ZOLA'S "LA JOIE DE VIVRE":

A CRITICAL STUDY

ZOLA'S "LA JOIE DE VIVRE": A CRITICAL STUDY

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A Thesis

Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies

in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements

for the Degree

Master of Arts

McMaster University

May 1968

MASTER OF ARTS (1968)
(Romance Languages)

McMASTER UNIVERSITY
Hamilton, Ontario

TITLE: Zola's "La Joie de Vivre": A Critical Study

AUTHOR: David Bond, B.A. (London)

SUPERVISOR: Professor O.R.Morgan

NUMBER OF PAGES: iv, 125

SCOPE AND CONTENTS: A critical analysis of Zola's La Joie de Vivre together with certain biographical information and details of Zola's methods of composition.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I should like to thank Professor Morgan for his help and criticism in the preparation of this study.

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to examine one of Zola's lesser-known novels, La Joie de Vivre, and the light which it throws on the author's methods of composition. It begins with a biographical note because this novel more than any other Zola wrote was born of his own experience and fears. La Joie de Vivre reveals a certain facet of its author's personality which is very often neglected because it does not fit in with the usual image of him which critics and readers of his novels have. This will become more obvious when the problem is dealt with in Chapter I.

La Joie de Vivre is unique among the twenty novels of the Rougon-Macquart cycle to which it belongs. It is the only one of these novels which does not concentrate mainly on studying a social milieu, a particular class of society, although there is a certain amount of this preoccupation revealed in the novel. Instead, Zola writes about what is really a philosophical problem[1] - the problem of evil. He deals with the age-old question

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[1] One can, of course, look upon this as a religious problem, but Zola did not have a religious mind, and hardly touches on this aspect of the problem.

of why there is suffering, pain, disease and disappointment in the world. Most of all, he writes of the problem of death and how fear of it can blight a man's life. At the same time he shows how men live and face these problems and how the will to live sustains them in their struggle against all these difficulties.

He sets his story against the background of a dismal Norman village. La Joie de Vivre is one of those novels, like Germinal, in which Zola creates a special atmosphere. In this instance it is an atmosphere of decay and destruction. The community about which he writes is an isolated one, so added to the air of decay is one of isolation, even of suffocation. The family which is at the centre of his story consists of four people, and this is another way in which the novel is unusual. The best known of Zola's novels depict masses of people, huge crowds in movement and large assemblies of characters. This novel is basically a family drama, the intimate story of a few people living in a small house by the sea. The nearest it comes to showing masses of people is when Zola describes the villagers gathering on the beach, but his descriptions come nowhere near achieving the breathtaking effect of the descriptions of masses of people in movement which he puts into Germinal.

La Joie de Vivre does not achieve the startling effects of Zola's greatest novels. Its interest lies

mainly in the way it differs from these novels and in what it has to say about how Zola's mind worked. No apology will be made, therefore, for choosing what is normally considered a minor novel as the subject of this study. Such novels as this often have more to reveal about a writer's techniques and personality than those which are a lasting success.

The edition of La Joie de Vivre used for this study is volume thirteen of the Oeuvres complètes published by Bernouard (1928), with notes by Maurice Le Blond. These notes are quite extensive and include sections of Zola's rough plans for the novel and excerpts from critical comment in the press when the novel was first published. In the absence of Zola's actual rough plans and the original press articles, the notes by Le Blond have been used fairly frequently in this study. The Bernouard edition has also been used for all other works by Zola which have been consulted.

I

A BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Perhaps the most remarkable thing about the life of Emilé Zola is the astonishing energy of the man. It seems as though his zeal for work never flagged, and this zeal is epitomised in the motto nulla dies sine linea which he had inscribed over the fireplace in his home at Médan. As well as the twenty novels of the Rougon-Macquart cycle, there came from Zola's pen several short stories, five early novels, six later polemical novels and innumerable collections of journalistic articles and literary criticism with such arrogant sounding titles as Mes Haines and La Vérité en marche.

Little wonder that there grew up round Zola's name a legend which he sometimes found it to his advantage to cultivate, for he had learned while working in the publicity department of Hachette's publishing house, that to create a reputation, be it good or bad, meant greater sales for his books. He was seen as a man whose self-assurance was matched only by his tremendous output. After all, it was argued, who but the most self-confident would set out to portray the social and political life of a whole era in a lengthy series of works which were to embrace every aspect of the times they described? Indeed, his pride at writing

the Rougon-Macquart cycle impressed several people, including Henry James, who wrote in his Notes on Novelists that Zola was a man "fairly bursting with the betrayal that nothing whatever had happened to him in life but to write les Rougon-Macquart."[1]

