

THE SUCCESS AND FAILURE OF SELECTED CHARACTERS  
IN ZOLA'S ROUGON-MACQUART SERIES

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## PREFACE

Many tragic characters are found in the Rougon-Macquart series of Emile Zola. Caught in their unbending life patterns, either by heredity or environment, they are powerless to change their actions and reactions.

Zola was a subscriber to the naturalistic method. This is an excessive form of realism which has the following characteristics: emphasis on the lower and coarser forms of life, a presentation of material which is often revolting, rejection of ideality, minimum of heart interest and plot with interest in facts and notations, magnification and study of industries while seeking to apply to fiction the processes of the natural sciences. The laws of brute nature are viewed as grimly controlling the destinies of helpless and hopeless man.<sup>1</sup>

Zola seemed to feel that he had to paint his characters so as to drain them of their very reason for life while they are searching for happiness, success, and fulfillment. On the other hand, he allows those without a great deal of human feeling or sympathy to reach a material success often unavailable to others.

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<sup>1</sup>William A. Nitze and E. Preston Dargan, A History of French Literature from the Earliest Times to the Great War (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1922), p. 623.

Although Zola, in the Rougon-Macquart series, wanted to show the heredity traits of the founders of the family and the way in which these traits dictated the life pattern of the descendants, it seems that the environment in which the persons lived and were trapped plays a more important role than does heredity. In fact, according to Angus Wilson,<sup>2</sup>

The complicated scheme of physical and mental inheritance, which Zola set forth in the genealogical trees he issued from time to time, became of less and less significance as the work proceeded. Nevertheless the family chronicle framework had great use in giving form and shape to the vast onrush of ideas with which Zola was first assailed.

So, the fact that some of the characters in the novels are related to each other is often a literary device rather than an integral part of the series.

To Zola, poetic justice was given short shrift. He did not seem to accept the conception that evil should be punished and good requited. Among certain of Zola's critics was a feeling that his conception of sin as its own worst punishment is more ethical than the old conception

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<sup>2</sup>Angus Wilson, Emile Zola, An Introductory Study of his Novels (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1952), p. 93.



of poetic justice and that he can "pass the trifling external expiation disdainfully by."<sup>3</sup>

This lack of poetic justice certainly seems clear when one regards several of the characters in the Rougon-Macquart and their reaction to one another. Zola seems to have a fear of letting a normal love relationship develop between a man and a woman. For one who loves, tragedy or great unhappiness usually results. The love relationship is doomed to failure. Often this failure is the result of circumstances over which the persons involved have no control. By not being able to control circumstances, but by being caught in them as in the vortex of a whirlpool, these people are obliged to continue in their helpless, frequently cowardly way. Often death is the unhappy reward for loving. However, Marc Bernard says the unhappiness of Zola's characters is due more to their complete lack of energy than to the conditions imposed upon them; each of them carries in the most secret part of himself a frightfully strong seed of self-destruction.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>Winthrop H. Root, German Criticism of Zola 1875-1893 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1931), pp. 62-63.

<sup>4</sup>Marc Bernard, Zola (New York: Grove Press, 1960), p. 52.

To contrast the effects of those who love and whom their environment overwhelms, one can look to the other side of the coin and see those who manage to survive in the midst of the human jungle. These are the ones who seem to be rewarded by their evil deeds. These characters survive and are rewarded because they understand their environment and know how to overcome their difficulties by use of skill, wits, craftiness, or dishonesty. Winthrop Root says that repeatedly Zola was charged with loving what was evil and fearing what was good.<sup>5</sup> This certainly seems to be carried out in his novels. The wicked prosper, and the good fail.

The organization of this study will include a summary of Zola's life, showing in part the influence his life had on the development of his novels. Certain childhood experiences found their way into episodes of the novels. In the next chapters, the theme of the success and failure of selected characters will be shown as it affects the lives of those who love and of those who simply seek personal gain. The novels for the study are as follows: La Fortune des Rougon (1871), L'Assommoir (1877), Une Page d'Amour (1878), Nana (1880), Au Bonheur des Dames (1883), Germinal (1885), La Terre (1887), L'Argent (1891),

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<sup>5</sup>Root, op. cit., p. 17.

La Débâcle (1892) and Le Docteur Pascal (1893). These novels will be treated in chronological order.

Conclusions will be discussed in the final chapter.



## CHAPTER I

### THE LIFE OF EMILE ZOLA

This is a brief sketch of Emile Zola, who lived much of his adult life vicariously through his novels. The widowed mother of Emile heavily stressed right and wrong in her moral teachings to her son. During his life, Emile's mother had a great influence on him, and he tried to follow her wishes.

Emile Edouard Charles Antoine Zola was born on April 2, 1840, in Paris. His father was a civil engineer who had come to Paris to try to interest Louis-Philippe's advisors in developing a water system for Aix-en-Provence, a town often threatened by drought. This was approved, and the Zolas moved to Aix.

In 1847, when Emile was six years of age, the father made a business trip to Marseilles. He became ill and died there. This sudden death in a hotel room appears in the novel Une Page d'Amour, in which the young woman, Hélène Mouret Grandjean, loses her husband in the same way.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>Emile Zola, Une Page d'Amour (Paris: Brodard et Taupin, 1966). Reference to each work of Zola will be given only once in the footnotes. Thereafter, the title and page will occur only in the body of the thesis after the quotation.

Having lost the main support of the family, Emile's mother was forced to move to poorer and poorer surroundings. Undoubtedly, this became more and more difficult as Madame Zola tried to rear her son with manners and morals superior to the other children in the neighborhood. It was quite difficult for the young Emile to fit into any social group. It was through the friendship and protection of the artist Paul Cézanne and other friends that Emile was in part able to adjust to a difficult school situation where he was often teased because of his northern accent and his slowness in subject matter.

In 1857, Emile and his mother moved back to Paris in hopes of obtaining some sort of financial assistance from former friends of François Zola, Emile's father. The young Zola entered school but failed his baccalaureate examination. He worked for a few months, in 1860, as a dock clerk, a task which filled him with despair. Zola quit this menial work to write verses and short stories. He lived in dire poverty, often catching sparrows on the roof and roasting them for a meager meal.<sup>7</sup>

During the winter of 1861-62, he had a disastrous liaison with a prostitute. Perhaps the unhappiness and lack of affection in this relationship led Zola to distrust

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<sup>7</sup>Wilson, op. cit., p. 12.

a true, happy, long-lasting love. This was reflected in his works. How could a happy fulfilling love be possible for others if it were not possible for him?

In 1862, Emile began to work for the publishing house of Hachette. Later that year he was introduced to Gabrielle-Alexandrine Meley, who became his mistress and later his wife.

In 1864, the Contes à Ninon was published. One of this collection of stories was entitled Simplice. Its theme was about a handsome young man who took refuge in a virgin forest. He met a lovely nymph whose love was fatal to them both.<sup>8</sup> This fatality foreshadowed the course that love played in future works.

To write for a living was Zola's goal, and in 1866 he decided to leave Hachette. Between journalism and novels, he was able to earn a living.

Thérèse Raquin was written during 1867. This novel of lust, murder, remorse, and suicide, although criticized, was a financial success. The violence represented in this novel was to be found later in many of the Rougon-Macquart books.

Instead of writing separate novels, Zola decided to do something on a larger scale. He had been influenced

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<sup>8</sup>Elliott M. Grant, Emile Zola (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1966), p. 27.



by the Comédie humaine of Balzac in which Balzac depicted all of contemporary society in many volumes. Zola preferred to use one family and its descendants during the reign of Louis-Philippe. Thus was born Les Rougon-Macquart, histoire naturelle et sociale d' une famille sous le Seconde Empire.

Heredity modified by environment was the vehicle by which Zola showed the results of excessive traits and passions. Zola appeared to feel that his work would have a social effect and that, by its presentation of a given situation, social action might follow. He explained his purpose thus:<sup>9</sup>

. . . the evils he described could only be cured by knowing that they existed and what their causes and effects were. This belief coupled with his esthetic credo that art must reproduce life exactly resulted in his complete frankness which so offended the critics' moral and esthetic feelings.

That Zola continued to write and produce in the face of many cries of obscenity attests to his courage and belief in himself.

The Rougon-Macquart series is based on a variety of backgrounds. The series numbered twenty with the first in 1871 and the last in 1893. The method of work was most organized. A primitive outline called an Ebauche

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<sup>9</sup>Root, op. cit., p. 16.

was used. Zola would sketch the characters, their actions, and their story in the Ebauche. Often he would seek first-hand information in the appropriate quarters in order to add to the reality of the novel. This documentation was methodical in preparation just as Zola was methodical in his work. He would write only about three hours a day.<sup>10</sup> The rest of his time was spent in documentation and journalistic efforts.

Difficulties between Prussia and France, which led to the war of 1870, caused Zola to write newspaper articles against the policies of Napoleon III. Zola came close to being tried for civil disobedience. Soon after, with his wife and mother, he went to Marseilles. After the war was over, he returned to Paris where La Fortune des Rougon<sup>11</sup> was being published in serial form in a newspaper. In this novel, as well as subsequent ones, Zola proposed<sup>12</sup>

to show how this Rougon-Macquart family is determined physiologically and environmentally, driven by the desires and appetites which in this modern age affect all classes of society from top to bottom.

Zola generally followed through on this plan although at times it appeared that the only relationship of one

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<sup>10</sup>Grant, op. cit., p. 53.

<sup>11</sup>Emile Zola, La Fortune des Rougon (Paris: Imprimerie Union, Mulhouse, 1966).

<sup>12</sup>Grant, op. cit., p. 59.

novel to another was that some of the characters just happened to be related to each other.

Six Rougon-Macquart novels were published before Zola reached success and recognition.

Because of its unflattering picture of the working class, Zola was highly criticized when he published L'Assommoir<sup>13</sup> in 1877. The language used in the book was also highly condemned as "Zola for the first time employed the language of the social class he was portraying, and what was worse, without expurgating the vocabulary. . . . This was one of his boldest departures from literary tradition."<sup>14</sup> But however much L'Assommoir was criticized, it appealed to the public and Zola became rich through its sale.

Other novels of the series had varying amounts of success and criticism. However, La Terre,<sup>15</sup> published in 1887, was to be the strongest of those written after L'Assommoir. This novel has been described as "a violent,

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<sup>13</sup>Emile Zola, L'Assommoir (Paris: Brodard et Taupin, 1966).

<sup>14</sup>Root, op. cit., p. 19.

<sup>15</sup>Emile Zola, La Terre (Paris: Brodard et Taupin, 1965).



excessive, poetic, sordid, sometimes moving, sometimes comical, and, in the last analysis, exasperating book."<sup>16</sup>

In 1888, Zola met an attractive young girl named Jeanne Rozerat who became his mistress. By 1891, she had given him two children. This deep and fulfilling relationship supplied a great need in Zola's life. It gave him the love and passion which had previously been lacking. Through Jeanne and their children, Zola was to find himself a complete man.

Alexandrine, Zola's wife, discovered the liaison in 1891. She was understandably furious. However, no separation followed and, although Alexandrine was not happy with the situation, she accepted it. She had given Zola no children. It would seem logical that Zola would have divorced his wife to marry Jeanne but, because he tried to live morally, he felt bound to his wife who had lived the lean, difficult years with him. He may have found it difficult to accept a liaison such as he had disapproved in certain novels.

The remaining novels of the Rougon-Macquart became weaker and weaker. Since Zola had found satisfaction in his personal life, he had no reason to release his

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<sup>16</sup>Grant, op. cit., p. 145.

frustration by writing. Although he continued to publish, he began to lose his powerfulness.

