



Emile Zola

The Sin of Abbé Mouret

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THE SIN OF ABBÉ MOURET

ÉMILE ZOLA was born in Paris in 1840, the son of a Venetian engineer and his French wife. He grew up in Aix-en-Provence, where he made friends with Paul Cézanne. After an undistinguished school career and a brief period of dire poverty in Paris, Zola joined the newly founded publishing firm of Hachette, which he left in 1866 to live by his pen. He had already published a novel and his first collection of short stories. Other novels and stories followed, until in 1871 Zola published the first volume of his Rougon-Macquart series, with the subtitle *Histoire naturelle et sociale d'une famille sous le Second Empire*, in which he sets out to illustrate the influence of heredity and environment on a wide range of characters and milieus. However, it was not until 1877 that his novel *L'Assommoir*, a study of alcoholism in the working classes, brought him wealth and fame. The last of the Rougon-Macquart series appeared in 1893 and his subsequent writing was far less successful, although he achieved fame of a different sort in his vigorous and influential intervention in the Dreyfus case. His marriage in 1870 had remained childless, but his extremely happy liaison in later life with Jeanne Rozerot, initially one of his domestic servants, gave him a son and a daughter. He died in 1902.

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ÉMILE ZOLA

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Translated with an Introduction and Notes by

VALERIE MINOGUE

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INTRODUCTION

Readers who do not wish to learn details of the plot may prefer to read the Introduction as an Afterword

THE SIN OF ABBÉ MOURET is the fifth of Zola's twenty Rougon-Macquart novels. It is less tied in to the history of the time than the other nineteen, being focused on one individual, a priest in love, torn between the biddings of Nature and the forbiddings of the Church. Zola had the idea of writing a 'priest-novel', as he called it, even at the start of the Rougon-Macquart series, and this developed into two novels. One, *The Conquest of Plassans*, is the fourth and perhaps the most obviously anticlerical novel in the cycle. It exposes, through the machinations of the iniquitous Abbé Faujas, the political and social dimensions of the authority-charged role of the priest. The other was *The Sin of Abbé Mouret*, an almost direct, though free-standing, sequel to the previous novel.

The Sin of Abbé Mouret was published in Paris on 27 March 1875, and ran to four editions that same year—the first of Zola's novels to meet with such early success. Zola was no doubt becoming known to the public and the title had enough of a 'sensational' flavour to make it very saleable. The priest in love had been the subject of a number of popular novels, some of which Zola had reviewed.¹ Reception of this fifth novel was very mixed. The idyll in the park was frequently admired, but also censured for excessive quantities of description. Some regarded the entire novel as grossly immoral. A few, like Taine, Huysmans, Mallarmé, and Maupassant, recognized the poetic quality of the novel and saw it as a long and magnificent love poem.

Naturalism

The subtitle of the Rougon-Macquart cycle is *The Natural and Social History of a Family in the Second Empire*. Zola had dubbed his brand

¹ For instance, Abbé Jean-Hippolyte Michou, *Le Maudit* (1865); Alfred Assollant, *La Confession de l'Abbé Passereau* (1869); Ernest Daudet, *Le Missionnaire* (1869); Hector Malot, *Un curé de province* (1872).

of realism 'naturalism' and styled himself a 'naturalist'. As a naturalist, Zola would base his 'natural history' on genetic and physiological characteristics, while the 'social history', though focused on one family, would, like Balzac's *Comédie humaine*, encompass a vast range of French society. Starting in the fictional town of Plassans, based on Aix-en-Provence where Zola spent the early years of his life, the Rougon-Macquart novels follow the family from Louis-Napoleon's *coup d'état* in December 1851, which founded the Second Empire, right through to the ignominious end of the Empire at Sedan in 1870, related in *The Débauche*. Influenced by the work of the philosopher and critic Hippolyte Taine, whom he had dubbed 'the naturalist of the moral world', Zola based his treatment of the family on three factors emphasized by Taine: *race*, the genetic and cultural heritage; *milieu*, the political and social environment; and *moment*, the contemporary historical background.

The 1871 preface to *The Fortune of the Rougons* (*La Fortune des Rougons*), the first volume in the Rougon-Macquart cycle, effectively launched Zola's 'naturalism'. His interest in the scientific discoveries and theories of the age led him to stress the scientific character of his work, presenting the evolution of the Rougon-Macquart family in quasi-Darwinian terms, and emphasizing observation, scientific documentation, and realist representation. This led to a misleading image of the novelist as an unimaginative note-taker and compiler of documents. Later, *The Experimental Novel* (1880), in which Zola applied the experimental methodology of Claude Bernard's *Introduction to the Study of Experimental Medicine* (1865) to the novel, reinforced that image. Zola seemed to be endowing the novel with scientific authority. But Zola well knew and fully acknowledged that the 'results' of the 'experimental novelist' were not comparable to those obtained by the scientist in the laboratory. On the other hand, if the writer presented his characters accurately in carefully studied situations, it should be possible to create at least plausible 'results' not at variance with contemporary scientific knowledge. Zola so successfully imposed on the public perception the 'naturalist' brand name that for far too long it screened out much of the real range, character, and quality of his work, which frequently elbows its way through the constraints of naturalism, sometimes so thoroughly as to subvert the naturalist programme. *The Sin of Abbé Mouret* is perhaps particularly subversive.

Study of contemporary scientific work² had provided Zola not only with ideas but also with a discipline that he applied to his writing. His fiction must be securely grounded in observed reality, and it would respect and indeed draw on available scientific data—from the laws of heredity to recent work on psychopathology and physiology. Such studies indeed often provided a sort of repertoire of ‘case studies’ that could be used in the novels. Further, the environment, circumstances, and activities of the characters would be accurately represented, whether dealing with the political machinations that followed the *coup d’état* of 1851, as in *The Fortune of the Rougons*, or the property speculation accompanying the Haussmannization of Paris in *The Kill*. For his ‘priest novel’, Zola would provide the necessary grounding with a huge amount of preparation. He studied the Bible, the Catholic Missal, and the methods and teachings of the seminaries. He went to Mass and made detailed notes on clerical dress and accessories, and the whole complicated choreography of the ritual. He read *L’Imitation de Jésus-Christ*, the fifteenth-century Catholic devotional book generally attributed to Thomas à Kempis, and the accounts of saints and martyrs that were part of the education of would-be priests. He read the Spanish Jesuits on the cult of Mary, as well as general works on the Church and the priesthood. Besides, Zola had reviewed a number of novels on this subject, and could plunder them for useful details. For the illness of Serge Mouret, he drew on his own illness and convalescence, which he described in his *Journal d’un convalescent*.³ For the plants of the Paradou, he studied horticultural catalogues and visited horticultural exhibitions to see for himself the flowers he would describe so vividly. For the park of the Paradou, he drew on memories of the domaine de Galice, west of Aix, where he had roamed in his youth with Baille and Cézanne.⁴ He describes the domaine in an essay of 1869: a chateau built in the reign of Louis XV abandoned for over a century, its great empty rooms littered with plaster, broken statues in the park, and traces of the former garden’s

² Darwin’s *The Origin of Species* (published as *De l’origine des espèces*, in 1859), Prosper Lucas’s *Traité philosophique et physiologique de l’hérédité naturelle* (1847–50), Letourneau’s *Physiologie des passions* (1868), among others.