The articles of literary criticism which he wrote only served to add to this impression, since the views they express are put forward with a bluntness and assurance which seems to brook no argument. They provoked much irritation among Zola's fellow writers and made even his friend Flaubert say: "L'aplomb de Zola en matière de critique s'explique par son inconcevable ignorance."[2] Nor are such reactions confined to Zola's contemporaries, for such modern writers as Henriot express wonder at Zola's self-assurance.[3] Zola was certainly a man who produced violent reactions in others, sometimes friendly, often hostile. There were those who envied him the financial success of his novels, forgetting that he had spent many years in abject poverty. There were others who envied him his ability to write so prolifically, forgetting that it

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[1]Quoted by Harry Levin in The Gates of Horn: A Study of Five French Realists, New York: Oxford University Press, 1966, p.309

[2]Gustave Flaubert, Oeuvres complètes, vol.8. Paris: Louis Conard, 1926, p.118.

[3]Emile Henriot, Courrier Littéraire au XIXe siècle; Réalistes et Naturalistes, Paris: Editions Albin Michel, 1954, pp. 290-296.

took great effort and application on his part to do this. But whatever attitude people adopted to Zola, they had to adopt some attitude, for he was one of those men to whom it was impossible to remain indifferent. He possessed, in the words of Harry Levin, "a flair - reminiscent of Victor Hugo and Voltaire - for stirring up the interest of the public".[4] The violent attacks on the one hand, and the avid support on the other, which he incurred during the Dreyfus affair are typical of the feelings he aroused throughout his life.

Although Zola found it to his advantage, in order to sell his books, to have his name a constant subject of controversy, he seems sometimes to have grown tired of the popular image of himself. Although he wrote prolifically and was not indifferent to material comfort, he protested against the popular idea that he was a cart-horse labouring solely for his own gain. There was, in fact, another, more vulnerable side to Zola's character. That this side existed is attested to by those who knew him well, and by Zola's own correspondence.

When he first went, as a young man, to live in Paris he wrote many letters to his friends in his home town of Aix-en-Provence. These letters show that at this

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[4]Harry Levin, op. cit. p.306.

early age he had frequent moods of depression when he faced life with anything but confidence. In September 1860 he wrote to Baille:

> Je suis presque continuellement indisposé. L'ennui me ronge; ma vie n'est pas assez active pour ma forte constitution, et mon système nerveux est tellement ébranlé et irrité que je suis dans un état perpétuel d'excitation morale et physique. [5]

In June of the next year we find him again complaining to Baille of his "ennui" and of the life he is living:

> Tout me semble couvert d'un voile noir; je ne suis bien nulle part, j'exagère tout en douleur comme en joie. De plus, d'une indifférence presque complète du bien et du mal; ma vie troublée, incapable de juger. Et enfin un ennui immense décolorant et déflorant toutes mes sensations; un ennui qui me suit partout, changeant ma vie en fardeau, annulant le passé et souillant l'avenir. [6]

Instead of the arrogance and self-assurance so often associated with Zola, these letters display doubt in their author's literary ability and extreme pessimism towards his future. He writes to Cézanne for example:

> Je suis abattu, incapable d'écrire deux mots, incapable même de marcher. Je pense à l'avenir et je le vois si noir, si noir, que je recule épouvanté. [7]

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[5] Letter dated Sept. 21, 1860 Correspondance I, p.167

[6] Letter dated June 10, 1861 Correspondance I, p.199

[7] Letter dated Feb. 9, 1860 Correspondance I p.32.

There are many other such letters written during these years[8] which attest to Zola's moods of gloom and doubt. They already show signs of the hypochondria and fear of death which were to dog him throughout his life. No doubt Zola was writing under the influence of circumstances, for at this time he was extremely poor, had little to eat and was forced to take menial employment to support himself. Yet his most pessimistic work, La Joie de Vivre, was written at a time when his material well-being had considerably improved, so his pessimism is not entirely dependent on circumstances.

No doubt there is also a certain amount of posing in Zola's display of "ennui", for at the time he was greatly under the influence of the Romantics. Nevertheless, these feeling are basically sincere since they persisted when he had thrown off the influence of Hugo, Musset and his other early idols.

In 1868, Zola met the Goncourt brothers for the first time. After the death of Jules, Zola kept up his friendship with the other brother, Edmond. The Journal des Goncourt mentions Zola quite frequently, and bears witness to his continuing hypochondria and moods of depression. It is true, as Hemmings points out[9], that

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[8]See for example Correspondance I, pp. 37, 58, 79

[9]Hemmings, Emile Zola, London:Oxford University Press, 1953, p.166.

the Goncourts had a fixed idea of the writer as being extremely sensitive and governed by his nerves, and that they were therefore liable to stress this aspect of Zola's behaviour without mentioning the occasions on which Zola seemed healthy and happy. However, these entries in the Journal do point to the fact that Zola's moods of depression continued after his romantic period, and there are other friends of Zola who mention these traits in his character. His most intimate friend and disciple, Paul Alexis, writes in his biography of Zola that the latter showed:

> Une inguérissable mélancolie, résultant, à certaines heures, de la conscience du néant de tout. Le corps, avec cela, alourdi par le manque d'exercise, d'une sensibilité nerveuse, maladive, le prédispose à l'hypocondrie. [10]

Zola's daughter in her biography speaks of his "épouvante de la mort", so it would seem that the testimony of the Journal des Goncourt is not altogether untrustworthy. [11]

It is no doubt this morbid streak in Zola which led him to adopt some rather irrational superstitions which contrast strangely with his avowed scientific and

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[10] Paul Alexis, Emile Zola, notes d'un ami, Paris: Charpentier, 1882, p. 201.