That Zola had found happiness is shown in the personal dedication of Le Docteur Pascal<sup>17</sup> that he gave to Jeanne Rozerat. Zola wrote to his darling Jeanne-- to his Clotilde who had given him the royal banquet of her youth and who had given him back his thirties. . . ,<sup>18</sup> for it is obvious that Dr. Pascal is an idealized version of Zola, and Clotilde is Jeanne.

After the Rougon-Macquart series, Zola wrote several other novels but they lacked the force, popularity, and success of previous ones.

Zola met from time to time with a group of writers, among them Flaubert, the brothers Goncourt, Daudet, and Maupassant. Here he frequently found information and inspiration for his novels.

In 1894, a Jewish officer, Alfred Dreyfus, was wrongfully convicted of selling state secrets to Germany. Zola, along with many others, investigated the case. He felt that Dreyfus was innocent. Zola's most famous article concerning Dreyfus, "J'accuse," was written in 1898. It

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<sup>17</sup>Emile Zola, Le Docteur Pascal (Paris: Brodard et Taupin, 1965).

<sup>18</sup>Henri Barbusse, Zola (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1933), p. 179.



was followed by a libel suit, and he was sentenced to prison. He fled to England for refuge where he remained for eleven months.

Zola died accidentally in 1902 as a result of asphyxiation. However, he appeared to have reached the following realization:<sup>19</sup>

. . . in the order of the universe, death is a necessary part. . . death is, therefore, ever present: death by accident, by starvation. . . death in all its terrible finality. To few does it come peacefully at the end of a long and happy existence. Yet, in the last analysis, it is defeated by life. If any positive credo emerges from Zola's work, it is precisely this: belief in the eternal force and value of life.

This theme of the value of life became much more prevalent after Zola met Jeanne Rozerat and softened his attitude toward evil and unhappiness.

Zola's sudden death at a time when he had wealth, fame, love, and a good life is somewhat reminiscent of the endings of some of his works. It is the good at heart who do not survive.

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<sup>19</sup>Grant, op. cit., p. 180.

## CHAPTER II

### THE FAILURE OF THOSE WHO REACH FOR LOVE

In considering love objects in the Rougon-Macquart series, one must be aware of certain patterns of behavior of those involved. Love is elusive and comes to the few rather than the many. It is often tinged with sadness, hopelessness, and despair. It is often of short duration with tragic consequences. The idyll of love is often associated with death. Perhaps Zola's failure to have children in his marriage contributed to his associating love with unhappiness because of his own unfulfilled desires and unfulfilled love. His wife's relationship to him was extremely maternal. This did not fill the passionate needs in Zola's life to love another person fully. Later, as he became more deeply involved in his relationship with Jeanne Rozerat, love took on a different face as we see in the last novel of the Rougon-Macquart series, Le Docteur Pascal, in which the love is happy, requited, and which presents a hope for future in the person of the child.

In examining several of the characters more closely, one can see more clearly the lack of success of the love relationship. In La Fortune des Rougon, the first novel of the series, one encounters Silvère Mouret, the grandson

of the founder of the family who is called Tante Dide, and Miette, his companion who lives next door to him. She is an orphan who lives with an uncle and cousin who overwork her and treat her without consideration. The story of Silvère and Miette is that of young, pure love which should hold many promises for the future. However, Zola draws the story of their love as one of death and sadness. An old cemetery is the meeting place of the two. They feel close to the spirits and bones there. Zola personifies the cemetery and the dead, as one reads that the dead want the marriage of the two (La Fortune des Rougon, p. 286). Silvère and Miette are saddened because they are not yet able to understand what the dead want of them (La Fortune des Rougon, p. 285). There is a foreshadowing of their approaching death when a voice in the cemetery tells them they will go to death before their nuptials on the day they want to give themselves to each other.

Silvère is going to leave Miette to join the Republican insurgents of the coup d'état of December, 1851. However, she goes with him carrying the flag for the company. During the long, cold night after hours of walking, the couple drop back to rest before cutting across the fields to meet the group in the next town. At this point, the two discover their passion for each



other which up to this time had been disguised as a close companion sort of relationship. Zola pointed out;

Jusqu'à cette heure trouble, les jeunes gens s'étaient aimés d'une tendresse fraternelle. Dans leur ignorance, ils continuaient à prendre pour une amitié vive l'attrait qui les poussait à se serrer sans cesse entre les bras et à se garder dans leurs étreintes, plus longtemps que ne se gardent les frères and les soeurs. . . . Ce fut par cette noire and froide nuit de décembre, aux lamentations aigres du tocsin, que Miette et Silvère échangèrent un de ces baisers qui appellent à la bouche tout le sang du coeur (La Fortune des Rougon, p. 230).

The two, realizing that they are too young to marry, feel it would be better to die together than to be separated. The complete ideal of their dying together would be to have Tante Dide join them, dying in her turn. Then they would all be happy in some future world (La Fortune des Rougon, pp. 234-35).

Silvère and Miette eventually rejoin the insurgents where they are attacked by the gendarmes. Miette is shot and lies dying in Silvère's arms. Her regret is in dying a virgin. Zola wrote,

Miette lui (Silvère) disait qu'elle partait seule, avant les noces, qu'elle s'en allait sans être sa femme; elle lui disait encore que c'était lui qui avait voulu cela, qu'il aurait dû l'aimer comme tous les garçons aiment les filles (La Fortune des Rougon, p. 300).

The feelings in the cemetery of the relationship of life, love, and death are carried on in the love of Silvère and Miette and her death, which served no purpose.

Later, Silvère is killed in the same old cemetery for having previously injured a gendarme. Because of the death of Miette, Silvère is delighted at the thought of joining her--especially in this spot which had meant so much to both of them. As he dies, he sees Miette before him (La Fortune des Rougon, pp. 430-31). Thus the idyll of pure love is preserved. It is the innocent who suffer.

Zola often follows the pattern of love leading to unhappiness. At times, as in the story of Miette and Silvère, there is no sexual surrender, thus keeping love on a high emotional plane. If one does surrender to his sexual desire, this too can lead to tragic consequences such as one can see in L'Assommoir.

The chief character of L'Assommoir meets an unhappy end in the degradation of her love for others and in the drinking and promiscuity that lead to her death. Gervaise, a young laundress, comes to Paris with Lantier, the father of their two illegitimate children. Lantier becomes a good-for-nothing who runs off with another woman, leaving Gervaise destitute. Lantier himself will be more fully discussed in the next chapter.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup>cf. p. 64.

The young woman then meets Coupeau, a roofer, who wants her to become his mistress. She refuses as she feels she must care for her children and thus she has no time to become involved with men. As time passes, the two do fall in love and marry. At first it is a good marriage. Both work hard and are able to save some money in order to buy a small laundry for Gervaise. But, before they acquire the shop, Coupeau falls off a roof and breaks a leg. During the time of recuperation, he does nothing and gradually loses his congenial, pleasing personality. He starts drinking during this time. Since he drinks only wine and not brandy, Gervaise takes a very maternal outlook and indulges her husband by caring for him and putting him to bed when he comes home intoxicated.

Gervaise is finally able to acquire her small laundry business through the loan of a sum of money by a good friend, Goujet, a blacksmith. This young man is silently in love with Gervaise and would do anything to make her happy or to help her. She feels a deep affection for him, but this is communicated only silently. Knowing of Goujet's feeling for her gives Gervaise a certain strength to meet life and to be more understanding and indulgent toward her drunken husband who has never gone back to work.



Hard work carefully done has helped Gervaise to rise quickly to a position of success in her business. Her downfall is much slower and drawn out. One can say it truly starts when Coupeau comes home drunk one day. He puts his arms around his wife. His wine-laden breath does not disturb her. Zola described their kiss: "Et le gros baiser qu'ils échangèrent à pleine bouche, au milieu des saletés du métier, était comme une première chute, dans le lent avachissement de leur vie" (L'Assommoir, p. 164). She finds it easier to give in and to please Coupeau than to try to change him and his lazy ways. She assumes the burden of earning a living for him and of indulging him.

Lantier is seen again around the neighborhood. Gervaise is shaken by her thoughts of him. She is upset by her reaction concerning him. She thinks of Goujet, the man she loves silently and from a distance. Zola commented,

Elle songeait au forgeron, le coeur tout hésitant et malade. Il lui semblait que le retour du souvenir de Lantier en elle, cette lente possession dont elle était reprise, la rendait infidèle à Goujet, à leur amour inavoué, d'une douceur d'amitié (L'Assommoir, p. 213).

At Coupeau's insistence of letting bygones be bygones, Lantier becomes a boarder at the Coupeau home. Goujet discovers that Lantier has tried to kiss Gervaise

and that he wants to become her lover again. Gervaise is naturally upset about this. Goujet proposes to Gervaise that they run off together to Belgium to live a happier life. Gervaise refuses him because she is married and because she thinks too much of Goujet to let him be carried away by this foolishness.

Through various circumstances, Gervaise does again become Lantier's mistress. This is with the approval of Coupeau, thus causing a rather curious ménage à trois. Accepting this situation is the easiest way out for Gervaise. Zola mentioned her lassitude: "Ses paresseuses l'amollissaient, son besoin d'être heureuse lui faisait tirer tout le bonheur possible de ses embêtements" (L'Assommoir, p. 312).

Life goes from bad to worse. Business in the laundry is falling off. Gervaise's work becomes sloppier. Coupeau drinks more and more heavily. Lantier demands spending money from Gervaise. At last, Goujet discovers that Gervaise has been sleeping with Lantier. He is overcome with chagrin and tells Gervaise that all is finished between them. Now Gervaise does not have even this faint spark of hope to keep her going.

When Gervaise was younger, all she wanted was enough to eat, a small but neat place to live, a husband who did not beat her and who did not drink hard liquor.



When Coupeau was courting her, she saw the distilling machine at the dram-shop. Her reaction was "C'est bête, ça me fait froid, cette machine. . . la boisson me fait froid" (L'Assommoir, p. 50). Now her husband is drinking the same hard liquor and has started to beat her. All of her dreams have gone. At one point in her life, all was going well, but now all is leading downhill. Gervaise finally joins her husband in his drunkenness. She finds some escape in alcohol.

The degeneration of Gervaise becomes more and more complete. She has lost her shop. Eventually, to earn money for liquor, she becomes a streetwalker. One night, by accident, she encounters Goujet. What a shock to have him see her in this condition! She goes with him to his home. Because she had not eaten for a long time, he gives her some stew. He confesses his love for her at last. She too confesses her love for him, but she leaves this emotionally charged situation as both the situation and her degradation in life are too much to bear before him.

Eventually Gervaise ends up living in a small hole under the stairs of a cheap apartment house, as she has no money for a room. While she is there, Coupeau dies in an asylum from over-drinking. One day, Gervaise is

discovered dead in her hole under the stairs. She has died of drink and slow starvation.

Again we have an unhappy ending for an unhappy person. Zola wants his characters to pay for any happiness they might have encountered or hoped for. Once Gervaise and Coupeau have started their downward trend, there is no hope for them. They are powerless to change the pattern of their lives. This is a high price to pay for the few short years of happiness that the two shared. Even the affair, if it can be called that, with Goujet is unhappy as neither Gervaise nor Goujet try to change the pattern of their lives. They love each other silently as though each is a pillar in the other's life, giving strength and comfort when needed. According to Elliott Grant, the book shows a "number of human beings engaged in an epic struggle against forces greater than themselves, a conflict in which they are doomed to defeat."<sup>21</sup>

The tragedy of Gervaise is that she is limited by education and circumstances to win a pathetic little vision of individual happiness from an uncomprehended and uninterested world. She is treated with the greatest pity and the least false sentiment. In a note, Zola says

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<sup>21</sup>Grant, op. cit., pp. 116-17.

that he must show all the world trying to bring about her ruin, consciously or unconsciously.<sup>22</sup>

Une Page d'Amour is a story of adultery treated sympathetically as a genuine search for idyllic love by two lonely people.<sup>23</sup> H  l  ne Mouret Grandjean,<sup>24</sup> a young widow, and her daughter, Jeanne, live in Paris. Jeanne is ill. Late one night, her illness reaches a crisis. H  l  ne calls for the doctor who lives nearby for help. He is able to save the sick child.

