CliffsNotes on

BALZAC'S

PERE GORIOT

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BALZAC'S PÈRE GORIOT

Notes

including

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LIFE AND BACKGROUND OF THE AUTHOR

Born in Tours, France, a small provincial town on the Loire River, Honoré de Balzac (1799-1850) will have a chance during his youth to observe the mores of provincial life, the topic of several of his novels, among which *Eugénie Grandet* is probably the best known.

Fortunately for us, though, Balzac's father will leave for Paris, then the capital of European intellectual and artistic life. The city is a fascinating place filled with charm, elegance, and riches--bustling with luxurious parties, elegant carriages, and beautiful women. But it is also a mud-pit of dilapidated homes and people with petty desires and hidden passions, a jungle where the cruel struggle for survival eliminates the weak and corrupts the pure. These two aspects of the French capital will serve as a background of *Le Père Goriot.*

In this milieu, Balzac, after completing his studies in law and the humanities, will soon feel the urge to become a writer. With hardly an income after the bankruptcy of his small printing business, he will have to publish to survive. Hardly twenty years of age, he works twelve to fourteen hours a day, fighting sleep and fatigue with innumerable cups of coffee, writing about 2,000 pages a year. This explains the many faults we find in his early works published serially in newspapers. They were mostly romanesque, Gothic romances and adventure type novels, influenced by Ann Radcliffe, Shelley (*Frankenstein*), the Swedish writer and philosopher Swedenborg, and James Fenimore Cooper. Conspicuous above all is the influence of Sir Walter Scott, which is clearly seen in *Les Chouans,* published in 1829, Balzac's first step toward fame.

But one has to wait until 1834, when, with *Le Père Gonot,* Balzac reveals his genius to the world. *Le Père Goriot* is the cornerstone of his huge undertaking: the epic saga of modern society. *The Human Comedy,* composed of 93 novels and short stories, filled with some 2,000 living characters, and intended to cover every possible facet of society, was divided by Balzac under two headings: Social Studies and Philosophical Studies, the former being subdivided into six parts:

- Scenes of Private Life
- Scenes of Provincial Life
- Scenes of Parisian Life
- Scenes of Political Life
- Scenes of Military Life
- Scenes of Country Life

This immense undertaking, wider in scope than the works of a Walter Scott or a Dickens, made Taine, a contemporary French critic, say, "Together with Shakespeare and Saint Simon, Balzac is the greatest source of information we have ever had on human nature."

A BRIEF SYNOPSIS

The story takes place in Paris in the year 1819, in a decrepit, dirty, ill-smelling boardinghouse on the left bank of the Seine.

Mme. Vauquer, a stingy old widow who owns the place, rules over her tenants. They are people with modest means and desires, like Mlle. Michonneau, the old maid; Poiret, a puppet-like human being; and a young orphan, Victorine Taillefer. Three tenants stand out in this company: Eugène de Rastignac, a young student from the provinces, of noble origin, but poor and eager to try his luck in the capital; Vautrin, the

"strong" man, bon vivant and humorous, but mysterious and alarming; and Père Goriot, a retired merchant, who seems to be suffering from a mysterious sorrow.

Rastignac soon discovers that strange events are taking place at the seemingly respectable boardinghouse: Old Goriot pressing silver dishes into ingots, Vautrin furtively returning to the house in the middle of the night in spite of the bolted doors, Goriot being visited by pretty girls whose bills he pays.

Rastignac is going to find out the solution of one of the mysteries. Pursuing his ambitions, he manages to be introduced into Parisian high society with the help of his influential cousin, Mme. de Beauséant. Everything seems to be working according to his plans, but for mentioning the name of Goriot, he finds himself shut out of the Countess de Restaud's salon, the meeting place of the cream of society. Crestfallen over his first *faux-pas,* he learns from Mme. Beauséant the secret of Père Goriot's life. The old man has ruined himself and has accepted a miserable life in order that his two daughters might be wealthy. Anastasie has married a nobleman, Count de Restaud; Delphine an Alsatian banker, Baron of Nucingen. Goriot, welcomed as long as his fortune had lasted, found himself ostracized by his sons-in-law when he became poor.

Vautrin, who has sensed ambition in Rastignac, cynically offers him a bargain: The young student should win the love of the fair Victorine, whose father is extremely rich but who has disowned her. As the only obstacle to Victorine's inheriting the fortune is her brother Frederic, Vautrin for the sum of 200,000 francs would manage to get rid of young Taillefer, thus insuring Victorine's and Rastignac's fortune. Rastignac is indignant, but one feels that he is secretly tempted by the proposal.

After Rastignac's failure in high society, he will try, aided by his cousin, to conquer the "middle world." He is introduced to Mme. de Nucingen and, with the help of Goriot, soon becomes her lover. In the meantime, Vautrin has started his Machiavellian plan and has Victorine's brother murdered. Everything seems to be in his favor when Mlle. Michonneau, a spy for the police, discovers Vautrin to be an escaped convict and has him arrested. This ends the detective story.

Goriot's daughters come to him for help. Their husbands have discovered their affairs and are trying to ruin them. In a pathetic scene, the two daughters show their monstrous egoism and pride. Père Goriot is afflicted by a stroke. He soon becomes delirious, muttering incoherent words, revealing also his extreme love for the daughters who have left him, one to go to a dance, the other to protect her fortune.

Goriot dies blessing his daughters, with only Rastignac and Bianchon, a medical student, at his bedside. Rastignac attends to the funeral arrangements and, after saying a last goodbye to Goriot in the graveyard overlooking Paris, declares war on the capital: "Beware, Paris, here I come" and goes to Mme. de Nucingen's for dinner.

LIST OF CHARACTERS

Mme. Vauquer

A stingy, hypocritical, middle-aged widow, humble to the rich, heartless to the poor, she is hypnotized by Vautrin because of his strength, joviality, and gallantry.

Sylvie

The "sturdy cook."

Christophe
The handyman.

Poiret
A small bourgeois of vague antecedents, who could have been a government clerk or a hangman's aid; a robot of a man, mechanically repeating what other people have said.

Mlle. Michonneau
A stingy, meek old maid, well paired with Poiret. Ready to do anything for money, she will turn Vautrin over to the police.

Mme. Couture
A ray of sunshine in this drab boardinghouse. The widow of an army commissary general, who has appointed herself guardian and chaperone of Victorine Taillefer.

Victorine Taillefer
One of the touching feminine characters depicted by Balzac, she reminds the reader of Eugénie Grandet; the daughter of a rich man who has disowned her and who wants to cut her from his will in favor of his son Frederic.

Bianchon
A medical student, a friend of Eugène de Rastignac who will be with Eugène the only ones in attendance at Goriot's agony and funeral.

Vautrin
A strong, jovial, gallant man, soon discovered to be the escaped convict Jacques Collin, alias "Trompe la Mort," a banker for the underworld.

Old Goriot
A former manufacturer of vermicelli who has sacrificed his fortune and accepted a miserable life at the boardinghouse to see his daughters happy.

Eugène de Rastignac

A young and ambitious student from a poor aristocratic family. In his efforts to conquer Paris, he will become involved with Goriot's two daughters: first with Anastasie, who will scorn him, and then with Delphine, who will love him.

Gobseck
One of the reappearing characters in the *Comédie Humaine*; a usurer who has been running a highly successful business and who counts among his clients Old Goriot and his daughter Anastasie.

M. Taillefer
Victorine's rich father.

Frederic Taillefer
Victorine's brother, whose murder will be ordered by Vautrin so that Victorine may inherit the family's fortune.

Mme. de Rastignac
Eugène's mother, kind and indulgent to her son.

Laure de Rastignac
Eugène's sister, a very minor character, but the most charming female in this book, devoid of the egoism we find in Anastasie or Delphine and of Victorine's passivity.

Mme. de Beauséant
Rastignac's cousin. She will introduce Eugène into society and give him friendly help and good advice on how to succeed.

Marquis d'Ajuda-Pinto
Mme. de Beauséant's lover.

Duchess de Langeais
One of Mme. de Beauséant's malicious "friends."

Anastasie de Restaud
One of Old Goriot's daughters. She is presented as a spoiled, self-centered young person, interested only in social prominence.

Count de Restaud
Anastasie's husband, a violent, heartless aristocrat.

Maxime de Trailles
A young nobleman, Anastasie's lover.

Delphine de Nucingen
Goriot's second daughter, a more complex character than Anastasie. A very pretty girl, spoiled and self-centered like her sister, but she can show true love for Rastignac and tenderness for her father.

Baron de Nucingen
Delphine's husband, an unrefined Alsatian banker.

De Marsay
A young aristocrat, Delphine's first love.

CRITICAL COMMENTARIES

PART I

Summary
The left bank of Paris in 1819, a district crowded with students from the nearby Sorbonne, the schools of law and medicine, full of lower middle-class boardinghouses catering to students, petty clerks, and retired people with modest means--such is the Pension Vauquer located at "Rue Neuve Sainte Geneviève between the Latin Quarter and Faubourg Saint Marceau."

Exuding a pestilential odor, the pension is a very depressing place with an ugly outside and a decaying inside. It is ruled by Mme. Vauquer, a plump middle-aged widow who is stingy, hypocritical, and selfish.

The other occupants are lodged according to their means. Mme. Couture, the widow of an army paymaster, occupies the most expensive set of rooms on the first floor. With her is her ward, Victorine Taillefer, who has lost her mother and has been disowned by her father, a wealthy banker who decided to leave his fortune to his son. Victorine is a pale, resigned, sympathetic young person who, unfortunately, "lacks the two things that create women a second time: pretty dresses and love letters."

On the second floor lives an old man named Poiret, "a sort of automaton," a shabbily dressed nonentity who thinks himself witty. On the same floor are the quarters of Vautrin, a man about forty with a black wig and dyed whiskers, a strong and boisterous character who is a keen analyst of people and of society, mysterious in his ways and somewhat sinister.

The third floor is shared by three lodgers. Mlle. Michonneau is a shriveled, elderly spinster who had been an old man's companion and succeeded in having herself put in his will. A man named Goriot, who was once a rich merchant, is now a poor, wretched man, scorned by most of the tenants, who call him "Old Goriot." The other third-floor tenant is another sympathetic character, Eugène de Rastignac, of an aristocratic but poor family from the provinces; he is an ambitious student who has just come to study in Paris.

The attic houses Christophe, the handyman, and Sylvie, the cook.

Commentary
This section, the first part of a long exposition, opens up as a drama would, giving us the setting and the cast of characters. It is a very good example of the author's realistic treatment of the novel, done in a classic manner. We see the place in which the drama is to take place first from the outside, then from the inside. Finally, we get a first glimpse at the protagonists.

All this is done in a typical Balzacian way with an accumulation of minute detail that lets us feel the atmosphere of decay and dilapidation of the boardinghouse. Stylistically, this is conveyed to us by a succession of adjectives, a device dear to Balzac: The furniture was "old, rotten, shaky, cranky, worm-eaten, halt, maimed, one-eyed, rickety, and ramshackle."

The characters are realistically examined. We are first given a glimpse of them in the way one would see them at a first meeting, and then, gradually, we penetrate bit by bit into their personality, as would happen in real life. And their physical traits and reactions to environment give us an insight into their moral behavior: For example, after describing the pestilential odor of the boardinghouse, Balzac adds that its owner "alone can breathe that tainted air without being disheartened by it."

However, there still remain many dark traits in the characters of the lodgers; many suspenseful questions remain unanswered. What deep-rooted passion obsesses Mlle. Michonneau, "vice, greed, or excessive love?" What was the exact nature of her occupation; was she a mere companion to the old man in her care or his lover? Could she possibly have driven her patient to his death to inherit his fortune?

