LITERATURE AND RATIONALITY

Ideas of agency in theory and fiction

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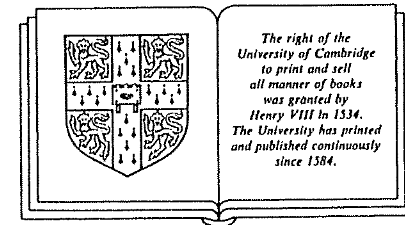

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to my parents

(1) *Mascarade* is a typical comedy of intrigue influenced by the Italian *teatro delle maschere*.[5]
(2) In writing *Mascarade*, Holberg used half of a play by Joachim Richard Paulli as his basis.
(3) While writing *Mascarade*, Holberg intended to create a play that would express his idea that society should allow a 'reasonable freedom' (*en fornuftig Frihed*) to its members; this intention was linked to his desire to oppose the state's repressive policy of prohibiting masquerades and gambling.
(4) *Mascarade* is Holberg's unintended expression of his unconscious Oedipal ambivalence towards his father, represented in the figure of Heronimus; other figures represent facets of Holberg's psyche, including contrasting rebellious and obsequious sons.
(5) *Mascarade*'s representation of the carnivalesque dimensions of masquerades exemplifies Bakhtin's emphasis on the critical and revolutionary dimensions of popular festivities.
(6) *Mascarade* conveys Holberg's philosophical belief, also expressed in his Epistle 347, that masquerades and carnival rightfully express the natural equality of master and slave.
(7) *Mascarade* has had an important political and social function in the constitution of the national literary culture of Denmark.
(8) *Mascarade* manifests the essential instability of language, for in its incessant displacements, tropisms, and figural processes, it paradoxically subverts the Subject's claim to coherence and grounding.
(9) *Mascarade* is not particularly original: its style is clumsy and uninspired, and the plot clearly reflects Holberg's slavish imitation of Molière. Perhaps its greatest merit was to have served as the inspiration for Carl Nielsen's lovely opera of the same name.
(10) Early in 1724, Holberg composed the script for *Mascarade* at his home on the Kømagergade in Copenhagen. The play was first performed in late February, 1774, at the Lille Grønnegade Theatre, and was first published in 1731 in *Den danske Skue-Plads*.
(11) In its belated neo-classical form and thematics, *Mascarade* reflects an illusory bourgeois ideal of Enlightened freedom based on an adequation between reason and nature.

Although this list certainly does not represent all possible types

of critical assertions, the kinds that it exemplifies do appear quite frequently in literary-critical publications. Thus the list quite faithfully illustrates the fact that the topics of critical enquiry are much more diverse than restrictive definitions of 'literariness' allow, for critics are interested not only in a literary work of art's aesthetic qualities, but in its psychic, social, and linguistic conditions and consequences. Given the complexity and heterogeneity of the object domain in question, this is as it should be: an insistence on purely aesthetic topics in the name of disciplinarity would amount to a mutilation of literary history, which is not reducible to the creation and experience of the aesthetic qualities of a corpus of literary artefacts, utterances, and performances. In this regard, it is at once appropriate and highly significant that the essays included in a recent literary history have been organized around a broad variety of events, actions, and artefacts, including the following: 'Four Years after Writing the Pléiade's Manifesto, Joachim du Bellay Goes to Rome and Repines', 'Rousseau Writes his *Essai sur l'origine des langues*', 'Prosper Mérimée Publishes *La Vénus d'Ille*', 'Louis-Napoleon Bonaparte, President of the Second Republic, Becomes Emperor Napoleon III of the Second Empire', and 'The 500th Program of "Apostrophes" is Broadcast on Antenne 2'.[6]

With these remarks in mind, we may now turn to the issue of the relevance of concepts of rationality and agency to the literary field. The present study defends a dual hypothesis: not only are the concepts and issues related to rationality and irrationality directly relevant, and indeed, essential, to enquiries concerning literature, but literature in turn has genuine cognitive value in relation to questions of human rationality and irrationality. The task of the present chapter is to defend the former claim; the latter claim is introduced at the end of this chapter and is defended at length in my subsequent chapters.