H  l  ne explains the child to the doctor:

Elle est si d  licate, si nerveuse. . . . Je ne suis pas toujours ma  trese d'elle. Pour des mis  res, elle a des joies et des tristesses qui m'inqui  tent, tant qu'elles sont vives. . . . Elle m'aime avec une passion, une jalousie qui la font sangloter, lorsque je caresse un autre enfant (Une Page d'Amour, p. 20).

This statement foreshadows the rest of the story as one sees the fight develop between Jeanne and Henri Deberle, the doctor, for the love of H  l  ne. Jeanne is a neurotic child who would prefer to die rather than to share.

Both H  l  ne and Henri help to care for the poor in the area. This gives them the opportunity to know each other and to discover their mutual growing feelings

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<sup>22</sup>Wilson, op. cit., p. 111.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 99.

<sup>24</sup>cf. p. 6.



for each other. In addition, Hélène and her daughter are often invited by Madame Deberle to share the garden of the Deberles. This continues the opportunity for Hélène and the doctor to add innocently to their relationship--an unavowed relationship up to this point.

Henri vows his love for Hélène during a party at his home. She flees, as she is afraid the other guests will be able to tell what happened by the expression on her face.

A period of calm follows. It is as if Henri has never yielded to a moment of madness in telling her he loves her. It is simply understood between them that they love each other and this for the moment at least is sufficient.

Jeanne falls ill again. Henri spends as much time as possible with her. Hélène and the doctor feel their love grow as they are together at Jeanne's bedside caring for her. There is a crisis, and the doctor is not certain if Jeanne will be able to survive it. He saves her, and Hélène in her gratitude, relief, and love falls on the doctor's neck and tells him she loves him. Zola wrote,

C'était son aveu, cet aveu si longtemps retardé, qui lui échappait enfin, dans cette crise de son coeur. La mère et l'amante se confondaient, à ce moment délicieux; elle offrait son amour tout brûlant de sa reconnaissance (Une Page d'Amour, p. 207).

Here one sees Hélène's role as mother and lover intermingled. She is not or has not been able in her relations with her daughter to show her that there are different kinds of love and that the kind she feels for her daughter is not the same as that which she feels for a man. Jeanne is jealous also of a M. Rambaud, a family friend who would like to marry Hélène.

As Jeanne starts to recover, she becomes aware of a closeness between her mother and the doctor. From this time on, Jeanne changes and becomes hard to manage, is sad, does not often speak, loses her gaiety and wants to be left alone. Finally, Dr. Deberle understands. Jeanne is jealous and does not want to share her mother. Jeanne's former admiration for the doctor begins to turn to hate. Her capriciousness knows no limits. One day, she treats the doctor coldly, rudely; the next, she is most amiable and wants to see him and her mother side by side next to her bed. Zola explained:

Alors, un sentiment de révolte anima peu à peu Hélène. Certes, elle serait morte pour sa fille. Mais pourquoi la méchante enfant la torturait-elle à ce point, maintenant qu'elle était hors de danger? Lorsqu'elle s'abandonnait à une de ces rêveries qui la berçaient, quelque rêve vague où elle se voyait marcher avec Henri dans un pays inconnu et charmant, tout d'un coup l'image raidie de Jeanne se levait; et c'étaient de continuels déchirements dans ses entrailles et dans son coeur. Elle souffrait trop de cette lutte entre sa maternité et son amour (Une Page d'Amour, p. 224).

One sees the reoccurring conflict in Hélène concerning her daughter and Henri. Hélène feels the antagonism grow toward her daughter but she takes no steps to correct the situation nor to make her daughter feel needed. She seems powerless to change the situation. She follows the path of least resistance. It is only in her daydreams that she is able to be free.

One day, after the doctor no longer comes to the apartment, Jeanne asks her mother if she is happy. Hélène says she is, but why the question? Jeanne answers that "elle voulait l'aimer si fort, si fort, qu'on n'aurait pas pu trouver une mère aussi heureuse dans tout Paris" (Une Page d'Amour, p. 228). Jeanne is trying to be everything to her mother; but, at the same time, she is failing because of the impossibility of the task.

Hélène discovers that Dr. Deberle's wife is going secretly to meet a man who would like to become her lover. Hélène sends a note to the doctor anonymously telling him of the rendezvous. Several minutes before the time, Hélène realizes the folly of what she has done. She grabs a wrap in order to leave her house to warn the couple that the doctor will be coming to that particular address. Jeanne wants to go out with her when she sees Hélène preparing to leave. When Hélène refuses to let her go, Jeanne says she will die if her mother leaves



her behind. This proves to be a rather strong blackmail threat for a twelve-year-old girl.

Hélène arrives in time to warn Madame Deberle that her husband is supposed to arrive shortly. Hélène stays behind after the others leave as she feels someone ought to be there when Henri arrives.

Henri believes she sent the note to arrange a meeting between the two of them. Hélène finds herself unable to tell him the real reason for writing the note. She lies and tells him what he wants to hear--that she was waiting for him. During the long afternoon they spend together, she gives herself to him.

Jeanne, who has been left at home, is enveloped in a jealous anger. She feels she has been betrayed by her mother. She stays by an open window and lets it rain in on her. She becomes quite ill.

Her already precarious health causes her to become susceptible to tuberculosis. Jeanne takes advantage of her ill health and prefers to hide her condition from her mother so it becomes worse and worse. She actually prefers to die rather than to see her mother have a close feeling for another.

During the last three weeks of Jeanne's life, the doctor comes every day to see how she is. Hélène will not see him nor let him into the apartment. She feels

that her daughter's dying is a punishment for their transgression.

Hélène never sees Henri again. The price the two had to pay for their love was too great a guilt to bear.

This episode which turns out to be a less than idyllic search for love raises several questions that Zola never answered. How could this relationship have ended other than unhappily? Would a divorce have been possible? Probably not at this time of history and among religious people. What would have happened to the wife, Madame Deberle, and to that marriage? Regardless of the added dramatic emphasis of Jeanne's dying, it appears that the relationship could not have ended other than unhappily.

Another kind of love episode appears in Nana.<sup>25</sup> Nana, a high-class prostitute, goes to her country home. Nearby is the home of Madame Hugon and her son, Georges, a young man just starting law school. He is in love with Nana.

Georges steals out of his house in the evening, is caught in a downpour, and finally arrives at Nana's house to surprise her with a visit.

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<sup>25</sup> Emile Zola, Nana (Paris: Brodard et Taupin, 1959).



She takes him in and, since she has no men's clothes for him, she lets him wear one of her peignoirs while his rain-soaked clothes dry. She then treats him as though he were a dear girl friend.

With him, Nana feels quite young and innocent again--as though she were going back to a time she had thought to be forever lost. She becomes his mistress for eight days--days filled with fun and happiness. At the end of this time she goes back to Paris. When she again sees Georges, or Zizi, as he is called, in Paris, the romance has gone out of the relationship for Nana, and she is bored with the younger man's company. This breaks Zizi's heart, and eventually he stabs himself in her apartment. He dies later--either a suicide by drowning or by the reopening of his stab wounds (Nana, p. 420). Nana's reaction is that he has been a foolish boy to do such a thing.

The time Nana spent with Georges in the country were among the happiest days in her life. This love, short-lived though it was, seems to be the one in which she becomes the most emotionally involved. However, this has the appearance of a romantic idyll based on fantasy rather than reality. According to Angus Wilson, this affair is "idyllic and sensual but also sterile and deadly as it is essentially adolescent in a pathological way."

Excitement for Nana comes originally when Georges is seen dressed in women's clothing.<sup>26</sup>

The innocence of Georges and his sincerity can be compared to Silvère's.<sup>27</sup> To them, death is preferable to losing the object of one's love. The brief time of love and happiness is paid for with death.

Au Bonheur des Dames<sup>28</sup> was to have been Zola's novel of "sweetness and light."<sup>29</sup> This book has a conventional happy ending; however, in keeping with his naturalistic tendencies, Zola first has to wring the depths of unhappiness and sordidness out of the lives of his characters before permitting them to reach any satisfaction in life. The owner of a large department store, Octave Mouret, nephew of Hélène Mouret<sup>30</sup> and Silvère Mouret,<sup>31</sup> is a man who believes in taking advantage of women, either sexually or in business affairs. He hires a poor young girl, Denise Baudu, as a sales clerk. At first, Denise is rather afraid of Mouret even though she is attracted to him. He treats her rather paternally;

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<sup>26</sup>Wilson, op. cit., p. 48.

<sup>27</sup>cf. p. 15.

<sup>28</sup>Emile Zola, Au Bonheur des Dames (Paris: Brodard et Taupin, 1964).

<sup>29</sup>Grant, op. cit., p. 108.

<sup>30</sup>cf. p. 6 and p. 24.

<sup>31</sup>cf. p. 15.

but, at the same time, he is jealous at the thought that she might have a lover.

Denise loses her position when it is incorrectly thought that she was entertaining a young man in the basement of the store. In reality, it is her brother, Jean, who has been asking for money. Mouret is the only one who believes her but, as she has already been dismissed, he makes no effort to rehire her.

A period of no work and great hunger follows for Denise. When she does have food, she gives it to her youngest brother, Pépé. One day in the Tuileries Garden, Denise encounters M. Mouret who tells her that she may have her job back any time and that everyone at the store now knows the truth about who the young man was. Denise is joyous because now Mouret knows that she has remained virtuous. She goes back to the Bonheur.

Mouret makes it known to Denise that he loves her and wants her to be his mistress. She refuses as she secretly loves him and does not want to be shared with his other mistresses. Mouret is tortured by the fact that she is the first woman to refuse him. For him, Denise "apportait tout ce qu'on trouve de bon chez la femme, le courage, la gaieté, la simplicité; et, de sa douceur montait un charme d'une subtilité pénétrante de parfum" (Au Bonheur des Dames, pp. 387-88). Denise loves



Mouret, but she does not want to be a temporary and shared part of his life. She prefers to keep her virginity and a tranquil life that she herself rules rather than embark on the unknown and the uncertainty of an indefinite tomorrow. She also does not approve of Mouret's using women simply as the means to an end. When she sees him suffer so greatly on account of her, it seems to her that he is making up for some of his former mistakes.

Interest in the underdog and trying to help him is a strong facet of Denise's personality. Using Mouret's feelings for her as a lever, she is able to improve the lot of her fellow employees and others with whom Mouret has business dealings.

Eventually Denise decides to quit her job as it is easier to flee the situation and its tenseness than to stay and perhaps yield to Mouret, which is something she would regret the rest of her life.

After much indecision, Mouret decides to ask Denise to marry him. Mouret says about marriage "Est-ce qu'il n'est pas la santé nécessaire, la force et l'ordre de la vie?" (Au Bonheur des Dames, p. 502) This statement sounds as though it could be Zola himself talking about the virtue of marriage. Denise refuses Mouret at first; but, finally overcome, she throws her arms around his neck and confesses her love for him.



