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THE CRITICAL RECEPTION OF ZOLA'S
NOVELS IN THE UNITED STATES

Thesis for the Degree of M. A.
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Harry G. Fitch
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THESIS

THE
CRITICAL RECEPTION
OF
ZOLA'S NOVELS
IN THE
UNITED STATES

by

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CHAPTER I

ZOLA'S METHOD

In Le Roman Expérimental Zola laid down the creed or manifesto of the naturalist school. In it he set forth what he understood by the experimental novel and justified it. As a basis for the work he chose Claude Bernard's Introduction à l'Étude de la Médecine Expérimentale.

Of Bernard's work Zola wrote:

Ce livre, d'un savant dont l'autorité est décisive, va me servir de base solide. Je trouverai là toute la question traitée, et je me bornerai, comme arguments irréfutables, à donner les citations qui seront nécessaire. Ce ne sera donc qu'une compilation de textes; car je compte, sur tous les points, me retrancher derrière Claude Bernard. Le plus souvent, il me suffira de remplacer le mot "médecin" par le mot "romancier", pour rendre ma pensée claire et lui apporter le rigueur d'une vérité scientifique. (1)

As to why he chose Bernard's work as a basis for his own Zola wrote:

Ce qui a déterminé mon choix et l'a arrêté sur l'Introduction, c'est que précisément la médecine, aux yeux d'un grand nombre, est encore un art, comme le roman. Claude Bernard a, toute sa vie, cherché et combattu pour faire entrer la médecine dans une voie scientifique. Nous assistons là aux balbutiements d'une science se dégageant peu à peu de l'empirisme pour se fixer dans la vérité, grâce à la méthode expérimentale. Claude Bernard démontre que cette méthode appliquée dans l'étude des corps bruts, dans la chimie et dans la physique, doit l'être également dans l'étude des corps vivants, en physiologie et en médecine. Je vais tâcher de prouver à mon tour que, si la méthode expérimentale conduit à la connaissance de la vie physique, elle doit conduire aussi à la vie passionnelle et intellectuelle. Ce n'est qu'une

(1) Zola, E., Le Roman Experimental, pp.1-2.

question de degrés dans la même voie, de la chimie à la physiologie, puis de la physiologie à l'anthropologie et à la sociologie. Le roman expérimental est au bout ... Je le répète, ce n'est ici qu'un terrain sur lequel je m'appuie, et le terrain le plus riche en arguments et en preuves de toutes sortes. La médecine expérimentale qui bégaye peut seule nous donner une idée exacte de la littérature expérimentale qui, dans l'oeuf encore, n'en est pas même au bégayement. (2)

Living bodies are as amenable to the employment of experiment as inanimate bodies, the difference being that the inanimate body has only an ordinary external environment, while the animate body is effected by an internal as well as an external environment. There is an absolute determinism in the existing condition of natural phenomena for the living as for the inanimate bodies. Determinism is the cause which determines the appearance of these phenomena. The end of all experimental method, the boundary of all scientific research, is then identical for living and for inanimate bodies. It consists in finding the relations which unite a phenomenon of any kind to its nearest cause, or in other words, in determining the conditions necessary for the manifestation of this phenomenon. Experimental science has no necessity to worry itself about the "why" of things; it simply explains the "how."

There is a clear line of demarcation between observation and experiment. An observer is one who applies the simple process of investigation to the study of phenomena which he does not vary, and which he gathers as nature offers them to him. The experimenter employs

(2) Ibid., pp.2-5.

the process of investigation to vary or modify the natural phenomena and make them appear under conditions in which they are not presented by nature. "Dans la méthode expérimentale, la recherche des faits, c'est-à-dire l'investigation, s'accompagne toujours d'un raisonnement, de sorte que, le plus ordinairement, l'expérimentateur fait une expérience pour contrôler ou vérifier la valeur d'une idée expérimentale. Alors, on peut dire que, dans ce cas, l'expérience est une observation provoquée dans un but de contrôle." (3)

The following passage shows how much observation and experimentation there can be in the naturalistic novel:

L'observateur constate purement et simplement les phénomènes qu'il a sous les yeux. Il doit être le photographe des phénomènes; Son observation doit représenter exactement la nature. Il écoute la nature, et il écrit sous sa dictée. L'expérimentateur est celui qui, en vertu d'une interprétation plus ou moins probable, mais anticipée, des phénomènes observés, institue l'expérience de manière que, dans l'ordre logique des prévisions, elle fournisse un résultat qui serve de contrôle à l'hypothèse ou à l'idée preconçue. Dès le moment où le résultat de l'expérience se manifeste, l'expérimentateur se trouve en face d'une véritable observation qu'il a provoquée, et qu'il faut constater, comme toute observation, sans idée preconçue. L'expérimentateur doit alors disparaître ou plutôt se transformer instantanément en observateur; et ce n'est que après qu'il aura constaté les résultats de l'expérience absolument comme ceux d'une observation ordinaire, et juger si l'hypothèse expérimentale est vérifiée ou infirmée par ces mêmes résultats. (4)

The novelist is equally an observer and an experimenter. The observer in him gives the facts as he has observed them,

(3) Ibid., p.6

(4) Ibid., pp.6-7.

suggests the point of departure, displays the solid earth on which his characters are to tread and the phenomena to develop. Then the experimenter appears and introduces an experiment, that is, he sets his characters going in a certain story so as to show that the succession of facts will be such as the requirements of the determinism of the phenomena under examination call for.

The novelist starts out in search of a truth. As soon as he has chosen his subject he starts from known facts; then he makes his experiment. He places his characters amid certain surroundings in order to exhibit how the complicated machinery of their passions works. Thus there is not only observation but also experiment as the novelist is not satisfied with merely photographing the facts he has collected, but interferes in a direct way to place his characters in certain conditions, and remains the master of these conditions. The problem is to know what a certain passion acting in certain surroundings and under certain circumstances will produce from the point of view of the individual and society. An experimental novel is simply "le procès-verbal" of the experiment that the novelist conducts before the eyes of the public. The whole operation consists in taking the facts in nature, then in studying the mechanism of these facts, acting upon them, by the modification of circumstances and surroundings, without deviating from the laws of nature. Finally, one possesses scientific knowledge of the man in both his individual and social relations.

The naturalistic novel is a real experiment that a novelist makes on man by the help of observation.

To the charge that the naturalistic writer is merely a photographer, Zola writes:

Nous avons beau déclarer que nous acceptons le tempérament, l'expression personnelle, on n'en continue pas moins à nous répondre par des arguments imbéciles sur l'impossibilité d'être strictement vrai, sur le besoin d'arranger les faits pour constituer une oeuvre d'art quelconque. Eh bien! avec l'application de la méthode expérimentale au roman, toute querelle cesse. L'idée d'expérience entraîne avec elle l'idée de modification. Nous partons bien des faits vrais, qui sont notre base indestructible; mais, pour montrer le mécanisme des faits, il faut que nous produisions et que nous dirigions les phénomènes; c'est là notre part d'invention, de génie dans l'oeuvre. Ainsi, sans avoir à recourir aux questions de la forme, du style ... je constate dès maintenant que nous devons modifier la nature, sans sortir de la nature, lorsque nous employons dans nos romans la méthode expérimentale. Si l'on se reporte à cette définition: "L'observation montre, l'expérience instruit", nous pouvons dès maintenant réclamer pour nos livres cette haute leçon de l'expérience. (5)

Instead of confining the novelist within narrow bounds, the experimental method gives full sway to his intelligence as a thinker, and to his genius as a creator. He must see, understand, and invent. Some observed fact makes the idea start up of trying an experiment, of writing a novel, in order to attain to a complete knowledge of the truth. He sets out from doubt to reach positive knowledge; and he will not cease to doubt until the mechanism of the passion, taken to pieces and set up again by him, acts according to the fixed laws of nature.

Science enters into the domain of the novelist who

is the analyzer of man in his individual and social relations. He is continuing by observation and experiment the work of the physiologist. He is making use of scientific psychology to complete scientific physiology. In brief, the novelist should operate on the characters, the passions, on the human and social data, in the same way that the chemist and the physicist operate on inanimate beings, and as the physiologist operates on living things. Determinism dominates everything. It is scientific investigation; it is experimental reasoning which combats the hypotheses of the idealists and which replaces purely imaginary novels by novels of observation and experiment.

Zola considers that the question of heredity has a great influence on the intellectual and passionate manifestations of man. But he adds, "Je donne aussi une importance considérable au milieu." (6) In the study of a family, of a group of living beings, the social condition is of importance. The physiologist explains the mechanism of human thoughts and passions. The phenomena resulting from the mechanism of the organs, acting under the influence of an interior condition, are not produced in isolation or in the bare void. Man is not alone; he lives in society and consequently for novelists this social condition modifies the phenomena. The great study of the novelists is in the reciprocal effect of society on the

(6) Ibid., p.18.

individual, and the individual on society. And this is what constitutes the experimental novel:

... posséder le mécanisme des phénomènes chez l'homme, montrer les rouages des manifestations intellectuelles et sensuelles telles que la physiologie nous les expliquera, sous les influences de l'hérédité et des circonstances ambiantes puis montrer l'homme vivant dans le milieu social qu'il a produit lui-même, qu'il modifie tous les jours, et au sein duquel il éprouve à son tour une transformation continue. (7)

Thus the novelist takes man from the hands of the physiologist solely to solve scientifically the question of how men behave when they are in society.

The novelist employs the experimental method in his study of man as a simple individual and as a social animal. The novelist desires to master certain phenomena of an intellectual and personal order, to be able to direct them. The novelist is an experimental novelist, showing by experiment in what way a passion acts in a certain social condition. Once the novelist gains control of the mechanism of this passion he can treat it and reduce it, or at least, make it as inoffensive as possible. To be the master of good and evil, to regulate life and society, to solve in time all the problems of socialism, to give justice a solid foundation - all this is being among the most useful and moral of workers in the human workshop.

Zola justifies the offensive, cruel, and terrible pictures:

(7) Ibid., p.19.

On n'arrivera jamais à des généralisations vraiment fécondes et lumineuses sur les phénomènes vitaux qu'autant qu'on aura expérimenté soi-même et remué dans l'hôpital, l'amphithéâtre et le laboratoire, le terrain fétide ou palpitant de la vie. S'il fallait donner une comparaison qui exprimât mon sentiment sur la science de la vie, je dirais que c'est un salon superbe, tout resplendissant de lumière, dans lequel on ne peut parvenir qu'en passant par une longue et affreuse cuisine. (8)

The doctor sees how a dislocation of an organism or a disarrangement of the most complex appearance can be traced to a simple initial/cause, which calls forth the most complex effects. "Dans la société comme dans le corps humain, il existe une solidarité qui lie les différents membres, les différentes organes entre eux, de telle sorte que, si une organe se pourrit, beaucoup d'autres sont atteints, et qu'une maladie très complexe se déclare. Dès lors, dans nos romans, lorsque nous expérimentons sur une plaie grave qui empoisonne la société, nous procédons comme le médecin expérimentateur, nous tâchons de trouver le déterminisme simple initial, pour arriver ensuite au déterminisme complexe dont l'action a suivi ... Les romanciers naturalistes sont bien en effet des moralistes expérimentateurs." (9)

On the matter of truth and morality Zola wrote:

Il n'y a ni noblesse, ni dignité, ni beauté, ni moralité, à ne pas savoir, à mentir, à prétendre qu'on est d'autant plus grand qu'on se hausse davantage dans l'erreur et dans la confusion. Les seules oeuvres grandes et morales sont les oeuvres de verité. (10)

(9) Ibid., pp.26-27.

(10) Ibid., p.35.

Naturalism is not a personal fantasy but the intellectual movement of the century. The experimental method recognizes no authority but that of facts and frees itself from personal authority. The experimenter shows his humility in denying personal authority, for he doubts his own knowledge, and he submits the authority of men to that of experiment and the laws which govern nature.

Naturalism is not a school as it is not embodied in the genius of one man, nor in the ravings of a group of men, as was romanticism. It consists simply in the application of the experimental method to the study of nature and of man. It is nothing but a vast movement, a march forward in which everyone is a workman according to his genius. All theories are admitted and the one that carries the most weight is the one which explains the most. Everyone moves freely and recognizes no other authority than that of facts proved by experiment.

The genius of the writer is to be found not only in the feeling and the idea but also in the form and style. Rhetoric, for the moment, has no place in the experimental method. The form of expression depends on the method; language is only one kind of logic and its construction natural and scientific. The excellence of style depends on its logic and clearness rather than a sublime confusion with a trace of madness. Zola's true opinion on the subject of style is this: "On donne aujourd'hui une preponderance exagérée à la form."



Zola finally sums up the whole matter by saying:

Le romancier expérimentateur est donc celui qui accepte les faits prouvés, qui montre dans l'homme et dans la société le mécanisme des phénomènes dont la science est maîtresse, et qui ne fait intervenir son sentiment personnel que dans les phénomènes dont le déterminisme n'est point encore fixé, en tâchant de contrôler le plus qu'il le pourra ce sentiment personnel, cette idée à priori, par l'observation et par l'expérience. (11)

(11) Ibid., p.52.

CHAPTER II

GENERAL CRITICISM

In this chapter I propose to present American critical opinion in general of Zola and his work. In succeeding chapters I will present the attitude of the American critics toward each work individually.

In his Studies in Several Literatures H.T. Peck wrote that Zola has been misunderstood outside of France by those whose judgments are based not entirely on fact. By many he has been condemned as one who sought pornographic notoriety because it promised him pecuniary gain. He has been accused of deliberately striving to secure success by sensational and unworthy means, by pandering to prurience and becoming for pay a sort of literary seneschal to sensuality. In other words these critics would not discriminate between Zola, working out a great, though terrible, conception, and such disciples of commercial lubricity as Adolfe Belot, Paul Ginist, and Octave Mirbeau. (1)

Others would have us see in Zola not a conscious trader in literary nastiness, but an unconscious pervert, essentially neurotic, "a high class degenerate with some peculiarly characteristic stigmata which completely

(1) Peck, H.T., Studies in Several Literatures, p.203.

establish the diagnosis, afflicted with onomatomania and coprolalia." (2)

B.O. Flower writing in the Arena claimed that as a novelist Zola was probably one of the most forceful, vivid, and convincing writers of the nineteenth century. No one possessed the power to make one see in its every detail the scene depicted as he did. The ability to portray life's great crises and turning points with such power and realism is given to few writers. It is doubtful if even Tolstoy exerted a greater influence in favor of the victims of ignorance, injustice, oppression, and superstition than did Zola.

The tremendous potential influence for good is greatly neutralized by "offensive and disgusting naturalism" that mars his works, frequently making them pernicious and unfit for immature minds. In justice to Zola it should be stated that this objectionable feature of his work was not due to prurient imagination born of a depraved, licentious, immoral life. Rather it was a result of that natural and almost inevitable tendency of the reformer to go to extremes. To this tendency was joined a deep-rooted conviction that only by a ste~~ar~~n unflinching determination to see life in all its phases as it actually existed, and to analyze the motives, the influences, the dominant ideals and impulses, the human passions, and the

(2) Ibid., pp.203-204.

power of environment, could society reach the bedrock of truth and so take its bearings that the fundamentals of justice and equity might become supreme. (3)

Most critics admit he was sincere in his convictions and that the gross defects of his writings were not the outpouring of a mind debased by licentiousness. A mind given over to bestiality or even accustomed to wallow in the mire of lust could not have championed for the length of its life the cause of social exiles with such tenacity. Neither would his works have continued to picture in such terrible vividness the truth that the wages of sin is death. Throughout his writings the spirit of retributive justice overtakes in one way or another the doers of evil, or to quote from one critic, "Zola did not write for children, for youths, or maidens. He wrote rather for the man of the world - but to warn him. The retribution that overtakes vice stalks through his works as unpitifully as in the Greek tragedy." (4)

Repulsiveness or offensiveness in Zola's novels was due to his conviction that it was important to tear away the mask that concealed the corruption of contemporary life in all its strata in order that the hideousness of disease might be realized and remedied. Zola came to the front of the literary world at a time when the moral

(3) Flower, B.O., "Emile Zola: the Man and the Novelist", Arena, XXVIII, p.649 (Dec., 1902).
 (4) Ibid., p.650.

enthusiasm of the middle of the century had waned and a brutal indifference to the real conditions of the poor and the oppressed was everywhere manifest. The question was not whether it was good and fundamentally right or just but whether it was good form or popular. Phrases were more considered than the thoughts and ideas they symbolized. The people and the press demanded that only smooth things should be preached. All that was repugnant was covered up. The misery of the slum, the injustice of the courts, the immorality in high and low life were not mentioned as these things might offend and outrage human tastes. Such was the keynote of the age when Zola launched his novels unmasking the wrongs, the injustice, and the corruption of society. (5)

Much of the abuse heaped upon Zola has been due to the thought of the age in which he lived. Many of his works have been essentially immoral and vicious in manner as well as repugnant in their delineations, and yet have received highest praise from the conventional critic. It was undoubtedly far less his naturalism that offended writers and upholders of class interests than his scathing revelation of social crimes, injustice, and the moral lethargy of those who could and should be engaged in the abolition of wrongs and the amelioration of the condition of the victims of society and civilization. (6)

(5) Ibid., p.653.