As I argued in my introduction, my belief that concepts of rationality are valuable tools for literary enquiry should not be understood as entailing the view that literary activities conform to some rigid and idealized standard of Rationality; even less does it entail the idea that literary activities should be *evaluated* in such terms. In my view it seems safe to assume that the canons of Bayesian decision theory are not applicable to the kinds of choices, preferences, and actions that may be associated with literature: the theory's classic assumptions are already problematic in relation to the actual preferences agents have in regard to a quantified commodity

cognitive value does not require that one seek to analyse every aspect of a work, or that one respect the kinds of features and topics that are typically pertinent to other modes of literary analysis. In my context, it is the research programme associated with rationality, and more specifically, with particular issues and problems related to that notion, that defines the principles of pertinence observed in a selective reading of the literary texts. The goal, then, is not an aesthetic appreciation, a recounting of the 'common reader's' experience, or even a depth-hermeneutical exegesis. The goal is to present the results of readings that were motivated by the heuristic value of a selective approach to some literary narratives. It should be obvious that I am not proposing that this is the only or the best avenue of critical enquiry. It is, however, a good, if not the best, manner of arguing for the cognitive value of literary interpretation.

Why would the analysis of literary works be a good means to improving hypotheses about human agency? Am I reviving the old claim about the propositional content of literature, following which literary works are direct expressions of the authors' genial insights into the eternal truths of human nature – insights that it is the job of the critic to rescue? Not at all. What I am proposing is not a matter of detecting and amplifying the correct arguments that authors have put in the mouths of their characters and narrators. In the case of Dreiser's writings, my analysis in fact brushes 'against the grain' of the author's project, for I am interested precisely in the ways in which the claims made by Dreiser's naturalist narrators are flatly contradicted by other aspects of the work. I deem this encounter with the contradictions of Dreiser's and Zola's naturalist fictions to be of special heuristic value. One reason why readings of literary narratives can have heuristic value in the context of hypotheses about rationality flows from what was proposed above about some of the most basic features of stories, namely, their invariant emphasis on purposeful activity and on the multiple ways in which such activity can go wrong. Literary narratives depict an extraordinary variety of situations where agents' practical deliberations and actions do not work smoothly to the attainment of the desired ends. These diverse literary depictions of the breakdowns and subversions of rationality are often particularly revealing because of their emphasis on the corresponding attitudes of the agents involved. By depicting ways in which our individual

and collective schemes falter and fail, literary narratives help make it possible to articulate the intuitions and concepts that enable us to say more explicitly what precisely has gone wrong in such cases. Such, at least, is a hypothesis to be explored in what follows.

'Yes she is,' she returned cheerfully, a little suggestion of possible defect in herself awakening in her mind. If that was so fine she must look at it more closely. Instinctively she felt a desire to imitate it. Surely she could do that too. (p. 99)

This text explicitly evokes Carrie Meeber's instinctive desire to imitate. Yet even this schematic and apparently simple description carries features that simply cannot be accomodated by any reductive, a-rational model of agency. Carrie is walking with her lover, Drouet, who calls her attention to the passer-by; observing the woman, Carrie has an 'instinctive' desire to imitate her manner of walking. What are the essential ingredients in this imitative episode? We may note first of all that although Carrie seems to be a passive figure in this sequence of events (a 'mirror' and not an 'engine', as Dreiser puts it elsewhere), the narrative in fact implicitly points to the rôle of her attitudes in determining what happens. This point is already suggested by the fact that Carrie does not have any 'instinctive' desire to imitate anything and everything around her. Not only are her attention and receptivity necessarily selective, but her inclination to act in function of what she observes is also selective.

This point is crucial to the analysis of imitative phenomena: observation of something does not entail imitation of it, for it is clear that no conceivable organism could imitate every feature of the environment that it happened to observe, or even all of the behaviour that it happened to perceive its fellow creatures engaging in. Note that in the episode at hand, the narrator has told us that Carrie had already 'spied' the woman before Drouet spoke, 'though with scarce so single an eye'. Carrie had observed the woman, but the observation had had no great implications for her, and certainly no automatic and 'instinctive' impulse to imitate had been set in motion. In short, for a basic sequence of imitation to be engaged, observation of some other being's actions must be followed by a certain kind of motivational process (and unless the imitation is instantaneous, the observation of the behaviour must in some way be remembered by the potential imitator). In other words, we must ask why Carrie does not observe the graceful walk of this other woman in the manner that she might observe thousands of other things in the world, that is, without the observation having any practical consequences for her.