Vautrin's character is described in a suspenseful, masterly way. We feel a dichotomy in his personality. Although a jovial person, fond of jokes and pleasant in his manners, he is a somewhat mysterious if not sinister character who can take a lock apart and replace it in seconds. He knows the sea, foreign countries, and prisons. (Vautrin, we will discover, is an escaped convict familiar with penal ships.) He disappears every evening, does not return until midnight, and seems to bear a grudge against society.

An interesting aspect of this section, which is opposed to the realistic treatment of the subject matter, is the author's constant personal comments and his tendency to philosophize. One example of this is Balzac's endeavor to rationalize the tenants' scornful attitude toward Goriot: "Perhaps," the author says, "its is only human nature to inflict suffering on anything that will endure suffering, whether by reason of its genuine humility, or indifference, or sheer helplessness."

Also interesting is the first hint of social criticism, which fills the whole book and is probably the unifying element of this complex work. Balzac shows us here a society in miniature patterned after the Parisian one; indeed, as in Paris, we see the guests at the boardinghouse lodged and treated according to their financial means and their social position (here the rooms each one occupies) fluctuating as their fortunes fluctuate, as shall be seen in the next section.

Summary
Six years before the beginning of the story, Goriot came to the boardinghouse. A widower of about sixty-two, he was a successful, retired businessman. He immediately produced a favorable impression on wealth-admiring Mme. Vauquer, who addressed him as Mister Goriot and soon conceived secret hopes to become the second Mrs. Goriot.

Practical in nature, she quickly saw what benefits could be derived from having this wealthy man as a boarder. She immediately started to raise the standing of the house and advertised, using Goriot's name and wealth as a means to secure better-class lodgers. Attracted by this publicity was a Countess de l'Ambermesnil, a woman of thirty-six. Delighted, Mme. Vauquer treated such an important guest with special favors. Quickly the two women became friendly, and Mme. Vauquer, still interested in Goriot, asked the countess to act as a go-between. The countess readily accepted, with the idea of keeping such a wealthy man for herself, but she was incensed by Goriot's indifference.

Hurt in her pride, the countess started downgrading Goriot in Mme. Vauquer's mind and, knowing now that she could not find a catch at the pension, departed owing six months' rent.

This event marked the turning point in Mme. Vauquer's attitude toward Goriot; needing a scapegoat and knowing now of Goriot's lack of interest in matrimony, her admiration and inclination for the retired businessman turned into spite and hatred. She first denied her lodger the small favors he had been granted, especially at the dinner table, but Goriot, a frugal and thrifty man, hardly noticed that. All the more enraged, the malicious Mme. Vauquer tried to find other ways to torment him. She enlisted her lodgers to needle him and then tried to find reasons to humiliate him.

Soon Goriot's fortune seemed to be shaking: He asked to move up to the second floor, cutting his rent to 900 francs and doing without a fire in winter. From that day the formerly respected Mr. Goriot was referred to as "Old Goriot." ("Père" in French is a term with a double meaning, impossible to translate into English. First, the derogatory meaning of "père" translated by "old" suggests the physical and moral

downfall of the character, and, second, it means "father," introducing the "paternity" theme of the novel.)

Another incident gave Mme. Vauquer a reason to exercise her cruelty. She had found that Goriot was receiving pretty girls in his room. She questioned Goriot, who told her that they were his daughters. Her twisted mind immediately interpreted the relationship as mistresses, but as long as Goriot had been wealthy, she was willing to close her eyes to his affairs. Then when Goriot's fortunes seemed to deteriorate, she violently objected to his "disrespectable" behavior. Goriot was rapidly declining. He moved to the third floor, dressed in cheap clothing, and cut down on all luxuries. He became thinner and thinner, more and more morose, to the point that Bianchon, the young medical student, suspected a state of cretinism. In four years the strong, successful, well-dressed merchant "had become a feeble, vacillating septuagenarian," reacting only at the mention of the young girls he called his daughters.

Commentary
This section tells us about the rise and fall of our title character, Old Man Goriot. It is highly dramatic to watch the change in him and the petty cruelty of his landlady and the lodgers toward him. It is important to notice, though, that we do not as yet learn much about the psychological makeup of Goriot, but rather about his situation. This again is part of the dramatic progression in the work.

By contrast with Goriot's seeming impassability, which Bianchon, the young medical student, calls "cretinism," the other tenants, especially Mme. Vauquer, are sharply portrayed. Mme. Vauquer is shown to be a woman with a malicious mind, impressed by title, money, and the power they command. She is an egotistical hypocrite who will close her eyes on sin if the sinner is rich, but who will crucify him when he becomes poor in the name of decency.

Goriot here becomes the center of a suspenseful plot. We are wondering what the cause of his downfall might have been, whether he was really a rich merchant or, as Vautrin puts it, a shady character "selling short" in stocks and bonds. We know, of course--Balzac tells us--that the two pretty girls who visited the old man were his daughters, but why were they so elegantly dressed and apparently of a different social environment? Why did they stop coming? And was this Goriot's only motive for depression?

In this section, even more so than in the preceding one, we can see the dual treatment of the subject matter: an objective, realistic narrative showing the decline of Goriot and the resulting attitude of Mme. Vauquer and her other tenants, and the subjective moralizing commentary about the characters. "It is one of the most detestable habits of a Lilliputian mind to credit other people with its own malignant pettiness," says Balzac of Mme. Vauquer.

Another concern of Balzac's expressed in this section is the interrelationship of the people and their milieus. Talking about Mme. Vauquer, Balzac says, "she is at once the embodiment and the interpretation of her lodging house, as surely as her lodging house implies the existence of its mistress."

Summary
Eugène de Rastignac has just returned from home, where he spent a vacation. On the old family estate he compared provincial life in its dullness with the brilliance and excitement of Parisian life. His illusions are gone and his ambition has grown; he now wants to be a social success and has noticed that hard work is not really the way to attain his goal. What he needs are connections to conquer the capital, and, as the great moving force in society is women, why not try to find a patroness?

He remembered how during his youth his aunt, Mme. de Marcillac, talked about the high aristocracy with which she was intimately acquainted. Could she not be his passport to success? And, indeed, upon his request, she wrote him a letter of introduction to a cousin, one of the most influential women in Paris, the Viscountess de Beauséant.

Mme. de Beauséant replies by inviting Eugène to a ball, where for the first time he meets the cream of society and manages to dance with one of the prettiest women in Paris, Countess de Restaud, who extends an invitation to call on her whenever he wishes.

The young student's head is whirling with joy when, at two in the morning, he returns to the boardinghouse, for not only has he gained an entry into society, but he has also succeeded in making an impression on one of Paris' beauty queens.

A noise suddenly disturbs his train of thought, a groan which seems to come from Goriot's room. Peering through the keyhole, Eugène sees the old man twisting silver plates into ingots and, with tears in his eyes, sighing "poor child."

Eugène's first reaction is that Goriot is a thief, but the words he has heard, the tears he has seen, make him decide not to be too hasty in condemning the old man. On his way back to his room, he hears other noises: muffled footsteps, voices from Vautrin's room, the clink of money, then someone departing. What could Vautrin be doing at this time of night?

Eugène is puzzled by these events, but he eventually goes to sleep thinking of the pretty countess.

Commentary
This section deals with another main character in the novel--Eugène de Rastignac--with his first glimpse at Parisian high society, with the awakening of the young man's ambitions, and with the mysteries he discovers at the boardinghouse.

It is also a first step toward the entanglement of three different characters: Rastignac, Goriot, and Vautrin. Rastignac's entry into society will enable him to meet Goriot's daughters and become close to the old man, while the ambitions aroused at the sight of this new and brilliant world that he will want to conquer will make him a prey for Vautrin.

In this section, the first description of Eugène's frame of mind is effected by Balzac with undertones of irony and compassion. Our author cannot help feeling sympathy for this young provincial who reminds him so much of himself, a struggling law student in the capital.

Here also starts the detective story with its mysteries: the suspicious actions of Vautrin, who seems to be entertaining people at two in the morning and to be storing or receiving money.

Summary
This section opens with a discussion between the two servants, Christophe and Sylvie, about Vautrin's strange and secretive habit of receiving men late at night in his room and of bribing Christophe to keep it concealed. Moreover, says the handyman, someone has been asking about Vautrin and whether or not he dyes his whiskers. In addition, Christophe tells of meeting Old Goriot on his way out with a mysterious parcel and recalls the merchant's connections with the pretty girls he calls his daughters.

Mme. Vauquer and Vautrin enter the room. The former has seen Goriot taking his silver to a moneylender, Gobseck, and draws the obvious conclusion that the old man is ruining himself to support his mistresses. At that moment, Christophe returns with a message from Goriot addressed to "Madame la Comtesse Anastasie de Restaud." Vautrin half opens the envelope and discovers a receipted bill, which, of course, confirms his deduction about Goriot and his mistresses.

Victorine and Mme. Couture are next to make their appearance. The latter complains about the young

girl's misfortune and says that they will attempt to see the girl's father, M. Taillefer and try to soften his heart. Vautrin, in a rather curious and ironic tone, offers to help in this matter.

At ten o'clock, Goriot, Michonneau, and Eugène take their places at the dining room table. Eugène, thrilled by his new experience, tells everyone about his wealthy cousin, the party, and the charming woman he had met, adding that he was surprised to see her on foot, at nine o'clock in the morning, in a street near the pension, the Rue des Grès. Vautrin then explains that she most certainly went to the moneylender, adding that the name of the pretty person is Anastasie de Restaud and that Goriot is well acquainted with and seems deeply interested in her. This is a bombshell for Rastignac, who has not mentioned any names.

Vautrin takes this occasion to develop his theories about society women and Goriot's affair: To him, Anastasie is the old man's mistress. One can imagine how shocked Eugène is at learning that "this Paris . . . is a slough."

After lunch, Eugène retires to his room resolved to get the truth from Anastasie. Mme. Couture and Victorine leave to see M. Taillefer, and Poiret, in a gallant endeavor, takes Mlle. Michonneau for a walk in the Jardin des Plantes.

At four o'clock, the lodgers are coming back for dinner. Mme. Couture tells of the fruitless and shocking meeting between Victorine and her father. M. Taillefer was extremely rude, refusing to recognize his daughter, and his son Frederic was likewise very cold toward his sister. The relations of that family drama infuriate Old Goriot: "What inhuman wretches they must be!"

The rest of the boarders are arriving now, exchanging run-of-the-mill jokes, which they mistake for wit. Vautrin, in a fit of joviality, crams Old Goriot's cap down on his head. Goriot, after an indignant reaction, draws back into silence. As everyone laughs at the old man, Rastignac tells his friend, Bianchon, that he has changed his mind about Goriot's supposed folly or stupidity and asks Bianchon to try his system of phrenology on him to prove it. "His life is so mysterious," says Eugene, "that it must be worth studying." Bianchon, taking all this lightly, refuses to feel Goriot's bump, saying, "His stupidity might perhaps be contagious."

Commentary
In the first part of the preceding section, we must admire Balzac's talent for commonplace dialog between the two servants, who tell us the inside stories of the pension in their picturesque "lingo."

At the same time that we watch a routine day at the pension, we also learn the progress of the plot: the continuation of the detective story involving Vautrin, Victorine's failure to become reconciled with her father, and the very strange way Vautrin offers his help. (In the following section, we will find out about the Machiavellian plan that be has conceived, a plan which involves Rastignac.)

It is also in this section that we find Goriot's first outburst of paternal love; his distress when he finds out that the silver he has pawned won't be of any use, as Anastasie has already gone to the moneylender; his emotion at hearing the name of the countess; and his pathetic eagerness to know how she looked at the dance.