Thus all ends happily like a story-book--all the trials and tribulations of the past are overcome. Perhaps Denise does protest too much; but for once in Zola's novels, one sees that love and virtue can win out. One must keep in mind however that this success is reached only after great suffering, poverty, unhappiness, and misery. In this particular novel, the pair suffer first and are happy later instead of vice versa as is frequent in many of the other novels in the series.

Germinal<sup>32</sup> is Zola's novel on coal-mining. Etienne Lantier, the son of Gervaise Macquart and Auguste Lantier,<sup>33</sup> arrives in Montsou, a small town, and finds work in the mine. He meets a young worker, Catherine Maheu, for whom he feels a comradeship. Before he can act to let her know of his feelings for her, his rival, Chaval, makes her his mistress. Catherine thinks briefly of Etienne with some regret but, now that she is committed to Chaval, must think of him no longer.

Etienne becomes a lodger in the Maheu home. There is a common bedroom for all the many children. Catherine sleeps with her sister, Alzire. Etienne shares a bed across the room with one of Catherine's brothers, Jeanlin.

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<sup>32</sup>Emile Zola, Germinal (Paris: Brodard et Taupin, 1964).

<sup>33</sup>cf. p. 18.

Both Etienne and Catherine continue to be drawn to each other but they never do allow themselves to be overcome by their love and passion for each other. Zola wrote:

Plus ils vivaient côte à côte, et plus une barrière s'élevait, des hontes, des répugnances, des délicatesses d'amitié, qu'ils n'auraient pu expliquer eux-mêmes (Germinal, p. 165).

Chaval had been tiring of Catherine; but, when he thinks she might be having an affair with Etienne, he becomes jealous and she, therefore, becomes quite dear to him. He beats her in fits of jealousy. Finally Catherine goes to live with Chaval. She is partly forced to do this because of his superior strength and because she finds it to be the easiest way out as it may as well be this man instead of another. She accepts his beating her with the same resignation.

Etienne and Chaval fight over Catherine. Etienne wins, and Chaval abandons Catherine. He wants nothing more to do with her as she has warned Etienne during the fight that Chaval had a knife.

Catherine is now staying with her family. One morning after the strike at the mine is over, Etienne awakens to find that Catherine is dressing in order to go back to work. She feels she must help the family financially. The two embrace, drawn more by feelings of pity and despair than anything else. Zola's description follows:

Et ils restaient sans autre désir, avec le passé de leurs amours malheureuses, qu'ils n'avaient pu satisfaire. Était-ce donc à jamais fini? n'oseraient-ils s'aimer un jour, maintenant qu'ils étaient libres? Il n'aurait fallu qu'un peu de bonheur, pour dissiper leur honte, ce malaise qui les empêchait d'aller ensemble, à cause de toutes sortes d'idées, où ils ne lisaient pas clairement eux-mêmes (Germinal, p. 435).

Etienne goes back to the mine with Catherine. It has been sabotaged, and the two are trapped underground. While fleeing the rising water, they encounter Chaval, whom Etienne is forced to kill in self-defense.

The couple becomes weaker and weaker due to lack of food. In one last burst of energy, after being trapped for more than a week, Catherine and Etienne make love for the first time. Zola commented:

Et ce fut enfin leur nuit de noces au fond de cette tombe, sur ce lit de boue, le besoin de ne pas mourir avant d'avoir eu le bonheur, l'obstiné besoin de vivre, de faire de la vie une dernière fois. Ils s'aimèrent dans le désespoir de tout, dans la mort (Germinal, p. 485).

Afterward, Etienne is seated with Catherine on his knees. They remain this way a long while as Etienne thinks that Catherine is sleeping. She has died, however. Several days later, help reaches them, and Etienne is saved.

The love between Catherine and Etienne has certain aspects of sameness with that of Silvere and Miette<sup>34</sup> and, to some extent, with that of Denise for Octave Mouret.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup>cf. p. 16.

<sup>35</sup>cf. p. 31.



There is innocence and idealism. Catherine and Etienne will not accept a less than perfect relationship. Matthew Josephson wrote, "Among miners, sublimated in rare moments above the instinct of reproduction, love struggles against squalor and implacable circumstances."<sup>36</sup> The fight for love to succeed is an uphill battle. Finally, it seems as though love will win out when Catherine and Etienne go to the mine together to start work again, but Zola lets them have just a few brief moments together before the sabotaging of the mine.

One may ask if Etienne and Catherine could have broadened their relationship sooner? Apparently they could not, as once they were set on a certain course, they were doomed to follow it. She could not change her relationship with Chaval. He was her first lover so she was bound to him. Etienne could only remain the outsider. Catherine, like Gervaise in l'Assommoir,<sup>37</sup> wanted only a little tenderness in life in loving another who loved her and who would not beat her. For her, also, death is the penalty paid for that short time of happiness.

Going from miners to peasants, one arrives at La Terre. One of the characters, Jean Macquart, the

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<sup>36</sup>Matthew Josephson, Zola and his Time (New York: Garden City, 1928), p. 191.

<sup>37</sup>cf. p. 18.



son of Antoine Macquart and the nephew of Pierre Rougon,<sup>38</sup> has come from his home in the southern part of France to La Beauce to work. He meets two sisters, Lise and Françoise. He offers to marry Lise, who is near his age; but, after committing himself to her, he discovers that he really loves Françoise, who is fifteen years his junior. He makes the best of this, however, in realizing that at least he will be able to be near Françoise as a relative.

As it turns out, Lise marries a man named Buteau by whom she has already had a child. He marries her after he has received his inheritance. Jean is delighted by the turn of events and begins to court Françoise. She avoids him by saying she is trying to be prudent in their relationship. Actually, all she feels is coldness.

Jean is forced into a quarrel and a fight with Buteau who is now Françoise's brother-in-law. This ruins his chances to receive Françoise in marriage, as she is still underage. Jean is desolate because he was trapped into a quarrel for which he had not looked. Lise and Buteau do not want Françoise to marry, as they will then lose her share of the land which they have been using.

Buteau is a thoroughly repulsive sort of person. He is constantly trying to rape Françoise, who is successful

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<sup>38</sup>cf. p. 61.

at repulsing him. His wife is aware of this and, even though she is jealous, she accepts it.

The main reason that Françoise will not allow Buteau to touch her is not because she does not want him to, but because she wants to give nothing and to receive nothing. She wants to remain free of all obligations. Also, Françoise's feelings toward Buteau are rather confused. All she knows is that she would rather die of need than share him with someone else.

Eventually, Françoise says she will marry Jean after reaching her majority when she then becomes mistress of her own property. This is all very matter of fact. Although Jean loves Françoise very deeply, their relationship remains that of two very good friends. Françoise has full confidence in Jean and makes him her confident and advisor.

The two marry and live in the ancestral family home which Françoise has been able to buy at an auction which has been held as a means of dividing the proceeds of the family property with her sister, Lise. But her triumph at being able to buy the house over Lise's wishes and opposition cause Françoise to feel no pleasure at her success. In fact, the first night in the house makes Françoise feel that her husband, Jean, is a stranger. This feeling of strangeness lasts until they are able to

laugh when the donkey enters the house accidentally. Then Jean kisses Françoise as if to say they would be happy all the same.

Jean and Françoise are married for two years. She does not love him as he loves her and he still feels like a stranger to her although they live in harmony and the marriage prospers. The largest note of discord is with Buteau and Lise who are always looking for revenge because Jean, by marrying Françoise, took her land and the house.

Buteau and Lise learn that Françoise is pregnant. If she dies before the baby is born, her property returns to her sister. Buteau would like to see the child be miscarried simply because he cannot get over the fact that Françoise refused to have anything to do with him sexually.

Lise has learned of a superstitious way of getting rid of a child. A man must take a woman sexually while tracing three signs of the cross on her stomach and recite an Ave in reverse. Buteau later attacks Françoise with this purpose in mind. His wife watches him rape her. In fact, she helps him by holding Françoise's legs.

Françoise, in spite of the circumstances, finds herself responding to Buteau's overtures and she realizes that she loves him and no other. One critic commented:<sup>39</sup>

Most interesting is Françoise with her prickly feeling for justice and personal integrity. . . . Françoise is fierce and revengeful; she defends herself like a cat against her seducer, but when she is raped, she fully accepts the complexity of her own nature: she loves her ~~destroyer~~ and respects his passion for her property. To deny that would be to deny that she is a peasant.

Françoise, in spite of herself, is aware of her own nature and faces the fact that she loves Buteau. Her sister is also aware of this.

Buteau, thinking only that at last he possesses Françoise, has forgotten to make the signs of the cross. Lise, in seeing the reactions of her husband and sister, unleashes her ever-present jealousy. This starts a fight between the two sisters.

Lise grabs a scythe and hits Françoise with it. It enters her side. Unbeknown to them, their grandfather, Fouan, has observed the entire scene but he does not dare to make his presence known.

In spite of this mortal wound, Françoise refuses to tell what her sister and brother-in-law have done to her. She claims it was an accident. She dies without

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<sup>39</sup>V. S. Pritchett, "Zola's La Terre," New Statesman and Nation, Vol. 48 (July 31, 1954), 134.



leaving a will so everything goes back to her sister and Buteau. Jean, the husband, remains the outsider.

The grandfather lets Jean know, while in Buteau's presence, that Buteau and Lise were responsible for killing Françoise. In fear of being caught for this crime, Buteau and Lise kill the grandfather but make it look like an accident. Jean realizes that he will be next on the list so he makes up his mind to leave La Beauce and go back into the army.

He knows he could have preferred charges against the couple, but why go to the bother? Françoise, by remaining silent on her deathbed, has indicated that she wants the matter to remain closed. So the easiest thing to do is to leave. Jean's reaction is as follows:

Dès son mariage, il en avait eu gros sur le coeur; mais les voilà qui volaient, qui assassinaient, maintenant! De vrais loups lâchés au travers de la plaine, si grande, si calme! Non, non, c'était assez, ces bêtes dévorantes lui gâtaient la campagne! Pourquoi en faire traquer un couple, la femelle et le mâle, lorsqu'on aurait dû détruire la bande entière? Il préférerait partir (La Terre, p. 484).

Had it not been for outside forces such as Buteau and Lise, the marriage of Jean and Françoise might have had a chance. The pressure applied by these two cause strain and difficulty. Had they been stronger, Jean and Françoise might have taken steps to remove the negative influence of the other couple, but it was easier to go along day

by day. Again, one can see the failure of those called "good" people. By living with goodness in their hearts and towards others, they meet tragedy and death.

L'Argent<sup>40</sup> is Zola's novel of the stock market. Saccard, the son of Pierre and Félicité Rougon,<sup>41</sup> is a man for whom money is everything and for whom feelings of loyalty, devotion, and uprightness are nothing. It is through money, be it his own or someone else's, that he shows himself to be generous rather than being generous in the giving of himself. He meets a woman several years his junior, Madame Caroline, and her brother, Georges Hamelin, who rent rooms in the same house that he does. They become friends. Saccard persuades Hamelin to become a partner in the new bank he is planning to open.

Saccard spends a great deal of time with the brother and sister. He finds Madame Caroline to be an excellent companion and friend. Occasionally he asks himself "ce qu'il arriverait, s'il la prenait un beau soir entre ses bras?" (L'Argent, p. 77) This, however, is a casual thought with which he merely toys until, one day, Madame Caroline receives extremely depressing personal news.

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<sup>40</sup>Emile Zola, L'Argent (Paris: Imprimerie Union, Mulhouse, 1965).

<sup>41</sup>cf. p. 61.

Saccard speaks to her so kindly of this unhappiness that "elle éclata en sanglots; puis dans cet attendrissement invincible, dans une sorte de paralysie de sa volonté, elle se trouva entre ses bras, elle lui appartint, sans joie ni pour l'un ni pour l'autre" (L'Argent, p. 78). At this point Madame Caroline has no deep love for Saccard nor he for her.

