

THE CURÉ IN ZOLA'S ROUGON-MACQUART

THE CURÉ IN ZOLA'S ROUGON--MACQUART

by

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## INTRODUCTION

The priest is a character which recurs frequently in Zola's series of novels entitled Les Rougon-Macquart, written between 1870 and 1893. Zola conceived the Rougon-Macquart as the "histoire naturelle et sociale d'une famille sous le second Empire." Initially, he envisaged a series of ten novels dealing with certain sectors of society and various political events and economic developments during the Second Empire. In his preliminary notes to the Rougon-Macquart, Zola listed four principal areas of society about which he wished to write: the "peuple", which included both the worker and the military man, the "commerçants", the "Bourgeoisie", and the "Grand monde". He also designated "un monde à part" which encompassed four figures: the prostitute, the murderer, the artist, and the priest. Thus the original framework of the series, prepared in 1868, allowed for "Un roman sur les prêtres (Province)."<sup>1</sup> The scope of the series was expanded later to include twenty novels. Half of the novels (ten) contain figures from the priesthood.

This thesis will confine itself to the figure of the curé or parish priest, with the exception of Frère Archangias, who appears

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<sup>1</sup> Henri Mitterand in his Appendice to Les Rougon-Macquart (Paris: Fasquelle and Gallimard, 1960), V, 1734-1735, citing Zola's "Documents et Plans Préparatoires", f. 22 and 23.

as a "frère des écoles chrétiennes" in La Faute de l'Abbé Mouret. Minor references will also be made to the character of the bishop who plays an important role in two of the novels, La Conquête de Plassans and Le Rêve.

Of the ten novels, two, the fourth and fifth of the series, introduce a priest as their principal character. La Conquête de Plassans (1874) dramatizes Napoleon III's use of the Church to dispel any Legitimist and Republican Party opposition to his regime. Abbé Faujas is sent by Eugène Rougon, a minister in Napoleon's government, to Plassans, a town intended to represent provincial France under the Second Empire, according to Zola's "Ébauche". Faujas' mission is to sway the electorate over to the Bonapartist cause, which he successfully does by gaining control over the town and arranging that a Bonapartist deputy wins office in the elections of 1863. At the same time, Faujas achieves personal success by promotions through the ecclesiastical hierarchy to the position of curé of Plassans. La Faute de l'Abbé Mouret (1875) presents the subject of "le prêtre amoureux", as stated in the novel's "Ébauche". The role of the priest is completely detached from any political implication. In this volume, Zola examines the personal aspect of the priesthood through its effect on the priest himself.

Some priest figures within the Rougon-Macquart have a very minor role in their respective novels, yet contribute important elements to Zola's general depiction of the priest. Abbé Roustan in Le Ventre de Paris (1873) is a priest similar to Faujas in his

extra-religious duties. He is introduced to us as a man knowledgeable in economic matters and appears in the capacity of a business advisor to Lisa Quenu. He is called upon on occasion to advise her on personal matters, but never touches upon the question of religion. In L'Assommoir (1877), the unnamed priest, in his brief appearances, haggles over the fee for Copeau's and Gervaise's wedding, performs the wedding with unfeeling brevity and later, at Mme Copeau's funeral, he merely mumbles a few prayers which are incomprehensible to those present. In so doing, he reflects the collective attitude of the clergy towards the poorer classes. The respective positions of Abbé Joire and Abbé Ranvier with regard to the miners' strike in Germinal (1885) illustrate the liaison which existed between the clergy and the propertied bourgeois class who also supported Napoleon III. The fate of a conscientious priest who sympathizes with the workers and refuses to follow the orders of his bishop is also made clear in the novel.

Other priests serve a more obvious purpose in the plot of the novels in which they appear. Pot-Bouille (1882) deals with the lives of a number of middle class families living in a large apartment house in Paris. Zola describes at length the desperate efforts of mothers to secure advantageous marriages for their daughters, and the unending scandals among the different families. Abbé Mauduit, a constant visitor to the building, does not deter the adulterous behaviour of the residents and is even drawn into the scheming of Mme Josserand to marry off her daughter. At the end of

the novel, Abbé Mauduit's weak rationalization of the residents' conduct, that God must have abandoned these people, is clearly contrasted to Doctor Juillerat's account of their behaviour and his proposed remedy for it. Abbé Horteur in La Joie de Vivre (1884) is quite conspicuous in his failure to help Lazare Chanteau, a weak young man lacking purpose in life and above all consumed with a fear of death. The abbé's failure in general to cope with the daily happenings in the lives of the people of Bonneville and particularly in the Chanteau family is also evident throughout the novel. The roles of Abbés Godard and Madeline among the peasant farmers of La Beauce are key elements in Zola's vivid portrayal of the peasants in La Terre (1887), in that they illustrate the peasants' attitude towards the clergy and religion in general.

We may deduce from these different novels that Zola's portrayal of the priest falls essentially into two basic types. Each priest figure exemplifies, to varying degrees, one of the two types. On one hand, the priest is viewed as an aggressive individual more involved in politics and other matters unrelated to his clerical responsibilities. On the other hand, he is viewed as a somewhat sympathetic yet ineffectual figure when weighed against his supposed dedication to the way of God.

Our study will comprise four aspects: an examination of the priest within the socio-political framework of the Second Empire, the physical characterization of the priest, his psychological make-up, and finally, an analysis of the language

spoken by him. We shall try to show that within these four areas, Zola's treatment of the priest follows a certain pattern which clarifies a predominantly anti-clerical position.

## CHAPTER ONE

THE CURÉ AND POLITICS

One of the most controversial aspects of politics in the Second Empire was the alliance between the Church and the State. With the collapse of the July Monarchy and the abdication of Louis-Philippe in 1848, the Church found itself in a very strong position, certainly stronger than that of the State. The next two years of political and economic instability did little to improve the government's weakened position. The fact that Napoleon III returned at such an unsettled period in France's history accounted, to a great extent, for his initial success. All sectors of society readily supported him, for in him they saw hope for the restoration of order and economic progress. The clerical party, led by Montalembert and Falloux, was Legitimist in principle, in that it favoured the restoration of the Bourbon monarchy. It was prepared, however, to accept Napoleon III in return for certain concessions, such as a greater control over education and a guarantee that the State would maintain the sovereignty of the Pope in Rome.

As one historian, J.P.T. Bury, points out, Napoleon moved quickly to establish "a police state resting on the twin pillars of army and Church".<sup>1</sup> He was well aware of the tremendous social and

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<sup>1</sup> J.P.T. Bury, Napoleon III and the Second Empire (London: English Universities Press, 1964), p. 35.

political influence exercised by the Church over the French people in the past and of his need for its support if he was to consolidate his position as Emperor after his coup d'état. To ensure the State of the Church's support, Napoleon approved the "loi Falloux" of 1850, which granted the clergy free rein in the opening of new elementary schools and introduced councils with strong religious leanings to control the University. Napoleon also supported the reinstatement of the papal government in Rome in 1849. He increased the State's financial contribution to the Church, turning over five million francs realized from the confiscated properties of Louis-Philippe, thus enabling clerical stipends and pensions to be increased.

The Church realized other advantages under Napoleon's virtual dictatorship. There was little opposition voiced against its newly acquired authority, since Napoleon strictly controlled the press, thus eliminating any possible attack. Hence the Church benefited openly from its pact with Napoleon, as J.P.T. Bury remarks: "In consequence, their material wealth much increased, their schools and influence in education multiplied and the number of religious orders were greatly augmented."<sup>2</sup> Thus Napoleon III was assured not only of the support of the Church but also of that of a large majority of French Roman Catholics. However, the exact nature of the bond between the Church and the State is accurately

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 43.

described by J. Brugerette, in his study of the French priest and society, as follows: "La protection impériale était en effet subordonnée aux intérêts et aux caprices d'une politique personnelle."<sup>3</sup> As long as Napoleon III could make good use of the clergy, his patronage of the Church continued.

Because the Church-State alliance was such a dominant factor during the greater part of the Second Empire, we can readily understand why Zola incorporated the subject into the Rougon-Macquart. As we pointed out in our introduction, one novel, La Conquête de Plassans, is devoted entirely to this question. Meant to depict "la province sous l'Empire", La Conquête de Plassans is a sequel to La Fortune des Rougon, the first novel of the series, in which Zola relates the initial consequences of Napoleon's coup in the provinces. In the second novel, Zola depicts the provinces during the middle period of the Empire, from 1857 to 1863. Along with Zola's other novel on the subject of politics, Son Excellence Eugène Rougon, La Conquête de Plassans exposes the corruption rampant during the regime of Napoleon III. Specifically, the novel details the political scheming of the clergy in collaboration with the government. We shall also see that one other volume of the Rougon-Macquart, Germinal, reveals another side of this political association.

Zola defines clearly the political circumstances of the

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<sup>3</sup> J. Brugerette, Le Prêtre Français et la Société Contemporaine Vol. I (Paris: P. Lethielleux, 1933), p. 172.

novel in his "Ébauche":

Je ferais arriver à Plassans un prêtre avec sa mère, un gaillard que les hommes de Paris enverraient à Plassans, ville légitimiste, pour la convertir au bonapartisme. On sait qu'on peut compter sur la bourgeoisie; le peuple n'existe pas; mais les dernières élections ont failli être légitimistes. De là, l'envoi du Curé Bonnard [later named Faujas], un terrible homme, ... à qui on a donné la ville à gagner. C'est un envoi d'Eugène Rougon.

(I, 1658) <sup>4</sup>

Thus Faujas' secret purpose is to secure the defeat of the Legitimist deputy in the ensuing election, so that Napoleon III will have a solid electoral base in the south of France. It is also revealed that certain government officials disapprove of Plassans' rejection of Bonapartism, in view of the fact that one of the highest officials in Napoleon III's government, Eugène Rougon, comes from this town.

Napoleon III relied on electoral management to maintain an illusion of overwhelming national support. Government prefects and sub-prefects, with help from the clergy, saw to it that official government candidates were elected in their respective constituencies. Although this corrupt measure succeeded in eliminating, for the most part, any significant government opposition, in some areas the electorate refused to be manipulated.<sup>5</sup> Such is the case in Plassans in the election of 1857. The sub-prefect, Péqueur des Saulaies, has

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<sup>4</sup> Page references within the text are to Zola, Les Rougon-Macquart (Paris: Fasquelle and Gallimard, 1960).

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, Alfred Cobban, A History of Modern France Vol. 2 (London: The Whitefairs Press, 1961), p. 223.

been unable to get a Bonapartist deputy elected. The town remains divided into two predominant political factions - the weak Bonapartist group led by the sub-prefect and the strong Royalist or Legitimist group led by M. Rastoil, President of the Tribunal. Faujas' task is to unite the two groups into supporting a Bonapartist candidate. His method is both calculating and unscrupulous.

Faujas does not act simply as the political puppet of the government. A mutual manipulation is taking place, for he associates his own personal desires with his political task. Zola describes Faujas' ambition in his notes to the novel as follows: "Il vise, comme premier échelon, la place du curé (1655)." Thus we see that both partners of the alliance have their own motives and use each other to serve their individual purposes. They succeed easily through the awesome power that they exercise jointly and which is revealed in Faujas' actions.

In the beginning, Abbé Faujas appears as a quiet, pious and humble priest. He rents a room in the home of François Mouret, a leading merchant in the town, who is known to have Republican sympathies yet is not politically active. Mouret's wife, Marthe, is the daughter of Félicité Rougon. Faujas' connections with Eugène Rougon, her son, assure him of Félicité's help in his 'conquest' of the town. Informed of Faujas' duty, Félicité introduces Faujas into the upper levels of Plassans society, members of which attend social gatherings of a political nature at her home. Faujas also makes use of Marthe, who at first resents his presence in her home

but is gradually won over to him. Faujas' presence in the home leads François Mouret to send away two of his children. His son, Serge, enters a seminary due, in part, to Faujas' influence, while Mouret himself is eventually committed to an asylum. Thus any possible opposition within the home is removed. Marthe returns to her religious services and charitable work. Faujas wins the admiration of many people who see him as the reason for Marthe's conversion. He persuades Marthe to head a committee of society ladies in order to establish a centre for the young girls of the working class. Marthe, in turn, gains the support of Mme de Condamin, a very influential matron of society who pressures people into supporting Abbé Faujas and his project. In this way, Faujas wins the support of both the working class and the upper classes. He matches this success by establishing a guild or club for the young men of good families and in so doing, wins further admiration and followers in the town. His popularity grows steadily in Plassans, and soon most of the townspeople are under his influence.

Besides winning over the town in general, Faujas must overcome two major groups of influence in Plassans in order to achieve success. These are the ecclesiastical establishment and the strong Legitimist group of influential townspeople, including M. Rastoil, M. de Bourdeu and M. Maffre. Within the Church of Plassans, Faujas surmounts the bishop by threatening his elevation to archbishop. All appointments to the episcopate at the time were made by the State: thus Faujas, with his connections in Paris, can have Mgr. Rousselot's

candidacy quashed. Faujas warns the bishop that the government holds him responsible for the victory of the Marquis de Lagrifoul, a Legitimist, in the recent elections. With the death of Abbé Compan, cure of Saint-Saturnin, the bishop must appoint a successor. Although Abbé Bourrette seems to be a likely replacement, the bishop gives the position to Faujas and is at his mercy: "Dame! c'est sur vous que je m'appuie maintenant, cher Monsieur Faujas (1020)." This advancement from a lowly vicaire to cure of Saint-Saturnin permits Faujas to frequent freely all levels of society and brings the other members of the clergy under his influence. His power and prestige increase, so that soon he controls the entire diocese. He is consequently able to mobilize the clergy into working for the government candidate that he selects, M. Delangre.

As for the other group, Faujas' take-over is just as calculating. Mouret's home, strategically situated between the homes of M. Péqueur de Saulaies and M. Rastoil, serves as a base from which Faujas is able to frequent both party groups. He manages this by first occupying Mouret's garden during their gatherings and eventually opening it up to the two different political groups. He earns their respect and admiration as a man of good sense, and when he suggests that M. Delangre would be a suitable candidate for their constituency, everyone enthusiastically supports him:

Ce fut une trainée de poudre. La mine était prête, une étincelle avait suffi. De toutes parts à la fois, des trois quartiers de la ville, dans chaque maison, dans chaque famille, le nom de M. Delangre monta au

milieu d'un concert d'éloges. Il devenait le Messie attendu, le sauveur ignoré la veille, révélé le matin, et adoré le soir.

(1151)

Thus Faujas, in his clerical and political role, has completely transformed the political thought of the town.

Yet Abbé Faujas is not the only priest in La Conquête de Plassans who is concerned with politics and government. For instance, several of the priests voice opinions as to who should have the greater authority in France, Napoleon or the Pope. Zola classifies their respective stands in his "Ébauche" as follows: "L'évêque est très indécis, - Fenil est pour Rome, - Faujas est pour Paris, - Bourrette pour Dieu et Surin pour rien (1666)." All of the priests are either directly or indirectly involved in the temporal affairs of Plassans. Two minor priests in the novel, Abbés Fenil and Surin are directly connected with political affairs. Abbé Fenil, who actively supports the Legitimist cause, is a determined opponent of Faujas. Zola describes him in these terms in his notes on the "Personnages": "Une tête du parti légitimiste, ambitieux, soutenant le candidat légitimiste, s'effaçant pour mieux agir, vicaire de monseigneur (1660)." Until Faujas wins over the diocese, Fenil has control over the Bishop: "L'abbé Fenil tenait Mgr. Rousselot tremblant sous la rudesse de sa volonté (987)." It is suggested in the novel that Fenil may be an agent of a group, running the diocese in the interests of the Legitimists. In fact, the bishop admits to Faujas that it was primarily through the actions of Fenil in the previous election

that a Legitimist candidate was elected. Abbé Surin, the bishop's secretary, is a Legitimist like Fenil. Although he is not directly concerned with the political manoeuvrings of Fenil and Faujas, it is inferred that some previous activity on his part has guaranteed him the appointment of bishop (1138). In his notes on the "Personnages", Zola describes Surin in these words: "Un profil pointu de prêtre ambitieux et aimable, surtout bon. Un peu parent de monseigneur. A sa mitre dans la poche (1660)."

Two other clerical figures, Mgr. Rousselot and Abbé Bourrette, serve as pawns in the political game-work taking place in Plassans. Mgr. Rousselot prefers to be left out of politics and its complexities, but he is reluctantly drawn into the struggle for power in his diocese which is being waged between Faujas and Fenil. As we have shown, Rousselot is a weak-willed individual, responsive to every political pressure from Paris.<sup>6</sup> Abbé Bourrette is a kind, amiable priest who is drawn unwittingly into the political schemings of Faujas. He makes the arrangements for Faujas to live at the Mourets', thus giving him ready access to the two political factions of Plassans whose leaders are neighbours of Mouret. Bourrette is passed over in favour of Faujas

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<sup>6</sup> Ecclesiastical support of Napoleon was not unanimous throughout France. Many members of the clergy and bishops tended to favour the return of the Bourbon monarchy and refused to openly support Napoleon. The State's hold over the episcopate forced bishops to proclaim their support of the government. Furthermore, rigorous political indoctrination in the seminaries during this period usually guaranteed that the clergy would be properly instructed as to its role in society, which was to instill into the French people faith in Napoleon. However, some members of the clergy refused to change their political views and adopt such a role. See, for example, J. Brugerette, op.cit. p. 168, and Alfred Cobban, op.cit., p. 188.

for the position of curé.

In addition, many of the priests, including Abbés Fenil, Surin and Bourrette, attend M. Rastoil's weekly gatherings of Legitimist party supporters. In the novel, Zola describes the situation as follows: "Tout Saint-Saturnin y dînait, l'abbé Fenil, l'abbé Surin, et les autres. Il n'y avait pas une robe noire à Plassans qui n'eût pris le frais dans le jardin, devant la cascade (944)."

Thus we see that La Conquête de Plassans presents an overpowering picture of a clergy which, for the most part, is lacking in evangelistic spirit and preoccupied with temporal affairs. Some members of the clergy, like Abbé Faujas and Abbé Fenil, participate in politics in pursuit of a personal goal, a desire to possess a strong position within the Church, while at the same time satisfying their own political ambitions. With the help of the State, the priest wields a considerable amount of power and influence. Paul Louis, in his study of the various social types found in the works of Balzac and Zola, shows how the politically active priest was the most successful in the ecclesiastical hierarchy during the Second Empire:

Ceux qui montent au premier plan du monde clérical en ce siècle comme en tous les autres, ce ne sont point les modestes, les timides, - les prêtres qui perpétuent l'esprit évangélique et qui sont d'ailleurs de beaucoup les moins nombreux, - mais les ambitieux, les avides les impétueux, les caractères dominateurs qui veulent, avec leurs propres visées d'orgueil, satisfaire ce besoin de commandement qui est inhérent à toute Eglise constituée. 7

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<sup>7</sup> Paul Louis, Les Types Sociaux Chez Balzac et Zola (Paris: Éditions du Monde Moderne, 1925), p. 165.

It is this type of clericalism, typified by Abbé Faujas and also displayed in other figures like Abbé Fenil, that Zola opposes. The fate of Abbé Faujas in the final outcome of La Conquête de Plassans underlines Zola's anti-clerical position.

