

Show and Rumor: The Worldly Scales in Balzac's *Eugénie Grandet*

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Several critics, most notably Maurice Bardèche in his *Balzac Romancier*,¹ have analyzed the dramatic structure of *Eugénie Grandet* to show the manner in which Balzac fulfilled his promise of raising the trivial and the ordinary to the level of tragedy by juxtaposition of characters, skillful management of properties, and careful interweaving of scenes. I should like to reconsider some instances of explicit staging and dramatization in the novel to illustrate how show or spectacle itself becomes motif, and how a pattern of rumor, generally attuned to show, serves Balzac to establish a scale on which his protagonists' actual worth can be distinguished from the multitude of assumptions made about it. To demonstrate the grandeur of little people, as he set out to do, and to show the poetry of life in the provinces that simply flows by, in contrast to Paris where it happens,² Balzac had to indicate degrees of superiority and set moral gradations opposite social and economic estimates. He suggested a literal scale on which his heroine ascends to heaven in the end and on which gravitational pull determines relative positions. But he also relied on conventional Platonism to make action appear as the imitation of successive models, all removed from truth. The high and low points—Heaven and Earth, Truth and everyday "Reality"—correspond on the scales. But intermediate positions do not, and estimates vary considerably. Staging could suggest an appropriate perspective and underline sham.

Balzac's famous exposition scene establishes a cloistered atmosphere in the Maison Grandet, at the top of the Grand' Rue in Saumur, and turns it into an ideal setting for silent drama and unsuspected beauty. The reader as Bardèche demonstrates, acquires a heightened awareness of the inhabitants and their activities, of their regular guests, the cruchotins and grassinistes, and of the cousin from Paris who knocks dramatically on the door the night of Eugénie's twenty-third birthday and enters the household to change things completely behind the unchanging facade. Inside-outside distinctions are maintained throughout the novel by treating those who are not members of the household as a chorus which offers a worldly perspective on the events staged in Grandet's cloistered realm: a thoroughly traditional chorus that comments on the action, is affected by it, yet has relatively little impact on what goes on. Evidently, traditional dramatization seems like a fitting complement for the conventional endeavor to distinguish appearance from reality and the no-less conventional wisdom offered in the end: *sic transit gloria mundi*. For Balzac, the traditional has the marks of the true. He knows only too well that dramatic presentation does not promote a specific truth. But by suggesting other, expanding stages beyond the "salle" ("théâtre de la vie domestique," p. 27), the Maison Grandet and Saumur, and by positioning spectators on and off, including himself as master-showman apostrophizing sympathetic readers, he

¹Maurice Bardèche, *Balzac Romancier* (Paris: Plon, 1947), pp. 297-330.

²P. 261. All page references, given parenthetically in the text, are to the Castex edition of *Eugénie Grandet* (Paris: Garnier, 1965). I would distinguish three scales in the novel. A heavenly scale, devised primarily by associating Eugénie with the Virgin Mary; the worldly scale considered here, which uses show, rumor, and gold as measurement; and a cosmic scale whose gradations one must read in time.

opens the perspective on infinity which he felt the novel required: the real epilogue would be written "au ciel," where a supreme judgment could establish a genuine hierarchy of values. "Drame" by itself, that is, action alone, as the opening of *Le Père Goriot* would soon point out, suggests that "all is true," and that a discriminating eye and temporal scales are needed. The author must provide them.

When we study the scenes in which the discrepancy between appearance and reality and the absurdity of rumor are dramatized, we soon find that Balzac uses them most effectively to affirm not the superiority of life in the country but the superiority of only a few among his provincial characters and, consequently, of the principles by which they live. For in a world governed by a deceptive exterior on the one hand, and by hypocrites and manipulators on the other, those who uphold convictions, who remain steadfast, and who cannot be judged on a conventional scale will necessarily seem superior. The entire Grandet household, including of course the miser, dominates its surroundings.