Madame Caroline, a woman of common sense and good character, finds that she is greatly worried by the speculation of Saccard. She has nothing really on which to base her fears as she trusts Saccard and knows he is interested in making a fortune for her and her brother through the stocks they own in the bank.

One day, Madame Caroline again finds herself in Saccard's arms, and she allows regular sexual relations to be established. She is not sure of her reactions because:

si elle était maintenant à Saccard sans l'avoir voulu, sans être certaine qu'elle l'estimait, elle se relevait de cette déchéance en ne le jugeant pas indigne d'elle, séduite par ses qualités d'homme d'action, par son énergie à vaincre, le croyant bon et utile aux autres (L'Argent, p. 203).

A short time later, she discovers he is unfaithful to her and to her surprise she suddenly realizes that "elle aimait Saccard, elle en emportait l'étonnement et la douleur, comme d'une plaie honteuse qu'elle ne voulait pas montrer



(L'Argent, p. 254). Because of her love for him, she is not able to break with him nor is she able to tell him of the wrong he is doing to her and of the hurt he is causing her. She decides to flee and join her brother, Georges Hamelin, who is now working in the Orient. As she starts to pack, she receives a letter from him describing the good investments that Saccard's bank has made and how the money from these will make money for the stockholders. Thus Madame Caroline is able to rationalize that Saccard, in spite of his speculating on the stock-market, is really trying to do good with his speculating. Her invincible hope for the future and her good spirit allow her to love Saccard but without having esteem for him. As F. W. J. Hemmings points out, "She is his mistress without feeling any love for him, or anything but an unwilling admiration for his energy."<sup>42</sup> She continues to belong to him even though she knows he is unfaithful to her. Because of past difficulties and great unhappiness in her life, she finds it easier to not disturb the status quo. She follows the same pattern as H  l  ne Grandjean in Une Page d'Amour, Catherine in Germinal, and others. The theme of passiveness in life continues.

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<sup>42</sup>F. W. J. Hemmings, Emile Zola (New York: Oxford University Press, 1953), p. 226.



Saccard and Hamelin, who has returned to Paris, are arrested for certain irregularities in the records after the bank has collapsed because of over-speculation. Madame Caroline is greatly shocked by the arrests. She is no longer able to lie to herself about Saccard and his unethical business dealings. Through him, she and her brother have lost their money. He alone is the guilty one. Through him, both she and her brother have greatly suffered. Then she discovers that in addition to causing countless others to lose their money, Saccard, too, has lost his in the same gigantic defeat. This raises him again in Madame Caroline's eyes as she knows he was not trying to make money for himself at the expense of others. She leaves him for the last time after telling him she is no longer angry with him for the unhappiness he has caused so many.

Several months later, Madame Caroline finds that she has forgotten her love for Saccard and her recent despair and unhappiness. Zola commented:

. . . elle venait de toucher le fond du désespoir, et voici que l'espoir réssuscitait de nouveau, brisé, ensanglanté, mais vivace quand même, plus large de minute en minute. . . . Ah! la joie d'être, est-ce qu'au fond il en existe une autre? La vie telle qu'elle est, dans sa force, si abominable qu'elle soit, avec son éternel espoir (L'Argent, pp. 498-99).

So one sees that Madame Caroline's love of life is stronger than even her love for Saccard. Angus Wilson says that

the most positive element in Zola's work is his love of life.<sup>43</sup> This feeling shows up clearly in the personality and words of Madame Caroline, who is Zola's mouthpiece in the book.<sup>44</sup>

This novel follows the pattern of Une Page d'Amour in that the love is ephemeral, and is followed by a period of grief. However, in L'Argent, the love of Madame Caroline for Saccard is not reciprocated by him although he feels esteem for her.

This woman is one of the first heroines in the Rougon-Macquart to come out of a love affair successfully with hope for the future. Even though the love is dead, Madame Caroline is alive and hopeful. This optimism perhaps can be attributed to the fact that Zola by this time had met Jeanne Rozerat who had become his mistress and by whom he had two children. They gave him the love and fulfillment he had missed for many years. Since he received such satisfaction from his personal life, he no longer had to live such an intense vicarious life through the novels he wrote. According to Angus Wilson, ". . . Zola had ceased to see sex as the hideous alluring wasteful road to death when he came to write L'Argent in 1890.

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<sup>43</sup>Wilson, op. cit., p. 121.

<sup>44</sup>Grant, op. cit., p. 153.

He had found sexual fulfillment in Jeanne and his children."<sup>45</sup>

La Débâcle,<sup>46</sup> a story of the Franco-Prussian war of 1870, is also the story of Jean Macquart,<sup>47</sup> who was seen in La Terre, and his new love, Henriette Weiss.

Jean, a corporal for the French forces, has six men under him in his command. Among them is a young man, Maurice Lavasseur, who becomes a close friend of Jean. Due to the many trials of living on the road without adequate shelter or food, the men in the regiment in the area around Sedan become extremely tired and hungry. There is confusion and lack of efficient order from the commanding officers. When the troops reach Sedan, Maurice invites Jean to come to the family home with him for food and sleep. Jean is near exhaustion. He enters Maurice's home and sees Henriette, Maurice's sister who is married to a man named Weiss. She is a vision of beauty. Her image is one of the last things Jean sees before he falls asleep. Later, after awakening and talking with her, his first thought of her is reconfirmed:

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<sup>45</sup>Wilson, op. cit., p. 107.

<sup>46</sup>Emile Zola, La Débâcle (Paris: Le Livre de Poche, 1965).

<sup>47</sup>cf. p. 37.

. . . il retrouvait son impression de l'arrivée, cette Henriette aux cheveux d'avoine mûre, si légère, si riante dans son effacement, qu'emplissait l'air, autour d'elle, comme d'une caresse (La Débâcle, p. 160).

Jean, Maurice, and M. Weiss leave the house.

The first two go to join their regiment to prepare for the battle of Sedan and the latter to his small property at the town of Bazeilles as he wants to protect it against marauders. While there, the Prussians attack the village and capture Weiss. His wife, Henriette, who has been worried by his unexpectedly long absence from home, has come to Bazeilles to look for him. She arrives in time to see him shot before her eyes.

After the disastrous loss of the Battle of Sedan, Jean and Maurice are put in a prison camp. During their escape Jean is shot in the leg with the bullet breaking the bone. The two go to the farm of Maurice's uncle. They discover Henriette who has fled there as a place of refuge after the violent death of her husband. Perhaps here she can find forgetfulness.

Jean is hidden in a room in the barn as the farm is in territory occupied by the Prussians. The only person to see him and care for him is Henriette as it is wise to have few people see him so as to not attract undue attention to the barn and the patient hidden therein. During the months that Henriette cares for him, a fondness



grows between the two. She spends all her free time with him but "ils n'avaient l'air de s'ennuyer, c'était une vie très douce, au fond de ce grand repos, lui tout massacré encore de la bataille, elle en robe de deuil, le coeur broyé par la perte qu'elle venait de faire" (La Débâcle, p. 388).

Jean, who has been growing better, has a relapse. Zola described his and Henriette's feelings at the time:

. . . cette première semaine de la rechute fut certainement pour Jean et Henriette la plus mélancolique de leur longue intimité forcée. La souffrance ne cesserait donc pas? toujours le danger allait-il renaître, sans qu'on pût espérer la fin de tant de misères? (La Débâcle, p. 400)

Zola, true to form, does not allow feelings of affection to be simple. Love and affection are accompanied by suffering and grief.

Some time later, Jean is well and wants to leave and rejoin his regiment. Henriette is in the depths of despair, as she has had no word from her brother, Maurice, who has gone to Paris with his regiment. There have been many casualties. Perhaps he is one of them.

Jean leaves. As he departs, he kisses Henriette. Zola wrote:

Jamais encore Jean n'avait embrassé Henriette. . . il voulut la remercier de ses bons soins, de l'avoir soigné et aimé comme un frère. Mais il ne trouva pas les mots, il ouvrit les bras, il l'embrassa en sanglotant. Elle était éperdue, elle lui rendit son baiser (La Débâcle, p. 447).

Later in the evening, Henriette is most surprised by her outburst of tears. She has fallen in love with Jean but does not yet recognize the symptoms.

Maurice is in Paris where he has left the regular army and has joined the forces of the Communards in the Civil War of the Commune. He accidentally encounters Jean, who has remained with the army. Both are disappointed to find they are on opposing sides. Later during a battle in the streets of Paris, Jean stabs his friend with a bayonet. He did not realize who it was until too late. Jean takes the dying Maurice to his apartment where they find Henriette who has come to search for the two. She recoils in horror when she hears the story, as she knows the two men are like brothers. She vows to save Maurice. Then all three will be able to be together. She dreams of this idyllic situation. The doctor tells her that her brother is near death. She asks herself:

Est-ce qu'elle ne le sauverait pas, est-ce qu'elle n'allait pas empêcher cette affreuse chose, leur éternelle séparation à tous les trois, qui étaient là réunis encore, dans leur ardent souhait de vie?  
(La Débâcle, p. 490)

It appears that one tragedy after another follows Henriette. First, her husband is killed before her eyes, then she finds her brother near death and, to add to the burden, she finds that the one who wounded her brother is the

man she is beginning to realize that she loves. Will she ever find happiness?

Maurice dies. Jean and Henriette realize that their love must finish as there will always be Maurice's tomb between them. As he prepares to leave, each thinks of the marriage that might have been. Zola explained:

. . . ils ne s'aimaient ouvertement, à cette heure, que pour l'adieu éternel. Il fallait encore cet affreux sacrifice, l'arrachement dernier, leur bonheur possible la veille s'écroulant aujourd'hui avec le reste, s'en allant avec le flot de sang qui venait d'emporter leur frère (La Débâcle, p. 499).

This couple finds love only to have it torn away from them. Both are good generous people. They have simple wants and desires but they are not able to fulfil them. They fail in their quest for love. They themselves do not die, but one close to them does. It is he, the dead one, who is responsible for their lack of success. Again, Zola does not reward virtue but instead seems to punish it. The tragedy of Jean and Henriette echoes the tragedies of many of the other characters discussed in this chapter.

Le Docteur Pascal is the last novel of the Rougon-Macquart series. In this novel, Zola sees himself in the picture of the doctor. He "painted himself in the most flattering light; the 'master' is good-looking, generous, intelligent, childishly unselfish. . ."<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>48</sup>Bernard, op. cit., p. 128.



Zola dedicated this novel to his mistress, Jeanne Rozerat, who appears as the niece-mistress, Clotilde.<sup>49</sup> The story is the happiest of the entire series as it is one of the few that offers hope for the future. It is a gentle story with the purity of love attained and fulfilled. As Zola presents the story, one seems to forget that the relationship between Pascal and Clotilde is actually incestuous, so sincerely is it told. According to Marc Bernard,<sup>50</sup>

Dishwater and perspiration marks are replaced by lilies and roses; desires are so sublimated that, when the "master" becomes the lover of a girl twenty-five years younger than he, it is as if an archangel were gently bending over a saint.

Clotilde, the daughter of the widower Saccard<sup>51</sup> and granddaughter of Félicité Rougon,<sup>52</sup> is sent as a young child to live with Saccard's brother, Pascal. It is an extremely happy household. Clotilde helps her uncle with his scientific work. Discord strikes when Clotilde and the housekeeper, Martine, are taken with a religious fervor and try to convert Pascal to their way of thinking. This is singularly unsuccessful. Because of this attempt a breach occurs in the warm relationship between Pascal

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<sup>49</sup>Hemmings, op. cit., p. 237.