[11] Denise Le Blond-Zola, Emile Zola raconté par sa fille, Paris: Fasquelle, 1931, p. 120.

rationalistic beliefs. He thought, for example, that certain numbers were lucky, and his English translator, Vizetelly, wrote that he would count the number of gas lamps in a street, or the number of houses it contained. Often he would not go to bed until he had placed certain articles of furniture in a particular position. He also had an extraordinary fear of thunder and lightning.[12]

These fears and morbid fancies did not decrease as time went by. In 1879 he published his short story La Mort d'Olivier Bécaille which might almost have been written by Poe. It tells of a young man struck by catalepsey. He lies in bed, alive yet seemingly dead, and completely unable to communicate with his wife and neighbours. The doctor pronounces him dead, a funeral is arranged, and he is buried alive. When he recovers his faculties, Olivier miraculously manages to escape from his grave and is cared for by someone who finds him. He slowly recovers his health and strength.

The important part of the story is the beginning, when Olivier lies in bed unable to communicate with those around him and thinks of how he has always feared death. There must surely be something of Zola's own fears in these thoughts of Olivier:

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[12] All of these peculiarities are reported by Vizetelly, Emile Zola, Novelist and Reformer. An Account of his Life and Work, London: The Bodley Head, 1904, p.312

> Que de fois, la nuit, je me suis réveillé en sursaut, ne sachant quel souffle avait passé sur mon sommeil, joignant les mains avec désespoir, babutiant: 'Mon Dieu! mon Dieu! il faut mourir!'[13]

He thinks back to his childhood and finds that even then fear of death had haunted him:

> Aux meilleures époques de mon existence, j'ai eu ainsi des mélancolies soudaines que personne ne comprenait. Lorsqu'il m'arrivait une bonne chance, on s'étonnait de me voir sombre. C'était que tout d'un coup, l'idée de mon néant avait traversé ma joie. Le terrible 'à quoi bon?' sonnait comme un glas à mes oreilles.[14]

It may well be that this story was an attempt on the part of Zola to work the fear of death out of his system. This is suggested by such lines as the following, where Olivier tries to persuade himself that death is not so terrible: "Si la mort n'était que cet évanouissement de la chair, en vérité j'avais eu tort de la tant redouter."[15] However, if it was Zola's intention to exorcise his fears, he failed. Certain events in the years 1880 to 1883 brought them to the fore again.

In April 1880, Duranty died. Although this novelist is not thought of highly today, Zola had great respect for him, seeing him as the first exponent of realism in France. He no doubt also reminded Zola of his

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[13] La Mort d'Olivier Bécaille, pp. 150-151

[14] ibid., p. 151

[15] ibid., p. 151

days as a struggling writer, for they had met when Zola worked for Hachette. Zola later tried to influence his publisher, Charpentier, to publish Duranty's works, and tried to stimulate interest in a writer who was almost forgotten by the public, through articles on him in the press.

In May, 1880 Gustave Flaubert died. He was a man for whom Zola had tremendous admiration and respect, and his grief at this loss was deep. On hearing of his friend's death Zola wrote to Henry Céard: "Oh! mon ami, il vaudrait mieux nous en aller tous. Ce serait plus vite fait. Décidément, il n'y a que tristesse, et rien ne vaut la peine qu'on vive."[16] In Les Romanciers naturalistes, Zola describes his sense of loss on receiving news of Flaubert's death, calling it "un coup de massue en plein crâne".[17] He goes on to tell of his numbing grief when attending Flaubert's funeral, and his anger that so few people had come to pay their last respects to the great novelist. No doubt Flaubert's death served to remind Zola that his own life and activity must end this way, since this is how he describes his feelings when he saw the hearse:

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[16]Letter dated May 9, 1860 Correspondance I, p. 545

[17]Les Romanciers naturalistes, pp. 137-145

> Quand j'ai vu le corbillard avec ses tentures, ses chevaux marchant au pas, son balancement doux et funèbre, déboucher de derrière les arbres sur la route nue et venir droit à moi, j'ai éprouvé un grand froid et je me suis mis à trembler. [18]