³ Included in the dossier of Sophie Guermès’s *Livre de poche, La Faute de l’abbé Mouret* (Paris, 1998).

⁴ Jean-Baptistin Baille (1841–1918), friend of both Zola and Cézanne since their schooldays in Aix-en-Provence. He later became a professor of optics and acoustics at the École de Physique et de Chimie in Paris.

lanes and paths, fountains and lawns still faintly visible. It reads like a preview of the *Paradou*.

Zola had always been aware that reality is subject to transformation by the eye of the beholder, and that such transformations, as he wrote to his friend Valabrègue in 1864, create the work of art. It is no surprise then that thorough and detailed as Zola's observation and research were, they are constantly overtaken by metaphor and analogy even in his notebooks. In the very act of seeing, each detail becomes expressive. Zola might well have said, along with Baudelaire: 'Tout pour moi devient allégorie' ('For me everything becomes allegory').⁵ The theorizing Zola is overtaken by the creator, and the experimental scientist by an innovative, experimental novelist; the note-taker yields to the poet, and the realist to the imaginative painter of visions.

Science, after all, was not the only powerful factor in the shaping of Zola's aesthetic; another was contemporary art, its theorizing and its practices. Along with his childhood friend Cézanne, Zola was a frequent visitor to the studios of the painters Baudelaire termed 'the painters of modern life', and he became closely associated with the Impressionists. As a journalist and art critic, he vigorously defended Manet, and supported other painters of the time, like Cézanne, Degas, and Monet. He dubbed the Impressionists 'naturalists': naturalists in their vigour, their discarding of the shackles of convention, and their direct engagement with contemporary life in all its variety and modernity. Not only was their subject matter new, but so also was their style of painting, and so it was with Zola, who not only dealt with modern subjects like railways and department stores, but dealt with them in a modern, indeed modernist, way. The subject matter of *The Sin of Abbé Mouret*, the priest and the Catholic Church, is scarcely a modern subject, but the treatment of the subject, and Zola's use of physiological and psychological studies to depict hysteria and hallucination in a manner that often seems to anticipate Freud, can be seen to be modern.

Serge Mouret is not the only priest in the Rougon-Macquart series; there are others, like the obstructive bishop Monseigneur Hauteœur in *The Dream*, the grossly insensitive Abbé Ranvier in *Germinal*, and the ruthless Faujas of *The Conquest of Plassans*. The priests in Zola's

⁵ In the poem 'Le Cygne', in *Les Fleurs du mal*.

five *Portraits of Priests*⁶ written at roughly the time of *The Sin of Abbé Mouret*, are all devoted to their own worldly interests, with one exception, and that one finally abandons the Church to seek truth elsewhere. In the novels that followed the Rougon-Macquart cycle, the *Three Cities* and the *Four Gospels*, the best of Zola's priests turn away from the Church and become parents and reformers rather than priests.

Zola regarded the rule of celibacy as unnatural, and a cause of deep harm to the individual psychology in terms of neurosis and hysteria, and also to society at large. Celibacy was particularly undesirable at a time when there was serious concern in France about the declining birth rate, which was seen to be threatening the development of the nation, as is clear from parliamentary reports and sociological studies of the time. Zola addressed the subject himself in an article for the *Figaro* on *Dépopulation*, in which he condemns the exaltation of virginity when fertility is the preferable option, and deplores the fashionable notion that large families are socially undesirable. Zola's last novels glorify fecundity and propose a new religion of science and justice, freed from dogma.

Heredity, Characters, Milieu

The principal character of this novel, Serge Mouret, first appears in *The Conquest of Plassans* as a young man of 17. He is rather serious, gentle, kind to his mentally retarded sister, and of a religious disposition. He becomes a great favourite of the relentlessly manipulative Abbé Faujas, who is, disastrously, a lodger in the Mouret family home. Serge's mother, more and more obsessed with religion, becomes more and more obsessed with Faujas, who brutally rejects her in terms that anticipate the misogynistic tirades of Archangias in the novel that follows. Serge had decided to become a priest, and the novel ends with his being briefly called back from the seminary to his dying mother.

Serge links both sides of the Rougon-Macquart family: a Rougon through his mother Marthe Mouret (née Rougon), and a Macquart through his father François Mouret, son of Ursule Mouret (née Macquart). He is the great-grandson of Adélaïde Fouque ('Tante Dide'), the founding mother of the Rougons through her marriage to

⁶ The text of *Portraits de prêtres* was published in Russia in 1877. French version included in Roger Ripoll (ed.), *Émile Zola: Contes et nouvelles* (Paris: Gallimard, 1976), 982–1009.

the peasant gardener Rougon, by whom she had a son, Pierre, and the Macquarts through her liaison with the drunkard smuggler Macquart, by whom she had two children, Antoine and Ursule. She suffered from nervous instability, and was prone to bouts of hysteria; she ends her days in the asylum at Les Tulettes. The shadow of Les Tulettes, and what Zola terms the *lésion* (flaw) or *fêlure* (defect) of Tante Dide hangs over all the members of the family. Serge's parents are both said to be very like Tante Dide. Marthe suffers hysterical fits, and her husband will go mad. Serge's ambitious elder brother, Octave (*The Ladies' Paradise* and *Pot Luck*), seems more Rougon than Macquart. Serge and his sister Désirée belong to what Dr Pascal calls 'the tail-end of the tribe, the final degeneration'. The physically frail Serge, with his tendency to religious mysticism, takes after his mother, while Désirée, physically strong and healthy, is mentally retarded. In Zola's preparatory notes Serge Mouret is described as a weakling, predestined to the priesthood by his blood, his race, and the education that neuters him. He will be the main protagonist in what Zola described as 'the great struggle between nature and religion' in his 1896 list of projected novels for the Rougon-Macquart cycle.

We meet the other characters in Book One in the remote village of Les Artaud to which Abbé Mouret has, at his own request, been appointed. We learn that after the death of his parents, he gave his inheritance to his elder brother Octave, and took charge of his mentally retarded sister, Désirée. He chose to be in a place cut off from the world, where nothing would distract him from his devotions. Book Two is set in the Paradou, a quasi-Garden of Eden, in which Serge and Albine will play—tragically—Adam and Eve. Book Three returns to the church and Les Artaud. The three books are like the three acts of a tragedy.