(6) Ibid., p.654.

In her Spirit of French Letters Miss Smith wrote:

Zola massed naturalistic detail around themes frequently disgusting. His novels have robust problems and he preaches his sermons with a fearlessness that lays color with a trowel and does not hesitate for even the fraction of a second at the nomenclature of a spade. Anyone who attempts a volume must expect a treatment coarse as well as powerful, but the author's purpose is always sane and honest.

While separate volumes (Le Rêve) and individual characters show Zola's ability to appreciate the beautiful and the delicate, his strength both as teacher and author lies in his merciless exposure of the degradation of society. Zola felt that the regeneration would be more rapid if the cause of degeneration were understood. His method was to write the history of different members of a suppositious family, the Rougon-Macquart. Each novel of this series is a unit; all together they make a terrific arraignment of the evils of French society. (7)

H.N. Snyder in the South Atlantic Quarterly stated that accurate observation and fidelity to truth are distinctive marks of Zola's method. Thérèse Raquin, published in 1867, represents his own first mastery of it. There had been naturalists before Zola wrote this gruesome book, those who looked at the bare details of life and endeavored to put them down just as they were. But no one had carried the method to such a "brutal" degree of perfection. "I say 'brutal' for one feels that the writer is heaping up the horrible details of crime and remorse, is handling both the reader and his characters with a pitiless brutality." (8) Nothing is omitted; apparently there

(7) Smith, Mabel S.C., The Spirit of French Letters, pp.342-343.

(8) Snyder, H.N., "Passing of a Great Literary Force", South Atlantic Quarterly, II, 24 (Jan., 1903).

1. The first part of the document is a list of the names of the persons who were present at the meeting.

is no selection beyond the evident purpose of leaving the impression of actual life. All the repellent abominable facts that bring to light the deterioration of moral nature and the collapse of the finer attributes of humanity are revealed with a relentless realism of detail. This portrayal of realism forces upon the reader, even though it outrages his sense of decency, the consciousness that he is in contact with a bit of sinning, suffering life. (9)

In each succeeding novel one is bound to see that the purpose becomes more and more prominent; that the naturalist is evolving into a social reformer. The alcoholism in L'Assommoir, the vice in Nana, the defiling meanness of the bourgeoisie in L'Argent, and the sheer beastliness of the peasant or artisan class in La Terre and La Bête Humaine are of the nature of social indictment. "This social quality of Zola's work ... becomes more and more obvious, generally in a deeper emotional intensity, until in his last novels ... the sickening details of vice, crime, the reeking slime of the moral filth, have in them the burning accusation of the social order, all depicted with the avowed purpose of bringing about change." (10)

Whatever purpose that Zola and his followers had, that thing that permeates their work is its gross

(9) Ibid., p.24.

(10) Ibid., p.25.

materialism. The source lies in the science which was materialistic and from which they professed to get their information.

Most readers, on laying aside one of Zola's novels, can only with effort avoid having a positive loathing for his work. These novels simply represent things as they are, a pitiless unveiling of the beast in man that kills faith in men and women, and in general human progress. This pessimism is further augmented by the almost inevitable moral defeat. Heredity, disease, tradition, the law, and the social order all combine to make the individual seem but a "helpless insect struggling vainly in the net of circumstance, and fated to defeat in a way that makes an Aeschylean drama inspiring reading." (11)

To reveal moral deformity in unashamed hideousness, to give but a few faint hints of higher possibilities, to develop with scientific precision and an inspiring fidelity to details the remorseless grip of heredity and the paralyzing power of surroundings, to take hope and joy and faith out of life - all this is the specific contribution of the naturalistic school to the pessimistic mood which the nineteenth century has been prone to put on. (12)

An editorial in the Literary World commented that newspaper reports of vice and crime labor under the restriction of merely presenting disagreeable facts. Although Zola's novels report the same facts, they present them in their connection, show us their causes in existing

(11) Ibid., p.26.

(12) Ibid., p.27.

institutions, and their effects on men's lives and characters. They thus suggest a remedy and rouse society to apply it. "No one who has read Zola's novels understandingly will ever think of denying this; but I am quite aware that persons do read them, who see no earnest purpose in them, and who carry away from them only what some tourists carry away from Cologne - a sense of bad smell. Such persons, of course, ought not to read them, just as they ought not to read any book that depicts vice without suggesting to them the means of remedy." (13)

One of the chief merits of Zola's books is the presentation of vice in "all its prosaic, dull, heartless, disgusting nakedness. No man has made vice so unlovely, so sickening as Zola has done. If any man can fall in love with vice from Zola's presentation of it, there is no hope for him in this world or the next." (14)

Zola's writings are seriously intended to make us hate vice by realization of its enormity and by pity because of the miseries it entails. Zola's novels might be medicine for the vicious classes, but there is danger that they may fall into the hands of those who might be poisoned by them. If books could be prescribed by authority and taken in doses under regulation like other powerful agents, the dangerous among them could be

(13) "Concord Philosophy and Zola", Literary World, XV, 264 (Aug. 7, 1886).

(14) Ibid.

circulated with far greater safety. (15)

A writer in the Dial claimed that if Zola had died ten years earlier, the verdict of criticism upon his work would have been substantially different from what it actually was at his death in 1902. An article states, "A false theory of art, applied to his material with amazing industry but perverse ingenuity, would have been the formula for the summing up of his remarkable activity, and little could have been urged in behalf of his claims to literary immortality. He would have stood as an awful example of doctrinaire method and of the dangers of excessive photographic realism. That he was a close observer of life could not have been denied, and that the accumulation of unimportant detail characteristic of his work had a certain bludgeon-like power in its assault upon his readers would have been freely admitted, but it would have been difficult to escape the conclusion that all this energy had been essentially misdirected, and that all the mass of the Rougon-Macquart chronicles had little of the penetrating and enduring quality that makes of literature in the true sense one of the most effective forces in the hands of men." (16)

Nearly half of the twenty volumes of the series deal with the most degraded aspects of life and portray the various forms of bestiality and vice. When it came

(15) Ibid.

(16) "Emile Zola," Dial, XXIII, 231 (Oct. 16, 1902).

to the practice of his theory, he was unflinching. The foulness of such books as La Terre and La Bête Humaine gives offense to readers of artistic sensibility. Whether Zola can be acquitted of the charge of having deliberately pandered to the most depraved tastes of his readers is doubtful. It is certain, however, that his great vogue in the 1880's was due in no small part to the most repulsive characteristics of his work. And yet, strangely enough, he could follow up the vilest of his pages with such a revelation of tender beauty as is given in Le Rêve, a book which has no stain of the sensual. His own answer to the charge was that he depicted life as he found it and that he described nothing he had not observed. (17)

The Living Age stated that Zola determined to make naturalism the literary weapon that should compel men and women to see and hear the facts of life around them - not of life as it was assumed to exist, but life as it was. Therefore Zola painted with infinite care in the most voluminous, graphic, and often enough ghastly and revolting detail, French life as he saw it and as he gathered it from evidence. It was a challenge to conventional art and an assault on the existing structure of the social order. He told the world, "These are facts that I am laying before you. I believe them to be absolutely true. They mean social and spiritual death. Whatever you think of

(17) Ibid., p.232.

me or my work matters nothing. What does matter is that it is no longer open to you to say that you know nothing of these things. If in doing what I am doing I break the canons of art and shock the sense of decency in men and women, so much the worse for art and decency. Art can afford to neglect nothing, and decency that is built on deliberate ignorance is valueless."(18) Such was the position which Zola wished the world to take as his. But it is also true that pride of popularity and fortune influenced him to keep on the track he had chosen and to force the note of animalism and the abandonment of decency and reticence. The vast popularity of his books should have been a warning to him as to the way his fictional revelations were being taken by the world. Instead that popularity led him to further degrade the mission he had set for himself.

In spite of our desire to do full justice to Zola, we cannot deny that too often [he] gives the populace what they want, not what they need ... He was widely read, often enough by the wrong people, and he was accused of being the worst example of the class of novelists who obtain readers by appealing to the lowest passions. Thinking men were appalled at the subjects he chose and not unnaturally, and could not wholly accept his answer: 'These things are facts, and can only be abolished by men and women grappling with them. People will not read Blue-books but will read my novels.' (19)

Unreadable as Zola often is, we do not wish to assert that he had no right to point out the baseness of human beings. But even though it is admitted

(18) "Emile Zola", Living Age, CCXXV, 376 (Nov. 8, 1902).

(19) Ibid., p.377.

that he had the right to do so, and whatever his motive may have been, we hold that he was, in fact, turning the drain into the fountain, and that this was not the right way to call attention to the perils of bad drainage. We cannot doubt that Zola's books did a very great deal of harm, - and what is more, more harm than good. The hideous details might have been justified had they been infused with the essential Christian spirit or with the passion of regeneration and human sympathy; but they were not. They move to pity and terror and disgust, but there is not a true solution of the passions aroused. Therefore ... we admit Zola's intention to have been sound and not that of the pornographer. (20)

He was not a gutter novelist. Men saw that in the same way that he had sacrificed his person in the cause of truth, so he had been willing to sacrifice his artistic genius in the cause of truth and social salvation. He was too great an artist not to know that the wearisome compilation of statistics and facts dealing with successive sections of society was in itself not so much an intolerable blot upon his art as a necessary solvent of his work. For if the results he aimed at were attained, the facts he compiled would cease to exist, and the structure of his work would fall away. The passions of humanity, in all their height and depth, are and must be the theme of art forever, but particular aspects of these passions, depicted for the purpose of ameliorating social life, are rather the field in which the social reformer labors than the theme of art. Yet even in the most desperate of the social novels the highest art flashes out again and again with irresistible force. (21)

(20) Ibid., p.378.

(21) Ibid.

The Nation contended that had Zola died ten years before he did, it is no exaggeration to state that his disappearance from the field of literature would have been a source of unfeigned relief to many of the most thoughtful observers of this age. (22)

The early critics of Zola were unrelenting and scathing in their reviews and criticisms. A.H. Fiske wrote, "Critics have had their say about the latest product of that genius of the muck-rake, Emile Zola. Many of them have endeavored to find a justification for his openings of the sewers of human society into the gardens of literature." (23) He displayed great ability in this offensive work of engineering skill and yet people are asked to pardon the foul sights and odors because of the art with which they were presented. Literary workmanship is not to be admired or condemned of itself. It is to be judged by its results, and it is no more to be justified in producing the repulsive or the unwholesome than is a factory whose sole purpose is to create and disseminate bad smells and noxious odors. Such an unsavory establishment might do its work with a great display of skill, but the health authorities would have ample reason for taking steps against its obnoxious business while those who encouraged the introduction of its products into the home would be

(22) Nation, LXXV, 260 (Oct. 2, 1902).

(23) Fiske, A.H., "Profligacy in Fiction", North American Review, CXXXI, 79 (July, 1880).

be guilty of inconceivable folly and would exhibit in addition a morbid liking for filthy exhalations.

Excuse for Zola's work is not found in his literary talent alone. It was said that he laid bare a phase of human life whose existence was actual and a knowledge of which afforded security and suggested remedies for its evils. Those who were likely to make a salutary use of a knowledge of its secrets had no difficulty in obtaining it and there was no reason for bringing its revelations into the circle of the family or the chamber of the school-girl. Surely the life of the fallen among woman was no deep mystery.

The whole descent from gay hilarity and defiance of doom to putridity and despair is a reality of the world's everyday experience. That cannot be denied and the fact is not one to be ignored. But the city sewers and cess-pools are realities too; yet their existence affords no reason for bringing them to the surface of the streets and exploring among their filthy contents in the light of day. It does not justify the introduction of their nastiness and stenches into decent habitations.

These things are real, Zola's delineations of them are not truthful. His work has been called realistic. Those averse to analyzing take it to mean that he portrays life and character just as they are without the color of glamor which fiction is supposed generally to throw over its descriptions. As applied to Zola's work, naturalism

has an entirely different meaning. It means that he drags into literature what others would not touch because of its coarseness of filth. He displays no extraordinary power in depicting scenes of human life, in portraying human character, or in fashioning the feeling or the motives of men. Where one paints a garden of flowers, he depicts a dunghill; where others present to the imagination fields and trees, a mountain, or the charms of home life, he conjures up the prospect behind the stable, the slough at the foot of the drain, and the disgusting bestiality of the slums. This seamy side of things is no more real life than the other and its delineation no more realistic in the sense given to the term. (24)

His drunkards and washer-women were real. It was part of his theory that the ignorance, the poverty, the vice, the crime, and the brutality of their existence were imposed upon them by society. These factors made up a fate for which the better and more fortunate people were responsible. "In the course of generations, out of this compost at the bottom of society, reeking with pollution, sprang this 'golden fly' to carry infection up to the ranks of the rich, the intelligent, and the favored, and the work of vengeance of the slums. The theory has a certain delusive plausibility, but its Nemesis is a creature of the fancy. As poetry, as ingenious fiction, it might pass; but its pretensions to reality are a sham

(24) Ibid., p.80.

and the poor excuse of 'realism' for unveiling the retreats of infamy can not be allowed to the Parisian scavenger." (25)

We unconsciously take on the character of our social surroundings and in the reading of fiction we subject our minds to the influence which its scenes are intended to produce. The imagination works on inner experience whose effects upon tastes and sensibilities are not different from those of the external experience of actual life. It is generally true that the repulsiveness of vice loses its force upon those who come into close contact with it. The man would be labelled a fool who would take his sons or daughters through the purlieus of vice and crime and make them acquainted with the dens of infamy and their inmates on the pretense that what they would see and hear would protect them from the allurements of sin. The result would be to harden their sensibility, destroy delicacy and remove the barrier that keeps the steps of good intent from straying into the paths of peril. It makes no difference whether people are introduced to the retreats of harlotry in actual experience or read of them in vivid pages of the novelist; the result is the same. The mystery is removed and with it goes the vague sense of unknown dangers. The familiarity which the reader acquires of the interior life of this realm of sensuous

(25) Ibid., p.81.

attractions seems to bring him into closer contact with it and make an actual entrance easier. Such a book is certainly not a warning to the unwary regardless of what its effect on the thoughtful may be. It is no preacher of virtue but a guide to debauchery. (26)

On no ground, intellectual or moral, is the publication of this kind of literature to be justified, but it cannot be prevented. Liberty has its penalties and its drawbacks, but it is too precious a boon to be easily placed in the power of official and officious meddlers. Zola's brain is at liberty to produce according to its nature, but the shame is, that thousands of decent people, people claiming the highest respectability and the purest taste, should take the foul brood of his incubation into their homes. To those for whom it has no novelty it is merely a new incitement to sensuality. To those for whom it brings a revelation it is contaminating, and opens to view a phase of life that had much rather remain hidden. And yet such are the freaks of what is called popular taste that this stuff has been tolerated as family reading. It has found its place on the drawing-room table and served to divert the mind of fashionable piety after a Lenten service. Critics have juggled with meaningless words until people have come near forgetting that indecency cannot be changed by phrases nor immorality transformed by a cloak of sophistry. (27)

T.S. Perry remarked that Zola claimed that it was always the loose liver who wrote the proper books, and the man whose life was above reproach made up for it by writing novels that shocked the prudish rake. "Accepting this view as true, we must acknowledge Zola to be a man of more than monastic ascetism." (28) Whatever his private life may have been, his books are more shameless and disgusting than anything in modern literature. Zola should have known

(26) Ibid., p.82.