Zola was quite definite in his notes to the novel as to what Faujas' fate would be. He states in his "Ébauche" that "Faujas doit finir mal... Bien appuyer sur ceci, la religion fatalement poussant Marthe jusqu'au bout de la logique et châtiant Faujas [our italics] (1670)." Once Faujas has succeeded in arranging the election of M. Delangre, he becomes increasingly arrogant. He is promised the position of grand-vicaire and thus has risen from the lowest level of the ecclesiastical hierarchy to a very influential position. Abbé Fenil, jealous and outraged by Faujas' coup, is implicated in Mouret's escape from the asylum. Mouret sets fire to his home and strangles Faujas as they both perish in the fire. But Faujas' accomplishment survives him and Félicité Rougon continues to direct the Bonapartist control of Plassans. Although the results of Faujas' efforts cannot be erased, he is punished in one of the most dramatic conclusions to any of the novels in the Rougon-Macquart.

As we mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, another volume of the Rougon-Macquart demonstrates a different aspect of the bond between the Church and the State. Germinal is Zola's second novel in the series which deals with the working class. The first, L'Assommoir, depicts the working class in Paris; Germinal relates the struggle of the proletariat against the capitalistic bourgeois

class. Germinal is one of Zola's most thoroughly documented works and is based, in part, on the strike in the mines of Anzin in northern France in 1884.<sup>8</sup> To suit his purposes, Zola sometimes transposed a significant event or issue from the Third Republic into the Second Empire, thus distorting, to a certain extent, the factual basis of the Rougon-Macquart. Although the strike did not occur during the Second Empire, the political issue of the working class movement was a key one in the Second Empire in the years 1868 and 1869. It is this issue which furnishes the subject matter of Germinal. In the "Ébauche", Zola introduces the subject as follows: "Le roman est le soulèvement des salariés, le coup d'épaule donné à la société, qui craque un instant; en un mot la lutte du travail et du capital (III, 1825)."

In the fictional chronology of the Rougon-Macquart, we have pointed out already that La Conquête de Plassans deals with the Second Empire from 1857 to 1863, a period in which the Church was not yet in complete support of Napoleon. There were still many dissenters within the Church, as we have seen in characters like Abbé Surin and Abbé Fenil. During the latter period of the Second Empire, the Church was, for the most part, organized in unanimous support of Napoleon's government. In Germinal, we see the Church, during this period, as a unified whole actively involved in the political struggle between the ruling class and the proletariat

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<sup>8</sup> See Henri Mitterand's "Étude" of Germinal, Les Rougon-Macquart, III, 1802-1868.

which flared up in 1868.

In this class struggle, the Church is portrayed as an ally of the ruling class opposed to the rise of the proletariat. In other words, the Church helps maintain the status quo within society. This added dimension to the alliance of the Church and the State was important to Napoleon III, since the wealthy propertied classes, composed of businessmen and financiers, formed the strongest sector of society which supported the regime. Thus, for the Church to defend the existing order by supporting the ruling class and by keeping the proletariat resigned to its place in society, was to maintain Napoleon's position as well. Napoleon's position as Emperor would be assured as long as the status quo was not upset. The Church is represented in this role by the two priest characters in the novel, each illustrating a different stand.

Before describing the actions of the two priests, we might mention a few details in the novel which illustrate further the role that the Church assumes in the mining districts of the provinces. In the second chapter of the novel, Zola gives a detailed description of the house of his "representative" mining family, the Maheus. On the walls, as part of a veritable iconography, are portraits of the Emperor and the Empress: "Collées sur les murs, des enluminures violentes, les portraits de l'Empereur et de l'Impératrice donnés par la Compagnie, des soldats et des saints, bariolés d'or, tranchaient crûment la nudité claire de la pièce (1149)." This scene illustrates graphically the alliance of the Church and the State, as representatives

of both partners appear side-by-side in the miners' homes. The fact that the portraits of the ruling couple were given by the mining company reveals the affiliation of the propertied bourgeoisie with the two partners of the alliance. This aspect of politics in the Second Empire is a fact of life which the proletariat has come to accept, as La Maheude reveals during her husband's talk with Abbé Ranvier during the strike: "Mais c'est donc que vous [Ranvier] ne vous accordez plus avec les bourgeois... Tous nos autres curés dînaient à la Direction, et nous menaçaient du diable, dès que nous demandions du pain (1473)."

In addition, it is apparent in the resigned attitude of many of the miners that they have been browbeaten into acceptance of their lot. La Maheude, Maheu's wife, is representative of the proletarian mentality. She is convinced that it is better to accept the status quo than to attempt to change it. She reveals this passive attitude while at the Gregoires', shareholders in the Montsou mines, to whom she has come seeking charity: "Oh, ce n'est pas pour me plaindre. Les choses sont ainsi; il faut les accepter; d'autant plus que nous aurions beau nous débattre, nous ne changerions sans doute rien...(1233)."

We learn in a later statement made by La Maheude that it is the clergy which helps to instil this resigned way of thinking into the miners: "Encore si ce que les curés racontent était vrai, si les pauvres gens de ce monde étaient riches dans l'autre (1277)!" Thus the clergy is directly involved in rendering the proletariat submissive, eliminating any threat to the status quo and to Napoleon through an uprising.

The first parish priest of the mining district of Montsou

introduced into the novel is Abbé Joire. Described as "désireux de vivre en paix avec tout le monde (1361)", he keeps out of the actual conflict and sides with neither the employers nor the miners. In other words, he does nothing, and is promoted to a better parish during the strike. His behaviour seems typical of priests who refrained from becoming involved in political issues and, in fact, refused to concern themselves with any of the problems and needs of the poorer classes. They merely sought a comfortable position free from any complications.<sup>9</sup>

Abbé Joire is succeeded by Abbé Ranvier, who sides with the miners against the propertied bourgeois class. He defends, verbally, the miners' rights and attributes responsibility to the owners for the deplorable living and working conditions of the miners. The best he can do is give evangelistic support to the miners. He tells the miners that the Church is on their side and that justice will triumph in the end: "Il disait que l'Église était avec les pauvres, qu'elle ferait un jour triompher la justice, en appelant la colère de Dieu sur les iniquités des riches (1472)." He gives no practical assistance to the miners such as giving them food or clothing. The practical value of his support is ironically shown in this statement from the novel: "... il courait ainsi les corons, sans aumônes, les mains vides au travers de cette armée mourante de faim, en pauvre diable lui-même qui regardait la souffrance comme l'aiguillon du salut (1473-1474)." M. Hennebeau, the local manager, sees Ranvier's activity simply as

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<sup>9</sup> Paul Louis, op.cit., p. 150.

an annoyance and at one point remarks casually: "S'il nous ennuie trop, l'évêque nous en débarrassera (1458)."

Abbé Ranvier even goes so far as to criticize the bishop and the urban clergy for their bond with the bourgeoisie:

Maintenant, en phrases voilées, il frappait sur les curés des villes, sur les évêques, sur le haut clergé, repu de jouissance, gorgé de domination, pactisant avec la bourgeoisie libérale dans l'imbécillité de son aveuglement, sans voir que c'était cette bourgeoisie qui le déposédait de l'empire du monde.

(1473)

But although he disapproves of the Church's connection with the bourgeoisie, he sees some personal gain from it, as he goes on to reveal:

La délivrance viendrait des prêtres de campagne, tous se lèveraient pour rétablir le royaume du Christ, avec l'aide des misérables; et il semblait être déjà à leur tête, il redressait sa taille osseuse, en chef de bande, en révolutionnaire de l'Évangile, les yeux emplis d'une telle lumière, qu'ils éclairaient la salle obscure.

(Ibid.)

Thus Ranvier pictures himself as a "révolutionnaire de l'Évangile". He sees in the strike an opportunity to enhance his own personal glory by leading a revolt of the proletariat. We cannot, however, discredit his basically good intention, which is to help the miners, although his method is both impracticable and inconsequential.

We can recognize, in the case of Abbé Ranvier, certain characteristics which Zola gives to his revolutionary characters in the Rougon-Macquart.<sup>10</sup> In Germinal itself, there are several

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<sup>10</sup> Other revolutionary characters include Miette and Silvère Mouret in La Fortune des Rougon, Pierre Florent in Le Ventre de Paris, Etienne Lantier in Germinal, and Chouteau and Maurice Levasseur in La Débâcle.

similarities between Ravier and Étienne Lantier, the revolutionary who leads the miners in the strike. Both characters are outsiders: they are not miners and never really integrate with the community. Thus they are divorced somewhat from the true plight of the miners and do not act in their best interest. One of the most significant characteristics of Zola's revolutionary characters is their 'visionary' tendency. Étienne visualizes fame and fortune at the head of a massive proletarian revolution:

il se grisa de ces premières jouissances de la popularité: être à la tête des autres, commander, lui si jeune et qui la veille encore était un manoeuvre, l'emplissait d'orgueil, agrandissait son rêve d'une révolution prochaine, où il jouerait un rôle. Son visage changea, il devint grave, il s'écouta parler: tandis que son ambition naissante enfiévrerait ses théories et la poussait aux idées de bataille. (1281)

Thus Ravier shares Lantier's personal dream for success which alienates both of them from the cause that they have undertaken. Both men forgo their ideals. Lantier sees his actual position at the head of the miners, leading them in a revolution, as an opportunity for personal recognition, while Ravier sees his imagined position at the head of a revolution in a similar manner. It is this ambition to fulfill an unrealistic vision, which leads the revolutionary to hurt his cause, that Zola criticizes in all his revolutionary characters.<sup>11</sup> Yet Zola does not condemn Ravier's position, since the latter's intentions are predominantly to help the miners. Furthermore, Ravier never achieves a strong position to the extent that his actions

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<sup>11</sup> For a study of Zola's revolutionaries, see Roger Ripoll, "Zola et les Communards", Europe, 468-469 (1968), 16-26.

could be of any consequence.

Despite Ranvier's continued support of the miners, the strike is unsuccessful and comes to a tragic end with the death of a number of miners, shot by soldiers protecting the mining property. Ranvier is last seen calling down God's wrath on the murderers. We learn later, in a letter from the bishop, read when the owners are celebrating their victory, that the priest who dared to side with the poor has been dismissed.

Thus in Germinal, Zola deals with an additional dimension of the alliance between the Church and the State, which historians like Alfred Cobban have described as follows:

A Church devoted - apart from an occasional easily crushed rebel - to the interests of the wealthy propertied classes provided the moral justification for their wealth, and spiritual sanctions against those who would attack it. 12

The Church's support of the State in protecting and promoting the interests of the rich alienated it from the poorer classes. Zola especially criticizes this aspect of the Church-State bond.

The neglect of the poorer classes by the clergy is portrayed in other novels, although there is no specific question of politics involved. We have already mentioned L'Assommoir, in which a surly priest rushes through Gervaise's wedding ceremony while the high altar is being lavishly prepared for the wedding of a wealthy bourgeois couple.

Frère Archangias, in La Faute de L'Abbé Mouret, shows no

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12 Alfred Cobban, op.cit., p. 219.

concern at all for the poor villagers, the Artauds. He sees the people living like animals beyond the hope of salvation, and expresses an intense hatred for them, coupled with contempt, throughout the novel: "Laissez donc! monsieur le curé, de la graine des damnés, ces crapauds-là! On devrait leur casser les reins, pour les rendre agréables à Dieu (I, 1237)." The sole teacher in the parish school, he is vicious in his treatment of his pupils. He punishes them severely when they do not learn their catechism, and is always pursuing them when they miss school. He deplores the morals of the promiscuous village children and believes that nothing can save them or their parents. For instance, when Abbé Mouret goes to bless the bedroom of the newly married Fortuné and Rosalie, as is the custom, Frère Archangias retorts: "Laissez donc! Est-ce que ça a besoin d'être béni, ce trou à cochons (1440)?" He also feels that there is no need to concern himself with the religious needs of the Artauds, since they scorn God: "Mais les Artaud se conduisent en bêtes, voyez-vous! Ils sont comme leurs chiens qui n'assistent pas à la messe, qui se moquent des commandements de Dieu et de L'Église (1237)."

In La Joie de Vivre, Abbé Horteur shows a similar lack of concern for the poverty-stricken peasants of his parish in the village of Bonneville, plagued by recurring floodwaters which destroy their homes. He sees his parishioners as lost souls, who, by their immoral conduct, have brought misfortune upon themselves: "- Quel peuple! s'écria le curé, en s'asseyant à côté de Chanteau. Dieu les abandonne, décidément. Dès leur première communion, ces coquines-là font des

enfants, boivent et volent comme père et mère... Ah! je leur ai bien prédit les malheurs qui les accablent (III, 1118)." He has no sympathy for the village children who come begging to the Chanteau family, where Pauline, a very generous young woman, adopted as a child by the Chanteaus, gives food, clothing and money to them. He believes that the children are liars who will say anything in order to receive alms. He also accuses them of stealing what they need (900-901). Horteur's severity is an obvious foil for Pauline's charity. He has given up hope of converting the people to a righteous way of life and keeps within the narrow range of his clerical duties, conducting the mass for those who come, performing weddings and giving last rites. His attitude is quite clear throughout the novel: "Personnellement, il soignait son salut; quant à ses paroissiens, tant pis s'ils se damnaient (849)!"

Abbé Godard, in La Terre, tries to carry out his clerical duties in two parishes which he must oversee. In the farming region of La Beauce, Godard has no respect for the peasant farmers, whose irreligious way of life distresses him. Although it is revealed that "Le terrible grognon, toujours emporté dans un vent de violence, avait la passion des misérables, leur donnait tout, son argent, son linge, ses habits,....(IV, 412)," he nevertheless seems to treat the people as if he hates them. Always described in words such as "furieux", "dans un tel coup de tempête", "hors de lui", he is eventually driven to abandon the people in a fit of rage because of their lack of religious devotion: "Vous allez vivre sans prêtre, comme des bêtes..."

Je sais bien que vos vaches ont plus de religion que vous (597)."

This lack of evangelistic spirit and indifference on the part of the priest are in recognizable contrast to the friendship shown between the bourgeoisie and the clergy in other volumes of the Rougon-Macquart. In Le Ventre de Paris, we pointed out how Abbé Roustan acts as a business adviser and confidant to Lisa Quenu, a merchant in Paris. Abbé Mauduit is a close friend of several of the residents in the apartment house, which is the focal point of the story in Pot-Bouille. He is familiar with all of the happenings in the lives of the residents, and particularly the women. He adopts a concerned attitude yet does not try to change their way of life:

Lui qui confessait ces dames et ces demoiselles, les connaissait toutes dans leur chair, comme le docteur Juillerat, et il avait dû finir par ne pas veiller qu'aux apparences, en maître de cérémonie jetant sur cette bourgeoisie gâtée le manteau de la religion, . . . . résigné à exiger uniquement une bonne tenue de ces pénitentes, qui lui échappaient et qui auraient compromis Dieu.

(III, 96)

He remains a loyal friend despite their immoral behaviour and tries to help them out in their misfortunes, as in the case of the Vabre family when M. Vabre dies (207-208).

Une Page d'Amour presents a touching friendship between Abbé Jouve and Hélène Grandjean, a widow living in Paris with a young daughter. In the novel, the priest is quite concerned with Hélène's welfare. He advises her to remarry on many occasions, feeling that it is not good for a woman to live alone in Paris: "-Mon Dieu! je connais peu le monde, continua le prêtre, avec un léger embarras, mais

je sais pourtant qu'une femme y est très exposée, lorsqu'elle reste sans défense... Enfin, vous êtes trop seule, et cette solitude dans laquelle vous vous enfoncez, n'est pas saine, croyez-moi. Un jour doit venir où vous en souffrirez (II, 872)." When Hélène becomes involved with the young married doctor, M. Deberle, Jouve is very distressed over Hélène's troubled state of mind, and persistently urges her to confide in him as a friend. In addition, he is always present, offering his faith and strength during Hélène's daughter's many bouts of illness.

From these various novels, it appears that the priest's degree of involvement with his parishioners is decided by their social status. On the whole, a camaraderie marks the priest's relationship with the bourgeoisie, while indifference and even contempt mark the priest's association with the poor and less fortunate.

The Rougon-Macquart, dealing with the Second Empire, became, for Zola, a vehicle in which he was able to dramatize all his complaints against the society and politics of the period. The novels which we have examined reveal Zola's strong opposition to the alliance between the Church and the State. We can see from Zola's portrayal of the priest in La Conquête de Plassans and Germinal that he assumes an anti-clerical position when the priest participates in the realm of politics. According to Ida-Marie Frandon, a critic of Zola's political thought, Zola sees the political structure of the Second Empire as the concentration of power in the hands of a few masterful and unprincipled individuals, satisfying their lust for position and

material gain.<sup>13</sup> Another critic of Zola, F. W. J. Hemmings, who shares Frandon's view, argues that, although Zola's viewpoint may have been an over-simplification of the actual political situation at that time, it was not entirely inaccurate.<sup>14</sup> Interested parties hastened to support Napoleon in order to reap whatever benefits they could from his success, as did the Church. The power the Church acquired in return for its support was a major contributing factor to the strength of Napoleon III's position during the first ten years of the Empire. Napoleon made ready use of the Church to the extent that it became deeply involved in the temporal affairs of the country. La Conquête de Plassans demonstrates the influence and power that the clergy could exercise under these circumstances in swaying the electorate. The political workings of the clergy in Plassans was analagous to that happening throughout France during the middle period of the Second Empire. Germinal relates the clergy's effective participation in support of the State in the political issue of the struggle between the ruling class and the proletariat during the Second Empire.

The Church, therefore, played a significant role in the politics of Napoleon III which Zola criticizes in the Rougon-Macquart. Ida-Marie Frandon clarifies the precise nature of Zola's condemnation

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<sup>13</sup> Ida-Marie Frandon, La Pensée Politique d'Émile Zola (Paris: Champion, 1959), p. 5.

<sup>14</sup> F. W. J. Hemmings, Emile Zola (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966), p. 84.

as follows:

La politique qu'il condamne, c'est celle qui cesse d'être une réalité humaine, qui oublie que les hommes souffrent, attendent plus de justice et d'amour, et qui n'est qu'affaires d'argent, jeux d'influences, luttes d'individus ou de coteries, ou pis encore, moyen de satisfaire fantaisie ou vice.

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The willingness of the greater part of the clergy to participate in this type of politics accounts for Zola's anti-clerical position. A less harsh stand is taken with other priests outside the field of politics, as will be seen in the next chapter on the characterization of the priest. It will be interesting also to see how the characterization complies with the political role that the priest assumes.

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15 Ida-Marie Frandon, op.cit., p. 24.

## CHAPTER TWO

## PHYSICAL CHARACTERIZATION

In the numerous portraits of the cure in the Rougon-Macquart, several patterns can be recognized in both the physical description and the psychological make-up. We shall attempt to distinguish in this chapter the recurring traits in the physical description of the separate priests, which will help to clarify Zola's conception of the clergy. In addition, our study will reveal different aspects of Zola's treatment of characters in general in the Rougon-Macquart.