The people of Les Artaud are all one family, all called Artaud, and distinguished only by nicknames. The whole tribe, much like the Rougon-Macquart family, comes from one source. With incest and promiscuity it has spread like the brambles that cover the rocky hill-sides. Among the Artauds some individual figures, like Bambousse, the ever-complaining Mother Brichet, or the Rosalie and Fortuné couple, add lively interest to the novel, and at the same time shed light on the life of the rural populace of France at that time: their poverty, their hard life, and their attitude to the Church. Religion is largely neglected, save for the traditional rituals of birth, marriage, and death,

and a few associated customs. The day's work is all-important and everything has to be fitted around it, so the marriage of Rosalie and Fortuné takes place before sun-up, much to the disgust of La Teuse, to avoid losing any of the day's pay.

There is little concern with morality. Rosalie's unmarried pregnancy does not bother her father, but the prospect of losing her in marriage to the penniless Fortuné certainly upsets him. She is a valuable commodity, as good a worker as any man, and if he has to part with her, he expects to be paid, as he would for a sack of corn. Each of the characters in this milieu has a specific role and La Teuse, the housekeeper in the presbytery, is the sensible, practical voice of rustic reasonableness. Against the background of mystical excesses, hallucinations, and an idealized landscape of love, she helps to maintain the solid 'reality' of the naturalist, that coexists and alternates with the imaginative exuberance of the poet. She not only does 'God's housework' in the church, but also, in her rough and ready way, looks after the abbé. She tries to curb the excesses of this young priest who denies all his physical needs to concentrate on his soul, and she shows a motherly affection for his sister, Désirée, the girl of 22 with the mind of a 10-year-old. La Teuse, like Zola, finds celibacy unnatural. Commenting on Abbé Caffin, the previous incumbent, sent to Les Artaud after breaking his vows, she remarks: 'I really don't understand how people can blame a priest so much, when he strays from the path' (p. 262), and although she has no liking for Albine, she will later tell a scandalized Archangias that if Albine 'represents the health of Monsieur le Curé... she can come whenever she likes, at any hour of the day or night. I'd lock them up together, if that's what they want' (p. 262).

Archangias, the other religious in Les Artaud, belongs to the order of the Lasallian Christian Brothers, who take vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience but are not ordained. Often derided for their lack of qualifications, they teach in the Christian Schools. Archangias's gross and violent nature is at once displayed in his bullying of the pupils at his school, and he shows a virulent hatred of women: 'they have damnation in their skirts. Creatures fit for throwing on the dungheap, with all their poisonous filth! It would be a good riddance if girls were all strangled at birth' (p. 25). He appoints himself 'God's policeman' in his zealous efforts to protect the abbé from sin. It is revealing of Zola's profound antagonism to Catholic dogma that

this physically dirty priest, with his scabrous imagination, claims to speak 'in the name of God' to drive the lovers out of Eden.

Serge's sister, Désirée, makes a significant appearance as a symbol of Nature when she enters the church during the last phase of the Mass. Farmyard odours enter with her, making a lively intrusion into the ritual at the altar. In her childlike innocence, Désirée is at one with her farmyard of animals she loves. But she has no more qualms about the killing of a chicken or a pig than about taking her cow to be serviced by the bull. Such things are natural, therefore unquestioningly accepted. She is comfortable in her body, and totally in tune with Nature and Life. She is Nature: beautiful, powerful, and mindless, untroubled by perplexity or doubt. She accepts death as she accepts birth and procreation as necessary phases in the process of making way for the next generation in an endless life-cycle.

The caretaker of the Paradou, Jeanbernat, Albine's uncle and guardian, is a representative of sceptical rationalism. In Zola's early plans he is simply a 'ridiculous old atheist', but in the finished novel, he is an impressive and distinctive figure, still tall, upright, and strong in his eighties. He allows his niece to run wild, with no education, believing in a Romantic, Rousseauesque free 'development of the temperament'. Having thoroughly absorbed the work of the eighteenth-century philosophers from books left in the chateau, he has become a well-read rationalist and atheist, a formidable enemy of the Church and all its priests: 'You'll find I can more than hold my own, Monsieur le Curé', he warns. Pointing to 'the whole horizon, earth and sky', he solemnly declares that 'When the sun gets blown out, that will be the end' because 'There is nothing, nothing, nothing...' (p. 36)—a cry he will repeat after the death of Albine. Jeanbernat spends most of his time quietly smoking his pipe and watching his lettuces growing, but he is goaded into using his stick on Archangias, and towards the end of the novel, the death of his niece provokes him to take dramatic revenge on the priest he despises and detests.

Dr Pascal, Serge's uncle, is not on stage a great deal, but has special importance for Zola, not only here but also in the first novel, *The Fortune of the Rougons*, and again in *Doctor Pascal*, the last of the series. Pascal frequently serves as narrator, as a connecting thread. Through him we learn the story of the Paradou: the lord who built the chateau in the time of Louis XV (like the chateau of the domaine de Galice) and his beautiful lady who died there. Through him we learn

something of the past of Albine, and something of the past of Serge. Pascal keeps records of the life and actions of the entire Rougon-Macquart family: 'I have files on all of them at home', he tells Serge, and 'one day I'll be able to draw up a wonderfully interesting chart' (p. 33). That 'chart', which features prominently in *Doctor Pascal*, stands proxy for Zola's own notes on the Rougon-Macquart family, the notes that provide the material of the novels. It is Pascal who takes the abbé with him to visit the Paradou, and later takes the sick Serge to convalesce in the Paradou: he can be seen as the 'experimenter', an avatar of the novelist.

Albine is Jeanbernard's 16-year-old niece, a 'child of nature' scarcely touched by education since the age of 9—though she briefly attended Archangias's school, to the fury of Jeanbernard. She runs wild in the park of the Paradou, draping herself in wild flowers. The abbé's first view of Albine—in a blaze of light through a suddenly opened door—immediately conveys the startling effect of this vision on the self-contained and generally unresponsive priest, while the opening of a door suggests the unlocking of a door to new kinds of experience. Rather than analysing his characters' feelings, Zola shows them externalized in this way through symbols, physical gestures, movements, and emotionally charged descriptions. Gaudily dressed like a 'gypsy-girl in her Sunday best', Albine seems to the abbé 'the mysterious and disturbing daughter of that forest he had glimpsed in a patch of light' (p. 39). The disturbance she causes signals the awakening of the abbé's hitherto repressed sexuality, while Albine's response to the encounter is suggested by her throwing down leaves as 'farewell kisses' over the visitors when they leave. The only further insight into the abbé's feelings that Zola offers here is to remark that the abbé at first avoids any mention of his visit to the Paradou, because of 'a vague feeling of shame'. It is up to the reader to interpret that shame, but Zola has obliquely indicated the importance and impact of this first encounter between the abbé and the woman he will love.