(27) Ibid., p.83.

(28) Perry, T.S., "Zola's Last Novel", Nation, XLV, 694 (May, 1880).

that he secured his readers by covering the pages of his novels with so complete an array of indecencies that there was almost nothing left for those who came after him. To be sure he had rivals, but they were far from equaling their master. If anyone could have beaten Zola on his own ground we probably would hear very little about the brood of the Rougon-Macquarts. He realized that he made a clean sweep of the gutters and that he left very little or nothing for those who followed. His position was secure and he could be satisfied that he had disgusted more readers than any man living.

Besides Swift, Zola is the only writer of distinction who deliberately devoted himself to the nauseous task of destroying whatever there was tender in human nature. It is not a figure of speech to call his books nauseous, for they really arouse physical repulsion. To close one's eyes deliberately to the redeeming side of human nature, while gloating over its infirmities, is as inexact as it would be to mistake the verses on a gilded valentine for an adequate picture of life. But this was what Zola did. To him men and women were beasts. He chose to devote his powers to recording vicious gossip of a corrupt period. (29)

He had no scorn for what he described; he drew the picture with all its revolting details and let it make its own impression. He was so far from scorn that if he

(29) Ibid., p.695.

only could have got hold of a new lust he would have welcomed it as a chance to study a rare disease. He called his novels physiological novels and boasted that he was striking out in the path that literature should henceforth follow. According to him and many others, science had come into being and literature must adapt itself to the new conditions of things.

Zola may be taken as a specimen of the most advanced type of the pseudo-scientific literary man. Art is to him as obsolete as the notion that the world is flat; what he means to do is to beat the scientific man with his own weapons. For the accomplishment of this purpose, he has composed the history of the depraved Rougon-Macquart family, introducing the last notions on heredity, with pleasing volumes on each separate form of vice, and some promised volumes on the genius of the family. But, on the whole, he makes a poor showing for literature ... In the first place, he exhibits most unscientific inexactness by overlooking ... whatever is honorable in human nature; and in the second place, his grossness, his unfailing prurience, remind one not of those genuine men of science, who examine coldly but thoroughly all the dark shadows of disease, vice, misery, as unattracted by their charm as they are unrepelled by prejudice, - no, we are not reminded of those, but of men who keep what they call anatomical museums, sinks of nastiness, which the police suppress as public nuisances. A scientific man ... who should in season and out of season harp on all the horrors he had discovered would certainly not be honored; why it is better for a literary amn to be perpetually fingering indelicacy it is hard to see. It is this willful preference for depravity that stamps Zola with the mark of vulgarity. (30)

Many other things contributed to make Zola what he was. Since what he saw impressed itself upon his memory, he early conceived a great dislike for the sort of nineteenth century fairyland in which most French novelists

(30) Ibid., pp.695-696.

laid the scenes of their stories. Even though these were as clever as possible they were not true pictures of life. His revolt against romanticism was natural and somewhat commendable. He brushed away the exaggerations and assumed elegance of the romantic writers. Balzac tried to do for the second quarter of the century what Zola did for the time of the Second Empire, but the older writer frequently mingled fantastic visions with the results of his observation. Zola did not write such parodies of life but he was not above making mistakes.

Zola was not without precedent in French literature. In the eighteenth century at a time when most writers were as far removed from direct observation of life as were the writers of the Romantic period, Restif de la Bretonne wrote countless stories which are of great value as documents describing the way people dressed, talked, thought, sinned, repented, in a word, lived at the time. Just as Zola observed life and included in his novels anecdotes from these observations, so Restif used to collect facts for the base of his stories. There is a great likeness between the two writers, who have photographed vice at intervals of a hundred years. Restif knew nothing of the modern scientific treatment of whole families; that is unmistakably Zola's contribution to the delight of readers, but he was one of the very first to record simply what he knew about vice, and his experience was large. He spoke without reserve and maintained that

all his work was in the interest of virtue; but this was one of his wildest delusions. Odious as he was, much that he wrote is invaluable as a chronicle of the eighteenth century. He did for it, only less ostentatiously, what Zola did for the period in which he lived. (31)

Zola did not invent naturalism, for realism, which is the same thing without the indecency, is the main stay of the English novel. Zola differs from the others in being frank where they are accustomed to display reserve. Most writers are intelligent enough to realize that the world is not made up wholly of nastiness, and they avoid or touch lightly upon the subjects in which Zola revels. A number of them would hesitate to traffic on the morbid curiosity of the world about vice. Zola had no such hesitation and laughed at it and called his opponents milksops as if he were the only manly writer alive. (32)

When he writes a novel that is something like the conventional story, such as Une Page d'Amour, he is no better than anyone else; he simply shows himself worthy of nothing but a very second-rate place among a great many skillful writers; he exhibits no marked virtues, nor yet any marked faults; he is simply a mediocre writer of a wearisome kind of novel. He makes up for this in his other books by cramming his pages with scandal, and calls himself the founder of a school. But exaggeration and dullness cannot triumph long, although it is very possible that the ultimate effect of his novels on French fiction may be a good one, by making writers study life instead of fantastic problems and fantastic people. But without doubt the true method will be found a good deal this side of his coarse-

(31) Ibid., p.697.

(32) Ibid., p.698.

ness. That a man, to write transcripts of life, must necessarily be gross will be judged as great an error as to suppose that a man cannot be impressive without profanity. Imagination and decency are two things that will probably survive even Zola's prolonged and repeated attacks. (33)

In the paragraphs that follow I am quoting some of the most critical reviews, most of which were written before his death.

Zola is a literary outlaw. Whether he be moralist or quack, his methods are those which lead to the madhouse. The extracts from Pot-Bouille were bestial; none but a tainted mind could have conceived them...

To bind respectable writers by the laws that are intended to bind Zola is to confine sane men in a strait waistcoat. (34)

Among the modern French novelists of the natural and realistic school, Zola undoubtedly occupies a bad preeminence. He is vicious enough to satisfy the most depraved and the Literary World in a review of La Joie de Vivre justly characterized it as "utterly contemptible and a disgrace to literature, science, and civilization." (35)

Against M. Zola Dr. Buchananan brings the charge often reiterated in the columns of the Literary World that it is not so much his fondness for the pathology of sensualism as his deliberate misrepresentation of humanity, in a word, his unmitigated pessimism, which deforms and sterilizes his art. (36)

There has been a brief and, on the whole, a bloodless battle between the great apostle of the filthy school, Emile Zola, and some of the young gentlemen who had attempted to follow in his train. The fact is that for the past eighteen months the author of L'Assommoir and Nana has become so eccentric and so impossible that even his ardent admirers have found it impossible to follow in his trail. His last novel La Terre in which he undertook to describe the passion of the French emancipated peasant

(33) Ibid., p.699.

(34) "Literary Philosophy", Critic, II, 72-73 (Mar. 11, 1882).

(35) "Paris Revisited", Literary World, XV, 164 (May 17, 1884).

(36) "Dr. Buchananan's Look Round Literature", Literary World, XVIII, 148 (May 14, 1887).

for the acquisition of territory, surpasses in indecency and in generally disgusting features, both Germinal, which was sufficiently nasty, and L'Assommoir. (37)

The author of Pot-Bouille and of La Terre goes out of his way in search of them [relations between the sexes] and of worse. He has a theory of literature according to which the facts of life which are indecent are those with which literature should chiefly concern itself, and should treat them in the most indecent way. They are the famous or infamous human documents. "It is my duty to describe what I see," says Zola, and therefore shuts his eyes to what is lovely and of good report and goes groping and prying into every artificial accumulation of filth he can hear of. Every writer must select. Zola selects what others reject; he is animal, bestial, obscene, by deliberate choice. I suppose he chooses that which is most congenial; perhaps also that which will sell best. And it is to the service of these enormities that he puts gifts as a writer equal to the gifts of all but the greatest of his time. (38)

As an artist his most inveterate trait is his insensibility to beauty; for what he failed to observe is the fact that in spite of his pretensions to science his work is by no means a record of facts at all but a piece of lurid and sinister impressionism. It is as much of a selection of the base, the ignoble, and the hideous. And to this infection of ugliness which corrupts his work he was early disposed.

I cannot imagine anyone, unaffected by the momentary prepossessions and prejudices of our own age, reading Zola for any other motive than one of irrelevant curiosity. To the sociologist so called, to the student of manners, to the historian he may continue to be of some documentary interest, but to the permanent acquisitions of the human spirit, to culture, he has made no lasting contribution. And that Zola himself had come to understand, or at all events to feel, his ultimate failure, notwithstanding the dust he had raised, seems evident enough from the attempt he made to wrench his work into a new direction - an attempt, for all its vigor, at once grotesque and pitiable.

He has had an extraordinary effect, not merely on the literature of his own country, but upon that

(37) King, E., "Zola and His Followers", Critic, XI, 132-133 (Sept. 10, 1887).

(38) "Loti's and Zola's Realism", Critic, XX, 358, (June 25, 1892).

of the whole civilized world. If he were to be judged solely by the extent and immediacy of his influence, he would take an easy pre-eminence as one of the very greatest writers that ever lived. In the space of a single lifetime he has overturned the whole conception of the novel and along with it the entire spiritual habit and temper on which it rested. So unprecedented has been his infectiousness that it stands out as the most striking singularity of his career and crucially significant of his literary career. For it is his willingness to fall in with the tendencies of his generation ... and his readiness to serve as a mouthpiece to whatever was fermenting obscurely in the heart of the time to which his success is due.

... In his eyes insensible to literary values and accustomed to look upon fiction of the older sort as frivolous, the "documentary" character of the new novel would serve as a guarantee of its positive practical worth. At the same time the proposal to study life nakedly and without evasion, at its worst as at its best, was one that appealed irresistably to the new spirit of fearless curiosity and honest investigation which was then prevailing and which, **however** it has been abused and exploited, was and still is a spirit worthy only of commendation in itself. To the professions it should not be forgotten, Zola's style lent a specious creditability - those hard sharp evocations of brutal physical fact like something scratched on flint, those horrid physiological and moral stigmata - in a word, that whole pitiless disembowling of life and the dangling of its **convulsive** viscera before the agonized spectators, which was eminently characteristic of the school and was felt, just in proportion to its crudity, to be real and scientific.

Properly understood his novels have little or none of that personal significance which constitutes the interest of literature. They center not upon an individual but upon some nebulous social complex such as the speculation of the time was already beginning dimly to perceive. In following the lead [of his contemporaries]... he has sacrificed to an immediate vogue the permanent position to which his power might otherwise have entitled him - provided he had the moral sense for it, for that is the very question his novels leave unanswered. (39)

Zola is a romancer of a violent idealistic type masquerading as an implacable realist; a

(39) Frye, P.H., Literary Reviews and Criticism, pp.63-81.

lyric pessimist at the beginning of his literary career, a sonorous optimist at the close, with vague socialistic views as to the perfectibility of the human race. As an artist it is doubtful if he grew after 1880; repetition was his method of methods. "The only way of appealing to the public is by strong writing, powerful creations, and by the number of volumes given to the world."

Certainly Zola gave the world a number of volumes, and if the writing was not always strong ... the subjects were often too strong for polite nostrils. Zola invented more than he observed. He was myopic, not a trained scrutiniser ...

Each book was a painful parturition, not the pain of a stylist like Flaubert, but the Sisyphus-like labor of getting his notes, his facts, his characters marshalled and moving to a conclusion. When the last page of a book was done he began another. He was a workman not a dilettante of letters.

Works of Zola in which coarse themes are treated with indescribable coarseness have sold and continue to sell better than his finer work ... His influence on a younger generation of writers, especially in America, has been baneful, and he has done much with his exuberant, rhapsodical style to further the moon-madness of socialism; of a belief in a coming worldly paradise. Zola may be called one of the best sellers among all authors dead or alive. (40)

Zola ... thinks the more bestiality he describes, the more he is unveiling the hearts of men. It is not necessary to consider Zola a pornographic writer for money-making alone; he seems not to have understood mankind otherwise.

As the years go by Zola's novels, always ponderous, are becoming more and more unreadable. They were the result of diligent note-taking carried to the extent of tediously minute description, and the tenacious quest for filth wearies even the most assiduous seeker after it. Zola's perception of smell, particularly the bad smell or stench, is extraordinary. (41)

His great novels ... have never found a very wide reading in the United States because the subjects are forbidding to a population that takes its pride in a wholesome family life. Acceptable realism among the mass of American readers is not

(40) Huneker, J.G., Ivory Apes and Peacocks, pp.275-287.

(41) Wright, C.H.C., A History of French Literature, pp.765-768.

the work of Zola, but the work of Mr. Howells. The "Silas Laphams" and their like are the American counterparts to the unspeakable family in L'Assommoir and Nana.

While Zola can never be Americanized, Mr. Howells' work will stand in fiction for a long time ... as the best response to the moral demands for literature by a democracy that, having thrown off its Puritanical mood, is yet unwilling to give free scope to suggestion. It prefers morality to tragedy, even at the risks of getting the commonplace. But the realism, the literalism, of both Zola and Mr. Howells perhaps belongs to a literary mood that has passed. (42)

Gohier admitted that it was true that Zola produced much but the quality was not equal to the quantity. The large sale of his works at home and their translation into all the modern tongues was attributed by their author to their literary merit, whereas the real explanation was of a less honorable nature. (43)

Zola's enemies accused him of purposely increasing the number of questionable descriptions and vulgar scenes, of having purposely utilized all that is the worst in human life, of having coined money out of filth.

Zola was honest in his desire to combat the conventionality of the literature of the day, but his sincerity misled him and he went too far. When he had set for himself the task of painting life and society as they really were he feared that he might forget the seamy side. He introduced this when possible into the picture along with the rest. Finally he got into such a state that he saw nothing else. A book filled with filth was the natural result of such a situation. The public eagerly seized

(42) "Why Zola Was Never popular in U.S.", World's Work, V, p.2715 (Nov., 1902).

(43) Gohier, U., "Zola", Independent, LIV, 2391 (Oct. 9, 1902).

upon the filth and Zola always imagined his grand success was due to the beauty of his style and the originality of his characters. But there was neither beauty of style nor originality of character. (44)

Taken altogether Zola's literary work is peculiarly strong. It is an imposing monument which wins admiration if you can overlook details. Notwithstanding the vulgarities and the obscenities, the lack of imagination, and unskillful construction, the wearisome mannerisms and lame style, the work has backbone. (45)

The Nation asserted that his novels in the main are human documents which are dull for us and will be dull for posterity. They have had the misfortune of having been read for their incidental filth and of having been the means of placing Zola in the position of a universal purveyor of the impure. His later novels show a new idealism struggling to express itself in the terms of naturalism. They are imbued with a finer spirit than the author had previously shown. They are still inchoate as art and intemperate as thinking. They show, however, a broad humanity which in the still later volumes often finds grave and noble expression. Yet since Swift there has not been a more notable instance of scorn of human nature accompanied by rare literary talent and complete personal probity. His last work was entitled Vérité (truth). But it is

(44) Ibid., p.2391.