The crucial factor is Carrie's reaction, not to the woman taken

separately, but to Drouet's comment about her, and to the woman as the object of Drouet's comment. The narrative expresses this in the remark that Carrie's attention is drawn to 'the grace commended' and not simply to the 'grace' on its own. Yet what is the significance for Carrie of this grace commended? A sketch of an answer to this question is implicit in the narrative, for although Carrie maintains an external show of cheerfulness, she thinks that Drouet's recommendation of the other woman may imply a possible 'defect' in herself, and the narrator's claim about her 'instinctive desire to imitate' is in fact immediately preceded and followed by clauses that attribute bits of reasoning to Carrie: 'if that was so fine she must look at it more closely . . . Surely she could do that too. When one of her mind sees many things emphasized and re-emphasized and admired, she gathers the logic of it and applies it accordingly.' These phrases destroy any possibility that this narrative could consistently advocate a purely mechanical model of imitation, for it is clear that Carrie's intentional attitudes and reasoning are indispensable parts of the episode: having been confronted with the proposition that a particular bit of behaviour is to be valued, she concludes that it must be observed more carefully; she asks herself whether it figures among the realm of her possible actions, determines that this is indeed the case, and moreover, manages to extract the very 'logic' of the evaluative statements, extracting from the various particular instances those kinds of traits to which Drouet's recommendations invariably refer. No passive 'mirror' could ever achieve such a feat. Rather, only complex intentional attitudes of perception, belief, and inferential reasoning could make such a process of learning possible, for we must recognize that it is a matter of learning here, even if we go on to add that what is being learned are stereotypical and reprehensible forms of gender-specific behaviour, and more precisely, a certain masculine image of the erotic feminine ideal. (The narrative has already informed us what lurks in Drouet's conception of the 'fine stepper': the 'grace and sinuosity' with which women swayed their bodies. 'A dainty, self-conscious swaying of the hips by a woman', everything that is 'alluring' to the eye of the male (p. 99). Such is what the *ingénue* from the country has not yet learned.)

Yet what motivates Carrie's apprenticeship of these things? That she has the intelligence and skill necessary to the learning of such behaviour is not sufficient to explain why she should engage in it,

example, although Lazare and his cousin have invested quite a lot of money in his project to build a sea-wall, as soon as the young man encounters some obstacles (the workers somehow exasperate him), he calls a halt to the work and immediately begins thinking of new schemes.[5] In short, Lazare is incapable of coherently developing means to the ends he sets for himself, and has an irrational habit of reconsidering and abandoning his own previously established long-term intentions. Such is the basic pattern of irrationality at the heart of each of the major episodes in his career, which is but a series of costly abortions.

Although the theory of planning allows us to describe Lazare's error quite accurately in relation to some basic norms of practical deliberation, the theory does not have anything to say about the reasons why an agent would typically deviate from these norms. Zola's text, however, does include various insightful suggestions along those lines. What, then, does it tell us about the bases of Lazare's irrational behaviour? A first basis would seem to be a discrepancy between Lazare's real desires and the schemes in which he becomes involved. Lazare apparently thinks that he can get what he wants by engaging in a successful business endeavour, but what he really desires is to enjoy a prompt success entirely on the basis of a brilliant and original idea. Just as when he shifted from music to medicine his goal remained the winning of some kind of worldwide fame, so in undertaking the business venture, he still thinks of the project as a way of quickly manifesting his individual genius and singularity. Thus he has a tendency to value only the most extreme and dramatic scenarios, ruling out the modest, mediocre, and time-consuming means to his ends. Here we may have a reason why he never conceives of the idea of making some money for a while by reverting to the old method of turning seaweed into a saleable commodity, even though he has already invested a small fortune, and stands to lose it all. Boutigny is capable of taking recourse to this slower and more ordinary approach, but Lazare is not, and expresses his contempt for the traditional method. Lazare's fundamental interest in the entire venture, then, is to prove to the world that he is a singular and outstanding individual, which is why only an innovative method truly interests him. This may also be why he could never be satisfied with a medical career, and is drawn to a number of different artistic endeavours.

A second, and perhaps more determinant basis of Lazare's error is his inability to sustain the necessary level of confidence in the

face of adversity. He is wildly overconfident as long as he thinks he has a brilliant and perfect scheme, but once he is faced with discrepancies between the clean, broad strokes of his scheme and the messy details and circumstances of reality, he loses faith, particularly when it is a matter of reflecting on his own capacities. As the text suggests, when the seaweed factory fails to work as expected, he becomes 'sick with uncertainty' over the ultimate outcome of the project (p. 873), and it is this uncertainty and fear that incapacitate him. His loss of confidence and the related emotions of disgust, anger, and fear vitiate his reasoning about what to do next, turning a problem posed by a plan into an insurmountable problem for the plan.