Here, also, appear the first cynical observations of Vautrin on society: its superficiality, its corruption, the evil power of money--one very basic idea of this novel.

Furthermore, we should notice the ironic way in which Balzac shows us the boarders' daily routine: their petty conversations, their stupid jokes, their cruel attitude toward Père Goriot--their favorite scapegoat.

Here is mentioned phrenology, in which Balzac believed and which we will find introduced later.

PART II

Summary
The next afternoon at three o'clock, Eugène de Rastignac, all dressed up, leaves the boardinghouse to call on Mme. de Restaud. His head is full of dreams, his heart of happiness, for he is sure he has made a favorable impression on the pretty countess. He suffers his first setback as he is shown in by a coldly disdainful footman, who sizes him up at first glance as a young man in financial difficulty. Eugène is dressed in evening clothes at three o'clock in the afternoon; since he arrives on foot, he apparently cannot afford a cab, much less own a carriage. His pride hurt, he tries to show that he is well acquainted with the Restauds, and preceding the footman, he finds himself lost in the servants' quarters!

Introduced into the drawing room, Eugène meets Maxime de Trailles, Mme. de Restaud's lover, and can't help admiring and envying the young man's attire and haughty attitude. Mme. de Restaud's cold reception leaves Eugène no doubt that only Maxime matters to her, which makes him furious, and instead of taking his leave, he decides to annoy the lover by remaining. A moment later, M. de Restaud comes in, greets Maxime, and ignores Rastignac until he finds that the young man belongs to their society.

Eugène, astonished at this social triangle--the wife, the lover, and the seemingly permissive husband--keeps on talking to annoy the countess and Maxime, who obviously want to be left alone. In the middle of the conversation, he happens to mention the name of Goriot, whom he had seen in the house and whom he had heard kissing the countess (thereby supporting Vautrin's theory of the old man's mistresses). The count's amiable attitude turns to coldness and the countess seems terribly flustered. Realizing he has made a blunder, Rastignac takes his leave. After his departure, the count instructs the footman never to let him in again.

Quite disenchanted, Eugène sets out to call on his cousin, Mme. de Beauséant, to try to find an explanation for this strange attitude. There he finds Mme. de Beauséant's lover, the Marquis d'Ajuda-Pinto, who is pleased to see Rastignac as that will give him a chance to take his leave of Mme. de Beauséant. In fact, d'Ajuda-Pinto is contemplating marrying a rich aristocrat, Mlle. de Rochefide, and is trying to break up his affair. He gives as an excuse for leaving that he is expected at the British ambassador's for dinner, but Mme. de Beauséant hears him plainly tell his coachman to drive him to the Rochefides. She sits down and, in a trembling hand, writes a note to her lover demanding an explanation.

She is still very upset and gives Rastignac a rather cool reception, but soon the disarming naivete of the young man makes her warm up to him. Rastignac tries to tell his cousin about his blunder but is interrupted by the arrival of a friend of hers, the Duchess de Langeais. The duchess has hardly settled down before she maliciously starts needling her "friend" about the possible marriage between d'Ajuda-Pinto and Mlle. de Rochefide. Mme. de Beauséant turns pale and, to change the conversation, asks Rastignac the nature of his blunder. On hearing the name of Goriot, the two women tell him that it was no wonder that the Restauds reacted as they did, for Mme. de Restaud is Goriot's daughter, and in high society, the daughter of a merchant does not like to be reminded of her humble origin. Then the two ladies begin to tell Eugène Old Goriot's story.

A merchant in flour and noodles, Goriot had acquired a great fortune during the Revolution by selling on the black market. Goriot's one weakness was his daughters; he married one to M. de Restaud and the other to the Baron de Nucingen, a rich banker. As long as the Republic and the Empire lasted, the sons-in-law, in need of protection, accepted Goriot, his money, and his influence, but as soon as the Bourbons came back to the throne, they discarded a father-in-law who came from such "common stock." Goriot's

daughters, used to the splendor of an aristocratic, wealthy, independent life, started feeling so ashamed of him that he then decided to make a sacrifice and move away.

After telling this story, the two women add some very pessimistic comments about this wicked society. When the duchess finally leaves, Mme. de Beauséant gives Eugène his first Machiavellian lesson on how to succeed in a society in which the women are corrupt and the men "despicably vain." Hide your feelings, she says; consider men and women merely as post-horses and "strike ruthlessly." She then offers Eugène her help.

As Mme. de Restaud is now out of the question, why not try Mme. de Nucingen? There would be a good chance of success. First, Goriot could introduce him to her; second, there is a rivalry between the two sisters, as Mme. de Restaud, belonging to an old aristocratic family, is invited everywhere, whereas Mme. de Nucingen, married to a foreigner of recent aristocracy, belongs to the middle-world banned by the aristocratic salons of Paris. She would give anything, Mme. de Beauséant adds, to be invited to my place. I will do that for you, she will be eternally grateful, and, if you can gain her favor, "other women will begin to lose their heads about you."

Commentary
This section deals with Rastignac's first rough contact with the reality of high social circles, a contact that will lead to a subtly insidious change in the young man's way of thinking and in his already decaying moral values. He receives his first lesson in cynical behavior from his cousin, whom he considers a friend and whom he admires.

Eugène first realizes the power of money and affluence after the cold and somewhat ironic reception of the Restauds' footman, who conveys silent contempt for a young man who does not own a carriage, is improperly dressed, and obviously knows nothing of the social amenities.

His sense of morality is shocked by the domestic triangle--evidently accepted by the husband--that he finds in the Restauds' house, and his ego is hurt by the disdain shown him by the countess, who obviously is interested only in Maxime de Trailles.

Finally, he hates his social awkwardness, which has made him blunder twice in one day.

Later, when Eugène visits his cousin hoping to find solace and reassurance, he finds her involved in the same social triangle. He sees in the duchess, supposedly his cousin's friend, an example of the ruthless, destructively jealous relationship found in this society even among friends. Finally, Eugène is told the bitter truths on how to succeed in a money-depraved society.

The elements that will contribute to Eugène's involvement with Old Goriot are introduced. He discovers that the girls seen visiting the old man are really his daughters and not his mistresses, that Goriot has made many sacrifices for their happiness, and that he now has been shut out of their lives and exists in poverty. The young man's resulting pity and his later entanglement with Delphine will make him the link between Goriot and his daughters and between the boardinghouse and high society.

The rivalry, introduced in this section, between the two daughters has resulted in Delphine's jealousy of her sister, who belongs to a higher social circle. This rivalry will end in a violent and dramatic clash, which will eventually kill their father.

The duchess inserts a comical social note when, with the contemptuous haughtiness of the born aristocrat, she repeatedly massacres the name of Goriot, a commoner of obviously no importance.

Summary
It is five o'clock when Eugène leaves his cousin; on his way back to the boardinghouse, his thoughts are whirling. He feels both angry and lost: angry at his blunder, at the cold reception he received at the Restauds', and at Mme. de Restaud and her lover; lost at the realization of his unimportance without money. All this reminds him of Vautrin's words, more brutal perhaps, but essentially the same: "Success is virtue." As he walks into the bleak boardinghouse, Eugène has made up his mind to study hard to become a successful lawyer and, at the same time, a man of fashion.

In this state of mind, he is certainly not prepared to take any jokes, and when Vautrin, at the dinner table, calls him a "lord," he reacts violently and warns him that he is not to be joked at and neither is M. Goriot, Mme. de Restaud's father. This piece of news is quite a sensation among the boarders, and there is a sudden change of attitude toward Goriot, who does not even seem to notice it.

The dinner over, Eugène decides to take Mme. de Beauséant's advice to try his luck with Delphine, but he needs money. Where can he get it? He goes to his room and writes a letter to his mother and his two sisters, asking for funds. He feels ashamed of his action, for he knows how poor they are and how much of a sacrifice it will be, but the urge to succeed is too strong. In the days that follow, he increases his visits to Mme. de Beauséant and decides to stop his studies for a while, with the intention of making up for lost time later.

Eugène's next step is to find out all he can about Goriot's life in order not to repeat the blunder he made at the Restauds'. He finds out that Goriot had two passions, his trade and his wife, and that when Mme. Goriot died after seven years of marriage, he transferred his love to his daughters. That love soon turned extreme. He could not refuse his girls anything, even the most extravagant. He raised them far above their station, giving them private tutors and a companion who taught them manners. In short, they were ready for any kind of life except that of their own social class.

Goriot allowed them to select their husbands. Anastasie, who liked glory, married Count de Restaud; Delphine, who loved money, married Nucingen, "a banker of German extraction who became a baron of the Holy Roman Empire." Very soon, since his daughters and sons-in-law were shocked to see him continue with his business, Goriot agreed to retire. He then took refuge in Mme. Vauquer's boardinghouse, where he finally found himself completely rejected by his daughters' husbands, who would have nothing to do with a commoner.

Commentary
At the beginning of the preceding section, we find Eugène thinking over the past events with mixed feelings. He is angry at the blunders he has made and at the reception he received from Mme. de Restaud, whom he had thought attracted to him, and above all, he is filled with a feeling of inadequacy, of his unimportance in the world where money is almighty.

The subtle change in him has started, but he is still trying to reconcile his moral principles and his ambitions. By studying hard, he will try to become a successful lawyer but remain a man of fashion. This decision is very important in Eugène's future development, for he will soon find that it is impossible to compromise.

This will lead to his entanglement with Vautrin, the tempter, who has discovered Eugène's hidden ambition and starts needling the young man about his social status, ironically calling him a "lord," which he is not but would like to be. Vautrin will eventually show him that he must go all the way, in one direction or another.

This section also completes the psychological delineation of the title character. We learn a last but salient

circumstance--Goriot's passion for his daughters, its origin and its quality. We are told that after losing his wife, Goriot transferred his love to his business and his daughters, and his paternal passion soon became disproportionate. He spoiled his two daughters, bringing them up as if they were aristocrats, hiring private tutors for them, giving them riding lessons, and acceding to their every whim. Goriot went so far as to ruin a man who told him, as a joke, that Delphine had been hit by a carriage. He finally procured for each a husband of her choice.

This inordinate passion explains all of Goriot's past and present actions and will be the cause of his future downfall. Balzac's concept of the fatality of passion is shown here to be very similar to that expounded in tragedy, and indeed this book is composed very much like a tragedy. This revelation completes Balzac's exposition for this work.

We can now understand the structure of a Balzac novel and the reason for this lengthy exposition (over one-third of the novel). What has Balzac been doing in the preceding pages?

He has placed each character in his social surroundings and has given us, piece by piece, details on his psychological makeup. He has started the interaction among the main characters appropriate to their psychology and social position. Now we have all the information we need to fully appreciate and deeply feel the tragic fate awaiting Old Goriot, the evolution of Rastignac, the role of Vautrin, and the clash of characters. Now, indeed, the tragedy can start and fill us with interest, compassion, and horror.

PART III

Summary
Eugène finally receives an answer to his letters, one from his mother and another from his elder sister, Laure. They are sending him the money he asked for. However, his joy is tainted with remorse because his mother had to sell her jewels, his sisters to part with their allowances--all this without a single word of reproach. But the thought of the fifteen hundred and fifty francs and what he can do with them blots out Eugène's shame.

He is eating breakfast when the postman enters with his money. The other tenants congratulate him on his good fortune. Vautrin adds a few sarcastic remarks which result in a second clash between the two men. When Vautrin offers a tip to the postman (as Eugène has no small change on him), the young man jumps up and goes to his room to fetch money to repay the debt. Vautrin reacts violently and takes Rastignac outside for what the tenants think will be a duel.