In Zola's portrayal of the priest, as in the portrayal of his characters in general, the emphasis is placed on the physical or physiological aspects of the character. In his literary works, Zola views man as the product of natural forces within the universe. For instance, Zola sees man as predetermined by the laws of heredity and then moulded or fashioned by his environment or milieu. As Guy Robert remarks: "Il en résulte assez naturellement que la vie de l'esprit perd beaucoup de son autonomie; le vrai drame ne se déroule plus sur le plan humain; la psychologie cède le pas à l'épopée des forces naturelles."<sup>1</sup> Zola's preoccupation with the physiological nature of his characters is evident in his characterization of the

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<sup>1</sup> Guy Robert, Émile Zola: Principes et Caractères Généraux de son Oeuvre (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1952), p. 113.

priest. The latter's general physical characteristics are illustrated at greater length than his psychological traits, however significant these may be.

In the seventeen portraits of the priest found in the Rougon-Macquart, Zola consistently presents two distinct physical types. On the one hand, the priest is described as stout, even obese, although at times deceptively strong. Five of the fifteen priests, who are given particular physical characteristics, fall into this category. Closely related to this category is a subgrouping of three priests who are described as solid and impressively built, but not necessarily stout. Alternatively, the priest is described as thin and often physically frail. Seven priests fit into this classification. Of the two remaining priests, Abbé Cornille in Le Rêve plays a very minor role and is not given any physical traits. The description of Abbé Roustan in Le Ventre de Paris does not fit into either classification. His unique case will be examined in the conclusion to this chapter. Thus Zola's basic physical characterization of the cure falls into two extremes. In this respect, the priest does not follow the norm. His physique differentiates him from the rest of society, and places him in Zola's "monde à part", of which we spoke in our introduction. Zola's tendency to set the priest apart from the whole of society is carried through not only in the latter's physical description, but also in his psychological make-up and in his language, as we shall

see in the subsequent chapters.

In the first category, five curés are depicted primarily as stout persons. To convey the notion that the priest is stout, Zola often concentrates on the facial characteristics. In La Faute de l'Abbé Mouret, Abbé Mouret's predecessor, Abbé Caffin, is introduced indirectly through the comments of other characters. Often referred to as "le pauvre M. Caffin", he is remembered for his carefree nature and his "grosse figure [qui] semblait toujours rire (I, 1422)." This is the only physical quality which Zola attributes to Caffin. Abbé Bourrette, who serves as the dupe in the political machinations of La Conquête de Plassans, is described as being out of proportion as well as overweight:

L'abbé était un gros homme, au bon visage naïf, avec de grands yeux bleus d'enfant. Sa large ceinture de soie, fortement tendue, lui dessinait un ventre d'une rondeur douce et luisante, et il marchait, la tête un peu en arrière, les bras trop courts, les jambes déjà lourdes.

(945)

His stoutness permeates his whole being, for even his voice is described as "grasse" (1010). Abbé Horteur, in La Joie de Vivre, is introduced as "un homme trapu, à encolure de paysan, dont les cinquante ans n'avaient pas encore pâli les cheveux roux (III, 810)." The stoutness of Abbé Mauduit in Pot-Bouille, which again is the one specific physical trait attributed to the priest, is evoked in a description of his face: "Son visage gras et fin exprimait une tristesse (96)." The fifth priest, Abbé Joire in Germinal, is

described as a well-fed cat: "l'abbé Joire, passait en retroussant sa soutane, avec des délicatesses de gros chat bien nourri, qui craint de mouiller sa robe (1209)."

If we consider the roles that these priests play in their respective novels, we can recognize the significance of the one trait which is specifically included in the five portraits. In each case, the priest's impressive girth is associated with a general lack of effectiveness and spiritual concern, which in turn reflect an attachment to the comfortable material advantages of the position of curé. We have already seen how Abbé Bourrette bears the brunt of the political schemings of other clerics in La Conquête de Plassans. Bourrette's physical description outlines his bumbling yet innocent nature, in contrast to the other politically active clerical figures. Abbé Horteur, who displays a certain severity and lack of concern for his parishioners, is always preoccupied with his small garden and enjoys simple pleasures like his pipe and card games with M. Chanteau. In Horteur's case, his psychological traits, which we shall examine in the next chapter, as well as his stoutness, underline his ineptitude as a curé. We may say the same of Abbé Mauduit in Pot-Bouille, who is portrayed in close association with the well-to-do bourgeoisie. As far as Mauduit's clerical responsibilities are concerned, he is ineffectual in deterring his parishioners from their scandalous behaviour. Abbé Caffin presents a similar case. He is a priest who does not take his clerical duties seriously. For

instance, one character in La Faute de l'Abbé Mouret, La Rousse, compares Abbé Mouret's lengthy talk on marriage with Fortuné and La Rosalie to Abbé Caffin's usual address at such an occasion: "M. Caffin n'en racontait tant, dit la Rousse. Lorsqu'il a marié la belle Miette, il ne lui a donné que deux tapes sur la joue, en lui disant d'être sage (I, 1424)." Abbé Joire is one of Zola's more antipathetic representations of the priest. We saw in the first chapter that Joire refuses to become involved in the actual struggle between the miners and the bourgeoisie, and tries not to compromise himself with the bourgeoisie by openly associating with the miners: "S'il avait fait sa course à la nuit, ce devait être pour ne pas se compromettre au milieu des mineurs (III, 1361)." He is described rather caustically as a well-fed cat. His physique is indeed directly associated with his desire to remain uninvolved: "son unique soin d'homme gros et doux à vivre en paix avec tout le monde (1458)." In the five cases which we have just cited, the priest's one predominant element, his stoutness, is used to highlight in an ironic manner his ineffectiveness and lack of devotion to his parishioners. The priests are presented in relatively comfortable positions in which they are content to live each day as it comes. This association of ideas, which is implied in earlier works written before Germinal (1885), is stated clearly in the case of Abbé Joire.

In addition to this pattern, two of the portraits of stout priests concern those associated with the bourgeoisie; these are

Abbé Mauduit in Pot-Bouille and Abbé Joire in Germinal. In these cases, the stoutness of the priests appears to highlight their profitable affiliation with the bourgeoisie, although this stereotype does not hold true in the case of Abbé Jouve, a small, very thin priest in Une Page d'Amour. This tendency to portray graphically the well-off position of a great number of the clergy is compounded in three other novels in which the stoutness of the clergy is obviously contrasted to the condition of its parishioners. The contrast is evident in La Joie de Vivre between the stout Abbé Horteur and the poverty-stricken peasants of Bonneville; it is especially striking in the contrast between the stout Abbé Joire and the starving miners in Germinal. Abbé Godard, who is part of the subgroup of militant clerics, is likewise an obese priest contrasted with the peasant farmers of La Beauce, who subsist on their small farms in La Terre. This pattern will be elaborated further by the second distinct type of priest whose physical build is the opposite of the stout priest.

Before examining the second distinct type of priest found in the Rougon-Macquart, we can distinguish a subgroup of priests whose traits are somewhat related to the stout priest. Three figures, Abbé Faujas in La Conquête de Plassans, Frère Archangias in La Faute de l'Abbé Mouret, and Abbé Godard in La Terre may be viewed as representative of Zola's concept of a clerical militant. There are several similarities in their characterization; all three men are described as solid and aggressively powerful individuals, which

coincides with the roles that they play in their respective novels.

Abbé Faujas, the priest who takes over the town of Plassans, is first introduced as "un homme grand et fort, une face carrée, aux traits larges, au teint terreux (I, 905)." When Faujas makes his first appearance at one of Félicité Rougon's political soirées, he creates an unfavourable impression: "il était trop grand, trop carré des épaules; il avait la face trop dure, les mains trop grosses (949)." Throughout the novel, his impressive size is emphasized along with other unfavourable physical qualities: "le visage terreux"(907), "la dureté du front et les plis rudes de la bouche"(909), "une vilaine mine"(953), and so on. One word always associated with Faujas is "le diable" which highlights the import of his description. As Calvin S. Brown has pointed out, Zola frequently attaches a particular term to his characters, which fixes their basic nature or principal quality. Brown refers to this labelling device as Zola's "tag".<sup>2</sup> Several such tags occur throughout the novel: "ce diable d'homme", "ce grand diable taillé à coups de hache" (926, 935, 947, 949).

Other physical traits of Faujas emphasize his large physique. One of these is the great power in his hands and arms. His lady penitents refer to his "main de fer" which they like to feel on their necks during confession (1043). Faujas' hands and arms represent his desire to control the town and win over the people: "L'abbé Faujas

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<sup>2</sup> Calvin S. Brown, Repetition in Zola's Novels (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1952), p. 5.

tendit les bras d'un air de défi ironique, comme s'il voulait prendre Plassans pour l'étouffer d'un effort sur sa poitrine robuste (916)."

Once Faujas has control of the town, he can take possession of it in his hands: "Il était le maître, il n'avait plus besoin de mentir à ses instincts; il pouvait allonger la main, prendre la ville, la faire trembler (1154)." His hands embody the threat that he poses to the town: "ses grosses mains se levaient, pleines de menaces et de châtements (1166)." When Faujas influences Marthe to work for him, it is with his hands that he is able to pressure her. When Marthe becomes more neurotic and poses a threat to Faujas' plans, he tries to bring her back under his influence. The power of his hands is depicted vividly in this passage:

Le prêtre tenta de la calmer par un moyen qui lui avait souvent réussi.  
 - Voyons, soyez raisonnable, chère dame, dit-il en cherchant à s'emparer de ses mains pour les tenir serrées entre les siennes.  
 - Ne me touchez pas! cria-t-elle en reculant. Je ne veux pas . . . Quand vous me tenez, je suis faible comme un enfant. La chaleur de vos mains m'emplit de lâcheté . . .

(1174)

Another trait to which Zola refers frequently is the mysterious power of Faujas' eyes, which seem to hypnotize those who fall under his gaze. There are several references to "le regard clair", and "ce regard d'aigle" (909, 912) which penetrates people. Faujas' ambition and desire for power are reflected in the flame of his eyes, which he reveals unintentionally on occasion: "il semblait qu'au fond de l'oeil, d'un gris morne d'ordinaire, une flamme passât brusquement . . . (912)."

Some characters are vaguely aware of the power in Faujas' eyes, as Antoine Macquart warns Mouret: "Et il a un singulier oeil, cet homme, Prends garde: les soutanes, ça porte malheur (942)!"

Faujas' strength is also stressed in the forcefulness of his voice. His sudden and violent temper is expressed in his thundering voice which renders fearful people subordinate to his wishes. He is described often in phrases like "une voix tonnante" and "formidable de colère" (1007). When it is necessary, however, his voice can be soft and persuasive. In one passage, Faujas' ability to manipulate Marthe is attributed to the power of his hands and to "la tendre inflexion de ses paroles (1136)."

Thus labelled as "ce diable d'homme", Faujas takes on the dimensions of the devil with his awesome, almost supernatural power, exhibited principally in his hands, eyes and voice. His undesirable physical description, presented in great detail, underlines Zola's condemnation of Faujas' political role in La Conquête de Plassans.

The characterization of Abbé Faujas is an excellent illustration of Zola's treatment of character in general. The most striking feature of most of Zola's characters is the simplicity of their portrayals. The characters are conceived with a particular purpose in the novel and follow a precise "formule", as Alfred Proulx argues in his study of the epic qualities of Zola's Rougon-Macquart.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Alfred C. Proulx, Aspects Épiques des "Rougon-Macquart" de Zola (The Hague: Mouton & Co., 1966), p. 102.

Since the characters are meant to serve a very specific purpose, they generally take on a predictable nature, which consistently supports or maintains their function. All Faujas' physical traits stress his consuming ambition to hold power and his capacity to manipulate the electorate of Plassans and other members of the clergy. His traits remain the same and are repeated to such an extent that Faujas is presented as a one-sided figure, symbolic of clerical domination and the threat that it poses to people.

Many of the elements in Faujas' characterization are also present in the case of Frère Archangias, the severe religious instructor in La Faute de l'Abbé Mouret. While Faujas is referred to as "ce diable d'homme", Archangias is called "le terrible homme" (1235). His big stature and severity of appearance are emphasized in his physical description: "son grand corps maigre taillé à coup de hache (1238)." Other elements of his description include "sa dure face de paysan, en lame de sabre (1238)."<sup>4</sup> Archangias' impressive size is mentioned in the description of different parts of his body, as, for example, in the phrase "ses gros doigts velus", repeated a few times in the novel (1238, 1280). His size is also stressed indirectly through references to his eating habits: "Il mangeait beaucoup, avec un gloussement du gosier qui laissait entendre la nourriture tomber dans l'estomac (1273)."

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<sup>4</sup> Note: this metaphor is applied to Abbé Fenil, another aggressive and menacing clerical figure in the Rougon-Macquart.

The predominant feature of Archangias' aggressivity and ruthlessness is "ses grosses mains", referred to several times in the novel (1279, 1437, 1523). There is also one reference made to "ses longs bras noirs" (1273). His harshness towards the village youngsters is represented by his menacing fists, which are mentioned frequently in the novel. Always angered by the behaviour of the children, he is described with "les poings fermés" in fits of temper (1416, 1443). His clenched fists represent his violent temper as he strikes out on many occasions: "Mais frère Archangias se haussa violemment derrière lui, allongeant le poing, branlant sa tête rude, tonnant . . . (1274)"; "ses poings s'abattaient sur les meubles (1438)." Thus both Faujas' and Archangias' menacing power is embodied in their hands.

Two other traits common to Faujas and Archangias are their eyes, which reflect their true inner feelings, and their voice, which manifests their menacing nature. Frère Archangias' eyes reflect an inner fire, a deep contempt and hatred for the villagers, the Artauds. The news of the tragic suicide of Albine sparks this flame in Archangias: "Frère Archangias ricanait, en fixant sur elle des yeux où flambait une joie farouche (1517)." Archangias' severity and harsh temperament are reflected continuously in his voice: he cries out in anger with "une voix âpre" (1234); he speaks in "une voix irritée" (1237), and at other times in "une voix maussade" (1279).

The neglect of clerical garb, which contributes further to the disparaging portrayal of the clerical militant, is a predominant

aspect in the description of Faujas. Archangias' cassock is in poor condition and badly soiled: "son rabat sale volant sur l'épaule, sa grande soutane graisseuse arrachant les chardons (1239)."<sup>4</sup> Archangias is described often as being in an unkempt condition (1442, 1499). Before his rise to power, Faujas' garb is thin and worn, but kept clean: "sa soutane râpée semblait rouge; des reprises en brodaient les bords; elle était très propre, mais si mince, si lamentable...(907)."

The third portrait of a militant cleric is that of Abbé Godard in La Terre, who is called "le terrible grognon". His obesity is described vividly in his first appearance in the novel: "Gros et court, la nuque rouge, le cou si enflé que la tête s'en retrouvait rejetée en arrière . . . il soufflait terriblement, la bouche grande ouverte dans sa face apoplectique, où la graisse avait noyé le petit nez camard et les petits yeux gris (IV, 406)."<sup>5</sup> Godard is described many times as being "suant et soufflant" (409) with "la face épaisse et suante" (412). As in the cases of other stout priests, the notion of stoutness is conveyed in facial description. We have already noted that Abbé Godard displays impatience and a violent temper towards his parishioners. Zola represents Godard's rage and urge to dominate his parishioners in a reference to his hands and arms. During one of Godard's outbursts of temper, "il ouvrit les bras terriblement, comme pour les gifler (802)."

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<sup>5</sup> Note: Faujas is also described as having grey eyes (I, 912).

His clerical garb is as neglected as that of Frère Archangias. Godard is said to be the most untidy, poorly dressed cleric in the region: "on n'aurait pas trouvé, en Beauce, un prêtre ayant une soutane plus rouge et plus reprise (412)."

Thus all three priests possess identical traits which establish them as aggressive figures. As a militant, Faujas is described at one point as having "ce crâne rude de soldat, où la tonsure était comme la cicatrice d'un coup de massue (I, 911)." Frère Archangias calls himself "le gendarme de Dieu" (1440). In all the portraits, the traits are repeated to present a collective stereotype of the clerical militant. In the case of Abbé Faujas, the militant is actively involved in political affairs, while Frère Archangias and Abbé Godard typify an aggressive clerical figure who abuses his responsibilities. Under these circumstances, the physical build of the cleric supports his belligerent nature.

Six priests are described as being essentially thin. From the general descriptions given of Abbé Surin in La Conquête de Plassans, we know that he is a young priest of slight build. Abbé Jouve in Une Page d'Amour is "un petit homme sec, avec une grosse tête (II, 823)." Again Zola refers to a particular part of the body to indicate the priest's thinness: "L'abbé aussi était là, avec sa grosse tête toute pâle, sur ses épaules maigres (933)." Several references are made to "sa grosse tête" (823, 870, 872, 933, 971), despite his small stature. Another detail which adds to his ridiculous appearance is his clerical garb. We are told that Jouve dresses "à la diable" (823), and wears

a "vieille soutane" (868, 971). In Germinal, Abbé Ranvier is introduced as "un abbé maigre, aux yeux de braise rouge (III, 1361)." He is referred to in identical terms in one other appearance in the novel: "ce petit maigre aux yeux de braise rouge (1457)." His thinness is also indicated in a reference to his legs: "avec sa soutane relevée sur ses maigres jambes (1496)." Both Jouve's and Ranvier's traits are taken to a greater extreme in the portrait of Abbé Madeline in La Terre.

Abbé Madeline is first described as "tout long, tout mince, avec une figure de cierge qui n'en finit plus, et pas fort. Peut-être trente ans. L'air bien doux (IV, 660)." His poor state of health is emphasized throughout the novel; he is "faible d'estomac" (670), and often "malade" (756). In addition, his paleness is underlined frequently, as in the cases of the other thin priests: "Ses yeux pâlissaient, il s'était décharné davantage, on disait qu'il s'en allait de la poitrine (757)." It is explained that Abbé Madeline suffers from the climatic and cultural change from his former parish in the cold mountains of Auvergne to the hot plains of La Beauce: "il n'allait pas bien, il regrettait ses montagnes (693)." His illness is as much psychosomatic as physiological; and is stressed more than his thinness.

The unnamed priest in L'Assommoir and Abbé Fenil in La Conquête de Plassans are thin and menacing figures. The priest in L'Assommoir is introduced as "un vieux petit prêtre, en soutane sale (III, 433)." His thinness is conveyed in a reference to "ses mains sèches" (436).

It is compounded by his paleness, described in his face: "la face pâle de faim" (436). One other trait attributed to the priest is his "l'air maussade", repeated twice within the same passage (Ibid).<sup>6</sup> Abbé Fenil, one of the politically active priests in La Conquête de Plassans, is described as "Un terrible homme, plat et pointu comme un sabre (I, 930)." His thinness is also referred to in the following sentence: "Les lèvres minces de l'abbé Fenil se pinçaient davantage...(987)." Again it is interesting to note how Zola relies on the description of a specific part of the body to convey the impression of thinness. In both these portraits, the thin nature of the priest is presented as a negative quality which underlines his role, of which Zola is highly critical. As we explained in our first chapter, the priest in L'Assommoir neglects his responsibilities towards the poorer classes, and Abbé Fenil is similar to Abbé Faujas in his political schemings.