Here our reading of Zola's text encounters an insight expressed by John Maynard Keynes when he underscores the importance of the degree of confidence that agents have in their various forecasts. On the one hand, then, are the various forecasts that an agent can make, including the one that the agent deems most likely; but on the other hand, there is the agent's second-order confidence in the forecast itself. Keynes suggests that 'the state of long-term expectation, upon which our decisions are based, does not solely depend, therefore, on the most probable forecast we can make'.[6] It also depends on our degree of confidence in that forecast. In a remarkable passage that deserves to be quoted in the present context, Keynes lays great stress on the rôle of confidence in determining the stability and instability of economic activity:

> [A] large proportion of our positive activities depend on spontaneous optimism rather than on a mathematical expectation, whether moral or hedonistic or economic . . . Enterprise only pretends to itself to be mainly actuated by the statements in its own prospectus, however candid and sincere. Only a little more than an expedition to the South Pole, is it based on an exact calculation of benefits to come. Thus if the animal spirits are dimmed and the spontaneous optimism falters, leaving us to depend on nothing but a mathematical expectation, enterprise will fade and die; – though fears of loss may have a basis no more reasonable than hopes of profit had before.
>
> It is safe to say that enterprise which depends on hopes stretching into the future benefits the community as a whole. But individual initiative will only be adequate when reasonable calculation is supplemented and supported by animal spirits, so that the thought of ultimate loss which often overtakes pioneers, as experience undoubtedly tells us and them, is put aside as a healthy man puts aside the expectation of death.[7]

Although Keynes's reference to an obscure psychology of the

point that the narrative stresses yet another factor, namely, the rôle of the partner in distorting Lazare's thinking: 'It was Boutigny who had terrified Lazare by giving him a disastrous account of the situation' (p. 880). Boutigny claims that he wants to leave the business in order to take up some brilliant position that is supposed to be waiting for him in Algeria; he shows great reluctance to have anything more to do with what he characterizes as a hopeless factory, and confuses Lazare by presenting the firm's accounts in a needlessly complicated way, emphasizing the debts. Lazare simply capitulates, accepting his partner's offer of 5,000 francs in exchange for the ownership of the entire enterprise, with Boutigny agreeing to assume responsibility for the monies owed by the firm. Obviously, Boutigny is aware of Lazare's loss of confidence and actively exploits this weakness; Lazare, on the other hand, seems blithely unaware of Boutigny's character and intentions, thereby failing to take note of the fact that he is in a strategic situation where his interests require him to formulate expectations about the possible strategic actions of the other party. Lazare trusts Boutigny and adopts what he takes to be the partner's vision of the situation, whereas in fact he is simply being duped by someone who has quite a different plan in mind. Thus we may give a provisional label to the 'animal spirit' that plays a decisive rôle in this transaction: Lazare's overconfidence in the other person.

Another look at the other episodes in Lazare's career suggests that a similar relation to other people consistently plays a decisive rôle in his planning. Zola's narrator at no point makes any explicit comment to this effect, and indeed, the explicit theoretical statements proferred by Zola's narrators are consistently misleading and ill-informed. But the narrative none the less includes the relevant information at each step in the story. First of all, Lazare's meta-ambition, his overarching belief that he must be a stupendous success in some domain, is not an idea that has sprung spontaneously from the depths of his own psyche, but is instead clearly the product of the family's mythology: the family lives modestly near a remote fishing village as a result of an unfortunate financial decline, and the only son is expected to engineer a triumphant reversal of their bad fortune: 'they were waiting for the success of their son, who was suppose to free them from their mediocre plight' (p. 822). Intensely dissatisfied with her own position, Lazare's mother dreams that her son will change her life by become a rich

and influential political figure.[8] A forceful and manipulative personality – the narrator refers to her *volontés dominatrices* (p. 821) – she has had years to rehearse this scenario with her son, while the invalid father passively looks on. These years of indoctrination have been successful in so far as Lazare never once doubts that he is destined for some variety of fame and fortune; he has only scorn for more modest (and realistic) schemes. The overarching life theme is in place, then, and only the specific means to that end remain to be filled in: Lazare must choose the domain of activity in which he will demonstrate his brilliance. Here is where one of the young man's other educators introduces an important element: 'At the Lycée in Caen, he had had a violin teacher who, struck by his musical talent, had predicted that he would have a glorious future' (p. 839). Yet this influence is countered by that of his mother, who has no confidence that her scenario is going to be realized in this manner and who regrets that she ever taught her son how to play the piano.[9] She sees her last hopes crumbling, and bitterly opposes Lazare's desire to apply for entrance at the Conservatory in Paris. They quarrel over the issue, and after Lazare's graduation, she gives him until October to abandon his artistic phantasy and choose a serious profession, one worthy of an *honnête homme*. Lazare's cousin Pauline plays a key rôle in breaking the deadlock that summer: 'She ended up by getting him interested in medicine, explaining to him that if she had been born a man, she would find healing people the most exciting thing in the world' (p. 842). Lazare weakly gives in to his mother and cousin.