Nature and the Church

From the first pages of the novel, Abbé Mouret is seen in the church, where life and death, light and dark, Nature and Church will do battle. The barn-like church is dilapidated and empty, but at the altar, the profoundly devout priest and the lad Vincent, the server, perform

ritual gestures and utter hallowed words in an ancient language. La Teuse, meanwhile, obstinately rooted in the everyday here and now, anxiously watches a candle, fearing its wax may be wasted. Description of the interior of the church underlines the crude artificiality of its ornaments: the painted lips of the Virgin and the ochre-stained body of the Christ bedaubed with red paint, on the cross on which, we are told, 'nature, damned, lay dying' (p. 11). But all around, Zola shows nature vigorously thriving: the tree poking its branches through broken windows, sparrows flying in to hunt for crumbs, and then Désirée entering with an apron full of newly hatched chicks. Finally the sun enters, and takes possession of the whole church. The sun fills the empty benches with the dust particles dancing in its beams, and everything seems to partake of a life-giving sap, 'as if death had been conquered by the eternal youth of the earth' (p. 13).

The abbé despises nature, 'damned as it was'; and with this acceptance of the view of nature as 'damned', he rejects life and denies his own physical being. He has the serenity of 'a creature neutered and marked by the tonsure as a ewe lamb of the Lord' (p. 21). Blind to the beauties of nature, he sees in the surrounding countryside only 'a terrible landscape of dry moors'. But when Archangias has expatiated on the iniquities of Les Artaud and the shamelessness of the girls, the same scene becomes a 'landscape of passion, dry and swooning in the sun, sprawled out like an ardent and sterile woman' (p. 26). The abbé's new awareness, and accompanying abhorrence, of ubiquitous sexuality now colour and shape the landscape he sees.

As a priest, he cannot avoid contact with what he sees as the 'filthiness' of sexuality and procreation. Even at the seminary, he had had to read a book about sex for the use of confessors, which had left him feeling 'soiled forever'. Pastoral duty also obliges him to talk to Bambousse about getting the pregnant Rosalie married to her lover, and while he does so, Rosalie gazes at him boldly, trying to make him blush. Everything seems to be testing or taunting 'the serenity that allowed him to move without a tremor even through all the filthiness of the flesh' (p. 31).

The Awakening Sexuality of Abbé Mouret

Believing himself still a child, a creature set apart, 'cleansed of his sex', the abbé does not recognize the sensuality that drives his excessive

mysticism, but the sexual connotations of his adoration of the Virgin are clearly indicated. 'Where could he ever have found so desirable a mistress?' he ponders (p. 75), as if engaged in a love affair with Mary. The warning of Archangias—'Beware of your devotion to the Blessed Virgin'—seems well justified. The frenzy of his worship, the accompanying hysterical hallucinations, and his total neglect of his physical being lead to illness, which he sees as the result of multiple attacks on his senses: the heavy odours and overwhelming fecundity of Désirée's farmyard, 'the fetid warmth of the rabbits and fowls, the lubricious stink of the goat, the sickly fatness of the pig' (p. 54). Or perhaps it was 'the smell of humans' rising from the village, or Rosalie slyly laughing, or the girls of Les Artaud piling their branches on the altar, or maybe the girl of the Paradou. To shut out these intrusions, the abbé takes himself back in mind to the seminary, and Zola here retraces the whole process of the abbé's ordination, following step by step his preparation for the priesthood.

To exclude every troubling disturbance, the abbé fixes his thoughts and memories on the Virgin, but a vivid recollection of Albine bursts into his mind. 'She smelled of fresh air and grass and earth', which aligns her with Nature, but she also has the white skin and the blue eyes of the Virgin. 'And why,' he asks, 'why then did she laugh like that, as she gazed at him with her blue eyes?' (p. 91). That question offers an encoded message to the reader, mocking as it does, the abbé's intermingling of the Virgin and the flesh-and-blood woman in a confusion that will painfully torment him when he transfers his morbid worship of the Virgin to the woman, and later finds, to his horror, that he has sexualized the Virgin, endowing her with the attributes of Albine. The abbé struggles to escape the memory of Albine's laughter, numbing his senses, but 'Albine reappeared before him like a big flower that had sprung up and grown beautiful on this compost' (p. 91). The use of 'compost' here speaks revealingly of the characteristic conjunction in Zola of disgust of the sexual act and joyful celebration of life, a conjunction that may explain why so many young women die either as virgins or immediately after losing their virginity,⁷ in the works of such an advocate of fecundity. That conflict indeed accounts for a good deal of the ambivalence and ambiguity of

⁷ Fleur-des-eaux in the story 'Simplice' dies in a kiss; Miette dies in *The Fortune of the Rougons*; Angélique in *The Dream* dies on the steps of the cathedral after her marriage; Catherine dies in the mine in *Germinal*.

Zola's presentation of love, in which sex may be filthy like compost, but is still creative of life. It is no accident that Zola has Désirée stand on the dungheap at the end of the novel to announce the birth of the calf, the triumphant continuation of life.

As Abbé Mouret grapples with the torments of his newly awakened sexuality, the whole countryside takes on a lubricious aspect, lying 'in a strange sprawl of passion. Asleep, dishevelled, displaying its hips, it lay contorted, with limbs outspread, heaving huge, hot sighs' (p. 89). In his fever and revulsion, the abbé turns to the statue of the Virgin, desperately begging her to restore his innocence, to make him a child again, to castrate him and thus preserve him from the filth of sex.

Love in the Paradou

Book One ends with the abbé collapsed on the floor of his bedroom in the presbytery and Book Two—with a bold and very modern disregard of literary convention—opens, with no explanatory connecting link, in a completely new space with no presbytery, no church, and no Abbé Mouret. The first paragraph is devoted to a detailed description of the Louis XV decoration of a room in which plaster cupids play on the walls. This is a 'faded paradise', which is 'still warm with a distant scent of sensual pleasure' (p. 97); the scent of the eighteenth-century love affair lingers in the room to disturb the innocence of the new occupants. Albine, no longer the gaudy 'gipsy-girl', is dressed completely in white with her hair bound in lace, like a new version of the Virgin, and sits at the bedside of a convalescent Serge, no longer 'Abbé Mouret'. In this new space, Albine and Serge will play the central roles in Zola's version of the Fall of Man, a version quite other than that given in Genesis.⁸

Serge has lost his memory, and it is as if he had been granted that return to infancy he prayed for. He imagines he has just been born in this room, and in a sense he is indeed reborn here. Innocence, either as noun or adjective, is constantly repeated through these pages. Zola's descriptions of the wonderful, wild garden of the Paradou show what Hannah Thompson has called a 'textual tension between the "explicit" message, that is the innocence of the protagonists [. . .] and the "implicit"

⁸ 'Genesis' was the title of one of Zola's early poems, and the novel seems to continue the same poetic impulse.

message, the presence of erotic desire in even the most apparently pure of contexts'.⁹ Zola describes with delicacy and tenderness the gradual awakening of love and desire, and descriptions of the garden provide markers for the progress of the love of the 'two children' (Albine is 16 and Serge 25) who become man and woman, Adam and Eve, in the Paradou which will become a paradise lost.