(45) Ibid., p.2392.

doubtful if truth ever takes as her own so stormy a spirit as was Emile's. (46)

Edwin Arnold wrote that Zola's theory of human life was detestable; his choice of subjects repulsive, his treatment of them too often needlessly and aggressively coarse and offensive. He exaggerated the evil in humanity at the expense of the good. His study was a dissecting room where nothing interested his pen except the cadavres and the diseased. In spite of his theory of heredity, it is still true that good is as much inherited as bad and is such a predominating force that nature is continually rooting out and healing evil. (47)

Incurable wards do exist in our hospitals, taints of hereditary insanity do affect the blood, sin, selfishness, and wild, low passions exist among us too widely to be ignored. "I am not one of those who would for one moment deny to M. Zola the right to choose these sombre themes for his extraordinary art. I do not even think his books immoral. If they be immoral in the sense of being mercilessly outspoken, coarse, revolting, and painfully true to our lowest nature, he would still have a right, in my opinion, to paint upon his rough canvas whatever suited him best, so long as he did not for the sake of pruriency or the amusement of the evil-

(46) "Emile Zola", Nation, LXXV, 261 (Oct. 2, 1902).

(47) Arnold, A., "The Best Book of the Year", North American Review, CLIV, 91 (Jan., 1892).

minded." (48)

Madame de Bovary and Mademoiselle de Maupin, the well accepted works of Flaubert and Gautier, could more easily corrupt minds than even "the brutal" La Terre or "the terrible" L'Assommoir of Zola. Some of his books could be considered of a most moral tendency, for example Thérèse Raquin, which could not be read even by the criminally minded man without a shudder at himself and his inclinations. (49)

A writer in the Literary News claimed that although Zola's works were filled with loathsome details, they could never be termed immoral. From first to last he made vice terrible. He saw the brute in man and showed up his brutality. He saw the wrong of society and fearlessly traced to its source, the selfishness and materialism of human beings. The achievement that looms large is the outburst of indignation which aroused a whole world against injustice. (50)

In the Sewanee Review B.W. Wells brought the fact that some critics charged that Zola's books were "shockingly immoral." Nothing is easier for the author who sets out to be pornographic than to succeed in his chosen line. This type of wit, the lowest of all, is more universally understood and appreciated than any other. Such success must satisfy only the lowest of literary ambitions. Zola

(48) Ibid., p.92.

(49) Ibid., p.93.

(50) "Emile Zola", Literary News, XXIII, 338 (Nov., 1902).

is too serious, too much in earnest, to have attributed to him such frivolity. "Zola never wrote a page with pornographic intent." (51)

Zola set out to paint life as he found it. He found a large part of the society he studied under the domination of low motives, chief of which was sexual passion that^{is} expressed more frankly among the lower orders of society. His vision of facts was clear and he set down nothing in malice.

The conversation of the lower classes in his books abounds with words and phrases that are not heard in polite society and which a dictionary will scarcely help define. To the objection that such language was more or less coarse, low, or even blasphemous, Zola answered, "Such men use such language." (52)

The licentiousness of life as depicted in Nana and L'Assommoir was not typical of normal conditions, nor would it have been, for fiction to be a social power must show us not where we stand, but whither we are going, and this it does by showing that men, who must live in the world and need to know its evil as well as its good tendencies, should ponder the story of Nana and the others of the Rougon-Macquarts. (53)

(51) Wells, B.W., "Zola and Literary Naturalism",
Sewanee Review, I, 389 (Agu., 1893).

(52) Ibid., p.390.

(53) Ibid., p.391.

The realism of Zola had its forerunners in Gautier and Balzac. The Goncourts before his time had shown literature how to deal with the lowest social order. Zola proposed to be more true than his predecessors, and by nature he thought to understand not the nature of the reading or educated class, but of the greater mass of the community. To his task he brought a wider and keener observation than any of his contemporaries, but his books are not great because of his photographic accuracy, but because of the poetic idealism with which he infused a naturalism that without this would be as dreary as the subjects of which he treated. He avoided picturing life as it really would be and gave us idealized types in which his genius broke the bounds of theory. (54)

The Bookman stated that by the force of his dominant conception of society's complex mechanism mastering man, Zola brought about a new style of novel, "a bastard realism, where a series of photographic slices of life were worked up to a romantic whole, with a strong sensual flavoring thrown in." (55) His novels are attempts to treat society scientifically, to create a set of drawings of the structure of society. Science is not life and the artist who tries to match his generalized scientific conception of life with its irresponsibilities and wholeness must end

(54) Ibid., p.399.

(55) "Emile Zola", Bookman, X, 427 (Jan., 1900).

by sacrificing one to the other. This is exactly what happened to Zola. As long as he let his impressionistic faculty and his observation keep his conception clear, the freshness and clever vividness of his photographic method gave his work its realistic strength. But the time came when his generalized ideas dominated his senses. Then he began to discover and treat questions such as heredity in Dr. Pascal; and when he descended into the street, notebook in hand, it was with the object of finding life conforming to his theories. At that time the naturalist lost sight of the true atmosphere of life. Paris is not the real Paris but Zola's ideas fitted out with dummies - anarchists, magistrates, Parisians - to carry out his practical propaganda. He became interested in social problems: the Dreyfus affair, depopulation of France, socialism, and so forth. "As for art, it is curious to note that Zola went the way of Tolstoy and Björnson, both of whom put art on one side to aid morality." (56)

There was a time when the appearance of a new Zola novel caused hands to be raised in holy horror. But at the end of the century the public read it without indignation; some read it out of curiosity, some for pleasure, some from mere force of habit. But he had not softened his style in the meantime or changed his methods or shown himself any more harmonious with his theories. He was still the same brutal painter of social disorders

He was still the same brutal painter of social disorders while his realistic novels continued to exhale the aroma of epics. (57)

The Rougon-Macquart family were fictitious personages without any reality except that given them by their creator. He claimed that had observed them and that he only invented their names. But that was an illusion for he took from numberless persons on every hand the traits he ascribed to a character. The Rougon-Macquart series gives much more information concerning Emile Zola than the family he parades. (58)

Occasionally he appeared to interest himself in his characters and suffer with them, but for the most part he did not even remain indifferent to them. He seemed to despise the beings he created, whose shortcomings and infamies he has dwelt on with such irony. This moralist, this ascetic was at the same time a poet, adoring life in its manifestations and in its sources; in this contradiction will be found perhaps the explanation of his taste for the violent or wanton portrayals, so unjustly attributed to low speculative calculation. (59).

Zola was not only inconsistent with his doctrine by hating his characters but also by displaying a tender affection for those in whom the neurosis took a virtuous

(57) Perry, T.S., "Zola as a Moralist", Living Age, CCXXII, 137 (July 15, 1899).

(58) Ibid., p.139.

(59) Ibid., p.141.

turn. Examples of such are rare because he troubled himself very little with respectable people. In some cases he allowed his secret sympathies to be revealed, inconsistently again with his doctrine, which should have inclosed him in an armor of indifference. (60)

Although Zola's works may be attacked at the time of their production at the moment when they are factors of contemporaneous society, they will be judged very differently later when they belong to history. Then only their literary merit will be apparent and no one will comprehend the indignation they aroused during their author's lifetime. (61)

W.D. Howells claimed that because Zola believed with his whole soul that fiction should be the representation of life, and not its misrepresentation, he will live as "dispute, a question, a quarrel, an affair of inextinguishable debate; for the two principles of the human mind, the love of the natural and the love of the unnatural, the real and the unreal, the truthful and the fanciful, are inalienable and indestructible ... His realism was the creed which he tried to make his deed; but before his fight was ended, and almost before he began to forbode it a losing fight, he began to feel and say ... that he was too much a romanticist by birth and tradition to

(60) Ibid., p.142.

(61) Ibid., p.143.

exemplify realism in his work." (62)

Zola's books, though often indecent, are never immoral, but always terribly, most pitilessly moral. They may disgust but they will not deprave; only those already rotten can scent corruption in them. It is possible that these may be deceived by effuvia from within themselves. (63)

Zola was an artist but beyond that he was intensely a moralist. He did not make his books a polemic for one cause or another. When he began to write them they became alive with his sense of what was wrong, false, and bad. His tolerance is for the weak sinners and not for the strong. The ethics of his work always carried over into his life. He did not try to live a life of poverty, privation, or hard labor, but surrounded himself with the graces and luxuries which his honestly earned money enabled him to buy. (64)

"Zola's life work was dominated by anxiety for sincerity and truth, an anxiety inspired by his great feeling of pity and justice." (65) These words justify the performance of Zola where in all respects it could not be justified without them. When the question of immorality has been put aside and the indecency admitted,

(62) Howells, W.D., "Emile Zola", North American Review, CLXXV, 588 (Nov., 1902).

(63) Ibid., p.590.

(64) Ibid., p.592.

(65) Ibid.

the realization remains that anxiety for sincerity and truth, springing from the sense of pity and justice, makes indecency a condition of portraying human nature so that it may look upon its image and be ashamed. (66)

When the moralist works imaginatively he has to ask himself how far he is going in illustration of his thesis. Zola went farther than most, but he did not go so far as the immoralists went in the portrayal of vicious things to allure where he wished to repel. The processes of low motive and high motive are bewilderingly alike and may cause confusion, but there is no reason for confusion in Zola's motive. His methods by no means always reflected his intentions. He believed himself to be working like a scientist, deducing principles from the specimens he has collected. But he was really working like the artist, seizing every suggestion of experience and observation, turning it to the greatest use, building it up into a structure of fiction. He thought he was recording and classifying but he was creating and vivifying. In his scheme every person was so natural that he seemed like a character out of biography rather than fiction. However, in spite of his intentions and his methods, he was essentially imaginative and involuntarily creative. (67)

(66) Ibid.

(67) Ibid., p.595)

H.N. Snyder wrote in the South Atlantic Quarterly:

The success of Zola as a literary man has its imperfections, its phases of defeat, but his success as a humanist is without flaw. He triumphed as wholly and as finally as it has ever been given a man to triumph, and he made France triumph with him. By his hand she added to the laurels she had won in the war of American Independence, in the wars of the Revolution for liberty and equality, in the campaigns for Italian Unity, the imperishable leaf of a national acknowledgement of national error. (68)

It was not only the novels, but in fact everything that came from his pen that was of the nature of a veritable sensation to as large a public perhaps as any other author ever had during his lifetime ... The psychologist read Zola because he thought he saw in his novels a sort of scientific revelation of the human mind under certain abnormal experiences, the social philosopher also took much that he wrote as first-hand sociological studies, the moralist went to him to discover to what loathsome degradation humanity might come, the student of literature, whether he cared for Zola's art or not, recognized in him a leader in a rather widespread literary movement that amounted almost to a revolution, many, no doubt, simply read him for the prurient filth that besmirches much of his work, and all received him as one of the sensations of the hour.

So Zola is a phenomenon in the literature of the last thirty-five years and Zolaism will probably take its place alongside of Byronism and Hugoism as descriptive of a far-reaching movement of literary adjustment, not to say of revolution. And we shall miss widely the meaning of this movement if we limit our conception of Zola to the abounding filth with which, in most cases, he outrages even a callous sort of decency, and accept his work as simply the efforts of one moral pervert appealing to the morally perverse anywhere. To accept Zola, then, as a merely vulgar purveyor of literary nastiness, as the worst representative of a quality popularly supposed to be always at hand in French fiction - the quality of moral uncleanness - is not to understand the real and vital significance of Zolaism. (69)

(68) Ibid., p.596.

(69) Snyder, H.N., "Passing of a Great Literary Force", South Atlantic Quarterly, II, 23 (Jan., 1903).

The Literary News ventured:

After much thought we risk the opinion that time will place Zola, not only among the great men of his day, but among the great authors of all time. (70)

(70) "Emile Zola", Literary News, XXIII, 339 (Nov., 1902).

CHAPTER III

THE EARLY NOVELS

Thérèse Raquin and Madeleine Féral were Zola's first novels of importance, and in these he was well along the road to naturalism.

Thérèse Raquin is a bourgeois nightmare, impeccably respectable in its morality, ludicrous in its insistence on gruesome details ... at the same time it is a kind of operation or experiment on conscience, performed with more or less logic and certainly with thoroughness, and decked out with pseudo-scientific trimmings. (1)

The horrors of Madeleine Féral are even more scientific. Zola is here playing with the physiological laws that govern character and is consciously making use of the vocabulary of determinism. The Nation in a review says:

It is long, the logic of it close, and the plot unusually compact for Zola. The last, however, only emphasizes his lack in the specially French quality of form. The ingenuity of construction which makes the typical French novel read like a play is replaced in him by a subtle study of occult and inherited causes, and one is never quite sure whether to place them in the category of pathology or that of art (2)

The Literary World is not so favorable.

The hideous wench depicted on the paper cover of Madeleine Féral is enough to make every right-minded reader turn away from the book with a shudder. But it must be admitted that the picture does injustice

(1) Muller, H.J., Modern Fiction, p.168.

(2) Nation, XXI, 382 (Nov. 25, 1880).

to the amiable and refined young woman whose misfortunes are recounted within and who was more sinned against than sinning ... Here is a character for Sara Bernhardt. Zola has certainly supplied the tragedy. (3)

Le Confession de Claude, the third novel of this early group, was not so well received. It was mentioned in the Critic and the Literary World. Of it the Critic remarks:

To a critic ignorant of the sale of Zola's novels, it would seem incredible that it should be necessary to spend time in denouncing them. It is quite as hard to understand that anyone should enjoy reading them as that anyone should be willing to write and publish them. As it is, the critic satisfies his conscience for the most cursory glance over Les Confessions de Claude - which appears to be hopelessly dull as well as immoral - with the reflection that it will be enough, for the initiated, to quote the publisher's announcement of the Confessions as an "analysis of human feeling and human errors such as Zola alone can produce," and for the uninitiated, to quote another announcement that the heroes and heroines "play parts in a dark drama of blasted youth and dissipation truly Parisian in all its characteristics." (4)

In [this novel] Zola is said to have revealed the story of his early life ... Its crudeness is nowhere relieved by imaginative beauty, and is only at times overwrought into sentimentalism of the hysterical order. This young Provençal (Zola) is a victim of feverish aspiration, not of genius. The analysis of character, which was meant to be profound, is simply a painting of surfaces: certain people looked thus and so, they felt and acted in such a manner - that is all. There is no natural development of motive from circumstance to deed ... There is, strictly speaking, no plot; and the death of Marie ... is a piece of sheer brutality. It may all be true, but it is not art; the mission of art is to please, to elevate the mind by appealing to the emotions on the noble side. Zola succeeds

(3) Literary World, XI, 395 (Nov. 6, 1880).

(4) Critic, II, 364-365 (Dec. 30, 1882).

only in arousing disgust. The interest felt in his work must be that of a man of science watching with abhorrent fascination some hideous larva crawling in the filth of the dung-hill. (5)

From these beginnings it was but a short step to the twenty volumes and twelve hundred guinea pigs of Les Rougon-Macquarts. (6)

(5) Literary World, XIII, 40 (Nov. 18, 1882).

(6) Muller, H.J., op. cit., p.169.

CHAPTER IV

LES ROUGON-MACQUARTS

What a picture these twenty books furnish of French life in the middle of the nineteenth century!. Here are the church, the state, the farm, the market, the mine, the real estate speculator, the merchant, prince, the artist, the politician, the courtesan, the dram-seller and his victims, the railroad, the banking-house, and the army. The final volume sums up the whole from the point of view of the truly scientific physician. We may securely say that no period of the world's history has been more minutely and vividly recorded than the French life of this area in this series of novels. (1)

Zola explained the purpose of the Rougon-Macquart series as follows:

I desire to explain how a single family, a little group of human beings, comes into relations with society at large, as it increases by begetting and giving birth to ten or twenty individuals who though at first sight they seem quite dissimilar when analyzed reveal how intently they are bound together, since heredity has laws as well as mathematics. The members of the family Rougon-Macquart, the one group that it is my purpose to depict, have as a family trait the gnawing lust, the appetite that leaps to its gratification. Historically they are a part of the people; they make themselves felt by contemporary society; they rise to see spheres of life by that characteristically modern impulse which the lower classes feel; and thus they explain the Second Empire by their individual histories. (2)

This huge undertaking compares in magnitude only with La Comedie Humaine. It was thought out in its

(1) Bardeen, C.W., "Zola's Rougon-Macquart Family", Overland Monthly, XVI, 414 (Oct., 1890).