Worse was to happen that year, however, for in October Zola's mother, who had been ailing for some while, died in considerable pain. During the time that she was dying, Zola could not bear to stay indoors, and had to go outside and wander the countryside. After her death Zola's hypochondria increased, and Edmond de Goncourt records in December of that year a visit from Zola which indicates the latter's state of mind at the time:

> Il entre avec cet air lugubre et hagard qui particularise ses entrées . . . Il s'échoue dans un fauteuil, en se plaignant geignardement, et un peu à la manière d'un enfant, de maux de reins, de gravelle, de palpitations de coeur. Puis il parle de la mort de sa mère, du trou que cela fait dans leur intérieur, et il en parle avec un attendrissement concentré, et en même temps, un rien de peur pour lui-même. [19]

Because of Flaubert's death, the dîners des Cinq were abandoned until 1882.[20] Goncourt writes that when the meetings resumed, the thought of death hung over

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[18] ibid., p. 139

[19] Journal des Goncourt, Dec. 14, 1880.

[20] These meetings, originally called the dîners des auteurs sifflés, gathered together five writers, Zola, Flaubert, Edmond de Goncourt, Daudet and Turgenev, who all claimed to have had plays booed off the stage.

Zola and his companions.[21] The letters Zola wrote at this time show him complaining of illness and very dissatisfied with his lot.[22] In 1883, there was yet another death to add to Zola's misery. This time it was his friend Turgenev, the Russian novelist who was largely responsible for introducing him to the Russian reading public. He wrote to Céard at this time:

> L'occasion se présentera sans doute un jour, je dirai combien j'ai aimé Tourgueneff et toute la reconnaissance que je lui garde pour ses bons services en Russie. Je crois qu'il avait de l'affection pour moi; je perds un ami, et la perte est grande.[23]

During this year Zola spoke to Edmond de Goncourt about the effect which his mother's death had had upon him and his plans for the Rougon-Macquart series. Goncourt reports Zola's words:

> Après un silence, il ajoute que cette mort a fait un trou dans le nihilisme de ses convictions religieuses, tant il lui est affreux de penser à une séparation éternelle. Et il dit que ce hantement de la mort, et, peut-être une évolution des idées philosophiques amenée par le décès d'un être cher, il songe à l'introduire dans un roman auquel il donnerait un titre comme La Douleur.[24]

It was this book which became La Joie de Vivre.

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[21] Journal des Concourt, March 6, 1882.

[22] Correspondance II, pp. 586 and 588.

[23] Letter dated Sept.4, 1883, Correspondance II, p. 598.

[24] Journal des Goncourt, Feb. 20, 1883.

The novel was, therefore, by Zola's own admission, partly autobiographical and born of the fears and preoccupations of the years 1880 to 1883. Beyond that, it reflects certain permanent characteristics of Zola's personality which were merely accentuated by the events of these years.

The fact that Zola wrote a novel which is concerned to such an extent with painful events of his own life throws a great deal of light on his psychological need to write. It seems fair to suggest that much of his prolific output is born of his need to write in order to escape his own fears. La Joie de Vivre was probably Zola's salvation, enabling him to escape from complete despair by incorporating his preoccupations into a novel. He himself must have realised that his work played this role in his life since he wrote to Mme. Charpentier shortly after his mother's death:

> Il faut attendre, car, c'est une chose affreuse à dire, le temps guérit les profondes douleurs. Pour mon compte, je vais tâcher de m'anéantir dans le travail. [25]

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[25] Letter dated October 30, 1880, Correspondance II, p. 550.

II

ZOLA'S METHOD OF COMPOSITION

In his biography of Zola, Paul Alexis explains that Zola attempted to stimulate interest in his novels by varying them as much as possible. He would try to make the subject matter of each novel different from that of the previous one:

> Une des préoccupations constantes de l'auteur des Rougon-Macquart est celle-ci: 'Il faut varier les oeuvres, les opposer fortement les unes aux autres.' A chaque nouveau livre, de peur de tomber dans l'uniformité, il cherche à faire l'opposé de ce qu'il a tenté dans le précédent.[1]

Hence we find that La Terre, with its down-to-earth treatment of the peasants of the Beauce, is followed by the rather sentimental Le Rêve; L'Assommoir is followed by Une Page d'Amour, and so on. Alexis, who was writing in 1882, two years before La Joie de Vivre was published, goes on to explain that when Zola had finished writing Nana in 1880, he intended to follow it with a work which would offer a contrast. He quotes Zola as telling him that he wanted this new novel to be: "Une oeuvre de sympathie et d'honnêteté ayant pour thème principal

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[1]Paul Alexis, op. cit., p. 98.

La Douleur et pour personnage central, Pauline Quenu"[2].