Balzac tells us almost immediately that a major reason for Grandet's power is superior acting. While the rest of the world thought he was absorbed in politics, he was actually amassing the wealth which political events had placed within his reach, never allowing his feelings or intentions to show. His fortune consists of the revealed and the concealed, "biens au soleil et capitaux," and, paradoxically, to get at its true worth one must measure the obsequious regard which the world offers him (p. 14). Balzac provides us also with details of his physiognomy that reflect, as accurately as possible, a moral and psychological reality: his colors are yellow and white, gold and silver, the color of his hair, eyes and complexion; and he is famous for his "loupe terrible," the growth at the end of his nose which not only reflects his moods, but, by thoroughly medieval tradition, asserts his cupidity. When it comes to judgment, however, this kind of data is of limited significance. The author tells us also from the start that the cloak of gold ("le manteau d'or") improves the appearance of all that Grandet does, and that despite his past manipulations, he is the most relied upon and, indeed, the most dependable source of truth in Saumur (p. 17). He never says "yes" or "no"; he acts, and his acts become models. We go on to learn that, in the world surrounding her, Eugénie's estimate is likewise offered in gold, on the basis of rumor. She is an heiress; whatever individual or transcendent worth she has must pierce through the cloak of gold. Yet even in Saumur, where assessment normally allows for a cover-up, only those who are out of step are sensitive to Eugénie's greater worth; they include Mme Grandet, Nanon, and, ironically, for a while Charles Grandet who does not believe in his uncle's fortune because it does not show. Only fiction, by associating Eugénie with the figures of religion, myth, or art, that is, by seeing in her the model for the painter's madonna and the sculptor's Venus, can hope to convey her transcendent worth.

The description of Nanon and Mme Grandet as sublime souls beneath a ridiculous exterior, places additional stress on the discrepancy between appearance and reality, and the presentation of the cruchotins and grassinistes as scheming marionettes prepares for Grandet's assumption of the puppet-master role. Balzac, however, first offers his own show, a tableau in the best tradition of the *drame bourgeois*, and since he does not trust even this tried device for conveying a message, he rises to take an overview of the situation as it exists prior to Charles's entrance. In the pettiness that is evident and in the greed disguised as affection, he identifies universal drama, "une scène de tous les temps et de tous les lieux"; Grandet, as he exploits the rivalry of the two families, seems to him the embodiment of the contemporary God, "l'Argent"; and the three naive women, Mme Grandet, Eugénie, and Nanon, at the center of the stage, suggest the "Affreuse condition de l'homme!" whose lot is to find bliss only in ignorance (pp. 46-47).

The tableau and the diatribe built on it are of course no more palatable in a Balzac novel than they are in a Diderot play. Their saving grace, here, is that a grotesque effect appears to have been sought consciously, that the morality is prelude to an action which, as it evolves, escapes facile interpretation, and that framing and staging in the novel are a thematic motif even more than they are a technical device. The tirade on ignorance as bliss, stemming from an allegorization of the modern world, must seem like a reasonable conclusion for the detailed exposition of Saumur reality in which all is sham, show, or mystery. Grandet's deification, "l'Argent dans toute sa puissance, exprimé par une seule physionomie" ("intronisé" in an earlier version), must be taken in contrast with Eugénie's presentation as the no-less silvery gossamer and celestial Virgin in the "Préambule" and "Épilogue" which Balzac eventually suppressed. Yet without dwelling on such contrasts, the novel associates Grandet with a line of creators featuring, aside from the author on one end and a god in heaven on the other, the painter Raphael and the sculptor of the recently uncovered Venus of Milo. As an alchemist, Grandet is second only to the sun in Saumur (p. 8). He is indeed the tyrannical Dieu Argent, lording over those blinded by cupidity or innocence. But he is also the intelligence which "dominait ce spectacle et l'éclairait" (p. 46), and, as such, he is indeed a surrogate for the author. Balzac's deference toward the miser as a superior ordering mind is serious and evident throughout the novel, asserting itself from the start in his name: he is not only the incredibly fortunate Félix, but his last name, Grandet, long before it ever suggests the anagram "d'argent," asserts in him greatness (or perhaps grossness; the irony goes both ways even for Charles who, when the "sang des Grandets" started asserting itself in his veins, in the Indies, "fit de l'usure en grand"; p. 232).³ While bemoaning the loss of absolute values, Balzac exploits the phenomenon of relative superiority, and dramatization obviously facilitates his task. The theatrical tableau which summed up the reality of Saumur is followed by a *coup de théâtre*, Charles's knock on the door, strong enough to startle the ladies in their seats and seem inauspicious to all (it is struck with the knocker described earlier as a well-worn "jacquemart . . . figure essentiellement bouffonne . . ."; p. 26).