(2) Peck, H.T., Studies in Several Literatures, p.211.

general plan almost from the beginning. The imaginary genealogy of the whole series was devised with the inception of the first volume. Zola's purpose was to do for the Second Empire what Balzac had done for the Restoration Period - to write the natural history of French society in all its phases and developments. Zola's undertaking embodied the idea of La Comedie Humaine but with all the differences that a half century could make. Zola had become imbued with the scientific spirit and did his work in an age that had created the science of sociology and that had come to understand something of the workings of heredity. The sombre genius of Zola did not humor its composition. This fact alone made a "human tragedy" out of what might otherwise have been another sort of "human comedy." In his eagerness to present types he frequently forgot to make them human beings as well. The aim of his work throughout is not so much the creation of individual characters as it is the presentation of situations and tendencies and the struggle of contending forces. At its best his purpose led him to heights of epic grandeur, but he achieved his most impressive effects at the expense of that individual characterization which the artistic novelist should never permit to escape from his view. (3)

(3) "Emile Zola", Dial, XXIII, 233 (Oct. 16, 1902).

The twenty novels of the series are of uneven excellence. (4) Some, like L'Assommoir and La Débâcle, were written with verve and gusto; others, like L'Argent, were turned out wearily and mechanically, simply to complete his unwavering design.. Similarly they vary in mood according to the kind of flower or weed in the garden of the two families that he happened to be cultivating; he ranges from the drabness of Pot-Bouille and the brutality of La Terre to the sheer fantasy of Le Rêve. Yet in all they fit into the same plan and all are unmistakably by the same pen. (5)

As their excellence varied, so did their fortunes. The earlier novels attracted no more than a moderate degree of attention. With the publication of L'Assommoir Zola burst into the full light of notoriety and of at least qualified fame. The volumes that have received the most praise in addition to L'Assommoir are Germinal, La Débâcle, Le Rêve, La Faute de l'Abbé Mouret. Among the comparative failures may be mentioned Le Ventre de Paris, Pot-Bouille, L'Argent, La Conquête de Plassans, and Dr. Pascal. (6)

When his story is drab it is sensationally drab; when his people are low, they stop short only at growing horns and tails. Zola claimed to have always exaggerated

(4) Ibid., p.232.

(5) Ibid., p.234.

(6) Ibid., p.232.

in the direction of truth, but the aspects of experience he chose to emphasize are ordinarily not only the vilest but the least significant. This was partly the fault of his creed, but it was also due to the violent opposition of his public. Zola plainly had a fondness for ugliness and evil and a driving instinct to exploit them. His best pages are typically his blackest. Hence his novels teem with misery, violence, brutality, idiocy, and ineffable squalor. Although he himself sickened of this bloody carnival, conscientiously following a particularly gross with a more or less idealistic novel, these works of penitence were almost without exception his feeblest, with little of the vividness or vigor of Le Ventre de Paris, L'Assommoir, Nana, Germinal, La Terre, La Débâcle. (7)

Its critics have reason for describing Les Rougon-Macquart as an epic of animality. Although Zola was by no means blind to the loftier aspirations, he in effect minimized the very important differences between men that are the source of our values and ideals. And in so far as he immersed himself in essentially paltry materials, his work is wanting in spiritual significance, especially for the contemporary reader who takes for granted the privileges for which he so bravely fought. (8)

(7) Muller, H.J., Modern Fiction, p.173.

(8) Ibid.

Many critics and readers see only the man of pseud-science, the man with the notebook, the man who delighted in forcing "raw, bleeding chunks of animal life down the public throat." Those who can digest the chunks should find that Les Rougon-Macquart is conceived and executed in grand style, and is genuinely epical in more than size. The coldly objective manner finally gives somehow the impression of towering passion; the undistinguished style culminates in an effect of headlong eloquence. In the best works all the manifold crudities are drowned in a resistless flood that sweeps us into a vividly imagined world - a world that is definitely idealized if it is not strictly ideal. The least that can be said of him was spoken at his funeral. "Everything of him was disputed, save that he was excessive and colossal." (9)

Regarding the longevity of Zola's works H.T. Peck wrote:

Some of the timid, twittering literary scribblers have sapiently asked of late whether Zola's works will live. The question is the acme of fatuity. That all he wrote will live, in the sense that it will be generally read, is, of course, untrue. Zola was a very prolific writer, and his successes were surpassed in number by his failures. Not all the Rougon-Macquart series will stand the test of time. L'Argent, Germinal, and La Terre will always find some readers among the discriminating, though not belonging to the imperishable literature of the world. Out of the whole mass of Zola's works there loom up three colossal masterpieces, so wonderful, so overwhelming in the evidence of genius which they afford, and so impossible to

(9) Ibid., p.175.

forget as to be assured of an unquestioned immortality. (10)

These three^{are} L'Assommoir, Nana, and La Débâcle.

They are linked so closely in their purpose and development of one idea as to form a trilogy from which no one member can be removed. They are the enduring residuum of the whole series. They exhibit an unbroken sequence and work out with all the precision and pureness of a scientific demonstration the thesis which was in the writer's mind. In L'Assommoir, he deals with individuals; in Nana, with society; in La Débâcle, with an entire nation. In L'Assommoir the influences of evil and uncleanness work amidst the haunts and hovels of the poor. In Nana the poison eats its way like a cancer and spreads into the homes of society. In La Débâcle a great nation is infected with a foul disease and struck to earth because of the rottenness that has eaten out its manhood and destroyed its strength. (11)

But are the works in the series wholesome reading? Zola is known as a realist. According to his theory there is nothing that cannot be described in literature, and whatever is described at all should be described just as it is, as vividly and exactly as possible. This accounts for the admission of many scenes that most writers and readers consider improper. In place of veiled allusion

(10) Peck, H.T., op. cit., p.213.

(11) Ibid., p.214.

and innuendo he used plain and direct language and spoke with brutal openness.

This is often startling and disagreeable. In an advancing civilization the more the functions of the body are respected, the more they disappear from common observation and become individually private. (12)

It must be admitted that there is certainly freedom in his pages, but it is seldom carried over into licentiousness. He has as little reticence as an anatomical atlas; he is also as scientific. There is not a licentious page in his work. He described sin but had no sympathy with it. Not a single scene is so depicted that the reader might wish that he were a participant in it. He was a pure man in his private life and personally detested and despised sensual indulgences. When he described vice, he described it as a physician would describe the manifestations of a certain disease. Such passages are blots, artistic blemishes. But beneath this fungus there is a vigorous oak, and only an eye in search of it will be fixed on the fungus. Certainly the oak is masterly. "A keen analyst, a luxuriant word painter, Zola is above all a conscientious artist. He believes in his work; he has wrought into it his life and heart and soul; and with all its blemishes I believe he has accomplished the greatest literary achievement

(12) Bardeen, C.W., op. cit., p.418

of the younger men of this generation." (13)

That he adhered with remarkable consistency to the plan for the Rougon-Macquart series in the larger number of the volumes of the series is a tribute to his self-effacement as a scientist; a tribute to Zola the artist lies in the addition of something of his own near the end of the series. But his claim for a large place in nineteenth century thought rests on these last volumes. (14)

La Fortune des Rougons

The Literary World was not enthusiastic about this novel when it first appeared. It was tedious and pointless except for the political bearing that it might have. "It is a sort of historic chronicle of the time of the Coup d'Etat. The Rougon-Macquart set are either vulgar or stupid, and their troubles, partly domestic and partly political, fail to enlist our sympathies. There is an incoherence and irregularity in the plan of the story and the romance of it is subordinate. As a whole the book is worth nobody's reading." (15)

A review of the English translation three years later echoes this viewpoint. It is classed as one of the best of the "interminable" series of novels, "if one can be called best where all are bad." There is no

(13) Ibid., p.422.

(14) Buck, P.M., The World's Great Age, pp.288-289.

(15) Literary World, X, 294 (Sept. 13, 1879).

deliberate dabbling in filth; the studies of Provencal life are dull but effective. ~~Themes~~ of natural beauty would have been treated by a genuine artist in a different and better way. The brightest colors when transferred to Zola's canvas take on a dimmer hue; "the most delicate sentiments in his hands become more or less soiled and threadbare.. It is impossible to interest oneself in these prosaic histories of domestic broils and disreputable alliances in which Zola's unsteady imagination delights to revel." Of themselves they are of no more importance than many other unpleasant things which cultured people ignore. It is difficult to discover the value of his so-called studies as he does not evolve any higher meaning from them. We do know that crime begets crime. If the mission of fiction in the future is to teach us no more than this, Zola may well be styled its master.. (16)

La Curée

La Curée evidently did not enjoy much popularity in this country. The Literary World voiced its opinion in no uncertain terms:

La Curée is a hunting term, and means that unsavory portion of an animal which, when the chase is over and the poor beast butchered, is given to the eager hounds. But Zola's novels do not depend upon the fascination of a name, and the enterprise of his American publishers in rechristening his productions adds nothing to their interest and takes nothing from their offensiveness. If the title of Zola's last were to read In the Cesspool, it would more accurately define the character of the work, and would have at least the merit of consistency,

(16) Literary World, XIII, 373 (Nov. 4, 1882)..

which the author has shown in the choice and treatment of his material. The descent to bestiality is complete. There is scarcely a redeeming character in the book. The plot turns upon the most shameless series of incidents ever gathered into a book of fiction. And Zola puts this forth as a study of manners under the Second Empire; as if carrion did not exist in every age or epoch, and could be taken as the index of any particular social condition! The story is vile with an indescribable vileness (17)

Le Ventre de Paris

The Nation commented favorably on this novel. It is the "most successful and the subtlest study he has made of those colorless characters which offer few or no salient points to most students of life, but whose delineation always tasks the highest powers of the novelist of the first class." Like the rest of his books it shows his ability to devote his theorizing to an acute and dispassionate study of life and character when he is at his best. (18)

The book is not notably moral or high-toned; it has no high purpose; it does not inspire to noble living; nor does it teach any great truth. It is artistic, but only in the sense that any careful study and realistic copy of nature or life is artistic. It is in literature what the school of Dutch realists is in painting. A photograph could not give a more literal picture of the markets than does Zola. The real artist portrays life,

(17) Literary World, XIV, 39-40 (Feb. 10, 1883).

(18) Nation, XXIX, 443 (Dec. 25, 1879)..

not merely its costume; life in any profound sense is not found in this novel. Hugo gave realistic pictures of Paris, but he created a Jean Valjean. It is vain to look for such a creation here.

Here are amours but no love; cabaret discussion of politics, but no patriotism; childish visions of revolution, but no intelligent love of liberty; one abbé, but no religion. The vice even has no fascination in it, the wickedness is without romance; it is low, sordid, stupid, vulgar. There is magnificent scene-painting, but no drama; perfect wardrobes, but no hero and no heroism. And this is very far from the perfection of art. (19)

Le Ventre de Paris is "bizarre, Rabelaisian, an Iliad of modern city life, a poem of plenty and of hunger, animality and idealism." A grotesque and baroque book, it has remained the most perfectly characteristic of Zola's early career. (20)

La Conquête de Plassans

La Conquête de Plassans is much more deft and elaborate as a constructive piece of work than Le Ventre de Paris. Here as elsewhere with Zola the pleasure to be derived is gratification at the solution of a problem or at least the adequate presentation of a problem. "The character study here, however, though highly refined, is subordinated to the exigencies of a plot with reasonable rigor. (21)

Admirers of Zola claim that Zola is one of the most moral of French novelists in spite of the people among whom he takes his readers. "He makes us perceive smell of vice, not of perfume ... There is not one of his books,

(19) Literary World, X, 359 (Nov. 8, 1879).

(20) Ibid., p.360.

(21) Nation, XXIX, 443 (Dec. 25, 1879).

not even the crudest, that does not leave in the soul ... aversion or scorn for the base passions of which he treats." This is true of La Conquête of Plassans. The motive is clear and "is executed with more firmness, directness, and clearness than in other works of his ... The whole atmosphere of the piece is sombre and forbidding; there is nothing pleasant in its situations; the denouement is direfully tragic; and we cannot think that the specific utility of the book is an offset to its general unwholesomeness." (22)

La Faute de l'Abbé Mouret

The Literary World said that La Faute de l'Abbé Mouret was as unlike some of the earlier novels as a bed of roses is unlike the gutter. "The conflicts which the soul may undergo have seldom been depicted with greater intensity and exuberance of imagination ... The power in this original and striking tale is not to be denied, but it is far from being of a wholesome kind." (23)

Son Excellence Eugène Rougon

The Literary World exhibited a more friendly attitude toward this work than it had to any of Zola's earlier volumes. "... the story is outwardly decent, if not inwardly pure. The author is still wading in the gutter, but it is a gutter which runs around a palace, and the

(22) Literary World, X, 326 (Oct. 11, 1879).

(23) Ibid., p.202.

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sewage of the court is, to say the least, scented ... We will say this for Zola, that in this book he has managed to be as little offensive as it would be possible to be in dealing with such a subject. The whole purpose is to show up the corruption, political and social, of the Napoleonic regime; and it does it with a masterly hand." (24)

The Nation compares Zola and Gaboriau, stating that their work belongs to what George Sand called "the literature of the mysteries of iniquity." The function of the former is to exploit the romantic possibilities of such mysteries, and that of the latter to show their vulgar and inane reality. The latter is part of Zola's profession and he has rarely had fewer relapses into the art of the romancer than in Son Excellence Eugène Rougon. "The book contains some of his best work; the study of each incident is exhaustive, and at times subtle enough to show a different phase to, and awaken a different judgment in, different minds - an effect justly to be called artistic and thoroughly antagonistic to his most impressive 'naturalism'." In other respects it is a failure. The transitions are abrupt, there is juxtaposition without continuity, and the author struggles with his masses of material with evident effort and apparently

(24) Literary World, XI, 295 (Aug. 28, 1880).

divided purpose. (25)

The Outlook reviewed a translation made in 1897 and remarked:

... the book ... is not the most unsavory of Zola's novels. It is almost an exception to these novels, as it deals with characters whose rank in society is higher than that of the Nana variety. As a work of art it is not one of Zola's greatest achievements; it often lacks a dramatic unity. As a historical novel, however, it deserves to take prominent rank. The picture of the Second Empire is more realistic and rather more revolting than in M. Daudet's Nabab. (26)

The Literary News voiced the same opinion. "Zola's fondness for chronicling the weaknesses of mankind qualifies him in an eminent degree for the investigation of the secret history of the second empire. Viewed as history of some phases of French politics, it is satisfactory ... The tone of the dramatis personae and their talk is not high, but there is little that is gross except occasional episodes." (27) "It is a terrible showing of an age so recent that it has barely passed into history, and the most terrible thing about it is the relentless accuracy with which Zola has depicted it. It is an arraignment with every detail and statement verified beforehand beyond the power of denial." (28)

L'Assommoir

L'Assommoir was the first of Zola's novels to

(25) Nation, XXXI, 176 (Sept. 2, 1880).

(26) Outlook, LVI, 702 (July 17, 1897).

(27) Literary News, XVIII, 290-291 (Oct., 1897).