To Eugène's surprise, Vautrin's attitude changes completely. After pointing out the futility of a fight, he offers the young man the loan of a million francs. He goes on picturing the drab future that awaits Rastignac as a poor lawyer and the difficulty of making a name for himself in a society where "corruption is a great power . . . and talent is scarce," where husbands sell their wives and wives cheat on their husbands.

Vautrin's scheme is simple. Rastignac should make Victorine fall in love with him, ask to marry her, and then Vautrin would get the only obstacle to the Taillefer's fortune, Victorine's brother, out of the way by arranging a duel with an expert fencer. Victorine then would get her father's millions and Vautrin a nice commission of 200,000, which would enable him to settle down peacefully in America.

Rastignac's first reaction is one of horror, and he tries to stop Vautrin from talking. After Vautrin's exit, Rastignac realizes how perceptive Vautrin was in guessing his desire for money and success and how similar his description of society had been to that of Mme. de Beauséant's. In his mind, there is a struggle

between his conscience and temptation, which he finally resolves by the negative words, "I do not want to think at all; the heart is a sure guide."

His train of thought is stopped by the arrival of his new clothes, and by Old Goriot, who tells him that Mme. de Nucingen is going to a ball at Marshal Carigliano's and that he would be so glad if Eugène could go and report on his daughters. Eugène replies that he will try to go with the help of Mme. de Beauséant. Goriot goes on explaining his relationship with his daughters, finding excuses for their callous attitude toward "an old carcass whose soul is always where [his] daughters are."

Commentary
This section presents us with the first direct clash between Vautrin and Eugène. Vautrin, who had long ago discovered the young man's hidden ambition and who has tried to arouse it by his ironic remarks, now feels that the time for direct intervention is ripe.

He takes Rastignac aside and, after picturing a bleak future for an intelligent but poor young man in this society, bluntly reveals his plan for having Victorine's brother killed by a swordsman so that the young girl could inherit her father's fortune. Eugène then could marry her and become a rich and influential member of society, accepted everywhere. All the tempter asks is a commission of 200,000 francs.

This speech sharply reveals the character of Vautrin. He shows himself to be a keen psychologist, a rebel against a society that has made him what he is, and a hedonistic man seeking the sensual pleasures of life, who would find happiness on an American plantation surrounded by slaves. Another interesting trait of this depraved character is his seemingly genuine interest in, and compassion for, Eugène.

We can also follow here the subtle evolution of the young student. His moral principles seem to be more easily overcome than heretofore, his remorse is not as long lasting. If he sheds a quick tear when he learns of his mother's and sisters' sacrifices, it is quickly dried at the thought of what he can do with the money he has received. And in spite of his horror, he can't help listening to Vautrin, who sounds so much like his much-admired cousin, Mme. de Beauséant. Eugene is seriously tempted for the first time, and his weakened conscience can only protest in a negative way: "I do not want to think at all," he says, and, "the heart is a sure guide," meaning that he will let himself act from feeling rather than from will.

This state of mind will be further accented by Delphine's cordial reception at the opera. Having been introduced by Mme. de Beauséant, she sees in Eugène a way to gain access to high society and to avenge herself against her unfaithful lover.

This section also accentuates the relationship between Goriot and Eugène, for in him the old man has found someone who can approach, see, and talk to his daughters.

A touching and probably more subjective element in this section is found in the episode of the two letters, particularly the one Eugène receives from his sister. Balzac possibly recalls the days when he was a struggling student in Paris like Eugène, his own financial problems, and the letters he himself sent to his family and to his sister, who, by the way, bore the same name as the girl in the novel, Laure.

Summary
On his way back to the boardinghouse, Eugène is reflecting about his evening. As he has been seen in public with his cousin and Mme. de Nucingen, Paris society's tightly closed doors will open for him, even possibly Mme. de Restaud's. Perhaps he can win pretty Delphine's love and make a fortune with the help of her banker husband.

Upon arriving at the boardinghouse, Eugène goes up to see Old Goriot and reports on his evening, adding

that he prefers Delphine because she seems fonder of her father. The two men then engage in a long conversation in which Goriot expounds on paternal love, saying, "since I have been a father, I have come to understand God." The old man adds that he would be so pleased if Eugène and Delphine were to love each other. Eugène, very touched by Goriot's concern and dismayed at Delphine's thoughtlessness, bids the old man goodnight.

This incident marks the beginning of a growing friendship between Rastignac and Goriot. The next day at breakfast, Goriot sits by Eugène, interested only in the young man's words and reactions. Eugène, stared at by Vautrin and recalling their previous discussion, feels uneasy and cannot avoid glancing at Victorine, the prospective heiress. But Eugène hopes that "his extemporized passion for Mme. de Nucingen . . . would preserve him from this temptation." Vautrin, though, continues to tempt him, saying that one should not go halfway but have "all or nothing."

The young man spends the rest of the day strolling aimlessly about and thinking of success, fortune, and of Vautrin's commentary on society. In the Luxembourg Gardens, he meets Bianchon, tries to explain his frame of mind, and asks for advice. The young medical student tells him that happiness is to be found inside, that it is not based on materialistic values; then, changing the subject, he mentions that he just saw Mlle. Michonneau and Old Poiret talking to a man who might well be a policeman in disguise and that he wants to investigate the couple further.

Commentary
The theme of paternal love, predominant in this section, is one of the important components of the book and completes the entanglement of Goriot and Eugène.

Goriot, in a very touching scene, explains to Eugène his love for his daughters. He shows us, at the same time, the sublime and the extreme elements in his passion. He says:

> Well then, since I have been a father, I have come to understand God. He is everywhere in the world, because the whole world comes from Him. And it is just the same with my children, monsieur. Only I love my daughters better than God loves the world, for the world is not so beautiful as God Himself is, but my children are more beautiful than I am. Their lives are so bound up with mine that I felt somehow that you would see them this evening.

Some of what he says expresses not only pure paternal love but also involves the pure act of creation. This was a subject dear to Balzac, who felt that an author is also a creator and that there is the same relationship between a child and his parents as between a writer and his works: "Are not our finer feelings the poem of the human will?"

Developed parallel with the above is the atmosphere of social corruption in which Eugène finds himself more and more deeply immersed. He is shocked at Delphine's lack of concern for her father. But, at the same time, he enjoys the glamour of all the receptions and starts coldly speculating on how he can conquer Delphine and make a fortune with the help of her husband--and there is still Vautrin's offer. We notice, though, that Eugène is still trying to fight his "wicked impulses," but now he needs the help of his friend Bianchon.

And the detective story, which will culminate in the next part, moves along. Bianchon has noticed the suspicious behavior of Old Poiret and Mlle. Michonneau in conversation with a man who looked "like a detective dressed up like a decent retired tradesman."

Summary
After leaving Bianchon, Eugène returns to the boardinghouse, where he finds a letter from Delphine de Nucingen inviting him to dinner and to the opera. His first reaction is that Delphine wants to make her unfaithful lover, Marsay, jealous, and he prepares to go out of curiosity to see what the girl's attitude will be.

He dresses very carefully, admiring himself in the mirror, and when he makes his appearance downstairs, he is greeted by the compliments of the bemused boarders and by Vautrin's satirical jokes.

At the Nucingens', Eugène finds Delphine completely downcast and making vain efforts to hide it. Taken a little aback by her attitude, Eugène urges Delphine to tell him what is the matter. Instead of answering his questions since he keeps on offering his help, she takes him to a gambling place, gives him a hundred francs, and asks him to bet them and try to win six thousand. A little uneasy at first, for he has never been in a gambling place and does not know what to do, Eugène becomes lucky and ends up winning seven thousand.

Delphine, overjoyed, undertakes to tell him why she needs the money so badly. Married to a man whom she did not really love, she pursued a separate life, using her savings and money she had borrowed from her father. Then she met Marsay and borrowed money from him, but when Marsay proved unfaithful, she wanted to return it. Her husband refused to help her unless she would be a wife to him. Now she can free herself from Marsay and give him his money back, thanks to Eugene's winnings.

The young couple have dinner together at Delphine's house and then leave for the opera, where their arrival creates a sensation among the Paris socialites, always in quest of new intrigues and love affairs. After the show, Delphine drives Eugène back within a few blocks of his boardinghouse. They separate until the next Monday, when Eugène is supposed to meet Delphine at the Duchess de Carigliano's ball.

Back at the boardinghouse, Eugène feels happy and disappointed at the same time; happy that his romance with Delphine is going so well, disappointed that he cannot use the husband to get into the financial world. Before going to bed, Eugène stops to talk with Old Goriot, who has been eagerly waiting for him, and tells him everything. The old man becomes very upset at Eugène's gambling and angry at his son-in-law, whom he threatens to sue. Eugène gives him the one thousand francs left from his winnings and asks Goriot to keep them for his daughter. Goriot is so touched by this that he cannot conceal a tear of gratitude, and Eugène, pleased with himself, goes to his room and falls asleep.

Commentary
This whole section concerns Rastignac's further involvement with society, with Delphine, and therefore with Goriot. For as the young man gets more intimate with the young woman, he also gets closer to her father.

At the end of the section, in a touching scene when Eugène relates the incidents of the evening to Goriot, the old man bursts into a rage at his daughters' husbands, threatens to kill them, and with tears in his eyes at the young man's generosity says, "You will succeed. God is just, you see. I know an honest man when I see him, and I can tell you there are not many men like you. I am to have another dear child in you, am I? There, go to sleep."

At Delphine's house, Eugène is brought face to face with the immoral practices so common in this social circle. Delphine reveals the ugly details of her conjugal life and of her infidelity. She explains she has had to borrow money from her lover, how money is the essential instrument for women to attain social status and retain it, and how low they will stoop to acquire it:

> Half the women in Paris lead such lives as mine; they live in apparent luxury, and in their souls are tormented by anxiety. I know of poor creatures even more miserable than I. There are women who are driven to ask their tradespeople to make out false bills, women who rob their husbands. Some men believe that an Indian shawl worth a hundred louis only cost five hundred francs, others that a shawl costing five hundred francs, is worth a hundred louis. There are women, too, with narrow incomes who scrape and save and starve their children to pay for a dress. I am innocent of these base meannesses.

We notice also a further breach of the young man's code of ethics, for if he appears mildly shocked when Delphine asks him to gamble for her, his second reaction is the happy thought that "She has gone too far to draw back"; therefore, "she can refuse me nothing now!" Furthermore, Eugène learns a new, fashionable way of acquiring that almighty money, the source of social success. We will find him later trying his luck and oscillating between Delphine and society when he wins, and between Vautrin and his Machiavellian plan when he loses.

PART IV

Summary
Two nights later, Eugène sets out for the duchess' ball with his cousin Mme. de Beauséant. There he is greeted by Delphine and introduced to high society people, who invite him to their houses. He then realizes that he is being accepted in Parisian aristocracy and envied by many on account of his intimate acquaintance with Mme. de Beauséant.

The next morning, he tells the boarders at the pension of his triumphant evening. Vautrin, in a sarcastic and rather diabolical way, whispers that in order to keep up this kind of life Eugène will need money--money to move to a more fashionable neighborhood, money for new clothes, money for gambling--and how will you get this money, Vautrin adds, looking cunningly at Mlle. Taillefer?

The following weeks Eugène spends with Delphine, dining with her almost every night and taking her out afterward. He gets up at noon, walks in the Bois de Boulogne with Delphine whenever the weather is fair, and gambles heavily. From his first winnings, he repays his mother and sister and sends them presents.

But this situation cannot last, and after a while Eugène finds himself without money, not wanting to give up Delphine, and determined to maintain his social life by any means. His preoccupied attitude at the dinner table is quickly noticed by Vautrin, who pretends to leave the room but slyly stays on to spy on the young man. He overhears Eugène asking Victorine Taillefer whether she would love a poor young man if she were to become rich. Vautrin then reappears shouting, in a jocular tone, that the two young people have become engaged.