Abbé Mouret is also presented as an essentially thin priest, but his case is less straightforward than that of the other five. For the most part, in the two novels in which he appears, in La Conquête de Plassans as a youth, and in La Faute de l'Abbé Mouret as a curé, he is presented principally as a thin, frail and sickly figure. In Part Two of La Faute de l'Abbé Mouret, however, he undergoes a transformation and becomes a healthy, robust young man, but this lasts for only a short time. In the final volume of the

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<sup>6</sup> Note: this quality is also attributed to Frère Archangias with his "voix maussade (I, 1279)."

Rougon-Macquart, Le Docteur Pascal, we learn that he is near death after a life-time of illness (V, 1215). Above all, then, he is seen as a sick and thin person and may be classified as the second distinct type of priest with some reservations about his transformation. We shall examine his case in depth in the third chapter, since it offers significant insights into the psychological make-up of the priest.

With the exceptions of Abbé Fenil, one of the politically active priests in the town of Plassans, intended to represent Aix-en-Provence, and Abbé Jouve in Une Page d'Amour, whose parish is in a middle-class section of Paris, we can see a pattern developed in the portrayals of the thin priests. These priests, in general, hold positions in either rural areas or in insignificant parishes. Abbé Ranvier is the curé in the mining districts of Montsou; Abbé Madeline, previously assigned to a parish in the mountains of Auvergne, is a priest in the farming district of La Beauce. The old priest in l'Assommoir has a parish in Paris, but it is in a predominantly working class section of the city. Abbé Mouret's parish is in a rural area. In contrast, the stout priests, generally, are cures in more important parishes. Abbé Faujas is sent to Plassans on an important political mission; Abbé Bourrette is also a curé in Plassans. Abbé Mauduit's parish is in a bourgeois section of Paris. Two stout priests, however, do have insignificant positions. Abbé Horteur's parish is the poverty-stricken village of Bonneville and Abbé Godard is curé in the farming region of La Beauce. Both these priests are depicted as somewhat backward and simple-minded. Because of this, they

have been given a minor parish. Abbé Horteur is described with "son allure et son langage de fermier pauvre (III, 850)." He is compared to his peasant villagers: "il ressemblait à un vieux paysan, courbé sur la terre dure (990)." He is "pauvre et simple, [avec] la tête rude (991)." Abbé Godard is presented as a priest unable to deliver a sermon: "l'éloquence était son côté faible, les mots ne venaient pas, il poussait des heu! heu! sans jamais pouvoir finir ses phrases; ce qui expliquait pourquoi monseigneur l'oubliait depuis vingt-cinq ans, dans la petite cure de Bazoches-le Doyen (IV, 410)." In general, then, the thin priests are not well looked upon by their Church. In two of the cases, it would appear that the thin priest is portrayed almost as a victim of his own Church. Abbé Ranvier, who sides with the miners during the strike in Germinal, is dismissed because he refuses to follow his bishop's orders and support the bourgeoisie. Abbé Madeline is unable to adapt to his new environment and is slowly consumed by it. He becomes seriously ill and must abandon his parish. Furthermore, the portraits of the thin priests tend to be the most sympathetic in Zola's portrayal of the priest.

Another pattern can be seen, stemming from this basic categorization of the priest into one of the two extremes. In a novel where two priests appear, one succeeding the other, they are contrasted as opposites, thus emphasizing each other's qualities. In Germinal, the first parish priest is described as a well-fed cat and keeps out of the conflict between the miners and the management. His successor, Abbé Ranvier, who is of a slight build, becomes

involved in the struggle. Their different physical descriptions underline their opposing stands with regard to the miners' strike. In La Terre, Abbé Godard is the short and fat militant clerical figure who eventually abandons his parish in a fit of rage. His successor, Abbé Madeline, is the lanky and frail priest who is gradually consumed by the environment. Madeline, in contrast to Godard, is devoted to his parishioners and is said to be "navré de l'indifférence religieuse de ses nouveaux paroissiens... (693)." Again, the contrast in the priest's physical build highlights the difference in their respective attitudes towards the parish. A similar contrast is drawn between Abbé Caffin and Abbé Mouret in La Faute de l'Abbé Mouret. As we have seen, Abbé Caffin is a big man, well-liked for his easy-going nature, and lackadaisical in his clerical duties. Abbé Mouret, his successor, is a young man of slight build who takes his clerical responsibilities quite seriously. This contrasting of the two priests within one work amplifies the general viewpoint which Zola seems to be expressing in the two extremes of physical characterization.

There remains one other interesting element to discuss, which is found in the two portraits of Abbé Surin in La Conquête de Plassans and Abbé Mouret in La Faute de l'Abbé Mouret. This element is their lack of masculinity. First, we may mention briefly the case of Abbé Madeline. In La Terre, two peasants raise an interesting question about Madeline's name:

Et tu sais qu'il s'appelle Madeleine.

-Non Madeline.

-Madeline, Madeleine, ce n'est toujours pas un nom d'homme.

(660)

The raising of the question about the masculinity of Madeline's name is significant when we consider the fact that Madeline and Mouret have similar physical traits.

Serge Mouret is first introduced as a youth in La Conquête de Plassans. His most dominating characteristic is his general poor state of health which is compared with that of a young girl: "le jeune homme était d'un tempérament si nerveux qu'il avait à la moindre imprudence, des indispositions de fille, des bobos qui le retenaient dans sa chambre pendant deux ou trois jours (1037)."

Serge's father continuously hesitates to send him to Paris to study law because he is "si délicat". During one particularly serious bout of illness, Serge is described in these words:

Il ressemblait à une fille, dans ses linges blancs. Ses yeux s'étaient agrandis; son sourire était une extase douce des lèvres, qu'il gardait même au milieu des plus cruelles souffrances. Mouret n'osait plus parler de Paris, tant le cher malade lui paraissait féminin et pudique.

(1040)

In La Faute de l'Abbé Mouret where Serge appears as a curé, he is described in a similar manner during his serious illness: "Il était très blanc, les yeux meurtris de bleu, les lèvres pâles; il avait une grace de fille convalescente (1317)."

The physical features of Abbé Surin, "le jeune prêtre", are compared to those of a young woman. During a game of shuttlecock, he is described in terms depicting a woman:

L'abbé Surin, rose comme une fille, s'essuyait délicatement le front, à petites tapes avec un fin mouchoir. Il rejetait ses cheveux blonds

derrière les oreilles, les yeux luisants, la  
taille souple, se servant de sa raquette comme  
d'un éventail.

(1052)

He is compared to a woman in another description in which the details  
are even more ambiguous:

L'abbé Surin, les cheveux au vent, les manches  
de la soutane retroussées, montrant ses poignets  
blancs et minces comme ceux d'une femme ...  
L'abbé Surin, la taille un peu renversée,  
développait les grâces de son buste.

(1055 - 1056)

After the game, he faints from exhaustion. When he recovers, he  
realizes that his robe has been opened and his reaction is described  
with a degree of ironic modesty: "Puis il vit qu'on lui avait  
déboutonné sa soutane et qu'il avait le cou nu; il sourit, il remit  
son rabat (1061)."

Thus in the cases of Mouret and Surin, there is a tendency to  
equate the priest to a female figure in his physical description.  
Jean Borie, in his analysis of the church in the works of Zola, argues  
that the priest is "[une] figure incompréhensible et ambiguë qui  
semble réunir en elle les caractéristiques des deux parents: l'homme  
en robe, l'homme-femme, le prêtre."<sup>7</sup> The physical descriptions of  
Abbé Mouret and Abbé Surin would seem to suggest that Zola associates  
the figure of the priest with homosexuality. We shall see to what  
extent this tendency is developed when we re-examine this question in

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<sup>7</sup> Jean Borie, Zola et les Mythes (Paris: Éditions de Seuil,  
1971), p. 218.

our study of the psychological make-up of the priest, where there are further implications of homosexuality, as in Abbé Faujas' and Frère Archangias' strong hatred of women.

The most predominating aspect of Zola's physical characterization of the curé is the consistency of detail among the different portraits. In the two major physical types of priest and the grouping of the militant cleric, the basic traits are seldom changed. Many features are repeated frequently, such as the face, eyes, voice and condition of the clerical garb. Although every trait is not attributed to each individual priest within a group, the traits are present in almost every case so that distinct patterns emerge. Guy Robert points out that Zola tried to avoid, as far as possible, the repetition of characters and situations in the Rougon-Macquart.<sup>8</sup> In the characterization of the curé, Zola seems to have deliberately not changed his basic conception of the priest.

All of the physical portraits of the priest are caricatures in which physical traits are exaggerated or pronounced in an ironic manner. Some of the portraits are very caustic in their intention and concern priests whose clerical role Zola criticizes strongly, as in the examples of Abbé Faujas in La Conquête de Plassans, of Frère Archangias in La Faute de L'Abbé Mouret, and of Abbé Joire in Germinal. Other portraits, particularly those of the stout priest,

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<sup>8</sup> Guy Robert, op.cit., p. 118.

belittle the figure of the priest yet retain a certain amount of the reader's sympathy, for example, Abbé Bourrette in La Conquête de Plassans and Abbé Horteur in La Joie de Vivre.

As we have already pointed out, the priest's physical characterization, in all cases, has suited his role. This is even evident in the portrayal of Abbé Roustan, who plays a very minor role in Le Ventre de Paris. He is described as "un bel homme d'une quarantaine d'années (I, 810)." His appearance, said to be "distingué", suits his role in the novel which is principally that of a business adviser and confidant.

From the different patterns in the physical characterization of the priest, it appears that Zola classifies the priest primarily as a stout figure who holds a relatively good position. The priests which play major parts in Zola's novels are, for the most part, in the first category of stout figures. Abbé Faujas and his political activities are the subject of La Conquête de Plassans, while Abbé Bourrette is an important character in the political plot of the same novel. Frère Archangias plays a major role in La Faute de l'Abbé Mouret and is described in considerable detail, as we have seen. Abbé Mauduit is an important character who appears frequently in Pot Bouille; Abbé Horteur is one of the main characters in La Joie de Vivre. Abbé Godard is treated to a greater extent in La Terre than Abbé Madeline, his successor, who is mentioned occasionally in the latter half of the novel. On the other hand, many of the thin

priests have roles of lesser importance, such as Abbé Fenil in La Conquête de Plassans, Abbé Ranvier in Germinal, Abbé Madeline in La Terre, and the priest in L'Assommoir. In fact, Abbé Mouret is the only thin priest treated at any length. Thus on the whole, the reader has the impression, from the lengthy treatment given to the stout priest figures and solidly built militants, that this is Zola's basic conception of the curé. We cannot ignore, however, the fact that Zola's view of the clergy does include, on the other extreme, a few thin and frail priests, but these priests, we have seen, seem out of place, in a manner of speaking, in their respective novels.

The predominant stereotype of a stout or solidly-built cleric supports in graphic terms the wealthy and prosperous position of the Church in the Second Empire. In Chapter One, we showed how Zola objects strongly to the alliance between Napoleon III and the Church, from which the latter acquired a tremendous wealth. Zola's characterization of the priest maintains his general disapproval of the clergy. His belittling and at times disparaging view of the priest will also be seen in his treatment of the priest's psychological make-up.

## CHAPTER THREE

## PSYCHOLOGICAL MAKE-UP

In contrast to the considerable attention that Zola gives to the physical characterization of the curé, his psychological portrayal is much more limited. Only the clerical figures who are major characters dealt with at some length are given any psychological depth. In the case of minor clerics, a few brief references are made to character traits and particular mannerisms which they display. As in the physical portrayal of the curé, there is very little variety in the psychological traits attributed to him. Three or four dominant traits are found in almost all the priests, varying only in the extent to which they are developed in each individual. The most thorough psychological portrait of the priest is found in La Faute de l'Abbé Mouret.

A British critic, Angus Wilson, argues that there are two different types of novel in the Rougon-Macquart, "the objective novels of the family chronicle and the 'romans à thèse'."<sup>1</sup> La Faute de l'Abbé Mouret is one of the "romans à thèse" which introduces an important theme for Zola, that of "le prêtre amoureux" (I, 1675). The subject of the novel is stated as follows by Zola in his preparatory notes: "J'étudierai dans Lucien [the name first given to the priest] la grande

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<sup>1</sup> Angus Wilson, Emile Zola. An Introductory Study of his Novels (London: Secker and Warburg, 1964), p. 51.

lutte de la nature et de la religion (Ibid.).<sup>2</sup> F.W.J. Hemmings explains that Zola objects to the restrictions which the Roman Catholic faith places on the priest. For Zola, the Church's insistence on the chastity of its spokesmen denies birth and signifies death, since the priest is refusing to create life.<sup>2</sup> In this respect, the Catholic Church incarnates sterility and becomes a symbol of death for the priest, according to Zola. As Zola states in his notes: "Ainsi le célibat, que sa règle impose au prêtre, est un état anti-naturel; on peut dire qu'ici la religion contrecarre les desseins de la nature (1675)."

Angus Wilson is correct in saying that "on the surface, the book is an attack upon the sterility of celibacy..."<sup>3</sup>, although the novel goes much further. In La Faute de l'Abbé Mouret, Zola examines the various effects of the priesthood on the inner life of the priest. The case of Abbé Mouret provides us with several penetrating insights into the psychological make-up of a priest, as Zola sees it. We shall study in depth the various elements of Mouret's make-up and show how these traits recur in varying degrees in other priest figures. In so doing, we shall see again that Zola presents an overriding conception of the cure through the latter's psychological make-up.

Serge Mouret's hereditary tendencies and his youth are important factors in pointing him towards the priesthood, as we are

<sup>2</sup> F.W.J. Hemmings, "Émile Zola et la Religion", Europe, 468-469 (1968), 131.

<sup>3</sup> Angus Wilson, op.cit., p. 108.

told. A descendant of the illegitimate Mouret branch of the family, Serge portrays the eccentric or unbalanced trait inherited from their ancestor, Adélaïde Fouque, known familiarly as Tante Dide, who was eventually put away in an insane asylum. Her insanity is passed on to Serge's mother in the form of religious fanaticism, which borders on the edge of madness and slowly drives her husband mad in La Conquête de Plassans. Zola incorporates a similar religious fervor into the young Serge, which tends towards mysticism.

Serge's hereditary inclination is compounded by his mother's constant presence and example, for his father plays a background role throughout the novel, thus eliminating his possible anti-religious influence. Serge also falls under the influence of Abbé Faujas, a boarder in his home:

Quand Serge était souffrant, chaque matin, il recevait la visite de son voisin, qui causait longuement au chevet de son lit. Les autres jours, lorsqu'il se retrouvait sur pied, c'était lui qui frappait à la porte de l'abbé Faujas dès qu'il l'entendait marcher dans sa chambre. Ils n'étaient séparés que par l'étroit palier, ils finissaient par vivre l'un chez l'autre.

(1038)

In addition to the influence of his mother and Abbé Faujas, other aspects of Serge's childhood are emphasized, which seem to qualify him for the priesthood. The most dominating characteristic is his general poor state of health, which we mentioned in the preceding chapter. In one particular instance, Serge is caught out in a sudden rain shower which makes him so ill that he is in a fever, between life and death, for three weeks; his convalescence lasts two

months. It is during this illness that Serge claims to have seen a vision of God, and decides to enter the priesthood: "j'ai vu Dieu, si près de la mort; j'ai juré d'être à lui. Je vous assure que toute ma joie est là (1040)." Finally, Serge does not have a normal childhood and adolescence, filled with playmates and companions, partly because of his health, and also because of his own desire for solitude. He spends most of his time in his room, "où il vivait presque cloîtré, lisant beaucoup (1037)." His father's concerned remark reinforces the nature of his son's youth: "J'aimerais mieux qu'il allât voir les femmes (1038)!" Thus we have the picture of a weak, naive youth, who has led a very sheltered life in a home dominated principally by the female figures of his mother, a religious fanatic, and Rose, the maid. Under these conditions Serge enters the priesthood, as Zola explains in his preliminary notes to the novel: "Serge, est un affaiblissement, il est prédestiné à la prêtrise, à être eunuque, par le sang, par la race et l'éducation. Appuyer sur ce côté physiologique (1676)."

The nature of Serge's faith, once he has entered the priesthood, is the key to his psychological make-up. Unlike the extreme fanaticism of his mother, Serge represents a gentler mysticism characterized predominantly by a rejection of nature in all its aspects. His reflections on his days at the seminary, besides offering an authentic account of the routines and studies in preparation for the priesthood, reveal Serge's contentment in a hermit-like existence, away from any

wordly concerns. Upon leaving the seminary, he asks to be sent to a small remote village "avec l'espoir de réaliser son rêve d'anéantissement", as he goes on to explain (1232):

Au milieu de cette misère, sur ce sol stérile, il pourrait se boucher les oreilles aux bruits du monde, il vivrait dans le sommeil des saints. Et depuis plusieurs mois, en effet, il demeurait souriant; à peine un frisson du village le troublait-il de loin en loin . . .

(Ibid.)

Serge's alienation from the rest of society stems mostly from his seminary training:

Au sortir du séminaire, il avait eu la joie de se voir étranger parmi les autres hommes, de ne plus marcher comme eux, de porter autrement la tête, d'avoir des gestes, des mots, des sentiments d'être à part.

(1306)

Thus Serge's life in the priesthood is characterized above all as a complete withdrawal from society; Serge is "à part".

The nature of Serge's priesthood is introduced in other terms as an artificial, or superimposed childhood. Throughout Part One, Zola describes Serge as a child, a youth still lost in his childhood. In his restricted upbringing, dominated by his mother, and in his confined life at the seminary, Serge has failed to mature physically, intellectually, or psychologically: "Il montrait des peurs, des ignorances, des candeurs de fille cloîtrée. Il disait parfois en souriant qu'il continuait son enfance, s'imaginant être resté tout petit, avec les mêmes sensations, les mêmes idées, les mêmes jugements ... (1306)." In La Conquête de Plassans, we saw that Serge's childhood hindered rather than engendered his proper development; there were none of the

positive elements like the wholesome activity of a normal childhood. Serge's childhood has continued beyond his youth, so that he is characterized as an ignorant, socially maladjusted individual. He has maintained his child-like state as protection from the outside world, as a sort of immunization from reality. When he experiences a growing malaise, indicative of his long suppressed yearnings for manhood, he cries out to Mary for help; "Je voudrais encore être un enfant. Je voudrais n'être jamais qu'un enfant marchant à l'ombre de votre robe... On ne devrait point grandir (1313)." He is afraid of growing up, of becoming a man; he wants to retain the simplicity of childhood, a life without complication.