Years of exegesis and some of Balzac's own comments in the novel tend to make us consider Charles's entrance in the Grandet household as the beginning of enlightenment. But this is actually true only to a limited extent. Charles opens the eyes of a single character, Eugénie, and he accomplishes this first by dazzling her with his luxury and then by blinding her with love. Her vision is understandably distorted. Balzac says, indeed, that Eugénie begins to judge her father as a result of his lack of sympathy for the despondent Charles (p. 109); but it is for us to ask how long she judges and to what effect. Balzac also tells us that she becomes conscious of the reality around her as soon as Charles has a share in it. Which reality? The one magnified by budding love or the one reduced in value and made more confining by frustrated love? An examination of the realities Balzac offers as background for the emotional development of his heroine shows that they are, once again, carefully and explicitly staged appearances. Obviously, in a novel which is specifically dedicated to examining provincial life and revealing its depth, we cannot expect the whole truth to emerge from confrontation with a twenty-one-year-old dandy from Paris. The arrival of Charles merely eliminates temporarily the need for a narrator decrying vanity or a puppeteer revealing his strings: the Parisian cousin incarnates show and perceives reality as a spectacle; in relation to him contrasts become obvious, and with the perception of contrasts insight may begin.

Having landed as "un paon dans quelque obscure basse-cour de village" (p. 49), Charles positions himself against the fireplace to be admired by those assembled

³See Sylvère Lotringer, "Mesure de la démesure," *Poétique*, 3, No. 12 (December 1972), 486-94; also P. -G. Castex, "L'Ascension de Monsieur Grandet," *Europe*, Colloque Balzac, 429-30 (Jan. - Feb. 1965), 248-63.

and placed in perspective by the narrator. Balzac capitalized on the incongruity from the beginning, but the extensive revisions that he made between the manuscript and the Béchét edition (end of 1833) indicate that he was aware of more subtle effects as well. It is not until this version, revised from the serial, that Eugénie's naive estimate of her cousin's appearance turns him into "une créature descendue de quelque région séraphique" (p. 56). The more sophisticated spectators in the "salle" understand immediately that appearances depend in part on the beholder and primarily on the art (in this case grooming) invested in preparation—we are told that Charles spent considerable time readying his entrance. In contrast to Eugénie, Grandet and his guests immediately exercise their provincial prejudices in sizing up the newcomer, and he, in turn, judges them with Parisian arrogance. But he is taken into the circle, and it is not long before he is offered an interesting estimate of the situation by Mme des Grassins, a *provinciale*, but one whose judgment is given special worth by a well-preserved figure draped in Parisian fashions: "Votre oncle est un grigou qui ne pense qu'à ses provins, votre tante est une dévote qui ne sait pas coudre deux idées, et votre cousine est une petite sottie, sans éducation, commune, sans dot, et qui passe sa vie à racommoder des torchons" (p. 60-61). This cruel description of the Grandet household is probably the most accurate in the entire book, yet Balzac undermines it immediately by showing how calculating it is. Then, within a few pages, he offers us still another overall estimate of reality, from Charles himself standing in utter "dégrisement" at the foot of the staircase: "Il se croyait dans un juchoir à poules" (p. 72). This is the peacock's overview: no matter how sober, it necessarily transforms the world into a chicken roost. In contrast, the narrator offers a glimpse of realities not for show and beyond rumor, finding them along the stairway, behind closed doors.

The presentation of Grandet as alchemist in his mysterious "cabinet" serves as an epilogue for Charles's arrival and as a commentary on the discrepancy between appearance and reality demonstrated throughout the chapter. Grandet's "laboratoire" is a source of truth. Regardless of what speculations go on below, regardless of what plots are devised in the temporary alliance of cruchotins and grassinistes against the common foe from Paris, here in the most Gothic setting of the novel is where future realities are actually worked out and translated, with awe-inspiring precision, into the only effective medium in the world's traffic, gold. The view from the alchemist's laboratory does not, however, stand alone at the end of the chapter: it is balanced by the vague fears of Mme Grandet, by Eugénie's first dreams of love, and by Nanon's excitement at the prospect of being given Charles's "robe d'or," with which she can eventually make an altar frontal dedicated to the salvation of her soul.