Although Lazare is initially exalted by his new life among the medical students in the Latin Quarter, during his second year he begins to hate his professors and fails his examinations.[10] It is at this point that Lazare encounters the model who becomes the next decisive influence on his desires – the famous chemist Herbelin, whom the young man eagerly adopts as his 'master'. Medicine is abandoned and chemistry becomes the chosen field. Lazare's first major professional venture is nothing but an attempt to apply one of this master's ideas, and Lazare's mistakes and failures in this scheme result in part from his overly rigid adhesion to the master's plan.

It would seem, then, that Lazare's thinking about different domains and activities is consistently mediated by his relation to particular individuals. Additional evidence of this pattern is

level of the cognition and motivation of the individuals involved. 'Social influence' is not a social or group phenomenon that vitiates Lazare's rationality from without, in some kind of mechanical fashion; nor should his tendency to be influenced by others be understood as something that emerges from a separate compartment within his psyche, a compartment having no contact with the rest of his thinking. Thus it should not be a matter of drawing a sharp contrast between an analysis based on a theory of individual rationality and an analysis based on some sort of a-rational social-psychological symptomology, comprised of unthinking impulses or 'forces'. Nor is it sufficient to contrast two forms of rationality (such as the 'instrumental' versus the 'charismatic' or 'traditional'), thought to stand in a wholly mysterious relation to each other.

Instead, the phenomena that may be associated with the idea of 'social influence' themselves require explanation in terms of the internal functional relations between the individual agent's attitudes. This is the case because the influence or impact that others may have on Lazare is necessarily mediated through Lazare's perceptions of these others' behaviours, as well as through his other various beliefs about them. If Lazare is capable of being influenced by what other agents tell him, it is because he has certain beliefs about these agents and certain desires in relation to them. For example, he initially takes Herbelin to be a genuis who embodies some kind of infallible scientific wisdom, and it is this poorly founded and simplistic belief that shapes Lazare's planning. When the plan falters, Lazare considers that he now has evidence of the falsehood of his former attitude, and the chemist (and along with him, the whole of science) is divested of authority. The difference resides in Lazare's perception of the situation, which shifts from an unreasonable and unfounded inflation of Herbelin's status, to an equally unreasonable and unfounded deflation of all scientific authority. And these shifts have their basis in Lazare's own assumptions and desires, not in the objective truth of the world.

Social influence, then, is not a non-rational process, or one that is detached from the individual agents' practical reasoning and beliefs. Nor is it solely or primarily a source of distortions and irrationality, as is shown by those instances where social influence is a useful part of an agent's rational planning and action. For example, the same narrative that depicts Lazare as a creature led to his ruin by his manner of reacting to others informs us that

Boutigny relies on the expertise of a bright young chemist when he successfully exploits the new method of treating seaweed. Presumably this means that Boutigny thinks that the chemist knows something that he does not know himself; the astute businessman follows the chemist's advice, adopting his ideas concerning which means should be adopted in order to achieve certain ends. Relying on the chemist's authority enhances Boutigny's probability of success in achieving his own goals.[15] Here we see that it would be simplistic to think that Lazare's distortions and irrationalities can be explained by the presence of 'social influence', while Boutigny's efficiency is explained by its absence. After all, it is Lazare who gets Boutigny involved in the seaweed business in the first place.

Lazare's irrationality should be discussed in terms of the incoherent and ineffective forms of reasoning that orient and distort his interactions with others, transforming them consistently into a source of irrationality and failure. The key point, then, is not that Lazare simply engages in no practical reasoning whatsover in his dealings with Boutigny, Pauline, and the others, his behaviour being instead oriented by 'animal spirits' or some other opaque and mysterious causes. Rather, in dealing with these others he consistently engages in a highly inadequate form of practical reasoning, which, far from being a total renunciation of his own beliefs and desires in favour of external influence, is in fact Lazare's habitual manner of trying to advance his own interests. Lazare consistently makes extremely naïve judgements about the motives and capacities of others. More specifically, his thinking involves a tendency to attach far too much weight to what may be called erroneous 'tutelary beliefs'. This means that in making his own plans, he frequently assumes that the information needed is all in the hands of some single authoritative individual and can easily be acquired from that person. Lazare then directly models his own attitudes on what he thinks the authority believes and prefers, for in this manner, Lazare assumes, he will win the desired rewards – which should fall to him the way he receives candy from his mother.