And it is a very beautiful, dreamlike paradise that is lost, with its own dreamlike time and space. Space in the Paradou seems limitless, yet is enclosed by high walls; and there are so many lanes, paths, and glades, and such a profusion of plants, trees, and flowers that the outlines blur in an increasingly fantastic landscape, like the landscape of a fairy tale. Time, too, moves erratically, seeming sometimes to stand still, then leaping forward. There are few temporal landmarks here of the sort found in Book One, where the abbé appears at a quarter past six in the morning, and does not eat the lunch prepared for eleven o'clock until half past two; there are no mealtimes here, no church services. It is often difficult to establish any clear chronology in the Paradou, the days seem to drift into each other: time simply flows. Serge's beard and the length of his hair are the only real indicators of the length of his illness.

The love story begins with the innocent friendship of the two 'children', who wander through the woods and fields of the Paradou, leap over streams, paddle in the rivers, and eat cherries off the trees. They are so innocent they can even play at being 'lovers', like the lord and lady of the chateau. They are surrounded by flowers and trees, sunlight and shade, blue sky and rippling streams, but in their wandering, they are also looking for a legendary tree, which is in a glade of such perfect bliss that one may die of it. They know the tree is forbidden, but the search continues. Gradually, new sensations creep in, and a new awareness of each other. The forbidden tree has become too disturbing, and they 'erase' it: 'The tree did not exist. It was just a fairy tale' (p. 151). Similarly, when the couple kiss and declare their love, their new situation is too disturbing, so the story is rewritten: 'They had not exchanged a kiss, they had not said they loved each other' (p. 159). They are tormented by frustrated sexual longings—longings they do not understand, and cannot satisfy. The landscape

⁹ *Naturalism Redressed: Identity and Clothing in the Novels of Émile Zola* (Oxford: Legenda, 2004), 56.

becomes distorted and ugly: 'there was here a crawling-forth, an upsurge of nameless creatures glimpsed in nightmares', as if this was a description of their very desires.

This beautiful garden, Zola decreed in his preparatory notes, is Nature the Temptress. Zola the naturalist has studied his plants and describes real flowers, often with their botanical names, but in an unreal, implausible profusion that seems to undermine reality.¹⁰ Alpine rock plants grow alongside tropical flowers and African shrubs. It is not surprising that Serge and Albine get lost in this exotic, surreal setting, where the senses are overloaded. This is both a garden of delights and a garden of temptation, where nature constantly provokes the senses. Flowers are sensualized and sexualized, transformed into tempting visions:

The living flowers opened out like naked flesh, like bodices revealing the treasures of the bosom. There were yellow roses like petals from the golden skin of barbarian maidens, roses the colour of straw, lemon-coloured roses, and some the colour of the sun, all the varying shades of skin bronzed by ardent skies. Then the bodies grew softer, the tea roses becoming delightfully moist and cool, revealing what modesty had hidden, parts of the body not normally shown, fine as silk and threaded with a blue network of veins. (p. 120)

Maupassant commented in a letter to Zola of the 'extraordinary power' of this novel, which plunged him into such an excitement of all the senses that at the end he felt 'utterly intoxicated'.¹¹ Zola makes of this garden a lyrical hymn to Nature:

Only the sun could enter here, sprawl in a sheet of gold over the fields, thread the paths with its runaway rays, hang its fine, flaming hair between the trees, and drink at the springs with golden lips that set the water trembling. (p. 108)

Zola the poet is a master of imagery, and shows an ever-changing, animate Nature, constantly transformed by metaphor. Grasses become a sea, with floods and waves and tides, through which the lovers wade. Flowers become dainty ladies with parasols, noisy harridans, blowsy prostitutes. The scents and colours of the plants are shrill or quiet, making loud or gentle music: 'Les couleurs, les parfums et les sons se

¹⁰ See Sophie Guermès, 'Détruire le réel: "L'Outrance de sève" du Paradou', *Cahiers ERTA* 3 (2013), 69–82.

¹¹ The letter is included in Henri Mitterand (ed.), *Émile Zola, Les Rougon-Macquart* (Paris: Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1967), i. 1684–5.

répondent' ('Colours, scents, and sounds correspond') for Zola as for Baudelaire. Here in this magical garden, the lovers will at last find the forbidden tree, in whose shade they make love. There they briefly enjoy the 'perfect bliss' of consummation, before they are driven out of paradise for ever.

Adam and Eve

In the Genesis of the Bible, Eve, tempted by the serpent, gives Adam the apple from the forbidden tree of *knowledge*. Both eat, and are expelled from the Garden of Eden, to prevent them from eating the fruit of the tree of life. In Zola's version, however, it is the tree of *life* that is 'forbidden' and it is beneath the tree of life that Serge and Albine make love, with the connivance of the garden. That consummation was 'a victory for all the creatures, plants, and things that had willed the entry of these two children into the eternity of life'. God drove Adam and Eve out of Eden so that they should *not* 'take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever' (Genesis 3:22). In Zola's version, Nature grants them entry into that endless life cycle which is the eternity of life.¹²

In his preparatory dossier, Zola wrote: 'Nature plays the role of the Satan of the Bible', and 'the woman helps Nature; she is the temptress, an Eve with no social nor moral sense, the human animal in love'. He unambiguously allocates the blame: 'it's the woman who brings down the man', and this has been seen as evidence of misogyny on Zola's part, but from dossier to novel is often a long jump, and Albine's role in the novel is not that simple. It is Albine who saves Serge's life and nurses him back to health, and she is allowed some confusion about Serge's priestly status. Albine takes Serge to the forbidden tree, and tells him it is not forbidden, but Zola, noting in his dossier that 'Eve pleads for the joys of the forbidden', at once adds: 'It's not true anyway, it's permitted.' Albine is perhaps only the temptress in so far as Nature is the temptress.

It has been argued that this replay of the Christian story reveals a Zola who is 'Christian in spite of himself',¹³ but Zola's reworking of

¹² Naomi Schor observes that 'the concept of a great life-death-life cycle underlies the whole of the *Rougon-Macquart* series'. In 'Zola from Window to Window', *Yale French Studies*, 42 (1969), 38–51, at 50.