Through most of the novel, naive hope and dreams are allowed to run parallel with speculations based on material displays and worldly prospects. Though they are expressions of a transcendent faith, hope and dreams do not challenge reality. They are, in fact, readily formed by the sheerest display (Eugénie is initially fascinated not merely by the seraphic appearance of her cousin, but by the "jolies bagatelles de sa toilette, ses ciseaux, ses rasoirs enrichis d'or"; p. 114). On the other hand, whereas the frustration of hope is merely a sign of temporal defeat, the failure of speculation is absolute. There are of course levels of speculation. If the miser towers above the rest, it is largely because his reasoning powers are less affected by consideration for others and concern for rumor. He does not hesitate to use show when it can advance his interest, but he works out his plans in stealth. "La discrétion du bonhomme était complète. Personne ne voyait jamais un sou dans cette maison pleine d'or" (p. 147). In contrast, Balzac lets us overhear the indiscreet world cursing Grandet in the morning for his treacherous deal with the Dutch and

Belgian wine merchants, and singing his praise the same evening because rumor has made him into the savior of his brother's honor (p. 144-45).

Still, whereas rumor merely distorts the report of men's activities, show distorts something fundamental, the order of nature. Probably the most elaborate diatribe in the novel is the one in which Balzac denounces the show of youth in Charles: it is but a deceptive exterior behind which is hidden a heart prematurely aged by a Parisian education; even the love which emanates from this heart is but a reflection of the love lavished on him by his parents; the facade is preserved by sloth: "Il était beau d'inexpérience. Mais, à son insu, l'égoïsme lui avait été inoculé. Les germes de l'économie politique à l'usage du Parisien, latents en son cœur, ne devaient pas tarder à y fleurir, aussitôt que, de spectateur oisif, il deviendrait acteur dans le drame de la vie réelle" (p. 155). In contrast to Charles's cold and derivative love, Balzac sets the radiant love of Eugénie; in contrast to his schooling in Annette's boudoir, he sets Eugénie's Christian education (p. 132). These opposites must serve as background to the exchange of treasures between the two, the "scène sublime" as Balzac calls it in a letter to Mme Hanska (November 13, 1833) who, he suggests, inspired it.

Coming to this scene nowadays, we are less likely to be impressed by the sublime action than by Balzac's careful design for assessing relative value. Thus, Eugénie's offer of her "douzain" to Charles is made a ritual betrothal in which values are matched and good faith engaged ("confiance pour confiance," p. 161); the old coins in Eugénie's treasure, are both figuratively and literally the gold of a former era; their worth is estimated at three different rates: they have a real value that is indicated and that becomes the market value cited in the exchange; a "conventional" value which can be obtained on the market from collectors; and a symbolic value for amateurs (p. 158 and note). Contrary to what might be expected, but consistently with Balzac's plan, the values coincide only for Grandet and his daughter, amateurs in a literal sense. Charles, who prides himself on his worldly wisdom, realizes only the treasure's exchange value.⁴ This is the same Charles who is taken in by his uncle's show of poverty and will be so overwhelmed by the parting words in which the old man promises to take care of the family honor, that he will interrupt them and miss the rest of his intentions (p. 177).

Having sent Charles off to the Indies, Balzac is ready to stage the carefully prepared confrontation between father and daughter. The subject is the daughter's lost treasure, not her virginity, as convention would have suggested, but her gold, the "douzain" given to Charles. (The departure from convention underscores the grotesque side of the enterprise.) Again, Balzac claims to offer theater, "une tragédie bourgeoise sans poison, ni poignard, ni sang répandu; mais relativement aux acteurs, plus cruelle que tous les drames accomplis dans l'illustre famille des Atrides" (p. 187). When he reaches the denouement of this tragedy, he actually cannot resist including a dagger in the hand of his heroine, and though he avoids shedding blood, he kills Mme Grandet and absolves the miser of responsibility for the death of his wife only by a preposterously contrived chain of events: in the excitement surrounding the arrival of her nephew, she could not complete knitting her yearly pair of "manchons de laine," and thus, when she broke out in a sweat during the argument with her husband, she caught a cold "d'une façon facheuse," and, eventually passed away to a better world. Actually, the "tragédie bourgeoise" offered here is not much worse than most, and perhaps the reason it is so bad is that

⁴On Charles's blindness and impotence, see Ruth Amossy et Elisheva Rosen, "La Configuration du dandy dans 'Eugénie Grandet.'" *L'Année balzacienne*, 1975, pp. 247-61. On the conflict between valuation systems, with reference to gold, see also L. et N. Rudick, "'Eugénie Grandet' martyr du capitalisme," *Rev. de l'Institut de Sociologie*, 46, No. 3-4 (Bruxelles, 1973), 651-69.

in such stage scenes as the rift and reconciliation in the Grandet household, Balzac, working with a reduced cast and without chorus, can no longer present to his readers the more subtle discrepancies between appearance and reality which were otherwise the basis for his dramatization in the novel. When Grandet pounces on the gold travel case, and when Eugénie threatens to kill herself if he desecrates this treasure, appearance and reality coincide. Those who are unable to generate pity and fear at such climactic points in the "tragédie," must proceed beyond them, to where "comédie" in the broad, Balzacian sense picks up again and where an intellectual response will generally suffice.