(28) Literary World, XXVIII, 239 (July 24, 1897).

attract widespread attention in the United States. The time was inauspicious for the pronounced and somewhat brutal realism of Zola, and the reception accorded it was decidedly unfavorable. The Nation said:

Zola belongs to the realistic school and his new work, L'Assommoir, pretends to be a photograph of the manners of the Parisian population of the Faubourgs. The story, as a story, is very simple but I feel embarrassed to tell it in its simplicity - it is so revolting ... I have not much sympathy for what is called popular literature, but this specimen exceeds anything of the kind I have ever read ... The wildest and coarsest imagination could hardly conceive some of its characters and scenes ... The absence of contrasts, in my opinion, accounts for the weakness of this novel ... I have quit this novel as I would a dissecting room ... it left me with an impression of anger and disgust. (29)

The English translation issued in 1879 was reviewed in Harper's Magazine. The reviewer declared:

Of Zola's L'Assommoir, the less said the better. A revelation of some of the most revolting phases of low Parisian life, its atmosphere is loaded with moral contagion. Its impure pictures may be life-like, but so would be the reproduction of cancerous sore or of a scrofulous ulcer. We would as soon introduce the smallpox into our homes as permit this unclean volume to come in contact with the pure-minded maidens and ingenuous youth who form their chiefest ornament. (30)

The Atlantic Monthly described Zola as a writer who deliberately blackened everything he laid his hands on. "Those who like this sort of writing call it powerful, but yet it is not a matter of congratulation that a man writes a novel which shows its power by an excess of

(29) Nation, XXIV, 160-162 (Mar., 15, 1877).

(30) Harper's Magazine, LIX, 309 (July, 1879).

unsavoriness." The book demands attention on account of its "shameless assault upon every principle of literature which distinguishes a novel as a work of art from a criminal indictment to say nothing of the outrages on decency of which the book is guilty. His own style is not attractive and when any of the characters speak they use ... the choicest argot which Zola puts down without the use of the dash - perhaps considering that it would injure the appearance of the page."

He lets no chance pass of describing the coarseness of the events of the novel. He not only lets it run on from the beginning to the end without one redeeming ray of virtue ... but he goes out of the way to drag in atrocities by the hair of the head so that his reader gets dizzy with the mephitic air this corruption breeds. When he tries his hand at it this author can regale the public with choice improprieties, but in this story, painful and shocking as many of the incidents are, it is not their impropriety so much as the coarse indelicacy of the writer that is odious. (31)

Zola's naturalism has been defined as an "attempt to reach the beast in man." Zola finds the beast without fail and does not spare us a single detail of its bestiality. The purpose of his frankness is to make us see the muck-heaps on which society has built in order that he may prepare us for a demonstration of the logical result. (32)

A writer in Lippincott's Magazine, in spite of the fact that L'Assommoir had been styled a depository of

(31) Atlantic Monthly, XXXIX, 761-763 (June, 1877).

(32) Peck, H.T., op. cit., p.217.

vulgarity and therefore a dangerous book, said that it was too realistic to be dangerous.

There is absolutely nothing attractive in Zola's delineation of vice in glowing colors. In this respect it differs from the production of many other novelists who have handled similar subjects. The really dangerous books are those that throw a charm around vice, not those that make it repulsive. The tendency of L'Assommoir is to repulse by making vice hideous and showing its consequences ... Zola has diagnosed correctly the diseased condition of certain classes of society, and pointed out the true causes of their degradation. But he does not pose as a physician. The applying of the proper remedies he leaves to the philanthropist, the statesman, and the church. (33)

The Nation condemned it on this ground: it offers "stimulus and means to the wicked; but neither help or suggestion of anything better as possible." (34) The Literary World "did not advise anyone to read L'Assommoir," (35) but it was being read widely in spite of vigorous criticism. (36)

Une Page d'Amour

Une Page d'Amour drew little attention from the American critics. In France it had been greeted only mildly. Some enemies instead of being astonished at the book's "sweetness" intimated that "the bear was losing his claws." The book is an example of the manner in which he could follow up a vile work with something far removed from the gutter. The Dial claimed that

(33) Lippincott's Magazine, LXII, 122-124 (July, 1898).

(34) Nation, XXIX, 213, (Sept. 25, 1879).

(35) Literary World, X, 202 (June 21, 1879).

(36) Atlantic Monthly, XLV, 571 (April, 1880).

this romance, Une Page d'Amour, showed Zola at his best, "or at any rate at his cleanliest and highest; it proves pretty conclusively that his realism can cut below the surface and is not ... confined to outward and visible things." (37) The Literary Review said that his greatness had never been more apparent than in this "remarkable, tragic, and simple love story. The book is sad - a tragedy of sin and suffering and repentance but all touched with so much poetry and so much power that we must acknowledge that the writer's greatness is of a kind that makes him able to take the simplest possible subject and turn it into a work of art." (38)

Nana

The appearance of Nana in 1880 in America aroused much unfavorable criticism. According to the Literary World it is a "sequel to L'Assommoir and is a book of very much the same kind. We cannot see the use of writing such books or the profit in reading them. A study of a ... woman of the town, however realistic it may be, is hardly to be recommended for general perusal ... " (39) The Critic remarked:

One cannot help suspect that even the situations in which temptation is resisted have been worked up less to chronicle the resistance than to describe the temptation. We wish to give Zola his due and there is certainly only one thing to be said in his favor: he never for a moment makes vice attractive

(37) Dial, XIX, 338-339 (Dec. 1, 1895).

(38) Literary Review, XXVI, 385-386 (Nov. 16, 1895).

(39) Literary World, XI, 58-59 (Feb. 14, 1880)..

Zola depicts horrible things in a horrible light, and will be likely to affect only imaginations and natures which are themselves horrible ... So fearful is the picture which he draws of such consequences ... and so fraught with dissatisfaction does he invariably depict even the short-lived triumphs of one who is a slave to temptation, that we can conceive of a serious-minded person debating whether he would put one of these books into the hands of the tempted. (40).

The Nation calls it Zola's worst book. The impression that it leaves is unreal and amateurish. It fails in verisimilitude. (41) Two months later this same period-said:

The conclusion to be drawn from most of Zola's books is that the devil is far blacker than he is painted, and it is gratifying to find him so overdoing the matter in Nana as to convince even the wayfarer that not even the devil can be of the unrelieved blackness with which he is there endued ... Zola has never considered the action of vicious forces on life, but always employed his acute observation in the vivid depiction of details that give a great air of reality to his works ... Here, however, the details themselves are so monotonous and so clumsily managed as to weaken rather than enforce the truth of what may fairly be called the argument. The one admirable thing about the book is the shallowness of Nana. Everything else is, to reverse the ordinary phrase, too bad to be true; or at least is so set forth as to leave an entirely false impression ... Nana, in fine, is not worth reading, but everyone who has been irritated by the extent to which the theory of "le naturalisme" has been carried will rejoice that it was written; it is a blow from which the cult of Zola will hardly recover. (42).

Mr. T.S. Perry, writing in the Atlantic Monthly, was severely condemnatory, saying that "if Zola had ever show a decorous fear of criticism, one would be tempted

(40) Critic, I, 189 (July 16, 1881).

(41) Nation, XXX, 141 (Feb. 19, 1880).

(42) Ibid., pp.311-312.

to think that he had written his famous, his infamous, Nana with the design of giving his readers and the world so distasteful a book that no right-minded critic could even mention it without being unclean ... " (43)

The aim of Nana is to portray the immoralities of the second empire, when according to Zola, sin was brought into the world, and consequently the time is set at the period of the French Exposition of 1867. What the air of the book is there can be no doubt. A book more redolent of corruption it would be difficult to find; it reeks with every kind of beastly sin. The hideous mien of vice, too, was never better photographed - for Zola's art is more like photography than any of the other methods of copying scenes. (44)

Pot-Bouille

Reviewers were not gentle in their criticism of Pot-Bouille. The Critic calls it a "filthy book" and "garbage."

We give notice to decent men and women that no book so foul and vile has ever been issued by reputable French publishers ... The Third Republic has brought us Zola, coarse but true in L'Assommoir, coarse and untrue in Nana, filthy beyond the expression of words in Pot-Bouille ... If its personages talk, they talk filth. If they act, their actions cannot be related in decent prose. Sleeping or waking, they are the vilest herd of criminals ever gathered outside of a prison ... Where other novelists stop at the door, Zola pushes in, and fills ... pages with such horrors as must make every honest man white with anger that the law of France has allowed this garbage to be placed within reach of his wife and children. There is nothing in L'Assommoir, nothing in Nana, nothing in any novel ever published before that can be compared with these pages. Their author is henceforth, not only a literary outlaw; he is on his way to the mad-house. (45)

(43) Atlantic Monthly, XLV, 693 (May, 1880)..

(44) Ibid., p.695.

(45) Critic, II, 140 (May 20, 1882).

The Literary World names it "Zola's Stink-Pot". It is "nauseously offensive."

There is not one decent character in the book; not one redeeming trait of manhood; not one pure woman; not one innocent child. It reeks with filth. It is a veritable hot-bed of indescribable grossness and will besmear everyone who touches it. Foulest episodes follow each other page after page ... There is one chapter that in absolute and downright nastiness has no parallel even in The Practical Midwife's Handbook ... Zola has willfully lain down in the mud ... The most devoted adherent of the realistic school must turn from it in disgust ... Even if M. Zola's observations were true - and they are not; and even if his books were faithful to life - which they are not; we would no more willingly apply the term art to them than to a microscopic examination of a pailful of sewage. (46)

Au Bonheur des Dames

A report had been circulated by the press that Zola had tired of writing immoral novels and had attempted in Au Bonheur des Dames to retrieve his reputation and create an honest romance - a novel that might be safely laid upon the drawing-room tables of austerely pious households. But this report was proved to be ludicrous upon a cursory examination of the novel. Lafcadio Hearn says:

The book is simply a continuation of Pot-Bouille. Zola has certainly been more disgusting, more insolently foul in other volumes ... but he has never been ... much more immoral ... The morality of Au Bonheur des Dames differs little from the immorality of Pot-Bouille although the outrage upon humanity perpetrated in the last portion of the latter-mentioned work has no parallel in its successor. Nevertheless the mere absence of stercoraceous nastiness from the new volume cannot suffice to justify its claim to superior morality. (47)

The Nation states that the novel is "dull and dirty", least readable of all his works, and lacks interest.

(46) Literary World, XIII, 175 (June 3, 1882).

(47) Hearn, L., Essays in European and Oriental Literature, pp.114-120.

It is less offensive than its forerunner (Pot-Bouille), but it is disfigured by the same hopelessly low tone, the same disbelief of the nobility of thought, word, or deed, and the same grovelling incapacity to be clean even when cleanliness is the most marketable quality. (48)

According to the Literary World it may have a helpful lesson for some persons of low principles as showing how good can resist evil and overcome it. But one man's food may be another's poison, and what might be a sermon in Paris might have a different effect elsewhere. (49)

The Critic is less gracious than others.

Zola has produced another monstrosity. His new book fully sustains his reputation for pruriency. Less gross in language than Pot-Bouille, it is quite as indecent in tone, quite as worthy of a place in the series of works which have done so much harm to contemporary French literature, and which are beginning to turn the stomach of this generation ... He seems to be mentally smitten like the Marquis de Sade and to be following the path which leads to insanity ... The book is dull and ignoble. (50)

La Joie de Vivre

La Joie de Vivre is not only sordid and debased; it is hopelessly dull - that is to any one who is not interested in pathology ... It is utterly contemptible, a disgrace to literature, to science, to civilization. It is impossible to escape forebodings respecting the future of a people which grants open toleration to so vile a production. We caution all clean-minded persons to avoid this book, and to keep it out of the hands of those whose moral

(48) Nation, XXVI, 301 (April 5, 1883).

(49) Literary World, XIV, 228 (July 14, 1883).

(50) Critic, III, 140 (Mar. 10, 1883).

welfare they have^{at} heart. He left no branch of literature untouched and touched nothing which he did not defile. (51)

In contrast to this attitude is the statement of Henry James in which he found the novel "admirably solid and serious." (52)

Germinal

The Critic pronounced Germinal "Zola's most powerful work since L'Assommoir. The higher Zola has risen in certain parts of his work, the more deeply must we deplore that, whether from weak concession to what he esteems to be public taste or from the natural bent of a coarse genius, he should elsewhere have given himself up to the most repulsive descriptions. It is hard to believe that the same poet who has written some of these pages, in such a broad, powerful style, has not only conceived, but painted with such a sickening abundance of details." (53)

The Nation and, as would be expected, the Literary World found little good in this novel. Zola's picture of the community of miners is one of "wickedness without a single redeeming feature ... and is not true to nature. When Eugene Sue described the slums of Paris with all their crimes and vices, he made us shudder without making us blush and, side by side with these hideous pictures,

(51) Literary World, XV, 127 (April 19, 1884).

(52) James, H., Notes on Novelists, p.51.

(53) Critic, VIII, 159 (Mar. 27, 1886).

he showed us native honesty, instinctive chastity." (54)

To speak only of the books that have brought him notoriety, if not fame: in L'Assommoir he traduced the Parisian workman; in Nana he dragged the aristocracy in the mire; in Pot-Bouille the bourgeoisie was defamed. We have just seen what he thinks of the most wretched class of working people ... His next novel will describe artist life, but the great work he has in contemplation is one on the French peasant. When that is done, he will have thrown mud on every class of Frenchman. It is true that every handful of mud brought him a handful of gold; but will it always be so? Pot-Bouille was a failure; Germinal is another. Obscenity may grow tedious as do many other things. (55)

The Literary World says, "In Germinal, Zola finds scenes and characters quite worthy of his disgraceful talent ... Of course one does not demand of Zola any representation of human nature as it really exists. In Germinal, as in his other novels, the men and women are simply beasts guided only by brute instincts. But the story is so hopelessly dull that it cannot possibly do any harm." (56)

L'Oeuvre

The Nation commented on L'Oeuvre:

Here, as elsewhere, his vocabulary is inexhaustible, his precision fatiguing, his prolixity annoying when it does not become unintelligible to a reader whose knowledge of the subject is only general ... Aside from the inherent repulsiveness of the matter, and the voluntary and even calculated disregard of the proprieties of language, L'Oeuvre is not one of the books in which Zola most offends the current taste and sense of decorum, though there is enough in it to make the work disagreeable even to readers

(54) Nation, XL, 286 (April 2, 1885).

(55) Ibid., p.287.

(56) Literary World, XVI, 113 (April 4, 1885).

not over-fastidious ... The same may be said of L'Oeuvre as of his other novels; they may interest on account of the many subjects they touch upon; they may even attract by the unusual nature of these subjects; but they cannot be said to amuse ... they dwell on all the hideous and repulsive details of human maladies and never suggest a remedy or raise a hope of some cure, however distant. (57)

Lafcadio Hearn says that in this novel Zola's method has changed markedly. He has risen above his own theories and abandoned mere grossness for something that can be the shadow of a superlative art to come. "Germinal was a mighty poem - rude, terrible but especially imposing. L'Oeuvre is certainly equally great, and still more forcibly illustrates the present bent of his genius. He has been obliged, in the very course of realistic study which he laid out for himself, while preparing the enormous material of his work to recognize the existence of the ideal as a motive for human conduct ..." (58)

La Terre

Mr. W.D. Howells in a review in Harpers praises La Terre highly.

Filthy and repulsive as it is in its facts, it is a book not to be avoided by the student of civilization; but rather to be sought and seriously considered. It is certainly not a book for young people, and it is not a book for anyone who cares merely for a story, or who finds himself by experience the worse for witnessing in literature the naked realities of lust and crime. This said, it is but fair to add that it legitimately addresses itself to scientific curiosity and humane interest ... with its literary power, its wonderful force of reali-

(57) Nation, XLII, 492-493 (June 10, 1886).

(58) Hearn, L., op. cit., pp.121-124.

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zation, it cannot remain valuable as literature, but must have other interest as a scientific study of French life under the Second Empire; it seems a great pity it should not have been fully documented. (59)

The Critic was not so cold as it previously had been toward Zola's novels.