Zola set about writing the novel in March or April of 1881, but was not satisfied with the results because he found certain gaps in his ideas.[3] At the same time, he found that in order to write the book he would have to draw on memories of the previous year, and these memories were still too close and too painful to bear. He later explained this in a letter to Edmond de Goncourt:

> Le plan de La Joie de Vivre a été arrêté avant celui d'Au Bonheur des Dames. Je l'ai laissé de côté parce que . . . sous le coup récent de la perte de ma mère, je ne me sentais pas le courage de l'écrire.[4]

He accordingly shelved his plans for the novel and wrote Pot-Bouille (published April 1882) and Au Bonheur des Dames (published March 1883), before resuming work on La Joie de Vivre.

Even now Zola's plans for the novel underwent several alterations. According to Maurice Le Blond, Zola had considerable difficulty deciding on the title to give his novel.[5] He rejected his earlier idea of calling it La Douleur and thought of La Vallée de Larmes,, L'Espoir du

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[2] ibid., p. 126

[3] ibid., p. 126

[4] Letter dated Dec. 15, 1883, Correspondance II, p.603

[5] Notes to La Joie de Vivre, p. 361.

Néant, Le Vieux cynique, La Sombre mort, Le Tourment de l'Existence, La Misère du Monde, Le Repos sacré du Néant, and Le Triste Monde before finally deciding on La Joie de Vivre because he liked the irony of this title.

From the time that Zola first planned to write the novel, it seems that he thought of and rejected six different plots before deciding on the one which he eventually adopted.[6] While it is beyond the scope of this study to examine in detail the changes which Zola's plans for the novel underwent, it is neverthless useful to look at the broad outlines of these changes insofar as they throw light on the final form of La Joie de Vivre.

As we have already seen, Zola intended the heroine of the novel to be Pauline Quenu. Now Pauline Quenu had appeared briefly in Le Ventre de Paris (published 1873) as a little girl, the daughter of a prosperous pork butcher. Working on his theory of opposing pairs of novels, Zola decided that Pauline in the new novel would have to form a contrast with Nana, the chief character of his previous work. Many of the characteristics he chose to give to Pauline - virtue, respect for propriety, calmness, and love of honour - were a deliberate contrast to Nana's characteristics. Some of them were subsequently

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[6] Information concerning Zola's changes in the plot of the novel is taken from Hemmings, "The Genesis of Zola's La Joie de Vivre", French Studies, IV (1952), 114-115.

used to create the character of Denise Baudu and Mme. Hédouin in the two novels he wrote after abandoning his plans for La Joie de Vivre.

When he returned to the novel in 1883, Zola decided that, in order to avoid repetition, he would have to change Pauline's character. He decided now to make her dominant characteristic "bonté" instead of virtue. This change in character brought about a change in plot. While Pauline was to exemplify virtue, Zola thought that the best plot would be the description of a married woman almost giving in to a seducer, but finally allowing her virtue to triumph. Now that Pauline's main characteristic was to be goodness and charity, Zola decided to eliminate one of the main characters he had planned (the seducer), and let Pauline's charity manifest itself in self-sacrifice. Accordingly, Zola made Pauline unmarried, but betrothed, had her release the man she loves from his obligations so that the latter might make a more socially brilliant and profitable match.[7]

In Zola's early draught of the character of Lazare, fear of death is only one of several characteristics. As we have seen, however, Zola's contact with death increased during the years 1880 to 1883, so it is not surprising

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[7]This shows, incidentally, how much, in planning his novels, Zola made plot depend on character. For more on this point see Chapter V.

that in later draughts fear of death is shown as Lazare's primary characteristic. He also became a fusion of the husband and the lover Zola had originally planned to put in his novel, and through him Zola could now depict a moral conflict between his love for the rich, seductive Louise and his sense of honour and obligation to Pauline. This matches, incidentally, Pauline's conflict between her self-effacing desire to see Lazare advance in the world by marrying Louise, and her natural jealousy. Finally, Louise takes the place of the woman with whom Lazare was to have deceived Pauline in the original plot.

Into these characters whose broad outlines he had now decided upon, Zola put certain elements of his own personality and memories. Zola himself was conscious at this stage that he was putting an important autobiographical element into the novel, and admitted after it was published, in a letter to Edmond de Goncourt: "Je voulais mettre dans l'oeuvre beaucoup de moi et des miens".[8] Paul Alexis speaks of the "souvenirs autobiographiques" which Zola intended to put into the novel[9] and many other critics have noticed these autobiographical elements.[10]

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[8]Letter dated Dec.15, 1883, Correspondance II, p.605

[9]Paul Alexis, op. cit., p.126.

[10]See, for example, Viztelly, op. cit., p.218

It is not necessary to examine in detail how Zola incorporated many of his preoccupations into La Joie de Vivre, but certain of these autobiographical elements will have to be mentioned in subsequent pages because of the light they throw on the composition of the novel.[11] It is sufficient to point out at this stage how Zola arrived at the plot of his novel and that it contains a considerable amount of autobiographical material.