The next time father and daughter face each other, over Mme Grandet's inheritance, their values, though at opposite extremes, coincide once again. Only the outsider, the solicitor Cruchot, shudders at Eugénie's renunciation, considering it inhuman. But for both Grandet and his daughter renunciation is just a ritual gesture; she considers it fulfillment of duty and he the payment of a debt: ". . . tu donnes la vie à ton père; mais tu lui rends ce qu'il t'a donné; nous sommes quittes" (p. 220). Father and daughter meet on the high plane while others remain below to judge by appearances.

The decline and fall of Félix Grandet is, in fact, conveyed to us in terms of a growing conjunction between appearances and realities. Already during the banishment he imposed on a daughter who would not yield to him, Grandet was so disturbed that he sacrificed some of his means of control over the outside world (the "boa" side of his "tigre-boas" nature): ". . . il ne bégaya plus, causa moins, et se montra dans les affaires plus dur qu'il ne l'avait jamais été" (p. 203). After his wife's death and the settlement with his daughter, advancing old age forces him to transfer his powers and to shed altogether the cloak of mystery behind which he operated; "[il] sentit la nécessité d'initier sa fille aux secrets du ménage" (p. 221). In the space of two pages Balzac takes him through five years. At the end of four, Grandet is paralyzed: only the instincts of avarice remain. He is unable to control the spectacle and at the same time becomes utterly dependent on it; he is haunted by fears for his treasure and derives his vitality from contemplation of the gold his daughter piles up for him. His famous last words and last gesture probably suggest the deterioration of his character rather than its endurance, as we are generally told: he tries to grab the priest's vermilion crucifix and warns his daughter that she will owe him accounts in the other world. Thus, when he finally reaches out for *her* values, for *her* God, and for the *other* world, it is merely in a desperate attempt to preserve *his own*. The scene is stagy again and the grotesque pervades it; yet it is saved and in fact heightened by the ambiguity of the last gesture and the last words.

Far from bringing about an emancipation, the death of Grandet makes Eugénie's confinement in the world more obvious and more intolerable. As the title of the last chapter "Ainsi va le monde," indicates, the way of the world will now become increasingly evident and utterly intolerable. So long as Grandet lived and used his daughter to snare the world, the worship of the cruchotins and grassinistes did not seem gratuitous, for, after all, the miser was forging value out of it in his alchemist furnace. Left alone in the house without anyone to dominate the greedy pack with a superior greed, Eugénie is a more pathetic prey than ever. The tableau of the gathering in the "salle" is reproduced by Balzac, but what was merely grotesque has now become absurd as well: the pack has closed in a little, the lotto has been replaced by the more dignified whist, the cruchotins have achieved a temporary dominance, but there is no "Dieu Argent" to give meaning to the worship or to the hunt. Petty calculations and empty formulae rebound aimlessly in the room, and only the praise of her beauty pleases Eugénie, for she can dedicate it to Charles, her idol (p. 229). Balzac tells us she still has hopes in two worlds beyond

the "salle": "Son coeur et l'Évangile lui signalaient deux mondes à attendre. Elle se plongeait nuit et jour au sein de deux pensées infinies, qui pour elle peut-être n'en faisaient qu'une seule" (p. 228). Flaubert was to use almost the same formula for the creation of his Félicité; but he endowed her with ability to alter the object of her love, and made her less apt to distinguish the secular from the sacred and consequently more apt to achieve beatitude by confusing them. Eugénie can consecrate what is associated with her love (for instance, the travel case and the portraits it contains); but she cannot transfer value, and this is not the least of the traits she has in common with her father. As soon as the world stops offering her a prospect, she must accept its ways and marry the judge, Cruchot de Bonfons. In terms of the discrepancy between reality and appearance as it exists for her, this is the point where she can no longer escape from the surrounding sham through dream or hope.