Henri Guillemin sees this notion of childhood in La Faute de l'Abbé Mouret as being expressed in the "thème de 'la main'."<sup>4</sup> When a child is young, he depends entirely on someone older, usually a parent. He puts his trust in that person, who in turn accepts responsibility for the child. Mary is that person for Serge: "Le monde lui semblait pareil au monde qu'il voyait jadis, lorsque sa mère le promenait par la main (1307)." After his sexual experience in Part Two, Serge no longer fears a similar temptation because he has turned to the father figure, God, for redirection and discipline: "Il vivait au milieu du mal, sans le connaître, sans le craindre, avec la certitude de le décourager . . . Dieu le menait par la main, ainsi qu'un petit

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<sup>4</sup> Henri Guillemin, Présentation des "Rougon-Macquart" (Paris: Gallimard, 1964), p. 94.

enfant (1479)." Again Serge has fallen back into the childhood connected with his priesthood in order to shield himself from reality. This notion of the priesthood as a refuge, in which the priest does not mature and is detached from reality, is a key factor in the psychological make-up of the curé. We shall see it repeated in other clerical figures like Abbé Horteur in La Joie de Vivre and Abbé Jouve in Une Page d'Amour.

Serge's withdrawal from life is qualified further by an abhorrence for all animal life, which is basically expressed as a feeling of "nausée". For Zola, the world is a place in which animal-like instincts and appetites dominate in everyday life. This notion of the animal-like forces in man's life is epitomized in the concept of "la bête humaine" in the Rougon-Macquart.<sup>5</sup> As a representative of the Catholic Church, Serge is one of the more extreme examples of this aversion, since his priesthood embodies the opposite concepts, those of renunciation and sterility. This "nausée" is demonstrated clearly whenever Serge enters his sister Désirée's barnyard, a place swarming with fecundity and life;

L'abbé Mouret ne put tenir davantage, dans la chaleur qui montait des portées. La vie, grouillant sous ce poil arraché du ventre des mères, avait un souffle fort, dont il sentait le trouble à ses tempes . . . Depuis qu'il était là, un étouffement le gagnait, des chaleurs le brûlaient aux mains, à la poitrine, à la face. Peu à peu sa tête avait tourné, il sentait dans un même souffle pestilentiel la tiédeur fétide des lapins et des volailles, l'odeur lubrique de la

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<sup>5</sup> For a detailed study of this question, see Jean Borie, "La Bête Humaine" in Zola et les Mythes (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1971), p.p. 43-75.

chèvre, la fadeur grasse du cochon. C'était comme un air chargé de fécondation, qui pesait trop lourdement à ses épaules vierges.

(1267, 1270-1271)

Not only does Serge's faith involve a rejection of nature surrounding him, it also signifies the extinction of all natural inclinations within himself, again a trait attributable to the priest's seminary training:

Il se sentait féminisé, rapproché de l'ange, lavé de son sexe, de son odeur d'homme. Cela le rendait presque fier, de ne plus tenir à l'espèce, d'avoir été élevé pour Dieu, soigneusement purgé des ordures humaines par une éducation jalouse.

(1306)

Readily accepting the imposed condition of celibacy, Serge is proud to become "la chose de Dieu" (1233). As Zola puts it in the novel: "On avait tué l'homme en lui, il le sentait, il était heureux de se savoir à part [our italics], créature châtrée, marquée de la tonsure ainsi qu'une brebis du Seigneur (1234)." Under these conditions, Serge hopes to attain the ideal of "un élan pur d'amour" (1232).

Serge's effort to suppress his natural instincts and his aversion to the animal-like nature of life in general are two symptoms of what we may identify as his neurosis. To begin with, Serge's retreat from life may be interpreted as the neurotic's desire to escape from "a dissatisfying reality to a more pleasurable world of phantasy [sic],"<sup>6</sup> more precisely, to the realm of mysticism. Sigmund Freud argues in

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<sup>6</sup> Sigmund Freud [Translated by Dr. A.A. Brill], Totem and Taboo in The Basic Writings of Sigmund Freud (New York: Modern Library Edition, 1938), p. 864.

Totem and Taboo that: "This real world which neurotics shun is dominated by the society of human beings and by the institutions created by them; the estrangement from reality is at the same time a withdrawal from human companionship."<sup>7</sup> Serge's attempt to extinguish his natural inclinations within himself is a more significant aspect of his neurosis. Again Freud's Totem and Taboo offers important insights into Serge's neurosis.

In his book, Freud examines thoroughly the psychology of primitive races, which, he argues, strongly resembles that of the neurotic. One of the most common fears among the tribes was that of sexual relations with other members of their totem or family. According to Freud's theories on infantile sexuality, the first love object selection of a boy is incestuous, because his libido is directed towards the one dominant female figure of his early life, his mother. A normal maturing male frees himself from this tendency, while the neurotic is never able to free himself from it. This incestuous fixation, then, is repressed into the individual's subconscious as "taboo"; that is, he imposes restrictions on himself. Such restrictions or renunciations involve an extraordinary displacement of the libido and more importantly, display an ambivalent attitude. The individual wants to carry out the prohibited act, while at the same time, he denies it. Each awakening of the suppressed libido is counteracted by a more severe prohibition or chastisement. Due to this ambivalent attitude (the unconscious desire

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

to transgress and the fear of it), the libido may become transformed into anxiety.<sup>8</sup> This theory of ambivalence is of capital importance in understanding Serge's 'devotion' to the Virgin Mary.

We learn in the novel that Serge's devotion to Mary began in his childhood: "Il se rappelait qu'à huit ans il pleurait d'amour dans les coins; il ne savait pas qui il aimait; il pleurait parce qu'il aimait quelqu'un, bien loin . . . Plus tard, il avait voulu être prêtre pour satisfaire ce besoin d'affection surhumaine qui faisait son seul tourment (1234)." Just as he had done in the seminary, Serge now fears that he may be depriving God of his due, an accusation which Frère Archangias later expresses. In fact, the image of Christ is entirely omitted in Part One for that of the Virgin Mary. Serge sincerely believes that Mary is the link between Heaven and earth, between himself and God. In his prayers to Mary, however, he loses himself in contemplation and sublimates his subconscious sexual desires.

Serge's 'devotion' to Mary has two dominant aspects - an incestuous or Oedipean desire to make love with her and a strong masochistic tendency. Words taken from the Bible and the Catholic liturgy are given an ironic double meaning:

- Marie est faite pour moi. Il ajoutait avec l'évangéliste:  
 - Je l'ai prise pour tout mon bien. Il la nommait: 'Ma chère maîtresse', manquant de mots, arrivant à un babillage d'enfant et d'amant, n'ayant plus que le souffle entrecoupé de sa passion. . . lui, habitait le bel intérieur de Marie, s'y appuyant, s'y cachant, s'y perdant sans réserve, buvant

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p.p. 807-864.

le lait d'amour infini qui tombait goutte à goutte de  
ce sein virginal.

(1289)

From a sketching of the Sacred Heart of Mary, Serge imagines that Mary comes alive and appears before him with her heart exposed and pierced by the sword. Here the sword, clearly a phallic symbol representing possession by the father, according to the Freudian interpretation, is erased in Serge's mind, so that he may take full possession of the heart in a wave of irresistible desire: "C'était comme un affolement de tout son être, un besoin de baiser le coeur, de se fondre en lui, de se coucher avec lui au fond de cette poitrine ouverte (1293)." The Virgin Mary, the Mother, becomes the sex object of Serge's repressed libido.

However, immediately after expressing these sexual desires, Serge is overcome with guilt and imagines that someone, no doubt representing the father figure, is watching him. He then prays to Mary for punishment and a greater strength and will to suppress these tendencies within himself. He asks for mineralization and castration:

Je ne veux plus sentir ni mes nerfs, ni mes muscles, ni  
le battement de mon coeur, ni le travail de mes désirs.  
Je veux être une chose, une pierre blanche à vos pieds  
. . . O Marie, Vase d'élection, châtez en moi  
l'humanité, faites-moi eunuque parmi les hommes, afin  
de me livrer sans peur le trésor de votre virginité!

(1314, 1315)

Borie refers briefly to Freud's essay on the Greek myth of the head of the Medusa, who had the power to turn to stone all who met her

gaze. Freud shows that the desire for petrification not only signifies a desire to be castrated, but also symbolizes an erection.<sup>9</sup> Thus Serge's desire to be castrated may be interpreted as an overpowering affirmation of his desire for sexual expression and fulfilment.

In the first part of the novel, Serge's adoration is also characterized by a strong masochistic urge. In his aspiration to possess Mary, he expresses a constant desire to inflict physical suffering and mental torment upon himself, as the following passage indicates:

Il se jetait devant elle, se criait son esclave; et rien n'était plus doux que ce mot d'esclave, qu'il répétait, qu'il goûtait davantage, sur sa bouche balbutiante, à mesure qu'il s'écrasait à ses pieds, pour être sa chose, son rien, la poussière effleurée du vol de sa robe bleue.  
(1289)

Serge clearly exhibits the ambivalent attitude of the neurotic. The more he renounces his desire and seeks punishment, the more he actually seeks the satisfaction of this desire. The austerity of his life in the priesthood does not succeed in destroying the natural instincts within him. We pointed out that Serge hopes to attain the ideal of "un élan pur d'amour" (1232). However, the serenity anticipated in achieving such a state is not found. A.A. Greaves argues that in reality, this ideal state is "un état de calme et de repos, qui compose les luttes épuisantes, les troubles violents et les inévitables

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<sup>9</sup> For the arguments presented in arriving at this conclusion, see Sigmund Freud, "The Infantile Genital Organization of the Libido" Translated by Joan Rivière in Collected Papers Vol. II (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1959), p.p. 244-249.

déceptions de la vie."<sup>10</sup> Serge experiences a growing, indefinable malaise. As Greaves explains further: "L'extase qu'il s'efforçait depuis des années d'éprouver commençait à devenir banale, pour laisser la place libre à d'autres sensations."<sup>11</sup> Torn between his religious indoctrination of abstinence and his subconscious desires, Serge becomes very ill.

The theme of "le souterrain", the underground passage or tunnel, is another key to Serge's neurosis. As Auguste Dezalay points out, the Rougon-Macquart on the whole depict a universe deprived of air and light, where individuals seem buried by their social or vocational position, or by some psychological disorder.<sup>12</sup> As we have already noted, Serge's life is characterized by confined, closed-in places, away from nature and society. In his youth he was "cloîtré", and his preparation for the priesthood was spent in "l'ombre morte du séminaire" (1232). His church is described in similar terms as a cave or cellar built by man to hide himself from the outside world. Albine realizes the true nature of Serge's church:

Et, ici, tu es dans un fossé. Tu ne pourrais élargir les bras sans t'écarter les mains à la pierre. La voûte te cache le ciel, te prend ta part de soleil, C'est si petit, que tes membres s'y raidissent, comme si tu étais couché

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<sup>10</sup> A.A. Greaves, "Mysticisme et Pessimisme dans La Faute de l'Abbé Mouret", Les Cahiers Naturalistes, XXXVI (1968), 149.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 152.

<sup>12</sup> Auguste Dezalay, "Le Thème du Souterrain", Europe, 468-469 (1968), 110.

vivant dans la terre . . . Et tu vis au milieu de la mort. Les herbes, les arbres, les eaux, le soleil, le ciel, tout agonise autour de toi.

(1469)

Thus for Serge, the underground symbolizes death, a living death cut off from life, as does his church. The notion of the church described as a cave or tomb is repeated in the case of Mgr. de Hautecœur in le Réve.

The psychological implications of this theme are even more striking. The theme is a recurring image, a nightmare in Serge's delirium caused by his fever:

'Je ne vois que du noir,' balbutia-t-il. 'C'est singulier, j'arrive d'un long voyage . . . Toujours le même cauchemar me faisait ramper, le long d'un souterrain interminable. A certaines grosses douleurs, le souterrain, brusquement, se murait: un amas de cailloux tombait de la voûte, les parois se resserraient, je restais haletant, pris de la rage de vouloir passer outre; et j'entrais dans l'obstacle, je travaillais des pieds, des poings, du crâne, en désespérant de pouvoir jamais traverser cet éboulement de plus en plus considérable... Puis, souvent, il me suffisait de le toucher du doigt; tout s'évanouissait, je marchais librement, dans la galerie élargie, n'ayant plus que la lassitude de la crise.'

(1319)

Serge's torment reveals his subconscious fear of being permanently sealed off from the outside world, and his desire for an outlet, a means of satisfying his repressed libido:

Mais il plaignait aussi les plantes. Les semences devaient souffrir sous le sol à attendre la lumière; elles avaient ses cauchemars, elles rêvaient qu'elles rampaient le long d'un souterrain, arrêtées par des éboulements, luttant furieusement pour arriver au soleil.

(1321)

Serge's subconscious desire for release and sexual gratification is

expressed as an effort to reach the surface of the earth. In a strictly Freudian interpretation of this dream, the underground or tunnel symbolizes the womb in which the person is sheltering himself. In Serge's case, this interpretation can be linked with his prolonged state of childhood.

In his illness, Serge experiences a new spirit of childhood, one that is positive. A new life begins for him, one in complete contrast to his life in the priesthood. It is initiated in a state of innocence in which Serge finds joy and fulfilment. Thus Serge's illness may be considered as a redemption and rebirth, as Henri Guillemin explains:

Serge a été guéri par la maladie qu'il a traversée, de ces crédulités enfantines. Il est tout neuf et intact. Il est l'Homme debout sur la terre, dans son intégrité. Sans mémoire et sans maître. L'Adam véritable... <sup>13</sup>

Yet this observation is not entirely true, since Serge's behaviour, when he is inside the Paradou, shows vague traces of his previous vocation, although now they are subconscious due to his amnesia. While in the Paradou, he experiences a certain anxiety, an unknown weight pressing down upon him. He does not give in to sex without some hesitation; however, his apprehension does not interfere with the actual act. But to all intents and purposes, we may say that Serge has forgotten his faith. Thus in a new state of childhood, he discovers new physical sensations:

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<sup>13</sup> Henri Guillemin, op.cit., p. 118.

Il naissait dans le soleil, dans ce bain de lumière qui l'inondait. Il naissait à vingt-cinq ans, les sens brusquement ouverts, ravi du grand ciel, de la terre heureuse, du prodige de l'horizon étalé autour de lui . . . Son corps entier entraînait dans la possession de ce bout de nature, l'embrassait de ses membres; ses lèvres le buvaient, ses narines le respiraient; il l'emportait dans ses oreilles, il le cachait au fond de ses yeux. C'était à lui.

(1334)

As for the sex act itself, we must first recognize the basic ambiguity in Zola's attitude towards sex. On one hand, Zola seems to believe that virginity and chastity are "anti-natural" states. Sex is a natural force which signifies the continuation of the human race; in this respect, he views it as a necessary component of life. To deny it, and consequently life, is a sin in Zola's eyes. On the other hand, the consummation of love is never a positive act in itself. It is presented as the satisfying of an animal-like appetite, an instinct, and usually has unfavourable consequences.<sup>14</sup>

In Serge's case, the sex act is a natural expression and marks his completion as a man:

Serge venait, dans la possession d'Albine, de trouver enfin son sexe d'homme, l'énergie de ses muscles, le courage de son coeur, la santé dernière qui avait jusque-là manqué à sa longue adolescence. Maintenant, il se sentait complet. Il avait des sens plus nets, une intelligence plus large.

(1410)

Albine replaces the Virgin Mary for Serge, and throughout Part Two, the latter's declarations are almost a duplicate of his prayers in

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<sup>14</sup> See, for example, F.W.J. Hemmings, Emile Zola (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1966), p. 107.

Part One. For example his words, "tu seras dans ma chair comme je serai dans la tienne (1339)", recall the vision of the Sacred Heart of Mary. This is evident in the following dialogue: "Oh! t'avoir dans mes bras, t'avoir dans ma chair... Je ne pense qu'à cela . . . Mon coeur fondrait dans ton coeur (1388)." Thus Serge's repressed libido is finally liberated when he and Albine make love. But immediately after the act, "le passé ressuscitait." Serge hears the noises of everyday life beyond the walls of the Paradou, and the church clock "[qui] évoquait toute sa vie passée, son enfance pieuse, ses joies du séminaire, ses premières messes, dans la vallée brûlée des Artaud, où il rêvait la solitude des saints (1415)."

In Part Three, Serge returns to his priesthood. In so doing, he rejects the trinity of the three female figures which surround him: the mother figure, the Virgin Mary, the loved one who is a mother-substitute, Albine, and the mother-earth figure, Désirée, who symbolizes death.<sup>15</sup> Serge chooses none of them. He abandons the mother figure, Mary, the object of his incestuous desires. He rejects Albine after he has returned to the Church. He maintains the

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<sup>15</sup> See Jean Borie, *op.cit.*, p. 230 for the arguments presented in arriving at this conclusion. In referring to the trinity of the three women, Borie draws a parallel between the situation in *La Faute de l'Abbé Mouret* and the scene of the three caskets in *Shakespeare's The Merchant of Venice*. In one of his essays, which Borie cites, Freud analyses the significance of the three caskets of gold, silver and lead as symbols of women. In a further comparison to *King Lear*, which also presents a trinity of three women, Freud analyses the choice of the lead casket as a death wish. For further reference, see Sigmund Freud, "The Theme of the Three Caskets" in *Collected Papers Vol. IV* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1959), p.p. 244-256.

association between Mary and Albine and hence cannot return to his former adoration of Mary since she is now spoiled. Serge never considers his sister, Désirée, for she symbolizes fertility, the earth and death, which Serge does not seek.. Serge then turns to the father figures of God and Jesus for guidance, and accepts the Church as a form of imprisonment. As Borie concludes: "Il se réfugiera dans 'l'impuissance', la démission, la soumission au Père et à son Très Saint Fils, confirmant le thème homosexuel qui, nous l'avons dit, est chez Zola, inséparable de l'église."<sup>15</sup>

The church becomes a place of renunciation and castration, for Serge's complete submission to God seems to incorporate a wish for castration so that God may take full possession of him: "Vous avez voulu qu'il n'y eût plus que des ruines en moi, pour y descendre en sécurité. Je suis une maison vide où Vous pouvez habiter (1510)." In contrast to his sexual fantasies before the Sacred Heart of Mary, he is possessed by a new admiration for the Cult of the Cross, glorifying death and suffering: "Souffrir, mourir, ces mot sonnaient sans cesse à ses oreilles, comme la fin de la sagesse humaine (1480)." His masochistic tendency is even more pronounced in his desire for self-punishment: "A chaque déchirement de sa chair, à chaque craquement de ses os, il se promettait des récompenses extraordinaires . . . Il s'ingéniait à trouver une volupté au fond de la souffrance, à s'y coucher, à s'y endormir (1479)." He has resumed his condition of Part One with an even more severe abnegation.

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<sup>16</sup> Jean Borie, op.cit., p. 229.

Yet at the same time as Serge succeeds in renouncing his virility, his subconscious desire finds expression in a wild hallucinatory vision, in which his church is attacked by a proliferation of life composed of plants, animals and the Artauds. This "affirmation phallique", as Borie interprets it, is also the ultimate expression of Serge's "nausée":

Accouchement excrémental, érection illimitée, tout l'ensemble analité-phallisme-fécondité se trouve renié par l'abbé Mouret qui ne craint point, suivant l'horrible mais ici pertinente expression anglaise, de jeter l'enfant avec l'eau du bain, qui le désire même, prêt à sacrifier sa virilité et sa vie pour échapper à cette pollution, à cette contamination de la vie.

17

Serge accepts the impositions of the priesthood, suppressing his desires, which again find expression in his subconscious.