The ladies having left for bed, Vautrin and Rastignac stay together. Vautrin acknowledges that he has guessed that Eugène is in debt and offers to lend him three thousand francs. At first Eugène refuses with indignation to be obligated to Vautrin, but when the latter presents it as a business proposition at a high rate of interest, the young man accepts and Vautrin leaves him, implying that he will proceed to initiate his plan.

That evening, Eugène sets out to Mme. de Restaud's, pays his debts to M. de Trailles and M. d'Ajuda, plays whist, and wins back all he has lost.

The next morning, he promptly repays Vautrin, collects his promissory note, and repeats that he wants no part in the plot. Vautrin pretends not to listen to him.

Commentary
Eugène continues his climb to the high circles of society. He has now given up studying, spends his time with Delphine, and gambles heavily. At first successful at the gaming table, he is able to keep pace with the financial demands of social life and even repay his mother and sister, buying them presents to appease his conscience. But very quickly the young man finds himself penniless and turns toward the potentially wealthy Victorine, becoming an easy prey for Vautrin, who finally succeeds in having him accept a note for three thousand francs and suggests that he is going ahead with his murder plot. Eugène is filled with horror and remorse. He gambles again, wins, and, with a sigh of relief, returns Vautrin's note.

This section depicts Rastignac's dramatic conflict between honesty and ambition, and Vautrin appears here as the devilish tempter, closely resembling the Mephistopheles in Goethe's *Faust,* then popular in France: "Ah! If only you'd let me teach you, I could make you achieve anything in the world. Everything you could possibly desire would be instantly granted, whatever it was: honor, fortune, women."

There is also in Rastignac's quest for money and love a strong resemblance to Balzac as a struggling young writer.

Summary
A few days later, we find Mlle. Michonneau and Poiret at the Botanical Gardens in conversation with the mysterious man Bianchon had mentioned to Eugène. The man is M. Gondureau, a detective who is trying to get information about Vautrin, whom he suspects of being the escaped convict, Jacques Collin, nicknamed Cheat-Death (Trompe la Mort). Trompe la Mort, he explains, is a very dangerous man, a banker for the underworld, who handles his fellow convicts' money, sees to it that they get the best lawyers, and arranges escapes.

The detective tells the couple that the Minister of Police would like them to obtain positive evidence that Vautrin is Jacques Collin before the police move in on him, as they cannot afford to make a mistake. Collin has been branded on the shoulder, so if Poiret and Michonneau would give him a drug, the effect of which is that of a heart attack, they could check his shoulder for the brand. (Convicts were branded with the letters "T. F.," initials for hard labor.)

For the sum of three thousand francs, Mlle. Michonneau finally agrees to expose Vautrin.

On arriving at the boardinghouse, the couple notice Rastignac courting Victorine Taillefer. Eugène, quite upset by Delphine's cold attitude toward him and following Vautrin's suggestion, has turned to Victorine, thinking that only a miracle could now save him from degradation.

Vautrin comes in and tells Rastignac that the trap is laid and that the next day Frederic Taillefer will be killed in a duel, leaving his sister the sole heir to the banker's fortune. Before Rastignac, who is stupified, can say anything, Goriot and other boarders come in.

Goriot asks the young man to his room and tells him that the reason his daughter sent Eugène away earlier was that she was expecting her father to come and that they had prepared a surprise for Eugène. They have rented an apartment for the young man on Rue d' Artois in a fashionable neighborhood, and all Goriot asks is to be allowed to use a maid's room belonging to the apartment so that he can be close to his daughter. Goriot explains to Eugène that he has had his lawyer arrange for Delphine to receive the interest on her dowry, on which the couple can live comfortably.

This is the miracle Eugène has been praying for. Now he can do without Victorine's fortune, and he plans to warn the Taillefers of Vautrin's plot.

When they come down for dinner, Vautrin is already there in a joyful mood, offering to treat the boarders to his claret wine. The dinner, owing to the effect of the wine, is going on boisterously when everyone notices that Eugène and Goriot seem drunk and are falling asleep. This is the effect of a soporific Vautrin has slipped into their wine when he overheard Eugène telling Old Goriot that he would go and warn the Taillefers. Victorine gets up to look after Eugène and helps the other women take him to his room. She is sure that Eugène loves her and feels "the happiest creature in Paris."

Another result of that dinner is Mlle. Michonneau's resolution to betray Vautrin. At first she was debating whether it would not be to her financial advantage to warn the convict, but when he calls her a "graveyard Venus," her mind is made up.

She meets the police inspector and tells him that she will unmask Vautrin the next day. The detective replies that they will be waiting with policemen and guards and that he hopes Vautrin will put up a fight, giving them an excuse to shoot and be rid of him.

Commentary
This very complex section deals, at the same time, with all three plots in the book.

The detective story continues as we learn that the man Mlle. Michonneau and Poiret had been talking to is a detective, who suspects Vautrin to be, in reality, Jacques Collin, alias Trompe la Mort, an escaped convict, and offers the couple money if they will expose him. As greedy Michonneau is debating whether she could not obtain more money by warning the suspect, Vautrin makes the psychological mistake of calling her "a graveyard Venus." This insult, a deep-rooted allusion to Michonneau's past, seals Vautrin's fate. However, the suspense is kept up, for we do not know whether the arrest will be successful or not.

Rastignac's character evolves. We see pictured here his dramatic hesitation between Delphine and Victorine. The young man, upset at Delphine's playing with him, has turned to Victorine, although he knows that it means his full acceptance of Vautrin's plot and the murder of young Frederic. He feels completely lost when suddenly Goriot comes in and offers him an apartment and money, to be shared with Delphine. This is the miracle Eugène has been naively expecting; now he does not have to sell his soul to Vautrin, and he even will try, but in vain, to warn Frederic. Of course, the fact that he does not realize that this alternative is hardly more ethical shows his slow moral corruption.

Finally, we see Goriot's very pathetic outburst of paternal love, a sublime but animal-like and destructive passion. Pathetic, indeed, is the way Old Goriot is shown here as a dog, waiting to be petted. (This is an obvious Balzacian scientific reduction of man to a zoological figure, and it is noteworthy that every individual in *Père Goriot* is compared, at one point or another, with an animal: For example, Victorine is a wounded bird, Vautrin a wild cat.)

Also pathetic is the destruction of the old man's ethics. We have already seen that he likes Rastignac inasmuch as the young man has become a link between him and his daughter, that he has threatened to kill his sons-in-law, and that he is quite content to see his daughter live a life of sin, provided he can be with her to share it. Of Delphine, he says, "She has known no happiness, that excuses everything. Our Father in Heaven is surely on the side of fathers on earth who love their children."

Summary
The next day is a historic one in the annals of the boardinghouse. Breakfast is served late as almost everyone has overslept after the previous evening of festivities. Vautrin has gone out before breakfast, giving Mlle. Michonneau a chance to pour the drug into the convict's coffee.

Eugène comes down quite upset. He has not had a chance to warn the Taillefers, he has received a letter from Delphine reproaching him for not coming to see her the evening before, and Vautrin greets him with "a cold and fascinating glance" charged with "magnetic power." Presently, one of M. Taillefer's servants rushes in to announce that Frederic has been fatally wounded in a duel. At Vautrin's cynical comment on the foolishness of youth, Eugène lets out a horrified exclamation. The boarders talk of fate, how it has brought Victorine her father's millions, and of how lucky Eugène is. Eugène disgustedly tells them that he is not going to marry Victorine and adds that he is leaving to see Delphine.

By that time the drug is beginning to affect Vautrin, who soon collapses on the floor as if felled by a stroke. Under the pretense of helping him to bed, Mlle. Michonneau takes off his shirt, slaps him on the shoulder, and the brand of the convict appears white on the red skin. Mlle. Michonneau has earned her three thousand francs, and, as she is alone with Poiret in the room, she decides to search for some hidden money but is prevented by Mme. Vauquer's entrance.

In the meantime, Eugène, on his way to Delphine's, meets Bianchon, who tells him that he has read all about young Taillefer's duel, adding jokingly that Eugène can now marry into a fortune. Rastignac, very upset, vehemently reiterates that he will never marry Victorine, and when Bianchon insists, he bursts into such a violent anger that the medical student thinks him ill.

Eugène, who wants to be left alone, tells Bianchon that he is needed at the boardinghouse to look after Vautrin. Eugène then leaves for a walk to put his mind at ease, trying to convince himself that there will be, after all, nothing indecent in his relationship with Mme. de Nucingen as it is an accepted custom.

Back at the boardinghouse, Bianchon examines Vautrin with suspicion. He has seen Poiret and Michonneau talking to a policeman, Mlle. Michonneau has tried to get rid of the matter Vautrin vomited, and the patient has recovered too quickly to have had a stroke. It looks like a plot against Vautrin. And when the boarders compliment Vautrin on his remarkable recovery, Bianchon mentions overhearing Mlle. Michonneau talking about someone called "Cheat-Death," which would be quite an appropriate name for him.

The joviality immediately disappears from Vautrin's face, replaced by a hard, ferocious expression; simultaneously, a rumble is heard on the street and Gondureau and his men appear to arrest the ex-convict "In the name of the King and the law!" Vautrin's first impulse is to resist and try to escape, but when he sees the officers draw their pistols, by a remarkable feat of self-control he calms down and lets himself be captured.

Mme. Vauquer and the boarders are fascinated at the extraordinary change in Vautrin's face, actions, and language, for he is now Jacques Collin, the convict, "the type and mouthpiece of a degenerate race, a brutal, supple, clear-headed race of savages." He glares at Mlle. Michonneau and tells her what he could do to a squealer like her, but that he will forgive her, ironically adding, "I am a Christian!" He tells everyone that he will not stay in prison very long. Upon leaving, he bids Eugène goodbye in an amazingly soft and sad voice, adding that he has left a friend behind to look after him, meaning of course, young Taillefer's murderer.

Vautrin's exit elicits some reactions from the boarders, who, rather than blame the convict, assail Mlle. Michonneau. They claim they do not want a traitor in their midst and threaten to leave if Mme. Vauquer keeps the old girl. It does not take the landlady very long to decide where her interest lies, and she asks Mlle. Michonneau to please leave. After a weak struggle, the old maid agrees and exits with her faithful Poiret. It is a blow to Mme. Vauquer to lose two boarders, but her trial is not yet over. A messenger comes in with a letter saying that Frederic Taillefer has died and that, of course, Victorine will now stay at her father's, with Mme. Couture as her companion. At that moment, Goriot comes in with a happy face,

and taking Eugène aside, says that his daughter is waiting for them.

Eugène, in a state of euphoria, can hardly wait until the evening, when he leaves with Goriot to what is soon to be the young man's own apartment. Delphine greets them in the drawing room with a tenderness that delights Eugène and convinces him of his success, and if some reluctance troubles him at the idea of living in such an expensive place paid for by his lover's father, he is soon persuaded by Delphine's pouting and Goriot's telling him that it is just a loan that the father is pleased to make to see his daughter happy.

When the old man adds that he will pay all the bills until the suit against Delphine's husband for her fortune is ended, Rastignac cannot help crying at Goriot's generosity, knowing how poor Delphine's father is and how much he has bled himself to make his children happy. And all Goriot asks of Delphine is that she come and visit him once in a while in the maid's room he has rented upstairs.

The three spend the rest of the evening together, the young couple in bliss and Old Goriot seldom leaving them in peace, staring at his daughter or kissing her dress, the way a young lover would. At midnight the two men depart, Eugène with an invitation to dine with Delphine the next day and go to the opera.