In contrast to Eugénie who must be made to capitulate to the world, Charles merely assumes within it the place and attitudes which Balzac had attributed to him from the start. He learns to cultivate appearance for profit. His exploits in the Indies are presented as an adaptation to the way of the world. He assumes a new name in order to be able to engage freely in the slave trade; he abandons all principles after observing that what constitutes a crime varies greatly from one country to another, and he finally returns to Paris a wealthy man who insures his future in mid passage by contracting for the hand as well as the name of Mlle d'Aubrion (pp. 234-35). The latter, it will be remembered, is not only a means for achieving worldly aims, but a parody of other-worldly aspirations: in order to make possible the marriage of a daughter rather slighted by nature, Mme d'Aubrion had to shape her with art, and, as a finishing touch, she taught her to put on the melancholy airs behind which men will think they can find the angel "si vainement cherché" (p. 235). Here is substantial gossamer. For the sake of form, Charles writes to Eugénie soliciting release from his promise to her on the grounds of worldly obligation ("Nous nous devons à nos enfants," p. 241). He settles his debt in a *post scriptum* and asks that his mother's travel case be sent to him by mail coach at the Hôtel d'Aubrion.

Having read the letter, Eugénie recalls her own mother's final estimate of the potential for happiness in this world. She then returns to the house from the garden and finds the parish priest barring for her the only escape she had contemplated: he asserts that her fortune confirms her role in the world ("Vous devez conserver ce que Dieu vous a donné," p. 243); he has come to her in fact to express the concern of the parish over her un-Christian self-denial. While he is still there, Mme des Grassins appears on the scene, bearing further confirmation of Eugénie's entrapment in the realm of appearance: a letter from her husband which announces that Charles's marriage plans are already public, and that only his father's bankruptcy and the ensuing debts so carefully cultivated by Grandet stand in the way of his worldly happiness. Eugénie responds with Grandet's famous "*Nous verrons cela.*" But the words can hardly be said to reflect an assumption of her father's way with the world; they merely convey determination to maintain her own way in a world to which she must yield. Subsequent acts confirm both her resignation and independence. As soon as she has dismissed Mme des Grassins, Eugénie asks the priest whether she could marry and remain a virgin without committing a sin. She does not wait for him to consult the *De matrimonio* of the celebrated Sanchez, but makes up her own mind (the church had relatively popular figures like Saint Cecilia to serve her as a precedent). She prepares herself the rest of the afternoon in her father's cabinet and, in the evening, when she comes down to her "monde," she has taken another step to insure her privacy in their midst: "Elle sut couvrir son malheur sous les voiles de la politesse" (p. 248). The

unconsummated marriage she arranges is intended to satisfy appearances without changing realities; once again the hand of a master showman is evident in the "salle": "Il y eut un coup de théâtre qui retentit dans Saumur" (p. 248).

Thenceforth, Balzac sums up his plot by combining worldly appearances and realities in quick succession and with great relish to demonstrate the obvious: regardless of staging or calculating talent, no one resists the irony of fate and the ravages of time. The pageant of the world that he reviews in his "Conclusion," moves to the sound of *sic transit*. There is only one ascending figure: "Eugénie marche au ciel accompagnée d'un cortège de bienfaits" (p. 256). But even she is tied down to the world, and when she preserves the routines of her household that insure longevity or profit, they seem pointless. Her wasted vitality is increasingly evident. She has retained an aura of sanctity enhanced by suffering; but she has also assumed the stiffness and the petty mannerisms of the provincial old maid. Rumor tries to undermine her good deeds, and rumor still builds her a future. But we know that Balzac abandoned several early projects for another marriage for Eugénie and for her entrance into high society in Paris in order to close with mere provincial gossip and vain calculation, which are, as the last words of the text have it, the "corruption du monde." The deletion of the original epilogue, in which Balzac had arranged an Assumption for Eugénie, the virgin, and a Coronation in heaven, made the sense of waste seem even greater and the earthly perspective more contemptible for being until the end founded on rumor and misunderstanding.⁵

⁵Bardèche points out (p. 330) that the Saumur locale is recalled just before the end to allow an estimate of the ravages of passion which, however, occur mostly below the surface. André Allémand notes the cyclical nature of the narrative also, but for him this is primarily an effect of characterization: "Eugénie Grandet, comme presque tous les personnages de *La Comédie humaine*, est simplement devenue ce qu'elle était déjà." *Honoré de Balzac: Création et passion* (Paris: Plon, 1965), pp. 102-03.