Thus Abbé Mouret portrays "l'histoire d'un homme frappé dans sa virilité par une éducation première, devenu être neutre, se réveillant homme à vingt-cinq ans, dans les sollicitations de la nature, mais retombant fatalement à l'impuissance (1678)." Serge chooses to stay within the Church, rejecting once and for all human love; he is doomed to an empty existence, "à l'impuissance". For Zola, the denial of sex, the vital force of nature, signifies sterility and precipitates the extinction of mankind. Serge Mouret typifies this tragic consequence in the figure of the curé. His "faute" is not the sexual act itself since, as we have already noted, this act was not a conscious rejection of the demands of his religious vocation.

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 66.

The real nature of his "faute" is his rejection of life and its perpetuating force, in his conscious refusal of love as a priest, which occurs in Part Three during his confrontation with Albine in the church. Conscious of his clerical discipline, he rejects Albine, the symbol of nature and motherhood (we learn after her death that she was pregnant). As Henri Guillemin puts it, clarifying Zola's position:

La 'tentation' de la nature, c'est l'appel de la vie elle-même; et le 'mal' des vieux préjugés délétères, c'est, au vrai, ce qui est juste, ce qui est bien, l'obéissance à la Loi du monde. 18

In Serge Mouret's psychological make-up, we see how the austerity of the priesthood and the imposition of celibacy lead to repression and a distorted personality. In the extreme, this repression is converted into a homosexual tendency, which we shall see repeated in other clerical figures. Serge is afflicted with a nervous disorder, acquired through heredity, and compounded by the priesthood. In fact, this 'abnormal' quality of Serge predestines him for the priesthood, according to Zola. Neurotic leanings can be traced in other clerics of the Rougon-Macquart, such as Abbé Mauduit, Abbé Horteur, Abbé Ranvier, and Mgr. de Hauteceur. We also see how the priesthood is viewed as a haven of refuge by the curé, in which he is able to hide from reality and maintain an almost child-like state of ignorance. In this respect, the church is described as a "souterrain" for the priest, cutting him off from society. Consequently the curé has

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18 Henri Guillemin, op.cit., p. 79.

difficulty coping with life, and tries, wherever possible, to remain detached from reality. These basic traits, developed at length in Abbé Mouret, can be found in other priests.

The question of celibacy and its consequences are presented in other portraits of the priest. The issue is introduced in La Faute de l'Abbé Mouret, in connection with the two other clerical figures in the novel, Abbé Caffin and Frère Archangias. The most important aspect of Abbé Caffin's personality is resumed in a brief statement at the end of the novel: "ce prêtre qui avait aimé et qui dormait là, si paisible, sous les fleurs sauvages (1526)." La Teuse, Serge's housekeeper, draws the parallel for us between Abbé Caffin's tragic story and Serge's predicament. A warm-hearted, sensitive man, Caffin fell in love and had an affair with the daughter of a miller. Afterwards, seeking penance, he asked to be sent to a remote village. In the village of the Artauds, the coarse nature of life was eventually responsible for his death: "Le pauvre homme était assez puni de vivre dans ce trou ...(1432)." Thus Abbé Caffin yielded to the same temptation as does Serge, although we are left to believe that Caffin was aware of his religious obligations at that time. Now he lies in peace.

Frère Archangias typifies an extreme form of asceticism. Through rigorous self-discipline, he has eliminated all desirable human traits. He is characterized as ignorant, rude, coarse, even grotesque. Archangias' two dominating traits are his intense hatred of woman, and his total lack of concern for the people, the Artauds, who, according

to him, "vivent comme leurs cochons (1238)."

Like Abbé Caffin and Abbé Mouret, Archangias displays the same repressed sexual desires: "Moi, quand j'avais votre âge, j'étais possédé; un démon me mangeait les reins. Et puis, il s'est ennuyé, il s'en est allé. Je n'ai plus de reins. Je vis tranquille...(1509)." His repressed feelings are further revealed in his curiosity to know about "ce qu'on goûte là-dedans" (Ibid.), in the Paradou that is, and in his envy of Serge:

Il avait arrêté l'abbé Mouret au milieu de la route, en le regardant avec les yeux luisants d'une terrible jalousie. Les délices entrevues du Paradou le torturaient. Depuis des semaines, il était resté sur le seuil, flairant de loin les jouissance damnables.

(Ibid.)

Archangias' abnegation appears to be transposed into a strong hatred of women, which he displays several times in the novel: "Elles ont la damnation dans leurs jupes. Des créatures bonnes à jeter au fumier, avec leurs saletés qui empoisonnent! Ça serait un fameux débarras, si l'on étranglait toutes les filles à leur naissance (1239)." Again we read: "Elles ont le diable dans le corps. Elles puent le diable; elles le puent aux jambes, aux bras, au ventre, partout...(1278)." Archangias' hatred of women is the key component of his aggressivity; he is often described as having "le dégoût, la haine de la femme" (1239); the young village girls' immoral behaviour often enrages Archangias: "Et toute sa haine de la femme parut. Il ébranla la table d'un coup de poing, il cria ses injures accoutumées (1278)." His abuse of the young girls is described as a frustrated perversity: "Il [Mouret] entendait Frère Archangias, relevant les jupes des gamines qu'il

fouettait au sang, crachant aux visages des filles, puant lui-même l'odeur d'un bouc qui ne se serait jamais satisfait (1308)."<sup>19</sup> Of all the village girls, Archangias detests Désirée the most, for she embodies the concepts of life and fertility: "Il avait une haine sourde contre Désirée, dont la belle poussée animale l'offensait (1279)." His hatred of women goes to such extremes that he refuses to worship the Virgin Mary (1479).

This condition of misogyny, which we shall see repeated in the case of Abbé Faujas in La Conquête de Plassans, again raises the question of homosexuality which Zola associates with the figure of the cleric. The homosexual tendency of Archangias is compounded by his feeling that Serge has betrayed him:

Comme ces maris trompés qui plient leurs femmes sous des allusions sanglantes, dont ils goûtent seuls la cruauté, il ne reparlait pas de la scène du Paradou, il se contentait de l'évoquer d'un mot pour anéantir, aux heures de crise, cette chair rebelle. Lui aussi avait été trompé par ce prêtre, tout souillé de son adultère divin, ayant trahi ses serments, rapportant sur lui des caresses défendues, dont la senteur lointaine suffisait à exaspérer sa continence de bouc qui ne s'était jamais satisfait.

(1441)

Thus, in La Faute de l'Abbé Mouret, all three priest figures have repressed their natural inclinations and alienated themselves. In each case, the consequences are tragic: it is this alienation that indirectly causes the death of Abbé Caffin, who requested assignment to the parish of the Artauds. It also creates the monstrous figure of Frère Archangias and brings about, in the case of Abbé Mouret, a

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<sup>19</sup> Note Zola's comparison of Archangias to a frustrated he-goat which is repeated on page 1441.

spiritual death.

There are other cases of clerics who alienate themselves by repressing their natural impulses. Obsessed by a desire to have political power, Abbé Faujas is very strong-willed and determined to let nothing interfere with his ambition. As Zola explains in his "Ébauche": "Dessiner Bonnard, un fort tempérament, un ambitieux, qui contient ses appetits [our italics] sous un caractère (1656)." Faujas represses any natural human qualities which might become weaknesses and lead to failure in his plans. He has one objective, to gain power, and allows no human emotion to weaken his intentions. His actions, which we outlined in Chapter One, show how cruel and unscrupulous he is in his manipulation of people and in his scheming in general.

Faujas' repression is transposed in one form as a strong hatred of women; for Faujas, to covet is a weakness, a flaw in the character of "les forts". Faujas tolerates women only because he must win their favour and gain their support in his schemings, as Félicité Rougon advises him: "Retenez bien ceci, plaisez aux femmes, si vous voulez que Plassans soit à vous (961)." For instance, Faujas wins the admiration of Marthe and uses her blatantly in his plans. Yet his distaste for women still shows in his conversation with her on several occasions: "L'abbé avait un mépris d'homme et de prêtre pour la femme; il l'écartait, ainsi qu'un obstacle honteux, indigne des forts. Malgré lui, ce mépris perçait souvent dans une parole plus rude (969)." As Zola categorically concludes in the novel: "Pour tout prêtre, la femme, c'est l'ennemie (985)." When Faujas' mother

begins to suspect his association with Marthe, he reaffirms his aversion for women: "Non, jamais, jamais, dit-il avec un orgueil âpre. Vous vous trompez, mère... Les hommes chastes sont les seuls forts (1079)." Although women may tempt him, he remains chaste. Once Faujas has gained complete control of the town, he returns to a vicious contempt for all women. In confession, "il fut cruel pour ses pénitentes (1166)." As the novel progresses, Marthe's friendship with Faujas develops into a strong infatuation. When she declares her love to him, he brutally rejects her and "laissa tomber sur elle son mépris de la femme (1176)":

Oui, c'est l'éternelle lutte du mal contre les volontés fortes. Vous êtes la tentation d'en bas, la lâcheté, la chute finale. Le prêtre n'a pas d'autre adversaire que vous, et l'on devrait vous chasser des églises, comme impures et maudites.

(Ibid.)

In the portrayal of Faujas, then, misogyny appears to be a major aspect which Zola attributes to the priest.

Mgr. de Hauteceur, in Le Réve, is a case quite similar to that of Abbé Mouret. We learn from Abbé Cornille that the bishop had married a beautiful nineteen-year old girl, whom he loved passionately, when he was forty-one. His wife died in childbirth, nine months after their marriage. One week later, hoping to find solace, Hauteceur entered the priesthood where he has remained for twenty years. During those twenty years, he has refused to see his son, Félicien, feeling him responsible for the loss of his wife. The solitude of the priesthood seems to have relieved his personal grief, for he finally sends

for Félicien: "l'âge, la prière, ont dû apaiser ce grand chagrin (IV, 852)."

At the same time, Hauteceur has repressed his passion, which in turn has distorted his normal character. He feels a bitter contempt for human love and passion, as Zola explains in the "Ébauche": "Brisé par la mort de sa femme, la plaie au coeur et se cloîtrant. La haine de l'amour, dur à la passion qui l'a brisé (1636)."

With his son now living with him, Hauteceur finds that his former passion has not diminished:

Depuis qu'il avait appelé son fils près de lui, Monseigneur vivait dans le trouble. Après l'avoir écarté de sa présence, au lendemain de la mort de sa femme, et être resté vingt ans sans consentir à le connaître, voilà qu'il le voyait dans la force et l'éclat de la jeunesse, vivant portrait de celle qu'il pleurait, ayant son âge, la grâce blonde de sa beauté.  
(940)

His natural feelings and desires as a man, which he had tried to suppress while a clergyman, are reawakened at the sight of his son:

L'âge, vingt années de prières, Dieu descendu en lui, rien n'avait tué l'homme ancien. Et il suffisait que ce fils de sa chair, cette chair de la femme adorée se dressât, avec le rire de ses yeux bleus, pour que son coeur battît à se rompre, en croyant que la mort ressuscitait.

(Ibid.)

The austerity of his life as a priest and bishop has not lessened his sexual desires: "Il avait cru oublier, dompter la passion; mais elle renaissait avec un emportement de tempête, dans le terrible homme qu'il était jadis, l'homme d'aventure, le descendant des capitaines légendaires (Ibid.)."

Mgr. de Hauteceur struggles against his natural inclinations,

trying to suppress the reawakening desires in a masochistic urge:

"Chaque soir, à genoux, la peau écorchée d'un cilice, il s'efforçait de chasser le fantôme de la femme regrettée (Ibid.)."  
His repression becomes a distaste for life which alienates him further:

La torture recommençait, saignante, comme au lendemain de sa mort; il la pleurait, il la désirait, avec la même révolte contre Dieu, qui la lui avait prise; il ne se calmait qu'au petit jour, épuisé, dans le mépris de lui-même, et le dégoût du monde. Ah! la passion, la bête mauvaise, qu'il aurait voulu écraser, pour retomber à la paix anéantie de l'amour divin!  
(940-941)

Hautecoeur's struggle to repress his desires is described in violent terms as a "combat" (940, 947), and as a "lutte affreuse" (975). His passion strikes with "un emportement de tempête" (940), and like "un coup de marteau" (852). He maintains a calm exterior in front of other people to cover up his inner turmoil: "Mais, derrière son impassibilité, rien n'apparaissait, ne trahissait l'effort du combat, pour dompter les battements du coeur (947)." The bishop's greatest trial comes in his confrontation with Angélique, the girl who wishes to marry his son and comes to the church seeking his blessing. Hautecoeur has refused permission thus far, wanting to prevent his son from falling victim to a passion similar to his own. He believes he has "le devoir rude de le soustraire au mal dont lui-même souffrait tant (941)." Hautecoeur does not accede to her wish, and afterwards he turns to God for comfort. The more he renounces his passion, the stronger it grows within him:

Lorsqu'il fut seul, Monseigneur, comme frappé d'un couteau en pleine poitrine, tourna sur lui-même et

s'abattit, les deux genoux sur le prie-Dieu. Un rôle affreux sortait de sa gorge. Ah! Les misères du coeur, les invincibles faiblesses de la chair! Cette femme, cette morte toujours ressuscitée, il l'adorait ainsi qu'au premier soir, . . . Il pouvait la rejeter à voix haute, il savait bien désormais qu'elle lui tenait le coeur, de ses humbles mains abîmées par l'aiguille...

(976)

In the end, however, he finds the will-power to deny his true feelings and decides to allow his son's marriage, as God wills it. The effects of Hautecoeur's abnegation are severe: "Quand il reparut, il était d'une blancheur de cire, déchiré, résolu pourtant (Ibid.)."

Furthermore, with the death of Angélique, immediately after the wedding ceremony, the bishop is "calmé lui-même, retourné au néant divin (993)." Like Abbé Mouret, he remains in an empty existence within the Church, suppressing his natural inclinations. The church shields Hautecoeur from human love and life and is consequently described as a tomb, a "souterrain". Angélique's impressions convey the nature of the bishop's church: "et Angélique, très calme jusque là, se mit à trembler, en entrant dans cette solitude sacrée et froide (943)." Depth and darkness characterize his chapel:

Cette chapelle était une des plus enterrées, une des plus sombres de l'antique abside romane. Pareille à un caveau taillé dans le roc, étroite et nue, avec les simples nervures de sa voûte basse, elle n'était éclairée que par le vitrail . . . L'autel, en marbre blanc et noir, sans ornement aucun, avec son christ et sa double paire de chandeliers, ressemblait à un sépulcre. Et le reste des murs était revêtu de pierres tombales, tout un encastrement du haut en bas . . .

(Ibid.)

This description recalls the similar nature of Abbé Mouret's church in La Faute de l'Abbé Mouret. For both clerical figures, the church is "le lieu même du renoncement et de la castration."<sup>20</sup>

The church described as a tomb is also found in Pot-Bouille. In this novel, Abbé Mauduit has alterations made in his church. He describes to the workmen as follows the effect that he wants created: "Naturellement, la plus sévère nudité, rien que des murs de pierre, sans un bout de peinture, sans le moindre filet d'or. Il faut que nous soyons dans une crypte, dans quelque chose de souterrain et de désolé ... (III, 175)." As an asylum, the church puts the priest in "un monde à part", separated from society. Although not specifically referred to in the portraits of the other clerical figures, this idea is implied in their psychological make-up. Some priests appear unable to cope with life in general, and try to detach themselves from reality and live in a state of ignorance.

Abbé Horteur, in La Joie de Vivre, furnishes one of the best examples of this tendency in the curé. Described as somewhat dull-witted, Horteur has accepted the most elementary form of the priesthood: "Celui-ci [Horteur], fils de paysans, crâne dur où la lettre avait seule pénétré, en était venu à se contenter des pratiques extérieures, du bon ordre d'une dévotion décente (849)." He is disinclined to bother with his parishioners, and is content "se réfugiant

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<sup>20</sup> Jean Borie, op.cit., p. 219.

au fond de son jardin, seul au milieu de ses salades (850)." Thus he gives the minimum of attention to his clerical duties:

Les autres faisaient leurs affaires, lui faisait la sienne. Après trente années d'avertissements inutiles, il s'en tenait à l'exercice strict de son ministère, avec la charité bien ordonnée du paysan qui commence par lui-même.

(992)

Horteur is often described as having the qualities of a child; for instance Lazare refers to "sa voix aiguë de vieil enfant" (991). Lazare envies Horteur's naïve simplicity: "et une envie lui venait d'être ainsi pauvre et simple, la tête vide, la chair tranquille (Ibid.).". As explained in the previous chapter, Horteur has been placed in Bonneville because of his rusticity: "Pour que l'évêché eût laissé le bonhomme vieillir dans cette cure misérable, il fallait vraiment qu'on le jugeât d'une grande innocence d'esprit (Ibid.)!" Horteur is unaware of the complexity of life, and lives blissfully within the narrow confines of his faith: "Sa croyance le gardait de la peur, il n'allait pas au-delà du catéchisme: on mourait et on montait au ciel, rien n'était moins compliqué ni plus rassurant. Il souriait d'un air entêté, l'idée fixe du salut avait suffi pour emplir son crâne étroit (Ibid.).". Consumed by a fear of death, Lazare is calmed by the "innocence aveugle" of Abbé Horteur. Lazare wishes that he too could return to a state of child-like innocence: "Pourquoi donc ne redeviendrait-il pas enfant, comme ce vieillard (992)?"

Thus able to cope with death and accept it, Horteur takes up

"son poste de consolateur" (975) during the illness of Mme Chanteau, and prepares M. Chanteau for the inevitable death of his wife. On the other extreme, however, Horteur is unable to face life in the birth of a child. During one visit to the Chanteaus, he arrives when Lazare's wife, Louise, is giving birth to their first child. Flustered, he does not know how to conduct himself: "Le prêtre, gêné d'être tombé au milieu d'un accouchement, ne trouvait pas ses paroles habituelles de consolation. Il finit par se retirer, après avoir promis de revenir ... (1081)." When Horteur does return, Chanteau smilingly refers to his hasty exit from the birth scene, chiding him for being afraid of children. Horteur makes a hurried and incredulous defense of his behaviour: "Le prêtre, pour se tirer d'embarras, raconta qu'il avait un soir accouché une femme sur la route, et baptisé l'enfant (1106)."

In the case of Abbé Horteur, then, we see that he uses his faith and the priesthood as a crutch or shield which allows him to follow a simple existence free from involvement. He allows nothing to affect or complicate his naïve life and invariably justifies his passivity with the statement: "Nous sommes tous dans la main de Dieu" (971, 991).<sup>21</sup>

Abbé Jouve, in Une Page d'Amour, displays a similar ignorance and naïve simplicity. He is continuously described as being in a distracted state. At Hélène's Tuesday evening dinners, it is said that

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<sup>21</sup> Note the repetition of the symbolic hand leading and protecting the child.

he is not even aware of what he eats; "Quant à l'abbé Jouve, il ne savait jamais ce qu'il mangeait; on le plaisantait même souvent sur son ignorance et ses distractions (II, 869)." Jouve appears to be self-conscious about his ignorance, as the same incident reveals: "Et le prêtre s'excusait d'un air embarrassé, comme si le manque absolu du sens de la gourmandise fût chez lui un défaut dont il désespérerait de se corriger. Mais, vraiment, il avait trop d'autres choses en tête (870)."