The two men return to the boardinghouse and find Mme. Vauquer and her servants by the stove. The landlady has been complaining about the events of the day, thinking only of the money she would be losing. She greets her "faithful" lodgers with pleasure, but her smile vanishes when they say that they, too, will be leaving. This, plus the announcement that her cat is missing, is the last straw for the landlady, who collapses.

Commentary
This section concludes the detective story and depicts Vautrin's arrest. It is interesting to note that the convict's downfall seems to be his triumph, for we witness such a culmination of his character traits that we are filled with as much admiration as horror. We admire his almost superhuman strength, will power, and self-control, while we are horrified by his devilish cunning and his cruelty. Balzac puts it very effectively:

> The real Vautrin shone forth, revealed at once before them all. They understood his past, his present and future, his pitiless doctrines, his actions, the religion of his own good pleasure, the majesty with which his cynicism and contempt for mankind invested him, the physical strength of an organization proof against all trials.

An enigmatic side to Vautrin's character is his friendly and apparently sincere attitude toward Rastignac. Throughout the book, he seems to have been the only one Vautrin really cares for. When arrested, Vautrin speaks to Eugène "with a pleasant smile that seemed strangely at variance with the savage expression in his eyes." It has been suggested that Vautrin is gay, but one can't see any clear indication of this in the book. It seems that Vautrin's interest in the young man is more profound than that and one of the unifying elements in the novel.

In the preceding section, we saw the theme of paternity developed, a purely animalistic paternity. Can we not see here the element of spiritual paternity in Vautrin's attempts to create another self, an alter-ego possessing the qualities that he lacks: beauty and refinement? Balzac's physical appearance (almost that of Vautrin) and his aristocratic ideal (he added the "de" to his name) seem to support this idea.

Rastignac is now freed from Vautrin's influence, but we watch the slow degradation of his character as his relationship with Goriot and Delphine becomes closer and closer.

Another moving outburst of Goriot's paternal love is described here in its sublimity and its animal and amoral manifestation. It is pathetic to see the old man kissing his daughter's feet, sniffing her dress, staring lovingly at her like a dog. Also pathetic is how his passion destroys every moral principle to the point of his saying (describing that day when Eugène and Delphine will commit adultery), "This is the happiest day I've had since you girls got married."

A final significant aspect of this section is found in Mme. Vauquer's punishment for her greed. She will see her lodgers leave, one after the other. This point was developed by Balzac, who, when accused of immorality, replied that most of his characters pay for their mistakes.

PART V

Summary
The next day at noon, Eugene receives an invitation to Mme. de Beauséant's much-sought-after ball. His cousin adds that she will be pleased to meet Mme. de Nucingen. Eugène promptly leaves to tell Delphine the good news. The young woman is overjoyed at her first chance to enter this select circle. She tells Eugène that her sister will most likely be there wearing all her jewels to crush the rumor that she has had to sell them in order to pay her lover's debts. That evening, Delphine becomes Eugène's mistress, and the happy young man returns to the boardinghouse for what he confidently thinks will be the last time.

The next day, as Eugène is clearing up his room in preparation for leaving the boardinghouse, he finds Vautrin's I.O.U. and is about to destroy it when he overhears Delphine telling her father that something horrible has happened. Her husband has tied up her fortune in speculations and cannot give it back. He has promised to repay her more than that sum, but he asks for complete control for two years and says they will have to live parsimoniously just to keep up appearances.

Upon hearing this, Goriot goes into a violent rage and says that he will ask to look into all the transactions and see to it that they are transferred to his daughter's name. Delphine tries to calm him and finally tells him about the agreement she had to reach: M. de Nucingen will let her do as she pleases (meaning in her relationship with Eugène) provided she lets him use her money; otherwise, they will go bankrupt. For Delphine, there is no alternative, and she tries to convince her upset father, who finally gives up, saying, however, that he will look into the matter.

They are getting ready to leave when the second daughter, Anastasie, arrives quite upset, announcing that her husband has found out about her settling Maxime de Trailles' bills, the last one for one hundred thousand francs, and about her pawning his family jewels. M. de Restaud told her that he did not want a divorce but that she will have to sign her fortune over to him upon request.

This is too much for Old Goriot, who bursts into a fit of anger and depression: angry at his daughters' husbands, depressed at the miserable life the two girls are leading, and reminiscing about their happy childhood. Anastasie interrupts him only to say that the situation is even worse, for she did not receive quite one hundred thousand francs for the diamonds; twelve thousand are still owed and her lover is facing a lawsuit. She points out that she still loves him, does not want to lose him, and is, in fact, asking her father for that sum.

The poor father tries to explain that he has nothing left, that he has just given up his securities to Delphine. At that point the two sisters flare up, reproaching each other for their conduct and for ruining their father. During this bitter quarrel, Goriot becomes more and more distraught, his grief turning into a sort of delirium, his face showing the signs of an approaching fit, his words becoming more and more incoherent as he threatens to murder his sons-in-law, to rob a bank, to kill himself; but for the girls

clinging to him, he would have smashed his head against the wall.

All this time, Eugène has been listening, horrified. Finally he picks up Vautrin's note, alters the figure on it, and makes the 12,000 francs payable to Goriot. He then goes next door and hands the note to Anastasie, telling her that it is the amount he owed Goriot.

Anastasie, realizing that a stranger knows her secrets, becomes furious at her sister, while Goriot almost faints on the bed. Rastignac tells Anastasie to keep the money and that he will keep her secret. The countess takes the note and leaves, coming back promptly, supposedly to see her father, but actually to ask for his endorsement on the note. Meanwhile, Goriot's condition seems to become more critical, and he starts complaining of a violent pressure on his head. When he finally falls asleep, Eugène takes Delphine home but refuses to stay for dinner, for he is worried about Goriot. At the boardinghouse, Bianchon, observing Goriot, quickly perceives the signs of oncoming apoplexy.

That evening at the opera, Eugène tries to conceal his worries, but Delphine, in her enjoyment, promptly dismisses the matter, saying that her father is too strong to be affected by such things; besides, her love is the only thing important to her now. She also tells Eugène that Mme. de Beauséant's lover is actually going to be married, that his cousin does not yet know anything about it, and that it will be quite a blow to her when the Marquis d'Ajuda doesn't appear at her reception.

The opera finished, Eugène and Delphine go to the newly rented apartment, and when the young woman leaves him at two o'clock in the morning, Eugene feels so delighted at having conquered a beautiful society woman and at living in such luxurious quarters that he goes to sleep, forgetting about Old Goriot. Delphine comes back for breakfast at twelve o'clock and it is only at four that they start worrying about the old man and that Eugene decides to go to the boardinghouse to bring him back.

Upon arriving at Mme. Vauquer's, Eugène finds out from Bianchon that Old Goriot has had a relapse and that there is only a faint hope of his recovering. Upon hearing Eugène's voice, Goriot proceeds to tell him of another shock he received from his daughter Anastasie. She came back to ask for more money to pay for her dress, so he had gone out and sold his silver forks, spoons, and buckles, and a year's income on his annuity. The father keeps raving of the joy of giving and insists that he is going back into business. Eugène calms him and as soon as Bianchon comes back, manages to have a bite to eat. Then the two young men attend the sick man through the night, applying leeches and poultices and giving him foot baths.

The next day, Anastasie sends a messenger to pick up the money from her father, and Delphine sends Rastignac a letter in which she bitterly reproaches him for deserting her and tells him how much she wants to go to Mme. de Beauséant's ball. Eugène promptly replies that her father is seriously ill and asks whether she still feels like going to a reception under these circumstances. That evening, Goriot's condition has not improved and the doctor is very dubious about the recovery, so Eugène goes to tell Delphine the sad news, only to find his mistress getting dressed to go to the dance. When Eugène tries to mention her father's illness, she abruptly tells him to get ready for the reception. Eugène leaves quite depressed, torn between pity for the old man, contempt for a society that conditions its members to such heartless actions, and passion for Delphine, which has now grown into love.

When he returns, Delphine is waiting for him and briefly asks about her father. He is extremely ill, says Eugène, and we should go and look after him. After the ball, replies Delphine. Eugène's anger grows, and he proceeds to tell her about Anastasie's selfish actions and the fatal effect it had on the old man. On hearing this, Delphine starts weeping, but her social preconditioning gets the better of her and the knowledge that she will look terrible at the party stops her tears.

At the reception, all the luxury of Paris glitters--the chandeliers, the pretty dresses, the jewels--but in the midst of that brilliance, that gaiety, the hostess, dressed in simple white, is trying to hide her grief. Her lover has finally decided to marry Mlle. de Rochefides. Mme. de Beauséant seems extremely pleased to see Eugène and asks the young man in a very touching voice to do her the favor of going to ask the marquis to return her love letters.

When Eugène comes back, his cousin, for the first time discarding her mask of stoic dignity, starts weeping and announces that she is leaving Paris forever and will bury her sorrow in the solitude of the country. She tells Eugène how much his friendship has meant to her, and as a token, leaves him a glove box for Delphine. She then decides to join her guests, among whom Eugène notices the two sisters, Delphine and Anastasie, the latter with the display of diamonds that cost her father so dearly. The young man is quickly claimed by Delphine and spends the rest of the evening with her.

After the guests have retired at four in the morning, Eugène finds the Duchess de Langeais apologizing to her friend for her bad behavior toward her and urging her to stay in Paris. But Mme. de Beauséant's heart has been crushed and her mind is set. Eugène bids her a last farewell and comes back to the pension on foot. There he meets Bianchon, who tells him that Goriot is past saving. Eugène's reply is, "I am in hell, and I must stay there."

Commentary
This part concentrates on the two daughters and their destructive effect on their father and on Rastignac.

Delphine and Anastasie, just like Mme. Vauquer in the preceding part, will have to pay their debts to a corrupt and ruthless society. They find themselves lacking the all-powerful instrument necessary for keeping up appearances and dignity--money--and, spoiled as they are, they will again turn to their father.

But this time poor Goriot has hardly anything to give, and his daughters' ingratitude bursts out in a jealous rage. They reproach each other for having obtained more money from their father, they throw their corrupt lives at each other's faces, and they will later refuse to leave a social function to attend him during his illness.

This is psychologically sufficient to explain Goriot's attack. Since the beginning, the old man's love had been his whole life, and the powerful means of asserting his love had been his capability of giving and of being of help. As a result, he had been rewarded by his daughters' thanks, which, he tried to convince himself, were expressions of true love. Now that he feels utterly incapable of giving and helping, he is confronted with his daughters' true natures, with their monstrous egoism and their bitter jealousy, and his life becomes meaningless.

Rastignac is also affected by the daughters' actions. He is appalled by their ingratitude and the intensity of their jealousy, but he is now in love with Delphine and ready to forgive many things. We hear him protest several times, however, and we are touched by his genuine interest in and devotion to Goriot, but he cannot leave Delphine and her social milieu. His state of mind is well expressed in his last remark to Bianchon.

A touching moment is Mme. de Beauséant's farewell to Paris. This truly sympathetic character has been crushed by the ruthless Parisian life. She has tried, but in vain, to reconcile her romantic ideals with a materialistic society. The last ray of sunshine has disappeared from the novel.

PART VI

Summary

In the afternoon of the same day, Bianchon asks Eugène to look after Goriot. The old man's condition has grown worse, and Bianchon does not think he will live long, but he still wants to fight the disease. Of course, they will need some money. Bianchon does not have a penny left and Rastignac only twenty francs. The young medical student decides to get the needed medicine on credit at the dispensary where he works. In the meantime, Eugène is to apply hot mustard poultices on the old man's feet and legs.

The two men return to Goriot's room. Eugène is appalled by Goriot's livid face and haggard eyes, and by the miserable condition he is living in, the dirtiness and the dampness of the room, and the heartlessness of his two daughters.