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[11]For a detailed examination of these elements see Niess, "Autobiographical Elements in Zola's La Joie de Vivre", PMLA, LVI (1946), 1133-1149 and Maurice Le Blond, Notes to La Joie de Vivre, p.361.

III

THE ROUGON-MACQUART CYCLE AND LA JOIE DE VIVRE

It was in about 1868 that Zola first began to think about writing the series of novels which was to become the Rougon-Macquart cycle. At first he envisaged ten novels, which were to be l'Histoire naturelle et sociale d'une famille sous le Second Empire. Although Balzac had already written a series of novels in which various characters reappear, Zola's roman-fleuve was to be somewhat different. Its novelty lay in the fact that instead of merely reintroducing characters, it was going to show the development of several generations of a family, tracing as it did so the fortunes of the Second Empire. Such was the project he submitted to his publisher in 1869, a project which underwent certain changes before becoming the Rougon-Macquart series as we know it today.

The two branches of the family which is the subject of the novels were to be descended from Adélaïde Fouque. The Rougons were the legitimate branch of the family, the more successful parvenus of the Second Empire, fathered by Pierre Rougon. The Macquarts were the illegitimate branch, the fruit of Adélaïde's union with the drunken smuggler Antoine Macquart. This branch is less successful in life

and produces the failures, the plebeian heroes and heroines of such novels as Germinal and L'Assommoir.

To further complicate the picture, the Macquart branch of the family was split during the first generation between the son and daughter of Antoine Macquart, the daughter producing a third branch of the family, the Mourets. The Rougon-Macquart series is therefore the story of three branches of one family rather than two branches as the title of the series suggests. Each branch bears within it, through the inevitable process of heredity, some of the characteristics of its progenitors.

Zola found, however, that he had overestimated somewhat his capabilities, for to accomplish what he intended to do within ten novels proved to be impossible. The first major change in his original plan was therefore an increase in the number of novels he intended to write. He extended his plan to encompass twenty novels, which, during the next twenty-two years he methodically produced, accomplishing in the process what must be one of the most astonishing feats in the history of the literature of any nation.

Zola had only produced the first novel of the series when the second major change was forced upon him. He had intended to write an account of contemporary events, chronicling the fortunes of the régime which ruled France at that time. However, in 1870, the Franco-Prussian war

broke out, followed by the disastrous collapse of France, the uprising of the Paris Commune and its suppression by the forces of the Third Republic. Zola now found himself writing what amounted to history, the chronicle of a past age. This is the chronicle which became the Rougon-Macquart series, the history of the Second Empire from Louis Napoleon's coup d'état to the time of its fall, traced through the several branches and generations of one family.

La Joie de Vivre is just one part of this history, and a comparatively minor one, it must be admitted. It is the twelfth novel in the series, and was published in February, 1884, although it had already appeared in serialised form in the Gil Blas towards the end of 1883. It did not cause the scandal and outcry which the publication of L'Assommoir had in 1877 or Nana in 1880, nor is it one of the most widely read of Zola's works. But although it is not a masterpiece, it is in many ways a work of art which is underestimated.

The Plot

The novel is set in the gloomy atmosphere of a small Norman coastal village called Bonneville. It begins with old Chanteau, the mayor of the village, waiting anxiously for the arrival of his wife, who is bringing back from Paris their niece, Pauline Quenu. The latter, a little girl of ten, is now to live with them since she has recently lost her parents. Their arrival has been delayed

by a storm, and we learn that these storms are quite frequent and greatly feared by the villagers, since each time one occurs, a little more of their village is eroded by the sea. Several houses have already been engulfed, and it seems that in the end the whole village will disappear.

Eventually Mme. Chanteau arrives with the little girl, who at once impresses those present with her charm and serenity. She soon brings joy to the family and plays with the Chanteau's son Lazare, who is nine years older than she is, as though he were a brother. She also nurses Chanteau during his attacks of gout, and is soon the only one who is able to go near him during these attacks, which grow in intensity as the novel proceeds. As for Mme. Chanteau, she also is charmed by Pauline, and seems determined that the money the girl has inherited from her well-to-do parents will be kept locked up in a drawer until such time as Pauline is old enough to decide herself what to do with it.

Lazare later leaves home to study medicine in Paris, and on his first return home is full of enthusiasm for the medical profession. On his second return home, however, he has changed. He has only scorn for doctors and is now interested in chemistry. On his third return he desperately wants money to set going a scheme of his to build a factory which will extract chemicals from seaweed. After some hesitation, and on the suggestion of Mme.