One puts it down with a conviction that the absolute and undisguised badness is less objectionable than the gilded badness of much literature that circulates in the best circles ... The bestiality of Zola has this excuse: that it is the bestiality of a class that could not well be otherwise than bestial. It is of a kind to rouse a profound pity for creatures weighed down by heredity and environment, till they can no more help being the degraded things they are than the butterfly can help flutter-int and glittering in the sunshine ... It is a possibility to perceive in Zola a desire, not to wallow in sensuality for its own sake, but to rouse the student to a sense of what sensuality, constant degradation, intolerable and irremediable poverty, and hopeless physical suffering, will lead the peasant class to, born as they are without higher instincts ... As a story we cannot conceive of anybody's finding it interesting; it is dull, slow, unpleasant, and bestial - but as a study, one reads between the lines and is filled with pity and a wholesome sense of warning ... Zola has become a synonym for everything that is bad; and when a suspicion of profligacy, sensuality, and Flotous bestiality appears in other works, we are wont to shrink from the suggestion of an American Zola. But it is safe to say that the American Zolas have never based their sensuality and bestiality on any such ground as a revelation or a warning or an impulse to pity, as may be perceived by the careful reader of Zola himself. (60)

Le Rêve

Le Rêve was recommended wholeheartedly by both the Literary World and the Critic.

(59) Harper's Magazine, LXXVI, 641-642 (Mar., 1888).

(60) Critic, XII, 255-256 (May 26, 1888).

Zola appears to have written Le Rêve with the idea of showing his critics that he can write with perfect purity if he so desires. The result is one of the most exquisite romances in the French or any other language, told with a beauty of style ... The whole atmosphere of the book is sweet and true ... We should especially commend Le Rêve to two classes of readers - those persons who take pleasure in Zola's usual filth and those who have been so far repelled by the report of it as not to read it at all. We hope the first may learn how much finer an artist the author is when he regards purity as one law of life, and we know that the second will acknowledge the genius of Zola, which they may have doubted, and join with us in the desire that he may cultivate this vein much more than he has thus far done. (61)

The Critic said:

It is highly aggravating to find the famous Zola writing a beautiful work of fiction; but it cannot be denied that Le Rêve is such. The evil wishers of the man had hoped that he would continue earthly, sensual, devilish, whose fit symbol is his own La Terre (fitly translated "Dirt")... But here he is, like a glittering-winged scarab, hiding his dirt under the plumes of an angel of light, writing an idyl exquisitely pure in its sorrowful but triumphantly virtuous denouement; a converted pagan burning his fetish and dreaming of heaven. The audacity of the man has invaded the realms of beauty ... Zola's repentance has wrought out in wonderfully nervous French, sonorous and vibrant to the core, love's young dream ... It seems indeed as if he had made a new start, burnt his ships and his obscenities behind him, and passed out into a golden sea of purity, innocence, delightful character-painting ... In comparing Le Rêve with Zola's other sensations, one cannot but think it a ewe-lamb among wolves, perilously beautiful, tantalizingly sad. Should one ask us whether to read Zola, we should say, "No, read Le Rêve, for that is not Zola." (62)

La Bête Humaine

Extremes followed extremes in Zola. After Le Rêve

(61) Literary World, XIX, 451 (Dec. 8, 1888).

(62) Critic, XIII, 271 (Dec. 1, 1888).

came La Bête Humaine. A writer in the North American Review stated:

I do not think he writes immoral books. He is mercilessly outspoken, coarse, revolting, painfully true to our lowest nature, but he does not paint for the sake of pruriency, or the amusement of the vile-minded. Some of his books are distinctly and powerfully of a most moral tendency. (63)

It may be supposed from this that the acceptance of Zola's claim of a humanitarian purpose was making headway among the American critics, and that many of his revolting scenes were now beginning to be looked upon as powerful indictments of the evil with which he was dealing. (64)

L'Argent

The Critic said of L'Argent, "It is a masterly work, unnecessarily revolting at times in some of its details, nevertheless a book in which a difficult subject is handled with the utmost skill and which sustains the most unflagging interest to its last page." (65) The Independent could not gather up any more enthusiasm than to say, "Those who care for Zola's novels will find this one quite up to the average." (66)

The Literary World was again severely condemnatory.

In his quality of positive philosopher as well as of unsparing realist, he means to grasp at the whole and neglect no detail. His work is the expression of his theories; a naturalist in the full

(63) North American Review, CLIV, 91-92 (Jan., 1892).

(64) Edwards, H., "Zola and the American Critics", American Literature, IV, 123 (April, 1932).

(65) Critic, XVIII, 262 (May 16, 1891).

(66) Independent, XLIII, 1218 (Aug. 13, 1891).

extent of the term, to him as to Nature herself, nothing is unavailable material. Yet he might learn a lesson from that severe and sweet mother, who veils the fallen trees with mosses and tints even decay with the colors of the rainbow. To this beautiful charity Zola has not attained. He now performs in the field of literature the office of the spreader of malodorous fertilizers, and leaves to others the more pleasing task of tending the vines and gathering the purple and gold of the fruit. (67)

La Débâcle

La Débâcle was termed "the most remarkable book which has been issued from the press during the summer", (68) "a masterpiece of portraiture and historic narrative", (69) "by far Zola's best novel", (70) and in spite of its faults it "stands out as Zola's best and strongest work up to the present time." (71)

The Independent approved La Débâcle. "In this book there is nothing of the brutish wallowing in filth which characterizes other of Zola's novels; it is a fiction to read with admiration if but for its wonderful military descriptions." (72)

The Critic commented:

It was a brilliant idea to introduce the scientific spirit of the age into the novel, and Zola set to work upon it with his immense energy and his unshakable resolution. One by one the evils of his time have been taken up by this prodigious

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- (67) Literary World, XXII, 141-142 (April 25, 1891).
 - (68) Review of Reviews, VI, 238 (Sept., 1892)..
 - (69) Critic, XXI, 103 (Aug. 27, 1892)..
 - (70) Independent, XLIV, 1330 (Sept. 22, 1892).
 - (71) Nation, LV, 93 (Aug. 4, 1892).
 - (72) Independent, XLIV, loc. cit.

representative of Latin realism and laid before the world in all their enormity. (73)

La Débâcle is a wonderful picture of the overthrow of the Second Empire ... Certainly no artist ever had a more lurid canvas than that which is devoted to La Débâcle. No book that we have read for a long time conveys with equal vividness the sense of the frightful waste of war, or enables us to realize so distinctly the way in which a battle appears to those who take part in it. (74)

A reviewer in the Literary News thinks that La Débâcle might have been written to inspire the public with a hatred of warfare. La Débâcle should do for the cause of universal peace what Uncle Tom's Cabin did for the anti-slavery cause. (75)

J.H. Findlater in a review in Living Age wrote:

If you will have realism, there can be no doubt that La Débâcle takes a first place as the great realistic war novel. The secret of its popularity cannot be his patriotism; there is no plot to interest any one; neither is the characterization sufficiently clever to attract many readers; any history book will give with equal veracity the story of this campaign; but Zola alone perhaps among living writers could have written of its appearances. The history of a campaign is one thing and a description of it is quite another. To put it quite plainly, the unvarnished horrors of La Débâcle account for its popularity. (76)

True to his realism Zola spares us no revolting detail of misery and wounds and death on the march, on the battle-fields, in the sickening hospitals. Indeed there is so much of this detail repeated page after page that the effect is weakened. (77) He spares us none of the horrors of his subject; nor in such a case should they be spared. We doubt if the conditions of that struggle and the tremendous

(73) Critic, XXI, loc.cit.

(74) Review of Reviews, VI, loc. cit.

(75) Literary News, XIII, 236 (Aug., 1892).

(76) Ibid.

(77) Living Age, CCXXX, 495-496 (Aug. 24, 1901).

events that led up to and followed upon the final day of Sedan have ever received a more careful and masterly analysis than M. Zola has here given them ... After all, morality is merely the nature of things; let things be shown as they are, and they convey their own lesson; nothing explicit is needed. (78) The realism is extreme; but with the exception of certain descriptions of the battle-field and of the impoverished military hospitals, it is not at all unbearable to the nerves, and in these scenes the shudder is merely physical, not moral. (79)

The writer in the Nation who feared that this novel would not receive the praise it deserved stated further:

The writer has got a bad name, and most deservedly so. It is so unusual an occurrence for Zola to publish a book of which much good may be said that there is a chance of its not being praised as it deserves. He has wilfully and of malice plunged into the vilest scenes and dragged his reader with him. What has made the judicious reader grieve all the more is the undoubted power of the man; There are many pages, even in his worst books that are simply superb. It is to the author's credit that in La Débâcle, while he has not wholly freed himself from the shackles of his besetting sin of disgusting sensuality and crude language, he has largely avoided it - rather perhaps, been so carried away by his subject as temporarily to forget his propensity. (80)

"The book abounds with horrible pictures, but it is full of an immense power and movement." (81)

Le Docteur Pascal

The appearance of Le Docteur Pascal, the last of the Rougon-Macquart series, was welcomed with sighs of relief by the critics. The Literary World is both laudatory and condemnatory in its reviews.

(78) Dial, XIII, 105 (Aug., 1892).

(79) Literary World, XXIII, 245 (July 16, 1892).

(80) Nation, LV, 93 (Aug. 4, 1892).

(81) Literary World, XXIX, 179 (June 11, 1898).

The last of the Rougon-Macquart novels is one of the weakest in the series, and we may take leave of this very repulsive connection with a sigh of relief that even Zola's genius can no longer present in fiction ... the human filth ... which this precious family exhibits. The novel is one which only a man of great talent could have written. It is a volume deeply provocative of thought on human destiny for those who cannot fail to consider its view narrow and its morality retrogressive rather than advanced. Its power of style and exposition is often extreme, though the book cannot rank with La Débâcle among its author's masterpieces. (82)

Five years later the Literary World commented:

If anybody cares to read this publication by Emile Zola, he, of course, will do so, but he shall have no encouragement from us. It is another exploration, with photographs ... of the sewers of Paris, and follows the fetid fortunes of the Rougon family with unflinching scrutiny. Zola writes well, of course, always powerfully - but, oh dear! the sights and the smells incident to such a subterranean miasmatic journey as this. They are too much for most of us. (83)

In the dedication of Le Docteur Pascal Zola proclaimed it to be the summary and crown of his whole work. But the Nation did not agree with his claims.

It is not the crown of glory in any sense of the word. The book is disappointing; it is not the equal of La Débâcle, of Germinal, of L'Assommoir. It displays abundantly enough the faults and vices of the writer but few of his better qualities, and none of his great powers. It is a labored justification of his wholly false views of life, his pet theory of heredity ... Foulness of the blackest, filth of the vilest, poured out in abundance can never give a man a place among the great literary artists of France ... One breathes a sigh of relief at the thought that Le Docteur Pascal is the last of that series of repellent books in which passages of marvellous beauty and strokes of undoubted genius serve but to deepen disgust and to intensify regret. (84)

(82) Literary World, XXIV, 253 (Aug. 12, 1893).

(83) Ibid., XXIX, 354 (Oct. 29, 1893).

(84) Nation, LVII, 53-54 (July 20, 1893).

CHAPTER V.

LES TROIS VILLES

Lourdes

Critics were not too warm in their praise of Lourdes, the first of **The Three Cities**. ~~Most~~ of them made a ~~play~~ on the word lourd. The Dial claimed that the pun was justified by the matter which the novel discussed. All things considered, it was not accorded a very gracious reception..

The Dial stated that reading the book is almost equivalent to making the journey from Paris to Lourdes.

"One can no more forget the one than the other." (1)

There is little to be said for the novel as a work of constructive art. It is the old story; Zola gives us most of the elements of art; he fails to give us the synthetic structure. His pages teem with life ... but the one step beyond is not taken, and the one supreme effect not attained. (2)

The Critic did not entirely agree with the Dial

It is undeniable that Zola has given us in Lourdes a human document of great value. Whatever his faults, he is certainly conscientious and painstaking, and this study of the emotional side of religion is a monument of patient research and close observation. He has chosen the narrative form, and the novel he has woven around the little town where miracles are wrought is a model of construction. (3)

(1) Dial, XV¶II, 54-55 (Jan. 16, 1895).

(2) Ibid.

(3) Critic, XXV, 54-55 (June 16, 1895).

The Literary World said that it was too overloaded to be artistic in the highest sense. Its review continued:

Its tone is sympathetic and pitiful, with no suggestion here or elsewhere of the vulgarity too common in other novels by this author. So vividly does he put forth the sad journey, that the book is one to be placed in every theological library as a study of modern superstition. (4)

This is rather high praise from a periodical that was always strong in its denunciation of his earlier works.

The Nation accused Zola of being his same blundering self.

Zola is incapable of treating delicate sentiments; he neither feels nor recognizes them. He crushes whatever is tender with a coarse heavy touch; his filthy imagination befouls whatever is pure. The book is dull and dreary from beginning to end. Nothing inspires Zola to write with an approach to his old-time vigor. The repulsive diseases, the hideous wounds, the incurable sores, the putrescent horrors which the Virgin is expected to cure are described with all the prosiness of detail and nauseating foulness which are naturally looked for from him; but out of this he has failed to evoke the powerful sensation of oppression, of horror, which alone could justify the catalogue. Zola's book is a painfully heavy report, badly digested, badly written, upon a generally sickening subject; all his readers wonder at is that a man of talent can deliberately perpetrate such a stupidity; all they enjoy is the thought that the numerous admirers of Zola's pornography will be bitterly disappointed. (5)

The Independent was brief in its criticism: "Admirers of Zola will find this story very different from his stories of the gutters. It is on a higher plane in some respects ... (6)

(4) Literary World, XXV, 386-387 (Nov., 17, 1894).

(5) Nation, LIX, 182 (Sept. 6, 1894).

(6) Independent, XLVI, 547 (Nov. 29, 1894).

Rome

The Literary News said that this was not a "religious novel" despite the undercurrent of religiosity that runs through it. "It will appeal no doubt to the higher feelings of many but it will also more than content those who seek purely human interest in a story." (7)

The Independent described Rome and Lourdes as "historical, religious, controversial, sensational, tedious," and able to afford "food for appetites various, and ground for all sorts of praise." Rome exaggerated his defects as a novelist and at the same time brought out to their fullest extent his powers as a word-painter of panoramas. (8)

The Literary World considered Rome a "series of remarkably dramatic pictures." (9)

Rome considered as a novel is inartistic. Although there are subjects touched upon in this book which are best untouched by literature, they are not dealt with in the prurient spirit which usually distinguishes Zola. (10)

The Dial stated that after struggling through the volume with a sense of bewilderment, the reader closed it with a somewhat reluctant recognition of its power.

There is little of what we commonly think of as Zolaism in the book; with the exception of a single scene that, in spite of its power, good taste must condemn, there is nothing to give serious

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- (7) Literary News, XVII, 163 (June, 1896).
 - (8) Independent, XLVIII, 1006 (July 23, 1896).
 - (9) Literary World, XXVII, 216 (Aug. 22, 1896).
 - (10) Ibid.

offense. The book is far finer a production than Lourdes, for which fact the subject-matter is not alone responsible. (11)

Paris

The Dial called Paris a "many-hued picture, a canvas with strong effects of chiaroscuro and lurid coloring, with startling contrasts between the base and the heroic, between social shams and social realities, between the heartless indifference of the wealth and the desperate frenzy of the proletariat." (12)

The purport of the book is not pessimism; it is rather the impatient and passionate idealism of the clear-sighted philosophical observer who ... does not shrink from laying bare the plague-spots of the present, knowing that by such service the permanent interests of society are best to be furthered. The future historian of literature will not be able to neglect the immense work of Zola, but will be constrained to deal with it as we now deal with the work of Voltaire. In other words, it will be dealt with not as a ~~permanent possession~~ of literary art, but as a literary force for the most part spent in the period that was responsible for its generation. (13)

The Literary World ranked Paris inferior to Lourdes and Romé because of the "flatness of the termination." (14)
The Critic said it was the "weakest in the chain." (15)

Technically considered, according to Zola's own method, the work is incomplete. Believing it superfluous to "discover" Paris, which all the world knows, he has omitted the splendid descriptive passages that make the two preceding volumes of *Les Trois Cités* so remarkable. He only shows us an un-

(11) Dial, XXI, 90-91 (Aug. 16, 1896).