<sup>50</sup>Bernard, op. cit., p. 128.

<sup>51</sup>cf. p. 43.

<sup>52</sup>cf. p. 61.



and the two women. It is especially upsetting to the doctor and his niece as this is their first disagreement. Clotilde feels that if Pascal will burn all his scientific writings, including the quite-involved family history, he will be saved and reach heaven. Pascal, who believes that science is all, fears that Clotilde will take it upon herself to destroy his works unbeknown to him. This becomes an obsession with him and he starts to lock up his work. One night, however, he discovers that the key is gone. Clotilde has taken it and is in the process of gathering up all his materials with the idea of hiding them and then giving them to her grandmother, Félicité Rougon, who finds the family history that Pascal is writing extremely embarrassing. Pascal, seeing what Clotilde is doing, struggles to take one of his manuscripts away from her. They struggle in a close embrace. Each is aware that the other is only half-dressed. Pascal tears the manuscript away from her. Clotilde, subdued, helps him to put his work away.

Pascal explains to her all of his scientific theories and also the history of the entire Rougon-Macquart family. He then asks her if she will be his enemy or friend. Will she be for or against him? She does not answer as she is suddenly aware that he has become her master for ever and ever, and she is "prise de l'irrésistible besoin

de se donner" (Le Docteur Pascal, p. 182). Confused, she flees the scene without answering.

A period passes in which Pascal lives in agony as Clotilde has given him no answer. Life continues in the household although there is not the former closeness. Gradually, as spring approaches, Clotilde and Pascal resume outdoor walks which they both enjoy. One day, after returning home, Clotilde finds that she cannot undo the knot in her bonnet strings. She asks Pascal for help. On seeing her so closely as he bends over to help, he is overtaken with a feeling of wanting to hold her and kiss her. Zola explained the scene:

Un flot de sang lui battait les tempes, ses doigts s'égarèrent, tandis qu'elle se renversait davantage, offrant la tentation de sa virginité, sans le savoir. C'était l'apparition de royale jeunesse, les yeux clairs, les lèvres saines, les joues fraîches, le cou délicat surtout, satiné et rond, ombré de cheveux follets vers la nuque (Le Docteur Pascal, p. 226).

At this time, Pascal is not able to comprehend an incestuous relationship such as that would be.

A young doctor, Ramond, asks for Clotilde in marriage. Pascal feels he would never be able to agree to such a sacrifice. A terrible jealousy tortures him. However, he feels he can never say anything, as the decision to marry is Clotilde's. When Dr. Ramond comes to the house for his answer, Pascal hears just the last part of the

conversation and it leads him to believe that Clotilde had accepted Ramond.

That evening, in secret, Pascal leaves a lovely piece of lace on Clotilde's bed to surprise her. It is to be used for her wedding dress. She is delighted and brings him to her room to show him her wonderful surprise. She asks him what the gift is for. Surprised, he explains that it is for her wedding dress. Clotilde asks if he wants her to marry Ramond because he still thinks she is his enemy as she has given him no answer yet. She tells him she is with him and for him. Then, she explains that she loves only him and not the other doctor. She knows that he loves her; therefore, she gives herself to him. For Pascal and Clotilde,

. . . il n'y avait plus ni peur, ni souffrances, ni scrupules: ils étaient libres, elle se donnait en le sachant, en le voulant et il acceptait le don souverain de son corps, ainsi qu'un bien inestimable que la force de son amour avait gagné. Le lieu, le temps, les âges avaient disparu. Il ne restait que l'immortelle nature, la passion qui possède et qui crée, le bonheur qui veut être (Le Docteur Pascal, p. 242).

A period of great happiness follows. Pascal takes great pleasure in buying gifts for Clotilde. Several times a week, he brings home items to enhance her beauty.

Then it is discovered that the person with whom Pascal has his money invested has taken it all and disappeared. Life becomes poorer, as does the food on the

table. Pascal and Clotilde in their love are oblivious to all this. As conditions worsen, Pascal begins to feel that he is doing a disservice to Clotilde. She is young and beautiful. If she remains with him, there will be no future for her. She will not have a chance to marry and to have children.

A letter comes from Maxime, Clotilde's brother in Paris. He asks her to come to Paris to care for him, as he is ill. Pascal insists that she go. He does not want to make her unhappy by keeping her near him. He wonders if she stays near him only out of pity. She refuses to go, as she loves him and wants to stay with him.

A period of agitation follows as Pascal tries to persuade Clotilde to go. She is just as firm in wanting to stay. He adds the argument that he has given her no children. For them, love is useless unless it leads to children. If she goes to Paris and leaves him, there will be a chance for her to meet someone else and marry.

Then Pascal makes the supreme sacrifice. He lies and tells Clotilde that, if she leaves, he will be able to resume work on his scientific writings so as to finish them before he dies. In order to work, he needs to be alone. She feels that he is choosing his work over her



so she agrees to go. She tells him she will return only when he sends for her. So she leaves for Paris.

One morning, Pascal receives a letter from Clotilde that she is two months pregnant. Great happiness fills Pascal, the father, as

. . . c'était l'oeuvre vraie, le seule bonne, la seule vivante, celle qui le comblait de bonheur et d'orgueil. Ses travaux, ses craintes d'hérédité avaient disparu. L'enfant allait être, qu'importait ce qu'il serait! pourvu qu'il fût la continuation, la vie léguée et perpétuée, l'autre soi-même! (Le Docteur Pascal, p. 416)

Pascal immediately sends for Clotilde to come home. Life will now be complete. But that night Pascal has a heart attack. Now it is a race to see which will arrive first-- death or Clotilde. He dies shortly before she arrives.

Clotilde watches over him that night. She thinks of the short cold letters he had written her and finds she understands why he has denied her. He wanted to save her from his old age and poverty. In Paris, he thought she would be rich through the graces of her wealthy brother, Maxime, and free to enjoy her youth. She realizes that, for him,

. . . c'était l'oubli total de soi, l'anéantissement dans l'amour d'une autre. Et elle en éprouvait une gratitude, une douceur profondes, mêlées à une sorte d'amertume irritée contre le destin mauvais (Le Docteur Pascal, p. 452).

Several months later, the baby is born. He seems to be normal in every respect. This child is the hope

for the future. He is the fulfillment of life. The novel closes as "Clotilde souriait à l'enfant, qui têtait toujours, son petit bras en l'air, tout droit, dressé comme un drapeau d'appel à la vie" (Le Docteur Pascal, p. 501). Thus the Rougon-Macquart series ends on a positive note. Through life, through the new-born, one can hope for happiness in the future.

This last novel is happier and lighter in tone than others in the group. Even though there are the rewards for the happiness of Clotilde in the child, there was also great suffering before attaining happiness. The novel ends on a hopeful note, but still Clotilde's happiness can not be complete as Pascal is not there to share it with her. They could have fought circumstances in order to remain together when her brother Maxime requested her presence in Paris; but neither could really believe in the complete sincerity of the other. Pascal wanted Clotilde to stay with him and she wished to do so. Each wanted to be so unselfish in order to show love for the other that they overdid it. Consequently they were unhappy. Le Docteur Pascal is written in a more hopeful tone than L'Assommoir or La Terre, for example, but just as Gervaise, Jean, and Françoise do not fight their so-called fate, neither do Clotilde and Pascal. Perhaps

one can blame it on "le destin mauvais" as Clotilde calls it (Le Docteur Pascal, p. 452).

As one reviews the several novels just discussed, one sees a pattern in the actions of the characters. Love is usually thwarted in some way: by death, by suffering, by irrevocable circumstances, by the inaction of those involved. It seems that, if one is capable of giving love, he is not capable of bettering his life or is not capable of trying to change his life so as to keep the happiness that is so elusive. There is always some factor that keeps life from being sublime. A certain cowardice keeps these characters from acting for their own benefit. Thus they fail.

In the next chapter, the success of certain characters in the series will be discussed.

### CHAPTER III

#### SUCCESS OF SELECTED CHARACTERS WHO REACH FOR PERSONAL GAIN

The results of lack of regard for others and of being dishonest and clever are seen in certain characters of the Rougon-Macquart series. These are the successful ones who are able to overcome their environment and who are able to make it work to their advantage. Love is not needed by these persons. Personal gain is their creed regardless of who is hurt as long as it is not themselves.

Félicité and Pierre Rougon in La Fortune des Rougon are the first ones to be shown as hunting for success. Pierre is the unscrupulous son of Adelaïde, or Tante Dide, as she is often called. He wants not only his share of his mother's property but also that of his half-brother, Antoine, and his half-sister, Ursule. Since they are illegitimate, he claims that they should receive no portion of it. Pierre "comprit vite qu'un homme habile doit toujours mettre la loi de son côté" (La Fortune des Rougon, p. 77). Using the law as a means of obtaining his mother's property, he manages to convince her to sell the property and sign the proceeds over to him. Somewhat confusedly, she does so, and Pierre is on his



way to bettering himself and improving his surroundings. He marries Félicité Puech, a young woman of good intelligence and high ambition. Zola described her,

Félicité s'était promis de faire un jour crever d'envie la ville entière, par l'étalage d'un bonheur et d'un luxe insolents. Et si elle avait pu jouer sa vie sur une scène plus vaste, où son esprit délié se fût développé à l'aise, elle aurait à coup sûr réalisé promptement son rêve (La Fortune des Rougon, p. 79).

The young woman knows that her ambition will have to be built on money. When she and her husband had enough, they would become the masters of the city. He would be named to an important post, but it would be she who would govern. Three years before the Revolution of 1848, the couple retire as they are middle-aged and are able to sell their business. They rent an apartment on the street that separates the old quarter from the new, which is where they would really like to live were they able to afford it.

Their son, Eugène, is in Paris working on the restoration of the Empire with Louis-Napoléon as the emperor. He secretly keeps his father informed of the events as they happen. During this time, a small group of businessmen have formed the habit of meeting each evening in the Rougon's parlor to discuss politics. Eventually, Pierre and Félicité are able to direct the conversations toward Bonapartism.

Félicité is quite resentful toward Pierre, as he does not show her the letters he receives from Eugène. So, taking matters into her own hands, she takes Pierre's desk key in secret after he is asleep and reads the letters he has hidden in his desk. In this way, Félicité is subtly able to help direct the conversations in the parlor.

In December, 1851, word is received that Napoleon's coup d'état is going to take place and that a large band of republican insurgents is coming toward their town of Plassans in southern France. Because of his political views, Pierre hides until all but a small group have gone. Then he arms a group of men who are for the Empire, and they capture the insurgents in the mayor's house. Among them is Pierre's half-brother, Antoine. There is no bloodshed.

These events are not spectacular enough to win a place for the Rougons in the government of Plassans, so again Félicité takes over. She goes to see the prisoner, Antoine. In return for his help, she will give him his freedom and a certain amount of money. He agrees, and she allows him to escape.

Antoine gathers a group of republican insurgents who have not been captured and tells them that they can recapture the mayor's home if they act quickly. It is a trap and, when these men arrive, Pierre and others

ambush them, killing three of the insurgents. Antoine escapes and leaves the country. Pierre Rougon is treated as a hero. Had it not been for his vigilance, the whole town might have been captured and killed. The sight of the blood and the dead men convince the people of Plassans that here is a true hero.

As a result of this night's success, especially when the town receives word that the coup d'état has been successful, Pierre receives a government post and also is made a member of the Legion of Honor. Thus the fortune of the Rougons is made. But at what expense? Several innocent men have been killed, Silvère,<sup>53</sup> the nephew of Pierre and of Antoine, being among them. Pierre and Félicité have fooled the town into thinking it was under great danger from the insurgents.

