from liberating a woman, the fortune that accompanied her made her excessively vulnerable to self-seeking, ambitious men. The situations of Eugénie Grandet and Rose Cormon are very different; though both are unmarried and exist in small provincial towns they represent different conditions of femininity. The daughter of the miserly Grandet has no possibility for personal development. The only future she has been brought up to expect is the miserable example of her mother, who has been reduced to abject servility. Her father's accumulation of wealth has drawn suitors to the house in Saumur, but she does not enjoy the privilege of choice in the matter of a husband, since the power of patriarchy has deprived her of all autonomy. The spinster of Alençon fell between the cracks of an earlier merchant bourgeoisie, one which afforded her a certain status and the possibility for control of her own household, and a new aggressively masculine society that promoted the dubious values of the parvenu represented by Du Bousquier. In allying herself in marriage to just such a member of the new order, she sacrifices what power she previously had. The portrait Balzac provides of Félix Grandet's downtrodden wife and daughter, mutually acquiescing to the strictures of an

enclosed existence characterized by total obedience and submission, eloquently conveys the emotional and psychological price of womankind's capitulation to the forces of bourgeois, masculine law. Eugénie and Mlle. Cormon strive valiantly to accommodate their own desires to the exigencies of society, but the cards are stacked against them.

By the time of Flaubert's Madame Bovary a generation has passed and the woman's identification with the house is no longer figured in financial terms. Dowry still matters, but the provincial society portrayed in this history is populated by shopkeepers, petty officials and members of the lesser professions. Unlike her literary forebears, Eugénie and Rose, Emma Bovary is a married woman, confined to the severely restricted domestic sphere controlled by petit-bourgeois men. In this milieu, the house represents social and moral respectability. To leave the home is to risk comparison with a woman of the streets. Societal pressures have become excessively harsh and there is literally nowhere for a woman to go outside of household duty. Failure to comply, on the part of the wife, results in her being ostracized, branded as a harlot. Although this situation has been constructed by men, we can see that the self-righteous provincial matrons of Yonville l'Abbaye also conspire to perpetuate a régime that represses women, by becoming the internal agents of their own persecution. But, as ever, it is impossible to lock up daughters, wives, maidservants, mistresses. The world is constantly bearing in on the domestic cocoon. And the woman is impelled toward the bigger world outside, even at

the cost of her reputation. Emma Bovary dreams of leaving provincial Normandy for the excitement of Paris, but as a woman she can not participate in the rites of passage available to young men and she pays dearly for her attempts to break out of domestic captivity. Like so many women of her generation and class she had embraced the seductive ideal of domestic bliss described in the writings of Jean-Jacques Rousseau and emblemized by Sophie of Emile and Julie of La nouvelle Héloïse. For her, as for so many women, the reality was very different.

In the very different lifestyles described by Zola in Second Empire Paris, the laundress Gervaise Macquart does not find the institution of marriage to be protective. For working-class girls, like Gervaise, legal marriage seems to offer a possibility of the kind of bourgeois privacy that Emma Bovary found so stifling. However, although Gervaise struggled valiantly to build a protective wall of respectability around herself and her family, the brutal forces of necessity and poverty bring her down. The chic suburbia in Passy, described in Une page d'amour is an unhealthy enclosed environment in which wives and daughters find little scope for self-expression. Deprived of the opportunity to participate in a public forum, women like Juliette Deberle resort to escapist, in-house theatricals or like Hélène Grandjean risk coming under the sway of religious fervor.

The greatest fear of the fathers and husbands who have collectively constructed this bastion is that their women, whom they have taken so much

care to enclose, will break out and jeopardize the inheritances of property and the stability of the bourgeois family. The narrations I have analyzed in this dissertation show how the walls guarding the domestic sphere are fragile and penetrable but that the transgressions of domestic women exact severe penalties.

1. Joan Landes, Women and the Public Sphere in the Age of the French Revolution, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988) 31.

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