(12) Dial, XXIV, 185-186 (Mar. 16, 1898)..

(13) Ibid.

(14) Literary World, XXIX, 99 (April 2, 1898)..

(15) Critic, XXXII, 226-227 (April 2, 1898)..

utterably corrupt corner of the bourgeoisie. It is difficult to epitomize one's impression of the book in a few words. It contains nothing that is new to the observer of social conditions today. We all know exactly what Zola tells us; we all feel our responsibility for the injustice that we find it so hard to remedy. (16)

The Bookman believed that even a casual reading would leave the impression that it was a powerful book. It was the best since La Débâcle and it was destined to rank among Zola's most enduring works. (17)

It has to a remarkable degree the quality for which he is unsurpassed by writers of contemporary fiction, the gift of portraying life on a large scale, of handling humanity in the mass, and by the swift succession of clause and sentence, and the insistent accumulation of petty details, communicating to his work its inimitable effect of ceaseless activity. (18)

The book is less a novel than a doctrinaire tract, and, notwithstanding, the undoubted cleverness of the author and his brilliant power of description, it is so often tedious in its preachments. The author spares no pains to convince us that Paris is rotten to the core, both in public and in private life. Nothing escapes his indictment. Zola lacks one of the indispensable qualities of a creator of the first rank. He lacks humor. The presence of this, even in a slight degree, would have saved him from some ludicrous positions. (19)

The Literary News feels the same regarding the lack of humor in Zola's works. "Considered as fiction, his books lack construction, proportion, light, and shade, and above all, humor." (20)

The conclusion he arrived at in this trilogy was

(16) Ibid.

(17) Bookman, VII, 142 (April, 1898)..

(18) Ibid.

(19) Harper's Magazine, XCVI, 964-966 (May, 1898)..

(20) Literary News, XIX, 116 (April, 1898)..

that orthodox religion cannot provide salvation for the modern world. In Paris he pointed out the true path to the future: "The Old Testament dream of the Evangel is to be swept away by clear Latin rationalism, aided by modern science." (21)

(21) Muller, H.J., Modern Fiction, p.181.

CHAPTER VI

LES QUATRE EVANGILES

Each of the novels of this series was to make up a gospel for the city of the future which Zola had idealized. Fécondité, Travail, and Vérité were completed but Justice was cut short by Zola's death.

This cycle is insufferably tedious, and to me unreadable. Zola took off into the airy blue never to return to this earth; his pilgrimage to Utopia was a final farewell to actuality. In short, the messiah swallowed the novelist whole as the novelist had once swallowed the scientist. In his apocalyptic novels there remains scarcely a trace of the amazing sense of reality Zola had once given to almost everything he touched. All is shrouded in a warm, blessed but dense fog. Even as prophecy and propaganda these novels are arid; Zola lost both his talent and his grip on reality. The faith of his last years is as extravagant as his youthful faith in the scientific method. (1)

Fécondité

The Literary World, which only a few years ago had condemned Zola, at the appearance of Fécondité declared:

This is indeed a great novel. It is the triumph of a large mind and a full heart. The interiors of life are open and the immoralities of some men and women are in full view; the depravities, degradations, and disasters which characterize human experience are not avoided. The purpose is noble, the plane of vision is elevated, the literary skill is varied and abundant, and the atmosphere is pure and uplifting. The book is an ascension of genius. As a denunciation of an evil Fécondité is frank, fearless, straight to the point, incisive, heroic, effective. As a glorification of true marriage, honest paternity,

(1) Muller, H.J., Modern Fiction, p.182.

genuine motherhood, and parental privilege and responsibility, of family integrity and purity, of the associations and delights of home, it is a masterpiece. It is a book for one's own reading by one's self, rather than for the family circle. Husbands and wives might well read it together, and the founders of new household circles." (2)

Much different is the view of the Independent:

The story is not fit for general reading. Its purpose suggests a morbid imagination if we regard the book as a work of art; and if we take it as a social and domestic study from a science point of view it has no sound value. The vilest brand of poison whisky sells as well as Zola's novels, and many there be who deem it delicious and strengthening. Moral purpose! As well boast of the moral purpose shown in the vilest play of the Bowery. Commercial purpose is the proper phrase. (3)

Travail

Strongest in praise of Travail was the Literary World.

Zola's latest novel is undoubtedly one of his greatest achievements. It has his characteristic faults - infinitude of detail, much of which seems irrelevant - frequent repetition of matter still fresh in the reader's mind, and somewhat of the coarseness and sensual frankness formerly so abundant in this master of fiction. But his excellencies are here in full power - immense vigor of realistic description, strong portrayal of natural passion and intimate acquaintance with human life. The temper of Travail, for the most part, is admirable, and its tone uplifting. As a work of art, it has episodes of vast power. Travail is not a novel for the light-minded, but the serious reader will consider it a masterpiece. (4)

The Arena stated no student of social, economic, or political conditions could afford to slight this masterpiece among social studies. It was the most

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- (2) Literary World, XXXI, 131 (July 1, 1900).
 - (3) Independent, LIII, 1450 (June 14, 1900).
 - (4) Literary World, XXXII, 116 (Aug. 1, 1901).

interesting as well as one of the strongest socialistic novels yet written; it is freer from naturalism that proved so offensive in Zola's great works. There was but one moral blot that took from the value of the book. It is with regret that one finds any moral blot in a work whose spirit and dominating note are essentially noble. "From a literary point of view it is rather prolix ... and weakened by long drawn-out chapters. As a story it is intensely entertaining, being filled with human interest ... while its comparative freedom from objectionable naturalism makes it an acceptable volume for general perusal."(5)

The Critic said Travail was a tedious piece of work in spite of its masterly treatment. "But the realistic power becomes merely tedious when it is used to detail every insignificant item of the work in the community of labor ... Never does the author succeed in making his tale seem real, though it is sometimes extremely realistic." (6)

To the acclaim of the Literary World the Dial added:

It is a far cry indeed from the Rougon-Macquart books, with their accumulation of repulsive details, to this lyrical exaltation of the **dignity of toil**, to this impassioned presentation of the noblest of mankind. The author does not escape from his earlier methods, however, for he still gives us interminable technical descriptions and family histories. But his spirit is a new one or rather it is a spirit not readily to be found in the books that first made him famous. But the book is so fine in its conception and so noble in its idealism, that it can

(5) Arena, XXVI, 321-327 (Sept., 1901).

(6) Critic, XXXIX, 76-77 (July, 1901).

hardly fail to quicken the most sluggish heart, and bring hope to the soul that is most despairing of social progress. (7)

The Bookman felt that Zola did not live up to his promise as revealed in the first one hundred pages.

He cuts loose and gives us a long tract on socialism tempered with adultery. Neither helps the other and both of them repel and tire out the reader. The only good thing in the book is found in the picture given in the early chapters of the brutalities of life in a French manufacturing town. Some of the descriptions and incidents here set forth show the power of the master still unimpaired. Yet, as we read farther on, the recollection of them merely serves to heighten our regrets that so great a genius should seek such futile ends through the diversion of its force to alien subjects. (8)

Vérité

Most of the critics remarked on the fitness of Zola's last novel, Vérité, being based on the Dreyfus affair, in which his courageous stand for the truth against error and prejudice brought him honorable applause from many who had before denounced him as an artist.

Of the substitution of the crime in Vérité for the accusations in the Dreyfus case, the Independent remarked:

The filthy crime which is chosen to take the place of that charged against Dreyfus, recalls only too forcibly the worst of Zola's literary offenses, but it must be admitted that, apart from this initial blot, the work is singularly clean - so much we have to be thankful for. Unfortunately, on the other hand, it is somewhat duller and lacking in the vitality which Zola knew how to impart in the most

(7) Dial, XXXI, 140 (Sept., 1901).

(8) Bookman, XIII, 442 (July, 1901).

cancerous of his creations; the concluding parts of the story in particular are insufferably long drawn out and amorphous. (9)

The Literary World commented:

As far as the artistic value of Vérité goes, it is as guiltless of any appeal to subtleness of style and construction as a pamphlet on the Single tax. There are, it is true, scenes and episodes where the novelist's grasp on life and character is shown, but from the first page to the last the moral appeal is sustained without a moment's pause. In spite of blemishes of coarseness no one can read Vérité without a sense that it is written with a moral purpose. It is an appeal to Frenchmen taking the form of a novel ... The substance might equally well have embodied itself in a political speech or sermon, and it must be judged accordingly, and it will be judged hereafter as a great and patriotic effort to set forth the truth before the French nation that the truth might set it free. (10)

The Bookman names Vérité "the last but the longest of Zola's many long books." His style was entirely devoid of grace. "His stories dispensed with all art in the telling, and came to rely entirely on reiteration of the thesis, the accumulation of masses of unselected evidence, and the thumping of these upon the reader's brain. Of Vérité as a story one can only say that Zola, writing with the fervour of one who has gone through fire for his beliefs, makes it hugely impressive." (11)

The Outlook remarked on the excessive elaboration of detail in his later works, and how he came to ignore altogether the idea of unity, proportion, and construc-

((9) Independent, LVI, 562 (Mar. 5, 1903).

((10) Literary World, XXIV, 73-74 (Apr., 1903).

((11) Bookman, XVII, 253-254 (May, 1903).

tion. "His last book is accordingly laborious reading; it is an argument illustrated by fictitious incidents rather than a novel of character and action." (12)

Lacking the volume Justice, the Dial said that we should have to accept Vérité as the "apotheosis of both truth and justice, for the work is consecrated to both these ideals in about equal measure. Its main theme is the Dreyfus affair transformed. The book is very long and very repetitious, yet its earnestness and its noble idealism save it from becoming wearisome, and carry us through its six hundred pages without much deadening of interest. (13)

Omitting certain long essays on the problem of primary and secondary education, there is an artistic suggestion, a fanciful play of the imagination, not usually found in Zola. A great genius is behind it all - there is no doubt of that. Force, power, persuasion, eloquence, are there. The author not only reveals his heart, but the working of his mind. Verite is a page from a wonderful autobiography which can never be completed. (14)

The Arena claimed it was a noble and very important contribution to twentieth century literature. "The volume is very rich in sayings that are pregnant with vital truths and helpful suggestions. It is a book that merits and should receive the widest circulation among the most thoughtful of our people. (15)

(12) Outlook, LXXXV, 184-185 (May 16, 1903)..

(13) Dial, XXXIV, 240 (April 1, 1903)..

(14) Critic, XLII, 278-279 (Mar., 1903)..

(15) Arena, XXIX, 665 (June, 1903)..

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

The American critics were loud in their denunciation of Zola's early novels. The Critic, the Dial and the Literary World were the leaders in the fight against Zola, his method, and his followers. But the reception given La Terre in 1888 gave evidence that a tendency to regard Zola's novels with a greater degree of tolerance was beginning to make itself felt. This novel of all of Zola's was the most open to the charge of sensuality as Zola attempted to depict the animality and degradation which, he felt, characterized French peasant life. Yet a periodical which a few years back had savagely denounced novels much less frank, such as L'Assommoir, acknowledged in La Terre, probably the most brutally realistic of Zola's novels, an ethical purpose which greatly mitigated its evils.

Henry James and William Dean Howells were two enthusiastic supporters of Zola and French naturalism in the United States. These two men undoubtedly paved the way for the acceptance of Zola's novels by the American critics. Henry James said of the American attitude toward realism in 1884:

It is not open to us, as yet, to discuss whether a novel had better be an excision from life, or a structure built up of picture cards, for we have not made up our mind as to whether life in general

may be described. (1)

Mr. Howells in an article in the Atlantic Monthly of the same year described a meeting of the naturalist group in Paris. The tone of the article was sympathetic toward the naturalists. (2)

When one considers that James and Howells were at the time the two outstanding men of letters in America, such an attitude could not help having effect. Their influence in helping to bring about a more tolerant feeling toward Zola was not immediately apparent. It was not until 1888 at the earliest that this change was felt..

At the time of Zola's death on September 29, 1902, he was regarded favorably by many American critics. In a period of a little over twenty years an almost complete reversal of public opinion of the novelist had taken place. Essays written at the time expresses both appreciation and praise for the man and his work. Howells said, in part:

Because he believed with his whole soul that fiction should be a representation, and in no measure the misrepresentation of life, he will live as long as any history of literature survives. It will not require so great an effort of the reader's honesty now, as it once would, to own that Zola's books, though often indecent, are never immoral, but always most terribly, most pitilessly moral ... As to the intention of Zola in his books, I have no doubt of its righteousness. Zola was an artist, and one of

(1) James, H., Notes on Novelists, p.29.

(2) Atlantic Monthly, LIII, 46 (Jan., 1884)

the very greatest, but even before and beyond that, he was intensely a moralist. (3)

Following are some of the more significant passages on Zola from Henry James:

His personality is the thing that finally pervades and prevails ... No finer act of courage and confidence is recorded in the history of letters ... its admirable, its almost unimaginable strength. The strength was in the young man's very person - in his character, his will, his passion, his fighting temper ... His weakness was in that inexperience of life from which he proposed not to suffer. "I don't know my subject, but I must live into it; I don't know life, but I must learn it as I work" - that attitude and programme represent to my sense, a drama more intense on the worker's own part than any of the dramas he was to invent and put before us.(4)

In 1884 James had faced the prejudices of most American critics, and had stood forth, together with Howells, as the champion of an extremely unpopular man. In their effort to bring about a more intelligent understanding of, and a greater tolerance for, Zola's novels in America, it may be well supposed that they contributed a by no means negligible share toward the development of more tolerant, more liberal, more intelligent critical standards in the United States. (5)

The Independent in a review of Travail shortly before Zola's death said:

In spite of the fact that he appeared to the critics in the light of a perverse and truculent

(3) Howells, W.D., "Emile Zola", North American Review, CLXXV, 595 (Oct., 1902).

(4) James, H., op. cit., pp. 26-64.

(5) Edwards, H., "Zola and the American Critics", American Literature, IV, 114-119 (April, 1932).

parvenu, without elevation or sensibility, yet he has exerted a tremendous influence not only over his own less fastidious following but over the entire literature of his time. That he has power is undeniable; and in literature as in life, power is always authoritative. He possesses preeminently the ability to seize crude fact and set it out in a fierce and searching light, naked and unrelieved. It is this power to disembowel life and dangle its convulsive viscera before the horrified reader which constitutes the distinctive feature of Zolaism. There is still in his method the same accumulation of fact, the same welter of detail, which makes documents, not literature. But there is in addition this noticeable difference: whereas his previous work was restricted merely to the statement of problems, Travail pretends not only to put the difficulty, but to provide the solution. (6)

A writer in the Dial stated shortly after Zola's untimely death:

When a great writer has died and we come to ask questions about his work, the final question must always be as to whether that work is destined to survive. For the writer who makes his appeal to the world in terms of art, something more than ideas are needed to secure immortality. If we grant all that may be claimed for Zola's ideas by the most enthusiastic of his followers, we are still confronted with the question of their expression. Now it must be allowed that for the most part, Zola's style is not distinguished. Three-fourths of his many thousands of pages are heavy, shapeless, and hopelessly inartistic. On the other hand, there are purple patches of composition that meet the reader's eye, often when he least expects them, and fairly startle him into admiration. It is for the sake of these, if for anything, that Zola's novels, will continually be read. The bulk of his work is already dead; it represents an impossible method and a discredited literary tendency. But there is enough that rises above the author's own theories to retain for him the attention of all who are willing to be at some pains for their literary satisfactions. When the memory of the man himself shall have passed away, and when his books as a whole remain only as instructive documents of the history of the nineteenth century sociology, we cannot believe that

(6) Independent, LIII, 1257 (May 30, 1901)..

there will not still be a few readers who, strictly for art's sake, will feel that it is worth while to explore the wilderness of his work for its buried treasures. And in the history of modern fiction, the figure of Emile Zola, because of his fame and influence while he lived, cannot fail to occupy a commanding position. (7)

(7) Dial, XXIII, 233-234 (Oct. 16, 1902).

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