¹³ See Henri Guillemin, *Zola légende et vérité* (Paris: Julliard, 1960).

the Genesis story and his views expressed elsewhere make a 'Christian Zola' a very dubious proposition. There can be little doubt that Zola's ideas, shaped in a Christian climate, are deeply marked by the Christian ethic, but this is adapted and used as the basis for a new mythology.

In *The Fortune of the Rougons*, a former cemetery scattered the streets of Plassans with bones when it was relocated. The bones serve as an extended, poetic imaging of the way the past dwells in the present, of how the paths of the living are strewn with relics of the dead, and the living are moulded by the history, the memories, and the heredity they carry within them. Throughout all the novels of the Rougon-Macquart series, the past is a constant presence,¹⁴ and perhaps nowhere more so than in this novel.

The past hangs heavy over Serge and Albine, most obviously in the story of Adam and Eve; and the Paradou, unlike the garden of Genesis, is not newly created. It is already a place of love and death, still holding the scent of the previous love affair, which eventually becomes suffocating in the room where Serge convalesces. On the walls, faded erotic pictures reappear. The lady is said to be buried in the grove of the tree of life, where Serge and Albine make love, and the earlier love affair is echoed in the marble woman, lying in the pool, her face worn away by water, with a broken cupid standing nearby. Serge and Albine are in a haunted paradise. Behind the eighteenth-century love story lurks yet another potent background story, in which Adélaïde Fouque,¹⁵ the founding mother of the Rougon-Macquart family, plays the Eve who stains the whole family with her 'sin', as well as her mental instability. Serge has to bear the full weight of his heredity and the education that has made a priest of him.

The Priest and the Church

After the sunlight and flowers of Book Two, Book Three is much darker, moving into the torments and hallucinations of the priest who has rejected Albine and returned to the Church. It begins with the marriage of Rosalie and Fortuné, with Abbé Mouret officiating and

¹⁴ Naomi Schor comments perceptively on 'the prominent role played by the dead in Zola's fiction', in *Zola's Crowds* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1978), 120.

¹⁵ The dead, in the Rougon-Macquart novels, refuse to remain dead, and Adélaïde Fouque refuses to die—both metaphorically and physically—she lives to the age of 105, dying only in the last novel.

repeating in his homilies the words that, as Serge, he used to Albine. This marriage makes a bitter comment on what has gone before. The abbé will be tormented and tortured, with grace descending on him to bring respite and serenity, then leaving him to sink back into the agonies of temptation. There is no serpent as such in this Eden, but at one moment the abbé recalls Albine with her 'bare arms, supple as snakes... It was she who led the way' (p. 250), as if blaming her as the temptress. She comes to the church to reclaim him, and he vividly recalls 'their love, the vast garden, the walks beneath the trees, the joy of their union' (p. 233). But that memory of love and happiness is damned and blackened when the man in Serge is vanquished by the priest, who condemns both Albine and the garden with a diatribe worthy of Archangias:

Where you live there is only darkness. Your trees distil a poison that turns men into beasts; your thickets are black with the venom of vipers; your rivers bear pestilence in their blue waters. (p. 242)

Zola dramatically conveys the twisting and turning, the illogicalities, the contradictions and tergiversations of a mind torn apart by the agonizing conflict of desire and renunciation. Albine's claim that he belongs to her is answered by 'I belong to God' (p. 234), and he drives her away quite brutally. Her image, however, remains tantalizingly vivid before him until at last, with no resistance left, 'he threw himself upon her breast, with no respect for the church; he seized hold of her limbs, and possessed her under a hail of kisses' (p. 245). That hallucinatory sexual act is followed by blasphemy, when he echoes Jeanbernard's cry of defiant atheism: 'There is nothing, nothing, nothing. God does not exist' (p. 254).

The abbé's earlier insistence to Albine that the church, though poor and small, 'will become so enormous, and cast such a shadow that all of nature will die' (p. 243), is mocked by a dramatic hallucination in which he sees the church destroyed by nature. Nature already invaded the church in the first scenes of the novel, but now it is 'Revolutionary Nature' attacking the Church that for centuries had overshadowed it. First the Artauds seem to break down the door, then animals batter the walls, and insects attack the foundations. Nature builds barricades with overturned altars and knocks down the walls. Nature tears the church apart piece by piece. The rowan tree that had earlier pushed its branches through the window, now enters the church as 'the tree

of life', and plants itself in the nave. There it grows and grows until it bursts the heavens, reaching 'higher than the stars'. At this, 'Abbé Mouret applauded furiously, like a damned soul [. . .] The church was defeated. God no longer had a home. God would not bother him any more' (p. 258). However, when he emerges from his hallucination, he is amazed to find the church apparently unscathed. He is still caught, as before, between 'the invincible church' and 'all-powerful Albine' (p. 258).

'Revolutionary' Nature, and the reference to the traditional barricades of insurrection, suggest that Zola may here also have in mind the revolution of the Commune in 1871, and the great push towards secularization that followed. The radical socialist Commune was violently suppressed in the *semaine sanglante* (bloody week) of May 1871, and the conservative moral order restored. The Church survived, and the general situation in the Third Republic returned, to Zola's dismay, to much as it had been during the Second Empire. The continued dominance of the Church was further stamped on the Paris skyline in the shape of the Sacré-Cœur, erected on the heights of Montmartre. Building began the year this novel was published.

Throughout the novel there are swift and sudden changes of mood and scene. The immensely dramatic invasion and destruction of the church, for instance, is followed by a domestic scene in which Archangias gallops round the table on a chair, and breaks plates with his nose! Successive scenes comment on each other with striking contrasts and parallels. The abbé drags Albine through all the stations of the Cross, telling her of the sufferings of his God, but Albine can hardly bear to look at 'the crudely coloured pictures on which scars of red paint cut across the ochre of Jesus's body' (p. 239). She is recalling their walks in the Paradou, and the paths that led to 'our love, to the joy of living with our arms around each other' (p. 240). The abbé is absorbed by the Cross, while Albine longs for life and love. A parallel scene shows the same gulf between the two when Albine takes Serge through what can be called 'the stations of the Paradou', reminding him of the happiness they had known there and telling him of the happy life they might yet live together: 'We'll live with our little family all around us' (p. 273). Serge does not even hear, he is thinking about stone saints and 'the tranquil death of my flesh, the peace I enjoy through not living' (p. 273). It was only with revulsion that he briefly imagined children, and pushed them away—'no, he would not have children' (p. 265).