Chanteau, Pauline lets him have some of her money, and the factory is begun. His fraternal feelings for Pauline now begin to change and Mme Chanteau, noticing the same feelings in Pauline, and not uninfluenced by the fact that the girl is fairly wealthy, asks Pauline how she feels about Lazare. She admits that she is in love with him, and when Mme. Chanteau asks Lazare also, his answer is the same. Mme. Chanteau suggests they marry, and it is agreed between them that they will do so in two years time.

Meanwhile the factory is not being very successful, and Lazare finally abandons the project. He becomes more and more pessimistic, talks frequently of Schopenhauer, and exhibits an exaggerated fear of death. Pauline manages to interest him in a plan to build a barrier against the sea which is eroding Bonneville, but after a flurry of activity and enthusiasm on Lazare's part and the use of more of Pauline's money, this scheme also fails. It is at this point that Lazare begins to feel an attraction towards Louise, a girl slightly older than Pauline who spends her holidays with the Chanteaus. His attraction is momentarily forgotten when Pauline falls ill, and he cares lovingly for her. But when she has recovered, he spends more and more time with Louise again. Mme. Chanteau, seeing that Pauline's fortune has declined, while Louise is the daughter of a rich banker, more or less pushes Lazare into Louise's arms. One day Pauline discovers

Lazare kissing Louise, there is a scene, and Pauline threatens to leave unless Louise does. Of course, Louise is the one who leaves.

All this time, Mme. Chanteau's feelings towards Pauline have slowly been turning to hatred. When she falls ill, Pauline cares for her despite the fact that in her delirium Mme. Chanteau accuses her of administering poison. When his mother dies, Lazare is plunged into a state of even greater gloom and pessimism. He thinks of and abandons various new schemes. Pauline realises that he cannot forget Louise, so after a bitter inner struggle, she invites Louise back to the house and releases Lazare from his obligations to her so that he can marry Louise. After a certain amount of hesitation, Lazare accepts. He and his new wife go to live in Paris and things continue quietly at Bonneville.

One day Pauline hears that Louise is expecting a child, and shortly afterwards Lazare arrives on his own. Pauline learns that all is not well between Lazare and Louise, but Lazare's gaiety returns for a while. Then Louise suddenly arrives. Her pregnancy has been a difficult one, and her pain grows day by day, until labour pains begin a month prematurely.

Louise barely survives the birth and the child only lives because Pauline massages and coaxes him back from the brink of death. Pauline devotes herself to the sickly

child as well as to old Chanteau, who is now completely gout-ridden. At the same time she dispenses charity to the villagers and their children since they are now all homeless, the sea having completely destroyed the village.

The novel ends with the whole family sitting outside the house, with the exception of Louise, who is still weak and spends her time in bed. They are all wondering what has happened to their servant, Véronique, who has suddenly disappeared. Then they discover that she has hanged herself from a pear-tree in the garden. Thus the novel ends with a death, just as it began with the death of Pauline's parents.

IV

DECAY, DEATH AND PESSIMISM IN LA JOIE DE VIVRE

A. A Reflection of the Age

There is in La Joie de Vivre a certain air of decay and an obvious obsession with death. While much of this obsession can be ascribed to events we have already noted in Zola's life, one can also see in it the influence of certain literary and philosophical trends of the time. It was at about this time that writers such as Barbey d'Aurevilly, Verlaine and Huysmans were introducing the decadent element into French literature, and a taste for decay, death and sadism was making itself felt.

The decadent movement was a complex one and had many facets. Some of these influenced not only La Joie de Vivre, but Zola's work as a whole. It would perhaps be as well to examine at this point how the movement developed, and some of its more important elements.[1]

Strangely enough, the decadents owe much to Rousseau and the idea of the noble savage. The attraction of this legend for Rousseau (and indeed for many others

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[1]Information on the decadent movement is taken mainly from Carter, The Idea of Decadence in French Literature, Toronto; Toronto University Press, 1958 and Praz, The Romantic Agony, trans. Angus Davison, London: Oxford University Press, 1933

before him, for Rousseau was not the first to write in this vein) was due to the idea that civilisation was unnatural, corrupt and artificial. He therefore turned away from contemporary civilisation and praised the virtues of a more primitive, "natural" life. The idea of the evils of civilisation and the virtue of primitive life passed from Rousseau to the Romantics. When a revolt against the Romantics came, it had, therefore, to be a revolt against the virtues of a return to Nature. The decadent movement was such a revolt, but although the decadents refused to live by Rousseau's gospel, they never denied its truth. They accepted Nature as the norm and life according to Nature as synonymous with virtue. What they did was to consciously turn away from Nature and embrace anything that was unusual, depraved or artificial.

The first writer of importance in the nineteenth century who showed elements of a decadent sensibility was Théophile Gautier. This romantic and theorist of Art for Art's sake had another side to his character. His preface to Baudelaire's Les Fleurs du Mal (1868) expresses enjoyment of the refinement of Baudelaire's poetry and shows love of the artificial. D'Albert, the hero of Gautier's Mademoiselle Maupin (1834) is constantly proclaiming his preference of Art over Nature and Fortunio, of the book of that name, leads a highly refined, artificial life.