As Bianchon is telling Eugène to take care of the old man and to observe his symptoms in order that he, Bianchon, and his teachers might learn from them, Goriot suddenly speaks up and asks Eugène if his daughters had a good time. Bianchon tells Rastignac that Goriot asked about his daughters many times, calling them by name, thinking of nothing else but of what they might be doing. The medical student departs and Rastignac is left alone with the old man. Eugène sadly acknowledges that noble thoughts and feelings, as displayed by Mme. de Beauséant and Old Goriot, cannot prevail in such a society. What a contrast between this drab picture of a man dying in poverty and the brilliance and riches at the ball!

At that point, Bianchon comes back breathless and tells Eugène a surgeon at his hospital recommended a huge poultice to cover the patient's spine, should he recover consciousness. When Eugène thanks him for what he is doing, Bianchon replies that, after all, it is an interesting case from the scientific point of view. Eugène is shocked at this detached attitude, but the young student tells him that he still can feel for his patient and leaves.

Alone with Eugène, the old man starts talking again, his delirious speech broken by flashes of consciousness.

Old Goriot had not recognized Bianchon and tells Eugène a young man spent the night burning his fuel and that he has no money left for firewood. Eugène reassures him; then Goriot asks for his daughters, sure that they are coming. He says that it is a shame that he will die because his daughters, especially Delphine, will suffer so much. After a few words on how hellish it is for a father to be without his children, he recalls the time of the girls' childhood, when they lived happily together, when he was the whole world for his daughters. This monologue is interrupted by horrible pains, as if his head is being split.

The pain subsides and Goriot keeps asking for his girls, explaining that if they are so long in coming, it is because of their wretched husbands. At that point, another fit of delirium seizes him: He wants to get well in order to go to Russia to manufacture starch and make another fortune. It is at that moment that Christophe comes in to say that neither of the daughters will be coming at this time. Mme. de Restaud has told him that she has some important business to discuss with her husband concerning her life and that of her children. Christophe adds that he could not see Mme. de Nucingen; her maid told him she was asleep and could not be awakened until midday.

Rastignac, thinking the old man is now asleep, lets out a horrified exclamation. But Goriot is not asleep. He starts bitterly complaining about the heartlessness of children who have received everything from their father and want to give nothing. "I have known it," he adds, with tears on his face, "but I dared not believe it." He reproaches himself for having given away his fortune, saying that his daughters would still be with

him if he had not, for all they wanted was his money, and when he had none left, they turned away from him and started noticing the blunders he made in their society. He adds that in spite of the scorn his daughters have shown him, he has returned to see them "as a gambler goes to the gaming table." He then starts demanding his rights as a father--a father being, he says, the foundation of society.

His speech at this point becomes more and more senseless, for the final stroke is approaching. He tries again to convince himself that his girls will come, that they *are* coming, that everything will be all right, that he will make another fortune. But perhaps they won't come, and his long delirium ends with a curse, which he soon forgets, thinking that Delphine is in the room.

Eugène, alarmed at all this raving, decides to try to fetch Anastasie and Delphine. Goriot urges him to convince them to come, not to bring them by force, especially Delphine. Tell Delphine, he says, that if she does not come you won't love her any more. Rastignac leaves, assuring the old man he "*shall* see them." As Rastignac leaves, he hears Goriot blessing his daughters.

Just then Bianchon comes into the room and, looking at the patient, tells Eugène that it is almost the end. Rastignac, pale as a corpse, tells Bianchon of the sufferings of the old man and that he has felt like crying at this tragic situation. When Bianchon reminds him of the financial problem, Eugène offers his watch and tells his friend to pawn it while he goes to see the old man's daughters.

He is coldly received by M. de Restaud, who says that his wife has not yet accepted his terms and that, therefore, he forbids her to leave the house, and that it is quite immaterial to him whether Goriot lives or dies. Anastasie, who has heard the conversation, tells Eugène, with tears in her eyes, that she cannot bring herself to accept her husband's terms and that if her father knew what torture she is going through, that he would surely forgive her.

Arriving at Delphine's house, Eugène finds his mistress in bed. She explains that she caught cold the night before and that she is afraid of pneumonia. Eugène tells her that her father is dying and calling for her and she should go to him. Delphine replies that she does not believe her father is so sick, but that she will go, after seeing a doctor for herself. Then she notices that Eugène is not wearing the watch she gave him. After some hesitation, Eugène tells her that he has pawned it to secure money for her father. At these words, Delphine gets out of bed, gives her purse to Eugène, and says that she will go and see her father immediately. As Eugène leaves, she asks a maid to fetch her husband.

Eugène feels relieved when he returns to the boardinghouse, for he will be able to tell the old man that at least one of his daughters is coming. In Goriot's room, he finds Bianchon and a surgeon applying cauteries to the patient's back to relieve the congestion. When Goriot see Rastignac, he asks him if his daughters are coming. Eugène replies that Deiphine will arrive shortly. The physician takes his leave, saying that the case is hopeless but that sometimes nature accomplishes miracles. He asks that the sheets be changed.

Eugène goes downstairs to find Mme. Vauquer setting the table. Upon hearing his request for new sheets, the landlady tells him that Old Goriot is penniless and that if she gives him sheets, she is not likely to see them again, as the old man will very likely be buried in them. Eugène runs back to Bianchon, asks him for the money he got for the watch, and finally gets worn-out sheets by paying for them.

Back in the room, the two young men proceed to undress Goriot, who starts crying for a locket that they had to remove from the old man's chest when they put blisters on him. Eugène picks it up and finds that the chain is made of a plait of hair, undoubtedly belonging to Mme. Goriot, and inside the locket are curls of hair taken from Delphine and Anastasie when they were children. When Goriot gets it back, he utters a groan of satisfaction, joy spreads over his tortured face, and in a last moment of consciousness, he calls

his girls by their pet names.

At that very moment, footsteps are heard, but it is not, as Eugène thought, Delphine--it is the maid, who says that, after a terrible dispute with her husband, her mistress fainted and is not in a condition to come. It is too late anyhow, replies Eugène.

Mme. de Restaud comes in unexpectedly, telling Eugène she could not come earlier. She kisses her father's hand and asks for his forgiveness and tells Eugène that she may as well die. Her lover has deserted her, she had to leave the rest of her fortune and the future of her children to her husband, and she has been so cruel to her father. At that point, Goriot's eyes open in a last muscular contraction. A few moments later, he will be dead.

Except for Eugène and Bianchon, the boarders react very selfishly at the news. They simply don't want to be bothered and minimize the tragedy, remarking that Goriot is much better off dead than alive. After dinner, Rastignac and Bianchon go out to find a priest to attend Old Goriot. Then Rastignac sends a letter to the two girls' husbands, asking for money to take care of the funeral, but there is no reply and the two friends have to finance all arrangements.

When they have the old man laid in a pauper's coffin, Bianchon is so furious that he asks Eugène to have the following carved on the headstone: "Here lies Monsieur Goriot, father of the Comtesse de Restaud and the Baronne de Nucingen, buried at the expense of two students."

Back at the boardinghouse, Eugène finds Mme. Vauquer in the dead man's room stealing his gold locket. He furiously takes it away from her and tells her that it will be buried with the old man so that he may have at least a part of his daughters with him in the grave.

Goriot's funeral is that of an indigent man. Followed only by Eugène, Bianchon, and the handyman, Christophe, his coffin is taken, after a quick seventy-franc church service, to the graveyard, accompanied by the same mourners and by two *empty* carriages bearing the coats of arms of the Restauds and the Nucingens. When the coffin is lowered into the tomb and earth is thrown on it, Rastignac cannot help but cry. With these tears of sorrow, "Eugène de Rastignac's youth ended," and, on top of a hill dominating Paris, he shouts a warning: "Beware Paris, here I come--"; he then leaves to have dinner with Mme. de Nucingen.

Commentary

In a powerful, realistic way, this part brings to an end the tragedy of the father and Rastignac's social education. Neither the summary nor the commentary can do justice to these splendid pages, which should be read extensively to be fully appreciated.

The agony of Old Goriot, his ravings of despair, have attained the summit of pathos, just as the old man, having reached the limit of human endurance, groans his life away in possibly the most beautiful and everlastingly moving pages of the whole book.

As for Rastignac, he is still "in hell." His last feelings of compassion, of altruism, have disappeared with the death of Old Goriot and with the tears he shed over his tomb. He is ready now, with cold calculation, ruthlessness, and cynicism--all the deadly weapons he has been taught to use--to fight a winning battle against Paris.

Thus ends this remarkably powerful novel, a literary monument, that gives us a penetrating insight into human beings and the society in which they evolve. It is a brilliant and complex masterpiece to which one could apply André Gide's comment, "more perfect, it would not be so gigantic."

CHARACTER ANALYSES

MME. DE RESTAUD AND MME. DE NUCINGEN

Père Goriot's daughters are best analyzed together, for both of them are the result of an over-permissive and blind love and of a money-corrupt society, the real unifying element of the book.

Brought up by a father who gave in to every one of their whims, who reared them as duchesses, they could not escape developing that self-centered egoism which we always find in them. But was not that upbringing itself also based on money, for Goriot gave them all that money could buy, including their husbands?

This leads us to Balzac's important idea of social preconditioning; they adapted readily to the social mores that acknowledged the fact that most girls married for wealth and prestige rather than for love and that, consequently, they had to lavish their passion upon someone other than their husbands. This triangular relationship is the source of the most dramatic psychological imbalance found in the two women and is quite apparent and often repeated in Balzac's works in general and in *Le Père Goriot* in particular.

Bound to their lovers, who also were hunting for money and prestige, they had to give away their money as well as their dignity as women. This explains Mme. de Restaud's paying for her lover's debts. This explains Delphine's lowering herself to ask Eugene, almost a stranger, to gamble for her to repay her former lover, De Marsay.

In both of them, there is exhibited a slow rotting away of their moral values. There is, however, a distinction between the two females.

In Anastasie, we find the cold, calculating egoism of a woman who has been consciously bleeding her father and ostracizing him at the same time and whom Balzac punishes greatly for it, as she will see her fortune and her children taken away from her and will have to come back to her father to humiliate herself in the last part. In the end, she has lost everything, even her father, but we don't doubt that she will continue, as preconditioned, to put up a front to the world.

Delphine also displays that egoism, but it is presented to us as brought on by passion, and, in her outbursts of emotion, Delphine shows herself so naive that we cannot deny feeling compassion for her. True, she used Eugène at first to be launched into high society, but she later shows such a true love for Eugène that we can't help liking her even when, by accepting Rastignac's love, she is rejecting everything else--family and father: "All my life is in you. My father gave me a heart, but you have taught it to beat. The whole world may condemn me. What does it matter if I stand acquitted in your eyes?" It is really affecting to see genuine emotion stifled by social mores.

And we know that Delphine is hardly going to change. She will be the same selfish, but likable, character that we find so often in a social environment where "fortune is virtue."

VAUTRIN

Although his adventures in the novel are incidental, his personality is omnipresent in two-thirds of the book. Vautrin is presented at first as a strongly built, middle-class man, sensual, jovial, likable, who indulges in silly jokes and pranks. And if the delineation stopped there, he would be no more than a younger Poiret. But the character is built on the quality of strength capable of breaking all obstacles. With this attribute, Vautrin becomes the symbol of a fighter, rebelling against a society which has created and degraded him. But physical power means for Balzac mental power as well, and he endows Vautrin with

the latter, thus creating a character of incomparable magnitude, capable of dominating everyone.