Jouve takes it upon himself to convince Hélène to remarry and finds the task difficult to handle; he is "plus distrait que de coutume" (Ibid.), and when he begins to speak, "il fut pris d'une telle faiblesse qu'il dut s'asseoir de nouveau devant la table desservie (871)." In addition, when speaking to Hélène, he admits himself "avec un léger embarras" that "--Mon Dieu! je connais peu le monde (872)." Thus we are left with the impression that Abbé Jouve has led a moderately sheltered existence within the priesthood. He finds some duties difficult, such as counselling young women on the dangers that they face in life, and explaining the virtues of marriage. In his efforts to cope, however, he is quite sincere.

As we have seen in Pot-Bouille, Abbé Mauduit can do little to check the adulterous behaviour of his parishioners, so he elects to overlook their conduct: "il avait dû finir par ne plus veiller qu'aux apparences . . . résigné à exiger uniquement une bonne tenue de ces pénitentes qui lui échappaient et qui auraient compromis Dieu (III, 96)." He does not try to put an end to their continuous scandals, maintaining

"son air d'aimable tolérance mondaine... (149)." Furthermore, Mauduit finds it difficult to face the facts of life, particularly the inevitability of death. On the death of M. Vabre, he arrives to perform the last rites and feels uncomfortable with the mourning family: "Et l'abbé, après avoir balbutié des prières, s'en alla d'un air de gêne, en remportant le bon Dieu (210)." On one other occasion, when chastising two servants for their scandalous behaviour, he again feels ill at ease: "Il rougissait, une hésitation pudique lui faisait chercher les mots (358)." Sheltered within the priesthood, Mauduit is set apart from the members of his parish by his naïveté, which often leaves him "gêne".

Because Mauduit assumes this attitude with his parishioners he begins to doubt his capabilities as a priest: "Un doute terrible le prenait, Dieu peut-être n'était pas avec lui (357)." In church, where his doubts are even greater, he believes he hears God calling out guidance to him, but he fails to understand. His doubts lead to an hallucinatory vision; "un spectacle surhumain l'ébranla dans tout son être (356)." In his vision, the figures of Jesus and Mary come away from the wall, advancing towards him as "le symbole divin de l'éternelle douleur (Ibid.).". In the case of Mauduit, "la force d'aller plus avant dans la misère humaine l'abandonnait, il agonisait d'impuissance et de dégoût (Ibid.).". He experiences a form of "nausée", similar to that of Abbé Mouret, for the base behaviour of his bourgeois parishioners. He has preferred to let them live their lives as they do, rather than endanger the Church by trying to reform them. But now his guilt over-

comes him and he seeks forgiveness:

Et les mains ardemment tendues, il demandait pardon, pardon de ses mensonges, pardon des complaisances lâches et des promiscuités infâmes. La peur de Dieu le prenait aux entrailles, il voyait Dieu qui le reniait, qui lui défendait d'abuser encore de son nom, un Dieu de colère résolu à exterminer enfin le peuple coupable. Toutes les tolérances du mondain s'en allaient sous les scrupules déchaînés de cette conscience, et il ne restait que la foi du croyant épouvantée, se débattant dans l'incertitude du salut. Oh! Seigneur, quelle était la route, que fallait-il faire au milieu de cette société finissante, qui pourrissait jusqu'à ses prêtres?

(365-366)

At the end of the novel, however, Abbé Mauduit reappears in his usual role partly overlooking the actions of his parishioners: "et vaincu, il souriait, il jetait une fois encore le manteau de la religion sur cette bourgeoisie gâtée, en maître de cérémonie qui drapait la chancre, pour retarder la décomposition finale. Il fallait bien sauver l'Église, puisque Dieu n'avait pas répondu à son cri de désespoir et de misère (382)."

Thus Mauduit feels the need to keep a respectable distance between himself and his parishioners in order not to compromise the Church. To some extent, then, he too remains detached from reality.

The case of Abbé Mauduit introduces one other psychological trait, which is attributed to two other clerical figures in the Rougon-Macquart. Abbé Mauduit is subject to hallucinations, as we have just seen in his vision of the statues attacking him. He is obsessed by the fear of compromising the Church by his parishioners' immoral behaviour and thus avoids getting too involved by trying to reform their

ways. This neurotic tendency to have obsessions and be subject to visions is developed to a considerable extent in Abbé Mouret, as we have already argued at length.

Abbé Ranvier, in Germinal, is also subject to visions. As explained in Chapter One, Ranvier imagines himself to be a "révolutionnaire de l'Évangile" (III, 1473), and envisages himself leading a revolt of the proletariat. He gives no practical assistance to the miners and is totally detached from their true plight. Ranvier appears as a religious fanatic in the novel, calling for the damnation of the bourgeoisie with "sa voix fiévreuse de sectaire" (1472). In his final appearance, he is "dans une fureur de prophète" (1511), completely outraged by the killing of some of the miners.

Thus Ranvier is represented as psychotic, obsessed by his vision of leading a revolt of the proletariat. This visionary tendency, which Zola gives to all his revolutionary characters, alienates Ranvier from the reality of the miner's plight; consequently he is unable to help them. All three priests suffer from mental disorders, such as obsessions and visions. Significantly, all three are devoted to the Church and take their responsibilities seriously. Two of the priests, Mouret and Ranvier, are physically similar, being thin, pale and sick-looking. Their appearance seems to underline their nervous disarray. Hemmings' observation is quite appropriate in their cases: "For Zola Christianity meant one thing above all: a belief in the miraculous. Short of hypocrisy, only the sick, mentally debilitated,

and the over-imaginative could adhere to a religious faith."<sup>22</sup>

This psychotic trait of the cure complies with the notion of decadence associated with the Nineteenth Century. A.E. Carter, in his book, The Idea of Decadence in French Literature, argues that the theme of decadence combines two premises: the corruption of civilization, or society, which imposes an overriding artificiality on nature and on man, and the virtues of nature left untouched by him.<sup>23</sup> Anything civilized is considered unnatural. The chief component, then, of decadence is artificiality.

The theme of decadence, according to Carter, falls into three phases. The middle phase, which concerns us, is the Naturalist phase in which psychopathology is a key determining factor.<sup>24</sup> During this period, decadence is interpreted in terms of a nervous disorder; for the naturalists, Carter argues: "The true decadent, on the other hand, is neurotic. He is not suffering from some mysterious fatality, but from nervous disorders, usually inherited from a line of tainted ancestors."<sup>25</sup> The pathology of the Rougon-Macquart family is based on degeneracy, originating with the founder of the family, Adélaïde Fouque. Degeneracy occurs in other characters, who have no relation

<sup>22</sup> F.W.J. Hemmings, op.cit., p.p. 107-108.

<sup>23</sup> A.E. Carter, The Idea of Decadence in French Literature (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1958), p.p. 4-5.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 27.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 28.

to the Rougon-Macquarts, such as Abbé Mauduit and Abbé Ranvier. In their cases especially, but also in general in the priest, the artificiality of the priesthood, which cuts the cure off from nature, has disorganized their personalities, to the extent that they become 'neurotic cases'. As for Abbé Mouret, his mental disorder is inherited; the priesthood only succeeds in compounding it. We may say, then, that the priesthood supports the theme of decadence which recurs throughout the Rougon-Macquart.

From the characters whose psychological traits we have examined, we can see that the priests in the Rougon-Macquart are invariably neurotic and self-centred, with an inability to face life and its related problems. The cure's neurosis combines three principal traits. First, the austerity of the priesthood, due, in part, to its stipulation of celibacy, leads to repression in the priest, and distorts his character. The stipulation of celibacy, an "anti-natural" state for men, alienates the priest, causing a mental derangement. In extreme cases, this repression can create homosexual and misogynist tendencies in the priest.

Another aspect of the cure's neurosis is the occurrence of puerilism. The priest remains in a state of child-like ignorance, as typified in figures like Abbé Mouret and Abbé Horteur. In this respect, the church acts as a haven for the priest, shielding him from reality. For the cure, the church is a place of renunciation and withdrawal from society, a "souterrain" in which the priest appears to hide contentedly.

This notion of the church as an asylum explains the priest's third psychological trait, his basic incapability to cope with life and adapt to society. The priest does not relate to the world around him, but lives in a "monde à part". Only priests like Abbé Faujas in La Conquête de Plassans, who are engaged in politics, are part of the real world. Others like Abbés Mouret, Horteur, and Jouve, seem to be quite detached from the practical realities encountered in their parishes. This detached element in the cure's psychological make-up will also be evident in our analysis of the language used by him.

## CHAPTER FOUR

THE LANGUAGE OF THE CURÉ

In our study of the characterization of the priest, we saw that one of the elements frequently included in the numerous portraits is his voice. In fact, its inclusion in twelve of the seventeen portrayals of the priest is quite striking, as is its recurrence within each individual portrayal. In each case, a reference is made to the nature of the priest's voice or to his manner of speech, or to both. In the cases of minor priests, at least one reference is made to their voice or to their manner of speech. In La Faute de l'Abbé Mouret, Abbé Caffin is a man of few words; in La Conquête de Plassans, Abbé Bourrette is said to speak "naïvement" (I, 1168), and with "[une] voix grasse" (1010); Abbé Surin has "une voix de flûte" (999). Abbé Ranvier in Germinal is described as having "[une] voix fiévreuse de sectaire" (III, 1472), and speaks on one occasion with "[une] voix vibrante" (1511); in Une Page d'Amour, Abbé Jouve is described as speaking "simplement" (II, 914).

In the portrayal of priests who play major roles in the novels in which they appear, much emphasis is placed on the description of their voice and their speech. For instance, in La Joie de Vivre, Abbé Horteur speaks in "le langage de fermier pauvre" (III, 850); his speech is characterized by "la langue lourde" (869). In addition, his voice is described as being "sourde et continue" (978), and is referred to on one other occasion as "sa voix aiguë de vieil enfant" (991). In

the case of Abbé Mauduit, who is said to be "un homme du monde" among his bourgeois parishioners in Pot-Bouille, his tact is indicated in his manner of speaking, as the following phrases applied to him reveal: "chercher les mots" (358), and "trouver de bonnes paroles" (348). Mauduit's voice is frequently qualified by adjectives such as "conciliante" (373), "grêle" (219), and "haute" (175, 176). He also speaks at times "avec douceur" (347). In La Faute de l'Abbé Mouret, similar words describe the voice of Abbé Mouret. He often speaks "avec douceur" (I, 1451), or "d'une voix très ferme" (Ibid.). His voice is also described as being "grave" (1220), and frequently his prayers are merely "[un] murmure monotone" (1292).

In the cases of militant clerics, adjectives like "irritée" (I, 1237), "âpre" (I, 1234) and "tonnante" (I, 1007) qualify the nature of their voice. The use of different verbs reveals their manner of speech, as in the examples "s'écrier" (I, 908, 1252; III, 1118), "crier" (I, 1278, 1444; IV, 409), "hurler" (I, 1443), "gronder" (I, 1443), "lancer les mots furieusement" (IV, 803), and "éclater" (IV, 596).

Furthermore, verbs such as "bégayer" (IV, 596), and "balbutier" (I, 1167, 1466; III, 210) are used to refer to the cure's speech specifically during his religious duties. One interesting recurrence in three portraits of the priest is a tendency to rush a mass to the extent that it becomes incomprehensible to the parishioners. In L'Assommoir, the priest conducts a wedding service in a negligent fashion: "il dépêcha sa messe, mangeant les phrases latines [our

italics]... (III, 436)." In La Terre, Abbé Godard is repeatedly described as hurrying his services: "Cependant, il dépêchait sa messe, mangeait le latin [our italics], bousculait le rite (IV, 410)." On one occasion, when angered by his parishioners' lack of religious devotion, "il leur lâcha leur messe dans un coup de colère... (523)." Frère Archangias in La Faute de l'Abbé Mouret also abuses the Catholic liturgy, for example: "il mâchait des phrases sourdes où revenaient les noms de Jésus et de Marie (I, 1438)." He is also said to use "les paroles trop crues" (1239), and often speaks with "un grognement de chien" (1442).<sup>1</sup> Like Abbé Godard, Abbé Mouret, Abbé Bourrette, and Abbé Mauduit are said to "balbutier des prières" (I, 1167, 1466; III, 210).

From these descriptions, we can see, then, that Zola gives particular attention to the nature of the curé's voice and to his speech mannerisms. Language is important to the priest; it is a tool of his trade, as it were, and supposedly his forte. The extent of its importance to the curé is demonstrated in the example of Abbé Godard in La Terre. As we mentioned in Chapter Two, Godard has a parish in the farming region of La Beauce where he has remained for twenty-five years due to his inability to deliver a sermon: "l'éloquence était son côté faible, les mots ne venaient pas, il poussait des heu! heu! heu! sans jamais pouvoir finir ses phrases; ce qui expliquait pourquoi monseigneur l'oubliait depuis vingt-cinq ans, dans la petite

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<sup>1</sup> Note: the verb "grognier" is used in reference to the priest in L'Assommoir (III, 433).

cure de Bazoches-le-Doyen (IV, 410)."

In his description of the curé's speech, Zola has restricted himself to a recurring pattern in which two tendencies in the curé's use of language can be seen. On the one hand, the priest uses his language as a skill or tool, a means of manipulation, to make people think and behave in a certain way. We shall cite five examples which illustrate this tendency. On the other hand, the curé's language is impractical and detached from reality. This results in a lack of communication between the clergy and the people. His inability to communicate with members of society leads to a certain degree of alienation on the part of the priest; he finds himself in "un monde à part". Again we shall cite five examples which illustrate this tendency in the priest's language. From the two different viewpoints, we shall attempt to clarify the precise nature of Zola's anti-clerical position.

The best example of the curé's use of language as a means of manipulation is found in the case of politically active clerics, such as Abbé Faujas, whom we studied at length in Chapter One. In La Conquête de Plassans, Faujas is able to influence Marthe Mouret to help his cause, sway over the electorate, and intimidate the bishop into giving him the position of curé of Plassans. In addition, Faujas' long talks with Serge Mouret are a factor in the latter's decision to enter the priesthood (I, 1038). In all his schemings, Faujas' ability to make people see his viewpoint is a key factor

in his success. For instance, he convinces Marthe of the need for a centre for young working-class girls in order to direct them into a better life. In preparing Marthe to accept this cause, Faujas frequently talks in the evenings about charity, playing upon her emotions:

il avait chaque soir quelque nouvelle histoire touchante, il la brisait d'une compassion continue qui la faisait s'abandonner. Elle laissait tomber son ouvrage, joignait les mains, la face toute douloureuse, le regardant, pendant qu'il entrait dans des détails navrants sur les gens qui meurent de faim, sur les malheureux que la misère pousse aux méchantes actions. Alors elle lui appartenait, il aurait fait d'elle ce qu'il aurait voulu.

(974)

When the prostitution of the young working class girls is made known in town, Marthe volunteers to help establish a centre for them, and gives credit to Faujas for the idea. As a result, he wins the admiration of the townspeople.

When Marthe's religious fervour makes her mentally unstable, she inflicts physical punishment upon herself. Faujas uses this situation to send away François Mouret, who is accused of beating his wife. In this way, Faujas eliminates the threat that Mouret poses to his plans, having him committed to an asylum. Once Marthe is well enough again to be informed that her husband has been sent away, it is Abbé Faujas who convinces her that it is for the best for all concerned:

lui, prit les mains, qu'il serra fortement, et en murmurant de sa voix la plus souple:  
- Soyez forte devant cette épreuve que Dieu vous envoie. Il vous accordera des consolations, si vous ne vous révoltez pas; il saura vous ménager le bonheur que vous méritez.

Sous la pression des mains du prêtre, sous la tendre inflexion de ses paroles [our italics], Marthe se redressa, comme ressuscitée, les joues ardentes.  
(1136)

It is usually with "une grande douceur dans la chute des phrases" (906) that Faujas is able to manipulate Marthe.

Faujas' confrontation with Mgr. Rousselot also demonstrates the former's ability to express himself and attain his objectives. He tells the bishop innocently that certain individuals in Paris are interested in him and the position he holds in Plassans. The bishop fully realizes the import of Faujas' words: "Bien que l'abbé Faujas eût parlé très humblement, l'évêque sentit la menace cachée que contenaient ces paroles (1017)." Rather than directly threaten the bishop, which could possibly jeopardize his plans, Faujas carefully explains the situation, showing that with his connections in Paris, it would be wise that he receive the appointment. We see, then, that Abbé Faujas skilfully uses words to achieve his own end, and at the same time successfully accomplishes his task.

By instigating two projects, the home for young working-class girls, and a guild for the young men of good families, Faujas wins the town's admiration as a man with high ideals. The town is willing to accept whatever he may say, and when he proposes that M. Delangre would be a suitable candidate for Plassans, the town feels it to be a wise decision. One final reference may be made to the way in which Faujas' manner of speech wins him support. Once the guild for young men is completed, he often frequents it, mingling with the young

people. Zola makes the following observation in the novel: "Les jeunes gens, qui l'aimaient beaucoup, disaient de lui: -Quand il cause, on ne croirait jamais que c'est un prêtre (1035)." This remark supports the secular political role that Faujas assumes in the novel.. His ability to use words is a major aspect of that role.

In Une Page d'Amour, Abbé Jouve is preoccupied with the well-being of his close friend, Hélène Grandjean, a widow living alone in Paris with her young daughter. Jouve feels that it would be in the best interests of them both if Hélène were to remarry. On two occasions in the novel, Jouve engages in long discussions with Hélène, trying to win her to his view. Although Abbé Jouve feels ill-at-ease discussing such a delicate subject, he presents his arguments quite clearly, as the following passage reveals:

- Écoutez, ma chère fille, je désire causer sérieusement avec vous depuis quelque temps... L'existence que vous menez ici n'est pas bonne. Ce n'est point à votre âge qu'on se cloître comme vous le faites; et ce renoncement est aussi mauvais pour votre enfant que pour vous... Il y a mille dangers, des dangers de santé, et d'autres dangers encore...

(II, 872)

He wisely foresees that her lonely life may do her unjust harm in later years, as he goes on to warn her:

Enfin, vous êtes trop seule, et cette solitude dans laquelle vous vous enfoncez, n'est pas saine, croyez-moi. Un jour doit venir où vous en souffrirez ... Un matin, il ne serait plus temps, la place que vous laissez vide autour de vous et en vous, se trouverait occupée par quelque sentiment douloureux et inavouable.

(Ibid.)

Hélène is prepared to accept whatever Jouve may advise her: "Je

me mets entre vos mains, mon ami, murmura-t-elle. Vous savez bien que je vous ai toujours écouté (873)." When Jouve proposes that she marry his brother, Rambaud, who has always been very fond of her, Hélène rejects his idea only because she is hopelessly in love with the young Doctor Deberle, who is already married. Abbé Jouve's argument, however, does influence her: "à la douleur qu'elle éprouvait, elle comprenait enfin la gravité de son mal, elle avait l'effarement de pudeur d'une femme qui sent glisser son dernier vêtement (874)." When she rejects Jouve's idea, he tactfully drops the subject for the time being: "Ma fille, dit tranquillement le prêtre, j'ai beaucoup réfléchi avant de parler. Je crois que votre bonheur est là... Calmez-vous. Vous ne ferez jamais que votre volonté (Ibid.)."