Albine's dream of life and love and children shows her as a natural, loving, mothering figure, while Serge rejects love, refuses children, and chooses death. With such alternations, contrasts, and parallels, Zola creates what Chantal Pierre-Gnassounou has called 'a harmonious ensemble, in which chapters echo each other across the text'.¹⁶

The church bell that opens the novel tolls again to call Serge back from the Paradou, and finally tolls for the funeral of Albine at the end of the novel. That last chapter exemplifies the rich texture of the narrative, as it interweaves the killing of the pig, the funeral procession, Jeanbernat's cutting off of Archangias's ear, and, just as the coffin is being lowered, an ironic last glance at 'the marble tomb of Abbé Caffin, that priest who had loved, and who lay there so peaceful beneath the wild flowers' (p. 291), before ending with the triumphant announcement of the birth of the calf. Such complex patterning is characteristic of what Henri Mitterand has called Zola's 'total mastery of a truly symphonic and choreographic composition'.¹⁷

The Sin of Abbé Mouret is a novel brimful of energy, audacity, and sheer lyrical beauty. It boldly disturbs the reader's expectations and habits, and destabilizes the 'real'. The passage from immediate 'reality' into dream, memory, or hallucination is often blurred, creating a surreal effect; and the inclusion of so many 'stories' within the story of Serge and Albine shows the sort of reflexivity that is more usually associated with the *nouveau roman* (new novel) of the twentieth century than with a nineteenth-century novel: 'there is no garden. It's just a story I made up', says Albine (p. 110). The tree is after all not forbidden, indeed perhaps there is no tree. Zola's fictional paradise is riddled with fictions. Further, in reflecting through Pascal his own work within this work, Zola points obliquely to his own authorial activity, and in so doing, subverts the naturalist stance,¹⁸ which stresses objective observation rather than authorship. *The Sin of Abbé Mouret* shows all the faces of this multifaceted writer—realist, poet, Impressionist, surrealist, and (almost) *nouveau romancier* (new novelist).

¹⁶ 'Zola and the Art of Fiction' in B. Nelson (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Émile Zola* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 93.

¹⁷ In 'Popular Novel and Literary Novel: Zola at the Crossroads' (trans. Valerie Minogue), *Bulletin of the Émile Zola Society*, 49–50 (2014), 5–15, at 13.

¹⁸ In the light of later literature and literary theory, French and English critics have reappraised Zola's work, finding in Zola, in the words of Susan Harrow, 'a more equivocal, more prospective writer than has traditionally been assumed' (in *Zola: The Body Modern: Pressures and Prospects of Representation* (London: Legenda, 2010), 207.

The Sin

And what, finally is the nature of the sin in this novel? For Abbé Mouret it is the sin of sex, the sin of breaking his priestly vow, while for Serge, it is the rejection of Albine. Albine is left seeking death and asking the fundamental question: 'What sin had she committed that the garden no longer kept the promises it had made her since she was a child?' (p. 277). Albine's challenge: 'Come on, answer me, accuse me, tell me it was I who came and tempted you. That will be the last straw' (p. 237) seems not only to challenge Serge but also to make an ironic and forceful protest for herself, and for Eve, against the biblically authorized condemnation. For Pascal, the sin is partly his, for not foreseeing the results of an 'experiment' intended to save his nephew and 'civilize' Albine. But it is Serge who, as Abbé Mouret, turns his back on love and life, and abandons Albine and her unborn child.

When Dr Pascal arrives with news of Albine's death, and learns the abbé is reading his breviary, he shouts angrily to La Teuse: 'No, don't call him, I'd strangle him, and there's no point... I only want to tell him that Albine is dead! Dead, do you hear? Tell him from me that she's dead!' Then he shouts once more: 'And also tell him from me that she was pregnant!' adding the bitterly ironic comment: 'He'll be pleased to hear that' (p. 283). He then goes to the Paradou where he sits by the bed where Albine lies dead among the flowers, and weeps, 'overwhelmed with grief'. In so far as Pascal stands in for the author, he here reflects the view of the author, who laments the terrible waste of life and condemns the Church that caused it. Zola gives the last word to life, as Nature emphatically resumes its sway, reasserting itself vigorously with the birth of the calf.

The novel has sometimes been regarded as pessimistic, but in its espousal of the cause of life and nature against repression and dogma, the novel seems to reaffirm what Anatole France commended at Zola's funeral: his 'real optimism, an obstinate faith in the progress of intelligence and justice'.

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

THIS translation is based on the scrupulously annotated text in volume i of Henri Mitterand's Bibliothèque de la Pléiade edition of *Les Rougon-Macquart* (Paris, 1967). Other editions were also consulted, notably those of Colette Becker (Paris, 1972), Colette Becker with Gina Gourdin-Servenièrre and Véronique Lavielle in volume ii of *Les Rougon-Macquart* (Paris, 2002), and Sophie Guermès's Livre de poche edition (Paris, 1998). All include very helpful critical commentary and a dossier of relevant material.

The first English translation was made by Ernest Alfred Vizetelly and appeared under the title *Abbé Mouret's Transgression* (London, 1894); then an abridged version by M Smyth, *The Sin of the Abbé Mouret* (London, 1904), and in the second half of the twentieth century, Alec Brown's *The Abbé Mouret's Sin* (London, 1957; repr. 1970, also published as *The Sinful Priest*, 1960), and Sandy Petrey's *The Sin of Father Mouret* (Lincoln, Nebr., 1969).

The novel was adapted for the French film *La Faute de L'Abbé Mouret* (1970; English title, *The Demise of Father Mouret*), directed by Georges Franju. The Austrian composer Gerhard Wimberger based his opera *Paradou* (1981/5) on this novel. The vividly pictorial quality of the novel inspired the painting *Le Paradou* (1883, Museum of Fine Arts, Ghent) by Albin Joseph Édouard Dantan, and a painting by the British late Pre-Raphaelite painter John Collier, *La Mort d'Albine* (1898, Glasgow Museum Resource Centre).

It has been a privilege and a pleasure to make a new translation of this challenging and extraordinarily rich novel. I have tried to respect and preserve its verve and variety, its rich, poetic texture and powerful rhythms. While trying to make the language read easily for English readers, I have tried not to 'over-English' a work so deeply set in its rural French context. I have kept 'Abbé' rather than 'Father', and kept names—'Les Artaud', 'La Teuse', 'La Rousse'—in the form in which they are written and heard in the text. Similarly, while not wishing to write Victorian prose, I have tried to avoid language too obviously twenty-first-century in tone and mood.

I should like here to acknowledge my great debt to the scholarship and insights of other writers in this field, and I should like to thank

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- Zola, Émile, *The Kill*, trans. Brian Nelson.
- Zola, Émile, *The Ladies' Paradise*, trans. Brian Nelson.
- Zola, Émile, *The Masterpiece*, trans. Thomas Walton, rev. Roger Pearson.

Zola, Émile, *Money*, trans. Valerie Minogue.

Zola, Émile, *Nana*, trans. Douglas Parmée.

Zola, Émile, *Pot Luck*, trans. Brian Nelson.