As the example of Boutigny's employment of the chemist suggests, relying on another person's authority is sometimes part of the recipe for rational planning. Yet there are many situations where a mimetic strategy is highly unlikely to be successful, so the rational agent has to be in a position to exercize some reflective control over

the adoption of the beliefs and preferences gleaned from a model. Quite obviously, if the mimetic agent is to be rational, he or she must have some good reasons to believe that the potential model or mediator's beliefs and preferences truly are in some way superior to the policies that the imitator is capable of generating without reference to the model's example. The example of Lazare shows as well that the imitative agent must have good reason to expect that he or she will be capable of successfully imitating the model's practices: some of Lazare's failures result, not from an error in choosing the model, but from his inability to demonstrate the requisite talent in executing the scheme that had been mimetically adopted.

There is another category of situations where the mimetic strategy is unlikely to be successful, namely, those where the imitative agent has no good reason to assume that he or she truly has access to the potential model's desires and beliefs. It may in some cases be wise to base one's decisions and actions on the policy adopted by a more authoritative and accomplished individual, but such wisdom becomes folly when the policy adopted in this manner is in reality only a strategic deception. Thus a mimetic strategy is least likely to succeed in cases where the model is engaged in deceitful behaviour in dealing with the imitator, for the simple reason that the imitator does not have any direct and simple access to what the model really believes and desires. Some of Lazare's major errors take this form, for he copies other people's actions and follows their advice without reflecting on the hidden assumptions and desires that motivate them. For example, Lazare does not really understand what Boutigny believes and wants until it is too late, just as Lazare never understands that his mother's life-long desire is a public recovery of her imagined distinction and superiority, not his own acquisition of autonomy and success. In short, Lazare's error is at times his unawareness of the first premise of all strategic thinking, which Sir Winston Churchill – a man of no small experience in these matters – expressed as follows: 'one should always try to put oneself in the position of what Bismarck called "the Other Man". The more fully and sympathetically a Minister can do this the better are his chances of being right. The more knowledge he possesses of the opposite point of view, the less puzzling it is to know what to do.'[16]

The analysis of Lazare's irrationalities does not terminate here, however, for one may wish to enquire about the origins of the self-defeating habits of reasoning that we have identified in Lazare. How could someone come to have the attitudes and dispositions that lead them to engage in these kinds of unsuccessful and ill-founded forms of mimetic belief and desire? Zola's novel clearly does not provide the kind of detailed evidence that a thorough investigation of this problem would require, yet it does present a few important hints which make possible a rough sketch of an argument along these lines. Briefly, then, our reading of the text suggests that in discussing the possible origins of Lazare's dispositions, it is crucial to study the character of his mother, for this woman is depicted as being largely responsible for creating the environment in which the young man has learned to envision the world, himself, and other people. Madame Chanteau's vision of things is twisted by the discrepancy between her beliefs about her proper place in the social order and the reality of her situation, and this discrepancy is a source of no small bitterness. The discrepancy in question is in part the product of her own imagination, for although she imagines herself to have been a distinguished creature of society who married beneath herself, the narrator identifies her to us as an orphaned school teacher, an '*orpheline de hobereaux ruinés de Cotentin*' (p. 821). She delusively blames her husband for their modest existence, 'wilfully forgetting' her own responsibility in the mismanagement of their resources. She shows herself in the course of the novel to be an unscrupulous, self-serving, and intensely manipulative individual, who wittingly or unwittingly casts a deceptive rhetorical veil over each of the unfair and manipulative actions she adopts in her dealings with others. She conceals her offences behind a smokescreen of accusations, loudly proclaiming that the very people she is exploiting are the aggressive and guilty parties. She cherishes her memory of the days when she supposedly enjoyed a distinguished social position in Caen, and has invested heavily in her phantasy of a dramatic reversal, which she hopes to engineer by manipulating her son's career. Lazare reveres this mother who has nourished him with an incessant stream of propaganda; he takes many of her statements at face value, and seems generally innocent of any knowledge of his mother's strategic and manipulative policies. Unquestionably obeying her exhortations and failing to reflect on the prejudices and interests that orient her actions, Lazare enjoys in return the promise that he will win the