Pierre and Félicité feel no more than a momentary remorse which is soon forgotten under their success. They have been dishonest. They have used cleverness and trickery to achieve their dreams and they have succeeded.

A man without morals is an apt description of Auguste Lantier of L'Assommoir.<sup>54</sup> Soon after he comes to Paris with Gervaise and their two children, he abandons

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<sup>53</sup>cf. p. 15.

<sup>54</sup>cf. p. 18.

them taking what money they have and leaving her only the children.

Lantier has been unfaithful to Gervaise. He now lives with his new mistress, Adèle. She pays for many of Lantier's expenses, just as Gervaise did.

Several years pass. During this time, Gervaise marries Coupeau, a man of the working class. Gervaise becomes friends with Virginie, Adèle's sister. Virginie works for Gervaise in her small laundry. One day, Virginie tells Gervaise that Lantier and Adèle have separated. Lantier beat her and often had childish temper tantrums when all was not going well.

To celebrate her birthday, Gervaise has a dinner for several of her and her husband's friends. A crowd appears around the door drawn by the odor of good roast goose. Among the spectators to the party is Lantier. Coupeau, Gervaise's husband, invites Lantier in for a drink. He insists that bygones be bygones (L'Assommoir, pp. 259-60).

Soon, Lantier is encouraging Coupeau to enjoy himself and to stay with his friends to drink and enjoy good comradeship instead of working sporadically as he has been doing. Eventually, through Coupeau's insistence, he becomes a roomer and boarder at the Coupeau home.



He soon assumes control of the family expenses and takes money from Gervaise in order to pay their living costs.

Coupeau works less and less and drinks more and more. Gervaise in her passiveness again allows Lantier to become her lover. The household degenerates until Lantier is completely supported by Gervaise. He repays her with abuse. A short time later, Coupeau goes to an asylum for alcoholics where he eventually dies of delirium tremens.

At last, Gervaise has to sell her shop. Virginie buys it and changes it to a sweetshop. Lantier now becomes Virginie's lover, as she has more to offer him than the worn-out Gervaise. Virginie's husband is unaware of the situation and considers Lantier a good friend.

To humiliate the poverty-stricken Gervaise, Lantier hires her to clean Virginie's shop. She has become so indifferent to her surroundings that she is not aware of the viciousness of allowing Lantier and his new mistress to gloat over her. She has failed in business and love where the shrewd couple appear to succeed. It never occurs to Lantier that he contributed to Gervaise's downfall.

Lantier in his immorality and lack of regard for others feels thus:

. . . la boutique et la boutiquière allait ensemble. Il venait de manger une blanchisseuse; à présent, il croquait une épicière; et s'il s'établissait à la file des mercières, des papetières, des modistes, il était de machoires assez larges pour les avaler (L'Assommoir, p. 419).

Since a woman supports him, Lantier no longer works. He claims to be working on an invention for which he borrows money from his mistress's husband.

Virginie loses her shop but this does not disturb Lantier as he already has another woman picked out to buy the shop. As she is a tripe dealer, Lantier is most pleased. It is a good change "après la friandise, le solide" (L'Assommoir, p. 487).

This man goes through life sponging off others. He gives nothing of himself. He does not even offer his love nor affection. He takes all that is given to him. His personal gain is being well-fed, well-dressed and well-cared for with no effort on his part. According to those who find success by securing personal gain, Lantier shows himself to be a success.

To die is to achieve success for Jeanne Grandjean, the daughter of Hélène, in Une Page d'Amour.<sup>55</sup> Jeanne, her mother, and her mother's lover are caught in a situation which can only lead to failure. One critic wrote that the intrinsic destructiveness of passion becomes for the

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<sup>55</sup>cf. p. 24.

first time the principal theme of a novel by Zola.<sup>56</sup>

Jeanne's passion for her mother knows no bounds and she will go to any length to keep her mother exclusively for herself.

Blaze de Bury stated, "Love is not the only passion, certainly, with which the novelist has to deal, but it is the passion of all others which finds most favor amongst readers for it is the only passion above all that has power of life and death."<sup>57</sup> Love in its most possessive form, jealousy, does have this power in the person of the malevolent daughter.

Jeanne, through her jealousy, refuses to allow her mother to have feelings and sentiments of her own. This child will go to great lengths to keep her mother from feeling affection for others. In this particular case, Jeanne feels threatened by Dr. Deberle, who loves H  l  ne. An even greater cause for concern for Jeanne is that her mother appears to return the doctor's love.

One day, H  l  ne leaves the house unexpectedly to warn the doctor's wife that the doctor is coming to interrupt a love tryst (Une Page d'Amour, p. 316). As

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<sup>56</sup>Hemmings, op. cit., p. 146.

<sup>57</sup>Yetta Blaze de Bury, French Literature of Today (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1898), p. 50.

she prepares to leave her house before the rendezvous, Jeanne begs to go with her. At Hélène's refusal, Jeanne becomes quite emotional and threatens to die if she is left alone. This maligning young person has previously used her precarious health as a threat to keep her mother and Dr. Henri Deberle apart. Now comes the ultimate threat. She will die if her mother does not cater to her wishes. Left alone, she stays by an open window and exposes herself to inclement weather. She wants to become ill because her mother has been unfaithful to her as she refused to say where she was going. Zola described Jeanne at this time:

. . . ses sourcils noirs se fronçaient, ses traits si fins prenaient cette dureté jalouse qui lui donnait un visage blême de vieille fille méchante. Elle sentait confusément que sa mère était quelque part où les enfants ne vont pas. On ne l'avait pas emmenée pour lui cacher des choses. A ces pensées, son cœur se serrait d'une tristesse indicible, elle avait mal (Une Page d'Amour, p. 341).

Her jealous anger, either consciously or unconsciously, is reflected in her health as she becomes quite ill and is bedridden for a period of time. She recovers slowly and seems to enjoy having her mother at her service.

Another doctor suggests that Hélène take Jeanne to Italy to recover her health in that warm climate. Several friends discuss this plan in the Deberle garden. The Deberle family decides to join them on this vacation.



Hélène is delighted as that fulfills her secret dream of going to Italy with Henri. Jeanne sees her mother's reaction and becomes ill. A family friend takes her back to her house. She bursts into sobs and tells the friend that she does not want to go to Italy and that "elle préférerait mourir dans sa chambre. . . . elle tomberait malade, elle le sentait bien. Nulle part, elle n'irait nulle part" (Une Page d'Amour, p. 386). A few minutes later, she coughs blood. Her illness, tuberculosis, is approaching the last stages.

Jeanne lives three weeks. She has made it clear to her mother that she will not tolerate Dr. Deberle in the house. He never sees her nor her mother again. Jeanne has succeeded in ruining this affair and in keeping her mother for herself.

When she dies, it is without forgiving her mother. Zola wrote, "elle avait ainsi dans la mort son visage blême de femme jalouse" (Une Page d'Amour, p. 404). Her hatred and jealousy have caused her to die. This wounds Hélène as "l'idée fixe que Jeanne s'en allait fâchée, avec son visage muet et noir de rancune, la traversait de la brûlure vive d'un fer rouge" (Une Page d'Amour, p. 417).

Jeanne has succeeded. Her quest for personal gain was to keep her mother for herself. The mother, Hélène,

was unable to force herself to see Henri again. Through the most drastic measure, her own death, Jeanne attained her goal. When Marc Bernard says that many of Zola's characters carry a frightfully strong seed of self-destruction,<sup>58</sup> he very well could have had Jeanne in mind. By her destruction of self, she also is able to ruin her mother's life and her mother's love for another.

Among the greatest of villains of the Rougon-Macquart series are Lise and her husband, Buteau, as seen in La Terre.<sup>59</sup> This novel often has the quality of a nightmare . . . and, as from nightmares, according to Angus Wilson,<sup>60</sup> there is no means of escape.

Buteau's father, Fouan, and his mother divide their farm while they are still living to give each child his share instead of leaving the land to them in their will after their death. In return, the children are to give the parents a certain sum of money each month for their living. After a few months, this sum of money becomes smaller and smaller. Often, another son called "Jésus-Christ," only because of his appearance, extorts money from his father. On one occasion Buteau finds

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<sup>58</sup>Bernard, op. cit., p. 52.

<sup>59</sup>cf. p. 38.

<sup>60</sup>Wilson, op. cit., p. 53.

that this has happened and he goes to his parents' house to see why they would loan the money to "Jésus-Christ" that he, Buteau, has just paid them. In his great anger, he pushes his mother who falls against the wall. Because she is old and worn out by a lifetime of hard work, she does not recover from this fall, but dies a short time later. Thus starts the violence that will follow Buteau.

During a harvest, Buteau tries to rape his sister-in-law, Françoise, but she fights him off. After this, he is constantly trying to force her. As she lives with him and Lise, life becomes one constant battle. Then, as it appears that Françoise may marry Jean Macquart, Buteau redoubles his efforts. First, there is his passion for her and, second, if she marries, he will lose her share of the land which Lise and Françoise have inherited from their father. If he is able to commence relations with her, he is certain she would not marry but stay with him. Buteau feels that "ces deux passions arrivaient même à se confondre, l'entêtement à ne rien lâcher de ce qu'il tenait, la possession furieuse de ce champ, le rut inassouvi du mâle, fouetté par la résistance" (La Terre, p. 290). Buteau continues his efforts and becomes bolder as time goes on.

During this time, the father, Fouan, moves in with the family as he has not been well treated at another

child's home. He soon becomes aware of what Buteau is trying to do to Françoise but is unable to do anything to help her. He has lost all the power he once had as the head of the family and is no more treated with care or respect. He scarcely has enough to eat or drink. The father leaves these miserable surroundings and goes to another son's house to try to find better quarters.

Later, it is discovered that Fouan has hidden money and bonds that his children do not know about. Immediately, all change attitude and all want to give the father good care. Of course, it is only a motive to gain the money. Fouan moves back in with Buteau as he feels safer there. The father has a stroke. In his helplessness, he sees Buteau and Lise look for and find his money. They neglect to give him his medicine as they have no further reason to keep him alive now that they have the money. He recovers in spite of their lack of care.

After his recovery, Fouan asks the two to return his money and bonds. They refuse, saying to their neighbors that they are keeping the belongings safe as the father had been trying to burn them just before his illness.

Françoise marries Jean. She gains possession of the family home and her half of the land. This infuriates Lise and Buteau. They want everything and will stop at



nothing to obtain their goal. Then they discover that Françoise is pregnant and that she has thus far made no will leaving everything to her husband. They think "si la gueuse s'était tuée avec son enfant, le mari n'avait rien, la terre et la maison leur faisaient retour" (La Terre, p. 426). Even the thought of causing her to lose her unborn child filled them with glee as they made plans to have it aborted. The rape and murder follow.<sup>61</sup>

Lise feels no remorse for killing her sister. Her only fear is that Françoise will tell the truth of what happened before she dies. But there is no need to fear. True to form, Zola does not reward the virtuous but the evil, as Françoise dies carrying the secret with her.

Lise and Buteau immediately move back into the family home. This occurs before the funeral and before Jean has a chance to remove his personal belongings. The evil couple are like two savage animals, showing no consideration for others. They have succeeded. The land and house are now theirs. They have everything. But do they? Buteau discovers that his father, Fouan, was a witness to the killing.

Lise and Buteau realize that only one course is open to them. They have to kill the old man. They decide

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<sup>61</sup>cf. pp. 40-41.

to smother him. Then they can say that he simply died in his sleep of old age. They cover his face with a pillow but press too hard and the nose breaks causing the face to turn a dark color. This sign of violence could not be explained as an accident. They feel the guillotine on them when Lise has an idea. Why not burn him? Then they can say that he caught on fire when they were asleep in their own bedroom. They set the room on fire. The plan succeeds. Even though the neighbors are suspicious, nothing can be proved and the pair are free to enjoy their ill-begotten gains.