Zola, Émile, *Thérèse Raquin*, trans. Andrew Rothwell.

A CHRONOLOGY OF ÉMILE ZOLA

- 1840 (2 April) Born in Paris, the only child of Francesco Zola (b. 1795), an Italian engineer, and Émilie, née Aubert (b. 1819), the daughter of a glazier. The naturalist novelist was later proud that 'zolla' in Italian means 'clod of earth'.
- 1843 Family moves to Aix-en-Provence.
- 1847 (27 March) Death of father from pneumonia following a chill caught while supervising work on his scheme to supply Aix-en-Provence with drinking water.
- 1852-8 Boarder at the Collège Bourbon at Aix. Friendship with Baptistin Baille and Paul Cézanne. Zola, not Cézanne, wins the school prize for drawing.
- 1858 (February) Leaves Aix to settle in Paris with his mother (who had preceded him in December). Offered a place and bursary at the Lycée Saint-Louis. (November) Falls ill with 'brain fever' (typhoid) and convalescence is slow.
- 1859 Fails his *baccalauréat* twice.
- 1860 (Spring) Is found employment as a copy-clerk but abandons it after two months, preferring to eke out an existence as an impecunious writer in the Latin Quarter of Paris.
- 1861 Cézanne follows Zola to Paris, where he meets Camille Pissarro, fails the entrance examination to the École des Beaux-Arts, and returns to Aix in September.
- 1862 (February) Taken on by Hachette, the well-known publishing house, at first in the dispatch office and subsequently as head of the publicity department. (31 October) Naturalized as a French citizen. Cézanne returns to Paris and stays with Zola.
- 1863 (31 January) First literary article published. (1 May) Manet's *Déjeuner sur l'herbe* exhibited at the Salon des Refusés, which Zola visits with Cézanne.
- 1864 (October) *Tales for Ninon*.
- 1865 *Claude's Confession*. A *succès de scandale* thanks to its bedroom scenes. Meets future wife Alexandrine-Gabrielle Meley (b. 1839), the illegitimate daughter of teenage parents who soon separated; Alexandrine's mother died in September 1849.

- 1866 Resigns his position at Hachette (salary: 200 francs a month) and becomes a literary critic on the recently launched daily *L'Événement* (salary: 500 francs a month). Self-styled 'humble disciple' of Hippolyte Taine. Writes a series of provocative articles condemning the official Salon Selection Committee, expressing reservations about Courbet, and praising Manet and Monet. Begins to frequent the Café Guerbois in the Batignolles quarter of Paris, the meeting-place of the future Impressionists. Antoine Guillemet takes Zola to meet Manet. Summer months spent with Cézanne at Bennecourt on the Seine. (15 November) *L'Événement* suppressed by the authorities.
- 1867 (November) *Thérèse Raquin*.
- 1868 (April) Preface to second edition of *Thérèse Raquin*. (May) Manet's portrait of Zola exhibited at the Salon. (December) *Madeleine Férat*. Begins to plan for the Rougon-Macquart series of novels.
- 1868–70 Working as journalist for a number of different newspapers.
- 1870 (31 May) Marries Alexandrine in a registry office. (September) Moves temporarily to Marseilles because of the Franco-Prussian War.
- 1871 Political reporter for *La Cloche* (in Paris) and *Le Sémaphore de Marseille*. (March) Returns to Paris. (October) Publishes *The Fortune of the Rougons*, the first of the twenty novels making up the Rougon-Macquart series.
- 1872 *The Kill*.
- 1873 (April) *The Belly of Paris*.
- 1874 (May) *The Conquest of Plassans*. First independent Impressionist exhibition. (November) *Further Tales for Ninon*.
- 1875 Begins to contribute articles to the Russian newspaper *Vestnik Evropy* (*European Herald*). (April) *The Sin of Abbé Mouret*.
- 1876 (February) *His Excellency Eugène Rougon*. Second Impressionist exhibition.
- 1877 (February) *L'Assommoir*.
- 1878 Buys a house at Médan on the Seine, 40 kilometres west of Paris. (June) *A Page of Love*.
- 1880 (March) *Nana*. (May) *Les Soirées de Médan* (an anthology of short stories by Zola and some of his naturalist 'disciples', including Maupassant). (8 May) Death of Flaubert. (September) First of a series of articles for *Le Figaro*. (17 October) Death of his mother. (December) *The Experimental Novel*.
- 1882 (April) *Pot Luck (Pot-Bouille)*. (3 September) Death of Turgenev.

- 1883 (13 February) Death of Wagner. (March) *The Ladies' Paradise* (*Au Bonheur des Dames*). (30 April) Death of Manet.
- 1884 (March) *La Joie de vivre*. Preface to catalogue of Manet exhibition.
- 1885 (March) *Germinal*. (12 May) Begins writing *The Masterpiece* (*L'Œuvre*). (22 May) Death of Victor Hugo. (23 December) First instalment of *The Masterpiece* appears in *Le Gil Blas*.
- 1886 (27 March) Final instalment of *The Masterpiece*, which is published in book form in April.
- 1887 (18 August) Denounced as an onanistic pornographer in the *Manifesto of the Five* in *Le Figaro*. (November) *Earth*.
- 1888 (October) *The Dream*. Jeanne Rozerot becomes his mistress.
- 1889 (20 September) Birth of Denise, daughter of Zola and Jeanne.
- 1890 (March) *The Beast in Man*.
- 1891 (March) *Money*. (April) Elected President of the Société des Gens de Lettres. (25 September) Birth of Jacques, son of Zola and Jeanne.
- 1892 (June) *La Débâcle*.
- 1893 (July) *Doctor Pascal*, the last of the Rougon-Macquart novels. Fêted on visit to London.
- 1894 (August) *Lourdes*, the first novel of the trilogy *Three Cities*. (22 December) Dreyfus found guilty by a court martial.
- 1896 (May) *Rome*.
- 1898 (13 January) 'J'accuse', his article in defence of Dreyfus, published in *L'Aurore*. (21 February) Found guilty of libelling the Minister of War and given the maximum sentence of one year's imprisonment and a fine of 3,000 francs. Appeal for retrial granted on a technicality. (March) *Paris*. (23 May) Retrial delayed. (18 July) Leaves for England instead of attending court.
- 1899 (4 June) Returns to France. (October) *Fecundity*, the first of his *Four Gospels*.
- 1901 (May) *Toil*, the second 'Gospel'.
- 1902 (29 September) Dies of fumes from his bedroom fire, the chimney having been capped either by accident or anti-Dreyfusard design. Wife survives. (5 October) Public funeral.
- 1903 (March) *Truth*, the third 'Gospel', published posthumously. *Justice* was to be the fourth.
- 1908 (4 June) Remains transferred to the Panthéon.