Of this power, Balzac gives us an inkling in the first section: Vautrin's "eyes, like those of a pitiless judge, seemed to go to the very bottom of all questions, to read all natures, all feelings and thoughts." As the novel progresses, this power increases, to become supernatural and diabolical: "The escaped convict cast a glance at Eugène, a cold and fascinating glance. Men gifted with this magnetic power can quell furious lunatics in a madhouse by such a glance, it is said."

With his physical and mental strengths, Vautrin will assume the role of the diabolical tempter. A keen psychologist, he has soon discovered the latent ambitions in Rastignac, whom he tries to convert to his side by his powerful comments on society, to make of Eugène an instrument of revenge.

But to Vautrin, Rastignac is more than a mere instrument; he becomes a sort of alter ego. Vautrin feels a genuine interest in, and love for, the young man, in whom he can see the attributes he lacks: an aristocratic charm and elegance, allied with a spontaneous naivete. Thus Vautrin will undertake to mold Eugène to his own image, to perform a sort of spiritual creation.

In Vautrin's character, we find much of Balzac and of his preoccupations. We have noted already the physical resemblance between Vautrin and Balzac; we have seen that Vautrin expounds many Balzacian ideas, that he unconsciously seems to be part of Balzac's dreams of the triumph of pure creation.

This is the reason why Vautrin leaves us with mixed feelings. Although he is presented as a villain, as a cynical and vicious person, as a diabolical tempter, we cannot help but feel toward him the unexplainable feeling of mixed admiration and envy one has for superhuman powers.

PÈRE GORIOT

The title character is the object of Balzac's deepest analysis. His irrational passion is powerfully shown, carefully explained, constitutes the dramatic element of the novel, and progresses to a sublimely tragic climax.

Balzac carefully shows us how in Père Goriot a wealthy merchant's passion has grown and has overwhelmed him. From then on, the old man lives only for his daughters, adding sacrifice to sacrifice, bleeding himself of his money and of his life, and, when finally there remains nothing to give, he withers and dies.

This strange passion inextricably combines two elements: animality and sublimity. We have seen throughout the book the animalistic behavior of Goriot toward his daughters, a behavior often compared to that of a dog. Balzac said of him, in reply to criticisms: "Old Goriot is like a murderer's dog, who licks the hand of his master when it is soiled with blood; he does not argue, he does not judge, he loves." And, indeed, his passion has annihilated every other human feeling: He would murder, steal, and "sell Father, Son, and the Holy Ghost" to spare his daughters. At the same time, Balzac elevates him to a type, a creator, a godlike figure, capable of infinite passion and abnegation, which will culminate in the ultimate sacrifice of that "Christ of Paternity."

EUGÈNE DE RASTIGNAC

He is the only character who is a principal figure throughout the whole book and undergoes a psychological change. He is also the one who ties up the disparate elements of the work.

At first he is shown as a young student just arrived from the provinces, full of dreams, prepared to work hard to become a successful lawyer. Of an aristocratic family, he has some influential relatives in Paris,

and he is quick to realize that with their help he will enter one of the most restricted and brilliant circles in Paris. Fascinated by that luxury, by that life of pleasure, he wants to become a part of it. But to join a club, one has to follow the rules, and Eugene discovers that to become a member, he will have to leave behind some of his moral principles. He will have to cheat, to lie, to dull his sensibilities. He also realizes that the important instrument of success is money, the almighty god.

He first tries to compromise. Why not combine hard work and pleasure? But Vautrin is right at his side to whisper that hard work will lead him to a life of bourgeois mediocrity and that in the meantime he will need money.

Eugène is defeated, and although he argues with himself and feels remorse, he will exploit his mother and sisters, forget his studies, and when his money runs out, he finds himself lost, so lost that he will listen to Vautrin's criminal plot.

Little by little, he makes more and more concessions. He accepts his illicit liaison with Delphine, Goriot's money, his mistress' present. And by the end of the hook, he has definitely joined the club and will successfully abide by its rules.

In spite of all this, Eugène remains a sympathetic character because of his candor, his childish naivete, and his love and devotion for Old Goriot.

CRITICAL ESSAYS

COMPLEXITY IN STRUCTURE

Just as a play is divided into scenes and acts, a conventional novel is divided into chapters which usually, taking one aspect of the story, help the reader break it down and follow more easily the progression of the plot. *Le Père Goriot* is not organized in this manner, although Balzac originally divided the book into parts having the following titles:

1. A Bourgeois Boardinghouse
2. The Two Visits
3. Debut in the World
4. Trompe la Mort (Cheat-Death)
5. The Two Daughters
6. The Father's Death

In the later editions, however, the titles were dropped and in most English translations we find no such divisions. In our brief synopsis of the book, we have tried to define eight phases of the novel which seemed to give a clearer, more logical account of the story.

Instead of the conventional main plot, we seem to have three interrelated stories, and it is difficult at first to decide which one is the most important:

The Adventures of Rastignac--A Story of Ambition
The story of a young ambitious student who has come from his native province full of hope, devoid of money; of his efforts to conquer Paris; of the gradual changes in him through his contacts with this savage society in which "Success is Virtue"; and of his involvement with Vautrin, Victorine Taillefer, and Delphine de Nucingen.

The Adventures of Vautrin--A Story of Revenge
This component brings into the work elements of mystery and melodrama which remind one of Balzac's earlier Gothic production. But it is much more than an adventure-type story; it gives also the characterization of a man--Vautrin, escaped convict, ostracized by society, seeking revenge. A powerful character physically and mentally, a keen and cynical judge of his fellow men and of the evils of the social order, Vautrin will try to use Rastignac as his alter ego to be an instrument for revenge.

The Adventure of Père Goriot--A Story of Paternity
Tragic, pathetic, human, this story is concerned with a man in whom paternal love has destroyed every other human trait--and will eventually destroy him. We may find Old Goriot's passion close to animality, but we cannot help feeling pity for this man who has accepted poverty and vexations so that his daughters may be happy; we cannot help being deeply moved by his agony and death, the culmination of the tragedy of his life.

COMPLEXITY IN TREATMENT

Added to the structural complexity is the variety in Balzac's treatment of his subject matter. We shall distinguish between realistic, naturalistic, and romantic or subjective approaches.

Realism
Le Père Goriot has been acclaimed, and justly so, as a great realistic novel. Balzac was concerned all his life with getting data on his characters; he went as far as visiting graveyards and jotting down the names on the tombstones. He studies the society of his time and gives us in his book invaluable information about the members, their interests, their behavior. He depicts many levels of social classes, high aristocracy, the middle world, the bourgeois, and the picturesque and somewhat pitiful members of the lower classes: Bianchon, old Poiret, Mlle. Michonneau, Gobseck the usurer, Sylvie, and Christophe.

Balzac's realism is also apparent in the minute descriptions he gives us, in the way he makes his characters express themselves according to their background (for example, Christophe and Sylvie, Mme. Vauquer, the Duchess de Langeais).

Naturalism
But Balzac goes beyond realism. He assesses each human being, classifying him as an entomologist or a zoologist would, comparing each one of his characters in the book with an animal of some kind. He tries to show us that man is predetermined not so much by his psychological makeup but rather by his environment, his social milieu. This scientific or pseudo-scientific approach to human reality constitutes the naturalistic elements in the novel.

Subjectivism
Although Balzac has taken so much care to present his characters objectively, in an objective situation, the novel is filled with subjectivity.

We read lengthy dissertations and short remarks which obviously expound Balzac's ideas and not those of the characters (even in the pathetic delirium of Père Goriot, we can feel Balzac's interference). And if it

would be foolish to say that such-and-such character is Balzac, thereby denying this great writer the gift of creativity, we still find many traits of the author in Rastignac and in Vautrin, and his own preoccupations with money, love, and success.

UNIFYING ELEMENTS

In the midst of such apparent confusion, there seem to be three elements which give unity to the novel:

The Role of Rastignac
A close observation of the novel shows that in the endless back-and-forth motion between the boardinghouse and the outside world, between Goriot and Vautrin, one character is inextricably involved: Eugène de Rastignac. He is the one who links the boardinghouse to the rest of Parisian society, who, because of his ambitions, becomes involved with Delphine, participates in Goriot's tragedy. He is also the character who appears constantly throughout novel, thereby giving it an element of unity.

The Role of Paternity
The omnipresent theme of paternity also gives a cohesive quality to the novel. Physical paternity in the title role, spiritual paternity in Vautrin's efforts to create an alter ego.

The Role of Society
But the real unifying force seems to be in the society depicted here and in its main working principle: money--the source of a preconditioning process which affects and explains the attitude of all the characters (except possibly Bianchon and Victorine). At the boardinghouse, we have seen the guests lodged according to their means. Mme. Vauquer's contempt for Goriot increases as the old man's wealth decreases. Mlle. Michonneau will betray Vautrin for money. Vautrin, himself, as a banker for the underworld, buys his influence. Delphine and Anastasie can only survive with money, which has become the yardstick for their love. And when he has no more money to give, Goriot withers and dies. Rastignac, himself, almost falls into Vautrin's trap because of money, and in the end, he has realized its vital importance.

This novel, therefore, finds its complete unity not as a novel of characters or as a detective story but rather in its social context. Placed by Balzac among his "Studies in Social Mores," it depicts a corrupt, ruthless society, but one in which one has to live, to which one has to adjust or experience the fate of Mme. de Beauséant, Vautrin, and Goriot, and in which many, like Anastasie, Delphine, and Rastignac, want to succeed at all costs.

ESSAY TOPICS AND REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Discuss Balzac's classic description of the boardinghouse. What feeling does he try to convey? What devices does he use?

2. What does Balzac tell us about the boarders at first? How does he manage to arouse our curiosity?

3. Point out the use of irony in Balzac's description of Mme. Vauquer, Mlle. Michonneau, old Poiret, and young Rastignac.

4. Why does Balzac find it necessary to give us such a lengthy exposition?

5. Compare Mme. de Beauséant's criticisms of society with those of Vautrin. What effect do they have on Rastignac?

6. Analyze the evolution of Mme. Vauquer's attitude toward Goriot.
7. How does Balzac prepare us to understand and accept Old Goriot's extreme love for his daughters?
8. Cite some incidents which are decisive in starting Rastignac's psychological change.
9. To what extent can it be said that Vautrin's downfall is also his triumph?
10. How do you explain Goriot's agony and death?
11. Justify Rastignac's attitude at the very end of the novel.
12. What effect on the reader has the constant switch from high society to the boardinghouse?
13. Point out the symbolic elements in Vautrin. To what extent do they explain Vautrin's attitude toward Rastignac?
14. Why has Old Goriot been called "A Christ of Paternity"?
15. Analyze and compare Anastasie and Delphine.
16. Why can Rastignac be called the central figure of the novel?
17. What is the role of society in the novel?
18. Show how Goriot's abnormal passion had destroyed his sense of values.
19. Point out and discuss the naturalistic elements in the novel.
20. What traits make Eugene a sympathetic character?
21. Evaluate the role of money in the novel.
22. What do the melodramatic elements add to the novel?
23. Discuss Balzac's realistic treatment in *Père Goriot*.
24. What are the unifying elements in the novel?
25. Compare Père Goriot and King Lear.

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

A wealth of material has been published on Balzac which appears in William H. Royce's *Bibliography of Balzac* and in the May issues of the *Publications of the Modern Language Association.* We have tried here to give a selection of those works which can help the reader get a clearer insight into Balzac's *Le Père Goriot* and possibly stimulate further study of this great, prolific writer. For the benefit of French students, we have included several essential works in French.

FRENCH WORKS

Bardeche, M. *Balzac Romancier.* Paris: Plon, 1951. A very penetrating study of Balzac's techniques and characters, both for the layman and the scholar. One whole chapter is devoted to *Le Père Goriot.*

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