As Hélène becomes more involved with Dr. Deberle, her inner torment increases. Aware of this, Abbé Jouve again approaches Hélène, offering his advice: "Ma fille, il faut vous confier à moi. Pourquoi hésitez-vous (968)?" Since she will not confide in him, he leads her on by another approach: "L'église vous effraie, continuait-il... Eh bien! puisque vous vous défiez du prêtre, pourquoi refuseriez-vous plus longtemps une confiance à l'ami (Ibid.)?" With this comment, Hélène relents and reveals her problems: "Vous avez raison, balbutia-t-elle, oui je suis affligée et j'ai besoin de vous... Il faut que je vous confesse ces choses (Ibid.)."

She admits to being in love, but again she turns down the idea of marrying Rambaud, because of her deep feelings for Deberle. Abbé Jouve's

final words to Hélène in the novel reassert his argument:

Écoutez, ma fille, promettez-moi une seule chose. Si jamais la vie devient trop lourde pour vous, songez qu'un honnête homme vous attend... Vous n'aurez qu'à mettre votre main dans la sienne pour retrouver le calme.

(973-974)

We learn at the conclusion of the novel that following the death of her daughter, which Hélène attributes to her scandalous behaviour with Deberle, she has married M. Rambaud, acceding at last to Abbé Jouve's advice: "L'abbé semblait sans cesse derrière eux, elle céda à la resignation dont il l'enveloppait. Puisqu'il voulait encore cette chose, elle ne trouvait pas de raison pour refuser. Cela lui paraissait très sage (1089)." Throughout the novel, consequently, Jouve offers sound advice to Hélène, which she can appreciate at the time but not follow because of her love for Deberle. She follows Jouve's reasoning and arguments, which are presented clearly, and at the end agrees to marry Rambaud.

In the case of Hélène Grandjean, the priest's ability to influence a person through his words has a favourable outcome. In Germinal, we see how this ability on the part of the priest has an entirely unfavourable effect. In Chapter One, we saw how the miners had been browbeaten into acceptance of their lot. La Maheude, whom, we suggested, is representative of the proletarian mentality, is convinced that it is better to accept the status quo than to try and change it. She reveals that it is the clergy which helps to instil

this resigned way of thinking into the miners: "Encore si ce que les curés racontent était vrai, si les pauvres gens de ce monde étaient riches dans l'autre (III, 1277)." Clearly this evidences the priest's deliberate use of religious terminology to manipulate the proletariat into acceding to the clergy's will. Although the miners do go on strike, it is to no avail, and eventually they return to work, accepting their deplorable living and working conditions. Yet the success of the priest's skill to mould people's thinking is apparent in La Maheude's resigned nature. The priest's technique in this instance appears to be almost a form of brainwashing.

La Joie de Vivre presents a brief reference to the priest's ability to influence a person's way of thinking. Abbé Horteur, aware that Mme Chanteau is near death, must prepare M. Chanteau for the imminency of his wife's death. Zola refers to Horteur's efforts in these words: "l'abbé Horteur venait, par de longues phrases ecclésiastiques, d'amener [our italics] Chanteau à cette idée que sa femme était perdue et qu'il y avait seulement là une question d'heures (980)." Again the curé demonstrates his technique in influencing behaviour by "[des] phrases ecclésiastiques".

Abbé Roustan in Le Ventre de Paris presents an example of the priest's gift for words providing an excuse or justification for a person's dubious action. In all his brief appearances in the novel, Abbé Roustan is a business adviser and confidant to Lisa Quenu. Pierre Florent, her brother-in-law, who is living with her and her

husband, is involved in revolutionary Republican activities of which Lisa is aware. Despite the fact that her husband refuses to interfere in his brother's affairs, Lisa feels obliged to report Pierre to the authorities. She hesitates, however, to betray him to the police, since he is, after all, a member of the family. She goes to Abbé Roustan, seeking his advice. Roustan finds the right words to justify her act of betrayal, which, he feels, it is her moral duty to perform: "Les natures honnêtes ont cette grâce merveilleuse de mettre de leur honnêteté dans tout ce qu'elles touchent (I, 811)." Following her talk with Abbé Roustan, Lisa searches Pierre's room and finds the necessary evidence to implicate him. When the threat of revolution appears imminent, she is resolved to betray her brother-in-law before her family is threatened. Thus in following Roustan's advice, she elects to denounce Pierre, rather than confront him directly:

A cette heure grave, la belle Lisa se coiffa soigneusement, d'une main calme. Elle était très résolue, sans un frisson, avec une sévérité plus grande dans les yeux. Tandis qu'elle agrafait sa robe de soie noire, en tendant l'étoffe de toute la force de ses gros poignets, elle se rappelait les paroles de l'abbé Roustan. Elle s'interrogeait, et sa conscience lui répondait qu'elle allait accomplir un devoir.

(861)

In the cases that we have just examined, we see the cure's technique of using language to achieve specific objectives, either influencing sectors of society or particular individuals to act contrary to their original intent. In the examples of Abbé Faujas, Abbé Joire and Abbé Roustan, this ability is used for nefarious

purposes, the consequences of which are far from being in the best interests of their targets. Abbé Jouve and Abbé Horteur, on the other hand, use their talent with words to bring about comfort and happiness.

On the other extreme, Zola presents the curé's language as being impractical, demonstrating that the priest is detached from the reality of his parishioners' life. This tendency is evident in Germinal with Abbé Ranvier. His visionary sermons as "un révolutionnaire de l'Évangile" are incomprehensible to the miners: "Cette ardente prédication l'emportait en paroles mystiques, depuis longtemps les pauvres gens ne le comprenaient plus (III, 1473)." Ranvier's language, dictated by his vision of a massive proletarian revolution, is as impractical as his stand in supporting the strikers, as this typical sentence indicates: "tous se lèveraient pour établir le royaume du Christ, avec l'aide des misérables (Ibid.).". Ranvier is too detached from the real situation to be of any practical help. Maheu's cutting statement points out the inefficacy of Ranvier's words: "Il n'y a pas besoin de tant de paroles, grogna brusquement Maheu, vous auriez mieux fait de commencer par nous apporter un pain (Ibid.).". In addition, Abbé Ranvier refers to "le déplorable malentendu entre l'Église et le peuple" (1473) when speaking of the miners' conception of the clergy linked with the bourgeoisie. As we have already explained, the clergy is out of touch with the working class; it associates itself basically with the State and the bourgeoisie. The clergy's only form of communication with the proletariat is in its efforts to render the

people submissive. Thus the Church is directly responsible for creating this alienation between itself and the proletariat, referred to as "le déplorable malentendu" by Abbé Ranvier.

Other novels in the Rougon-Macquart present more individualized cases of the priest's inability to communicate with his parishioners. In La Faute de l'Abbé Mouret, Abbé Mouret is concerned that Rosalie, the daughter of one of the villagers, Bambousse, is pregnant by Fortuné Brichet. Neither family has made any move to arrange the marriage, so that Mouret feels it is his duty to intercede. Rosalie, Fortuné and his family are in favour of the marriage, while Bambousse refuses to allow his daughter to marry, principally because Fortuné's family is so poor.

Mouret confronts Bambousse, arguing that he must let his daughter marry immediately: "Le prêtre, surpris, lui expliqua qu'il fallait couper court au scandale, qu'il devait pardonner à Fortuné, puisque celui-ci voulait bien réparer sa faute, enfin que l'honneur de sa fille exigeait un prompt mariage (I, 1243)." Bambousse does not see that the simple fact that Rosalie is pregnant necessitates her marriage to Fortuné. For Mouret, it is a moral issue, a question of what is 'proper', especially from the point of view of the baby. However, moral considerations have no meaning for Bambousse who thinks in practical, materialistic terms: "Rosalie est gaillarde. Elle vaut un homme, voyez-vous. Je serai obligé de louer un garçon, le jour où elle s'en ira... On reparlera de la chose, après la

vendange. Et puis, je ne veux pas être volé. Donnant, donnant, n'est-ce pas (1244)?" Mouret is unable to make Bambousse see his point; he is speaking on an entirely different level to that of the peasant farmer: "Le prêtre resta encore là une grande demi-heure à prêcher Bambousse, à lui parler de Dieu, à lui donner toutes les raisons que la situation comportait. Le vieux s'était remis à la besogne; il haussait les épaules, plaisantait, s'entêtant davantage (1244-1245)." For a peasant, devoid of any religious sentiment, Mouret's arguments are without significance.

Another incident in La Faute de l'Abbé Mouret demonstrates further Abbé Mouret's inability to communicate with the peasant farmers of his parish. Towards the end of the novel, the families of Rosalie and Fortuné have finally agreed to the marriage. During the wedding ceremony, Mouret talks at length about the institution of marriage, employing fervent religious phraseology:

L'institution du mariage est la figure de l'union sacrée de Jésus et de son Église. C'est un lien que rien peut rompre, que Dieu veut éternel, pour que l'homme ne sépare pas ce que le ciel a joint. En vous faisant l'os de vos os, Dieu vous a enseigné que vous avez le devoir de marcher côte à côte, comme un couple fidèle, selon les voies préparées par sa toute-puissance. Et vous devez vous aimer dans l'amour même de Dieu. La moindre amertume entre vous serait une désobéissance au Créateur qui vous a tirés d'un seul corps. Restez donc à jamais unis, à l'image de l'Église que Jésus a épousée, en nous donnant à tous sa chair et son sang.

(1422)

Moreover it is revealed that this address is a standard one prepared for the priest to deliver at all wedding services over which he

presides: "il mettait un attendrissement dans ces paroles, qu'il avait autrefois apprises, à l'aide d'un manuel destiné aux jeunes desservants (Ibid.)."

At this stage Mouret addresses himself first to Rosalie and then to Fortuné, directing each of them in the responsibilities of their roles as wife and husband. He speaks principally in figurative religious abstractions: "Et votre joug sera un joug d'amour et de paix. Soyez son repos, sa félicité, le parfum de ses bonnes oeuvres, le salut de ses heures de défaillance (1423)." Without understanding a word that Abbé Mouret has said, Fortuné is moved to tears: "Il [Mouret] avait baissé complètement les paupières, la figure toute blanche, parlant avec une émotion si douloureuse, que le grand Fortuné lui-même pleurait, sans comprendre [our italics] (1424)." La Rousse humourously comments on Mouret's speech ability as follows: "Il a la langue bien pendue, comme tous les curés(1422)"; and at the end of the service, having understood little, she ironically observes: "Il a bien parlé tout de même... Ces curés, ça va chercher un tas de choses auxquelles personne ne songe (1424)." Abbé Mouret's inability to communicate with his parishioners becomes quite apparent. His unintelligible religious ramblings are meaningless to the down-to-earth peasant, whose primary concern is living from day to day.

In contrast to Abbé Mouret's approach, that of Abbé Caffin is much more practical. At wedding ceremonies, Caffin's practice is to deliver a few simple words, which are in turn easily understood

by the people: "Lorsqu'il a marié la belle Miette, il ne lui a donné que deux tapes sur la joue en lui disant d'être sage (Ibid.)."

This illustrates that Caffin is able to communicate with the peasant farmers on their level.

The priest in L'Assommoir represents a somewhat parallel case in that no real consideration is given to those present at the service. He rushes the wedding ceremony of Gervaise and Coupeau to the point that it is unintelligible to all in attendance. Consequently no one is sure of what to do during the service:

Les mariés, devant l'autel, très embarrassés, ne sachant pas quand il fallait s'agenouiller, se lever, s'asseoir, attendaient un geste du clerc. Les témoins, pour être convenables, se tenaient debout tout le temps.

(Ibid.)

In the priest's only other appearance in the novel, at Mme Coupeau's funeral service, a similar scene is enacted. Again the priest hurries the service, and any lessening in tempo is due to his advanced age rather than any conscious feeling of compassion: "A l'église, la cérémonie fut vite bâclée. La messe traîna pourtant un peu, parce que le prêtre était très vieux (668)."

In these last two examples taken from L'Assommoir, it is not the priest's use of the language outside the church but his language during religious services that is questioned. In these instances, the priest's inability to communicate is a direct result of his poor delivery. One friend present at the funeral makes this sarcastic remark about priests' unintelligible flow of words: "ces farceurs-là,

en crachant leur latin, ne savaient seulement pas ce qu'ils dégoisaient (Ibid)."

In La Terre, Abbé Godard is faced with a situation comparable to that of Abbé Mouret in La Faute de l'Abbé Mouret. One of the village girls, Lise, is pregnant by Buteau Fouan. Godard takes it upon himself to urge père Fouan to make his youngest son marry Lise. Again the priest's evangelistic utterances are beyond the peasant's capacity to grasp: "Il n'est pas possible que votre fils Buteau laisse Lise dans sa position, avec ce ventre qui grossit et qui crève les yeux... Elle est fille de la Vierge, c'est une honte, une honte (IV, 407)." For a people who lack religious leanings, these words have little if any significance. When Godard argues that there is a baby who must be considered in the matter, Fouan sees the priest's point in a different way: "Bien sûr... Seulement, il n'est pas encore fait cet enfant. Est-ce qu'on sait?... Tout juste, c'est ça qui m'encourage guère, un enfant, quand on n'a pas de quoi lui coller une chemise sur le corps (Ibid)." The peasant Fouan thinks on a simple level, realizing that his young son, Buteau, has no means of supporting a wife and new-born baby. Only after Buteau has been given his share of the family property will the marriage even be considered. Consequently Godard is unable to emphasize sufficiently the moral necessity of Buteau marrying Lise immediately. The expression of such logic is unacceptable to the peasant.

Additionally, as we have already noted, to a people already

lacking in religious instruction, Godard's hurried masses become even more incomprehensible as he loses himself in words: "Cependant, il dépêchait sa messe, mangeait le latin, bousculait le rite. Au prône, sans monter en chaire, assis sur une chaise, au milieu du chœur, il ânonna, se perdit, renonça à se retrouver (410)."

In Pot-Bouille, Abbé Mauduit is asked by the Vabre family to help arrange the marriage between their son, Auguste, and Berthe Josserand. Mauduit, in "le rôle moralisateur" (III, 351), tries to reconcile the two families, who have quarreled over the question of an adequate dowry:

Il parla du pardon de Dieu, appuya sur la joie qu'il éprouverait à rassurer les coeurs honnêtes, en faisant cesser une situation intolérable. Il appelait Berthe malheureuse enfant, ce qui la mit de nouveau en larmes;  
(347)

He must also convince Mme Josserand that the match would be beneficial to both families:

Cependant, il dut en arriver aux cinquante mille francs: les époux semblaient ne plus avoir qu'à s'embrasser, lorsqu'il posa la condition formelle de la dot.  
(347-348)

The figure which Abbé Mauduit proposes is far too low in the Josserands' opinion. Mme Josserand indignantly rejects Mauduit's arguments:

Nous sommes très touchés de vos efforts. Mais jamais, entendez-vous? jamais, nous ne trafiquerons avec l'honneur de notre fille... Non, monsieur l'abbé, un marché serait une honte...

(348)

Instead of discussing the question further and arriving at a figure suitable to both sides, Mauduit, who feels ill-at-ease over the

financial aspect, leaves without trying to pursue it: "Et il se retira, sans revenir sur l'affaire, cachant la confusion d'avoir échoué, sous son aimable sourire, avec un pli de dégoût et de douleur aux lèvres (Ibid)."

The priest's moralizing has no meaning for the bourgeois woman whose main concern is the question of money, upon which Mauduit hardly touches. He is unsuccessful in reconciling the two families at this point of the novel.

In the latter group of priests, it is clear that the curé is incapable of communicating with his parishioners. In most cases, he speaks on a level completely unrelated to the parishioners' actual situation. The priest's religious references and his moralizing tendencies make no impression on the people in question, who view his speech as amusing rhetoric. Thus unable to relate to his people, to society in general, the priest places himself in "un monde à part" through his language.

In the first group of priests that we examined, the curé uses his talent for words, his ability to express his ideas well, to obtain certain ends. He is able to manoeuvre people into thinking and behaving in the way that he desires. While the priest benefits personally from the consequences of these manipulations, quite often the outcome is harmful to the person involved. This is seen in La Conquête de Plassans, and in Germinal. Rather than being placed in "un monde à part", in these instances, the curé is a part of the political scene. His skill with words is a frequently used tool

in his clerical domination.

On the whole, then, two extremes mark the priest's use of language. On the one hand, he is able to use words and express himself well, which is often an undesirable trait, although at times it can be of benefit to the people concerned, as in the example of Hélène Grandjean. On the other hand, the priest is unable to express himself, to communicate, which is a major reason for his ineptitude as a clergyman. Both viewpoints combine to make up Zola's anti-clerical position, which we may now amplify in our conclusion.

## CONCLUSION

Throughout our study of Zola's treatment of the character of the curé in the Rougon-Macquart, one particular feature has always been apparent in each area reviewed. In writing the twenty volumes, ten of which contain figures from the priesthood and span the years 1873 to 1888, beginning with Le Ventre de Paris and ending with Le Rêve, Zola consistently devotes himself to an organized and somewhat restricted pattern of treatment. He deliberately repeats certain fixed roles which the priest assumes, for example, in the realm of politics, in bourgeois sectors of society, in poor working class sectors, and in rural regions. In the physical characterization of the curé, Zola confines himself to two basic physical types. In the psychological make-up of the curé, Zola presents three principal traits, repression, puerilism, and social maladjustment, all of which recur in most of the portrayals. Finally, in the last area with which we dealt, Zola presents two key tendencies in the curé's use of language: an ability to master and employ words to achieve ends, and a lack of ability to communicate with his parishioners.

From this restricted pattern of treatment, we are able to see a fundamental conception of the curé as viewed by Zola. This concept of the curé encompasses, more precisely, two distinct viewpoints. First, Zola presents the priest as an active participant in political

affairs. Basically the priest in this category is aggressive, unscrupulous and in pursuit of some personal goal. One novel, La Conquête de Plassans, is devoted entirely to this question. It is also a key element in the political plot of Germinal. In this viewpoint of the curé, Zola portrays him as part of the real world, involved in politics and posing the threat of clerical domination, which Zola strongly opposes.

Secondly, Zola exposes the priest outside the realm of politics as an inept individual. For the most part, the priest is lacking in true religious devotion, and either neglects or abuses his clerical responsibilities. Those priests who do display a modest degree of religious fervour are invariably neurotic. Moreover, in general, each priest is depicted as having neurotic leanings. The curé is unable to relate to society and communicate with its members. Thus he makes no contribution to society and lives in "un monde à part" as Zola puts it in his preliminary notes to the Rougon-Macquart. Both these viewpoints combine to underline Zola's anti-clerical position, which is clearly developed in the Rougon-Macquart. For Zola, a man sincerely concerned about the social and political issues of the day, his series of novels afforded an excellent opportunity to portray fearlessly the curé as he saw him, and the effect of his methods, faults, and weaknesses in the society of the Second Empire.

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