Jean is aware of all that has happened but rather than involve himself in the whole affair, he decides to leave and join the army. Lise and Buteau realize that they have nothing more to worry about.

According to an article by V. S. Pritchett, "these appalling, ignorant peasants, avaricious, thieving, godless, continually in rut, drunken, suspicious, violent and malign, are redeemed by their compulsive dedication to their acres and are almost ennobled by their bewilderment in the world they hear of outside themselves."<sup>62</sup> The description fits Lise and Buteau perfectly. But are they redeemed? Does

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<sup>62</sup>V. S. Pritchett, "Zola's *La Terre*," New Statesman and Nation, XLVIII (July 31, 1954), 134.

the want for land justify the means, whatever they may be? As for the outside world, can one say it even exists for them?

Zola shows two people who alone may not have had the courage to carry out all of the evil acts they committed. Together, with each pushing and goading the other, one finds them sunken in the same guilt and horror. Will they suffer in the future for their actions? Probably not. They are people without love and compassion. They think only of themselves. They are guilty of the worst crimes. But they have reached for personal gain, and they have received it. Compared to Jean and the dead Françoise, they are successful and alive.

One of those who reaches for personal gain does so through the stock market. This is Saccard,<sup>63</sup> son of Pierre and Félicité Rougon,<sup>64</sup> who is a man for whom money is everything. He can be described as follows:<sup>65</sup>

From nature man came, to nature he shall return. While on this earth he follows the behests of nature only, his appetites of the body; his passions of the mind, which are gratified by the possession of power.

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<sup>63</sup>cf. p. 43.

<sup>64</sup>cf. p. 61.

<sup>65</sup>F. M. Warren, Ten Frenchmen of the Nineteenth Century (New York: Chautauqua, 1904), p. 183.

He is a speculator of the first rank. Zola described him as such:<sup>66</sup>

Saccard s'enrichit par l'expropriation, la démolition, la construction, la spéculation . . . Mais sa fortune n'est pas stable . . . cette fortune représente une rapidité de transformation étonnante, une fièvre de jouissance, un aveuglement de dépense, puis une formidable carte à payer, une liquidation terrible.

So one has the basic story of L'Argent.

Saccard has just failed miserably in a business undertaking. He has a strong desire for revenge on those who are snubbing him. He feels that

il avait goûté à tout, et il ne s'était pas rassasié, n'ayant pas eu l'occasion ni le temps, croyait-il, de mordre assez profondément dans les personnes et dans les choses. . . . Et une fièvre le prenait de tout recommencer pour tout reconquérir, de monter plus haut qu'il n'était jamais monté, de poser enfin le pied sur la cité conquise. Non plus la richesse menteuse de la façade, mais l'édifice solide de la fortune, la vraie royauté de l'or trônant sur des sacs pleins (L'Argent, pp. 13-14).

One sees that Saccard does not build a solid edifice in his new business which is a bank but wildly speculates and takes huge chances on losing all the money of those who invested in his new scheme.

Tied in with his plans for building a successful bank, Saccard also wants to crush the most successful man

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<sup>66</sup>F. W. J. Hemmings, "The Elaboration of Characters in the Ebauches of Zola's Rougon-Macquart Novels," (Publications of the Modern Language Association, XXCI June, 1966), 287. This passage is cited by Hemmings from the Ebauches of Zola, which give outlines of his stories.



on the stock market scene, a certain Gundermann, who becomes Saccard's fierce rival. For Saccard

c'était le serment d'une lutte sans merci. . . il jouerait la partie suprême, une bataille de terrible audace, qui lui mettrait Paris sous les talons, ou qui le jetterait au ruisseau, les reins cassés (L'Argent, p. 54).

For Saccard, it is all or nothing, regardless of the consequences for himself and others.

Another example of his lack of regard for others took place several years earlier when Saccard first came to Paris. He had seduced a young girl on the stairs of the apartment house where both lived. In retribution for the wrong he did to this defenseless girl, Saccard gave her several promissory notes. However, he never paid anything on them. He had also injured her shoulder while seducing her so she had been unable to work at a decent job. She turned to prostitution and died in poverty. Saccard never once thought to inquire as to what had become of her. Once the act was finished, it was forgotten.

Nevertheless, a son, unbeknown to Saccard, resulted from this union. This boy is living in dire poverty and degradation when Saccard's mistress, Madame Caroline, becomes aware of the situation. She has the child put in a home for foundlings. Later, when Saccard finds that he has this son, the information delights him for the moment. Yet he never goes to see the child because he

is too occupied with business affairs. Again he never has a thought for the child after the first moment of discovering his existence and he never inquires about the mother.

Several people have invested money in Saccard's bank. Saccard advises them not to sell their stocks as the price goes higher and higher. But he overextends himself and goes bankrupt, taking many of the investors with him. Saccard knew what kind of chance he was taking when he overextended himself. The fact that he caused the ruin of so many in no way seemed to bother him.

Saccard reserved certain shares of the stock for himself and several business associates by having a figurehead buy the stocks in his name but with money supplied by Saccard. Then, when the stocks rise in price, he can sell and make a profit for himself and the society of his business associates. This is clearly forbidden by the law, but again Saccard ignores this little detail.

Then Saccard and his partner, Hamelin, are arrested for certain business irregularities that come to light after the failure of the bank. Even though he is in jail awaiting trial, he does not personally blame himself for the defeat and ruin of so many. It was merely that he lacked enough money to cover his losses. In fact, if he had had enough money, he would have been the master

of the world. Saccard feels that, to be successful, it does not matter that "chaque pas que l'on fait écrase des milliers d'existences" (L'Argent, p. 482).

Among those who are crushed is a shareholder who invested his daughter's dowry and, after its loss, she is obliged to take to the streets. Another is a young stockbroker, a married man with children, who commits suicide. And a third is a noblewoman who, with her daughter, is reduced to beggary. Toward these people, Saccard feels no responsibility.

Saccard and Hamelin each receive a sentence of five years in prison which is pardoned if they will leave the country. Saccard goes to Holland where he works on a large project of drying the bogs and swamps. One wonders who is going to be crushed in this new scheme.

Once more the reader sees that the scoundrel wins. The innocent ones in the novel are crushed. Their only crime is trusting Saccard whom they believed would earn money for them. Perhaps for them, it was easier to let someone else take the responsibility of watching their investment; but, in Saccard, they chose a poor guide.

Félicité Rougon was discussed at the beginning of this chapter,<sup>67</sup> but she reasserts herself in Le Docteur

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<sup>67</sup>cf. p. 61.

Pascal. She has not changed. She has reached a high position in the society of the town and she is so aware of her position that she will do anything to prevent losing it. She feels that her son, Pascal, lowers her in the neighborhood's eyes as he is not interested in making money. He prefers to help people without cost and to work on his scientific experiments in peace. His mother cannot understand this. She does not hesitate to let him know that he does not come up to her expectations. She tries to enlist Martine, the housekeeper, and Clotilde, her granddaughter and Pascal's niece, to help her destroy all of Pascal's papers. She is afraid of them and of what is in them; especially, his history of the family with its many blemishes. If any of that history found its way among the townspeople, she would be ridiculed.

One embarrassing relative lives near the town. He is Antoine, Félicité's brother-in-law and Pascal's uncle. He is now an old drunkard. On one occasion, Félicité has heard that he has been drunk for the last fifteen days. As she finds herself near his house, she decides to stop in and see him out of curiosity. A gruesome scene follows. She finds him asleep in a chair. His pipe has dropped on his knees, and he catches fire. He has so soaked himself in alcohol throughout the years that his very flesh is burning. She calls to him but



he does not awaken. She does not try to put out the fire before it claims his life. Perhaps she thinks it would be one less embarrassment if he were gone. So she leaves the house, closing the door behind her.

When Pascal dies and Clotilde is mourning in her room, Félicité comes to the house and breaks open the cabinet where his lifeworks are kept. She destroys everything even though she has just been told by the housekeeper, Martine, that Clotilde is to keep the history in her personal possession and give the scientific work to the Dr. Ramond, a family friend. Clotilde discovers what she has done and is overcome with rage. Félicité explains, "je n'ai eu qu'une ambition, qu'une passion, la fortune et la royauté des nôtres.....  
.....  
c'est fini. . . ces abominables papiers ne nous accuseront plus et je ne laisserai derrière moi aucune menace. . . .  
Les Rougon triomphent" (Le Docteur Pascal, p. 471).

Félicité has accomplished the goal she set up for herself in La Fortune des Rougon. She has reached the heights. To celebrate this, she is having a Rougon hospital built as a monument to carry the glory of the family down to future ages.

This woman is not capable of real love. She does not know how to give it nor to accept it. So little does

she understand of love that she demolished her son's work without thinking that she was destroying a part of him too.

Félicité has reached for personal gain and she has succeeded, but at what expense?

## CHAPTER IV

### CONCLUSIONS

In reviewing the several characters discussed in this paper, certain observations are apparent. The so-called "good" suffer and the so-called "bad" prosper.

Those who are capable of love, merely love. They do not have the strength to fight in order to change the circumstances necessary to keep their love. Angus Wilson says that "most purely individual revolts against social convention are futile, for they are usually made without consideration of their consequences and the human will is not strong enough to endure. It seems that the knot, social or personal, is too hard for the individual to untie."<sup>68</sup>

To love and to have human emotions seem to qualify a person for automatic failure in Zola's novels. It is the selfish person, he who strives for personal gain, who succeeds with health and riches. To some, stated Winthrop Root,<sup>69</sup> Zola was seen as a man who had an almost inhuman leaning toward that which is commonly avoided and shunned, a depraved taste. The author noted that

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<sup>68</sup>Wilson, op. cit., pp. 41-42.

<sup>69</sup>Root, op. cit., p. 10.

Zola seemed to them, his critics, a cold observer who watched unmoved the horrors and ugliness of life, shutting his eyes to the happier side of existence. In fact, Zola was said to gloat over the horrible and filthy and had a fear of what was pleasant.<sup>70</sup> If this is true, it helps to explain the lack of happy endings in his novels. Poetic justice in Zola's work appears to be non-existent. A moral ending was not necessary to Zola as long as he was objective and painted the truth. Certain critics admired Zola's objectivity because he remained cool to the very bottom of his heart even though virtue was miserably defeated and vice triumphed.<sup>71</sup>

Death and defeat often seemed the goal of Zola; but, as he continued writing and as he found happiness, he was able to visualize a more hopeful future. For example, in L'Argent, Madame Caroline finds that there is hope for a happier future. This is a far cry from the unfortunate Gervaise in L'Assommoir, who gradually loses all hope.

There was a softening in the attitude of Zola toward the "good" persons as he grew older. However, the "bad" stay just as bad. In Le Docteur Pascal, for

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<sup>70</sup>Ibid., p. 10.

<sup>71</sup>Ibid., p. 61.



instance, Félicité Rougon was always grabbing for and trying to maintain personal power.

Zola himself would undoubtedly have been classed as a "good" person. Even though he was courageous in his business and in his political life, he remained passive for many years in his personal and married life. Not until Jeanne Rozerat entered his life, did he show signs of defiance and courage. He did not divorce his wife, however, to marry the woman whom he deeply loved.

Zola, then, appears to follow the plan he set forth for those who fail because of passiveness even though their love is sincere. Consistency of the success and failure of the characters discussed is carried throughout the novels of the series. For Zola, vice continues to flourish and virtue is defeated. Poetic justice never triumphs.

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