Baudelaire contributed even more to the decadent

movement than Gautier. His love of artificiality is seen especially in Samuel Cramer of La Fanfarlo (1847). Cramer insists that his mistress dress as Columbine and that she use all kinds of cosmetics and rouge. His cult of the dandy likewise shows a taste for artificiality since the idea of the dandy is as far removed from that of the noble savage as one could possibly imagine.

The taste for the artificial runs through the work of Verlaine, who sets many of his poems in Paris, since the city represents artificiality and remoteness from Nature. Mallarmé is likewise orientated towards the city, and in his Hérodiade and Igitur he depicts characters who live an extremely artificial life in curtained boudoirs and behind heavy draperies.

It is with Huysmans's A Rebours (1884) that the taste for the artificial reaches its height. The hero of the novel, Des Esseintes, finds in his cult of artificiality a sort of shelter against the unpleasantness of life. His love of the artificial is taken so far that it becomes a desire to violate Nature. He demands that his mistresses dress up and paint their faces. He himself collects orchids because they look artificial and has a set of cosmetics of every sort. When he is seriously ill at the end of the novel, he can only take nourishment by enemas. Far from finding this inconvenient, he thinks it a delightful way to violate Nature.

Des Esseintes represents the culminating point of the taste for artificiality. After A Rebours nothing new could be contributed to the cult, and the decadent writers who followed merely repeated what was written before them.[2]

As for Zola, he occupies a place somewhere on the fringe of the movement, and is by no means a real decadent. Nevertheless, he was influenced by these writers and some of his novels show their taste for the artificial. In La Curée, for example, there are lengthy descriptions of Renée's boudoir and clothes which read like something from Huysmans. These descriptions are dwelt upon in such a way that they become something more than a mere setting of a background. They show a definite taste for the artificially beautiful. In the same novel the descriptions of hot-house plants have the same heady effect as do works by the decadents, and so do the descriptions of Le Paradou in La Faute de l'abbé Mouret. In Nana there are descriptions of cosmetics reminiscent of A Rebours, and, as in Huysmans's novel, they are identified with evil. These are Count Muffat's feelings as he watches Nana put on her makeup:

> Le comte Muffat se sentait plus troublé encore, séduit par la perversion des poudres et des fards; pris du désir de cette jeunesse peinte, la bouche trop rouge dans la face blanche, les yeux agrandis, cerclés de noir, brûlants et comme meurtris d'amour.[3]

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[2] I have confined myself to mentioning only a few major writers. For an exhaustive account of later and minor decadents see Carter, op. cit., pp. 22-25.

[3] Nana, pp. 162-163.

There are hints in Nana that the heroine's sexual feelings have an abnormal direction at times, and here again one can find a link with the decadents. One of the first reactions against Rousseau's ideas is found in the works of the Marquis de Sade, who frequently attacks the Nature cult. Because Nature was identified with what was normal, any revolt against it would include the abnormal, and in the case of de Sade it took the form of sexual perversion. In the next century, therefore, many decadents wrote of such perversions, which were attractive to them because they were unnatural and artificial. Homosexuality was discussed in their writings, and Gautier's Mademoiselle de Maupin is almost an apology for it. Des Esseintes has distinct homosexual tendencies, and Baudelaire seemed fascinated by lesbianism. Later writers such as Rachilde described all sorts of sadistic practices, and so did Catulle Mendès in such novels as La Première Maîtresse (1887) and Mephistophélia (1890). There are many other writers who produced works in the same vein, since sadism and sexual perversion became one of the main themes of the decadents.

Now Zola was no sadist or pervert, yet some scenes in his novels come near to showing a sadistic taste for horror or perversion. He dwells on scenes of violence and mutilation in Germinal, describes in some detail the awful aftermath of a train crash in La Bête humaine and

depicts the horrors of war in La Débâcle. Violence and suffering reoccur quite frequently in his novels, but Jacques Lantier of La Bête humaine provides what is probably the best example of Zola's depiction of sadism and perversion. Jacques is a prey to homicidal mania of an erotic nature. Normal sexual desire becomes in him a desire to kill women, and he cries out at one point: "Tuer une femme! tuer une femme! . . . . comme les autres rêvent d'en posséder une, lui s'était enragé à l'idée d'en tuer une."[4]

Zola seeks to explain Jacques' mania by using the theory of heredity. This shows more than an interest in science as such, it reflects a growing interest at that time in scientific explanations of nervous disorders. Poe had written several stories the heroes of which are scions of decayed families (Usher and Roderick, for example). These men often had nervous diseases, epilepsy, catalepsy[5] and mental disorders. Poe usually uses their ancient lineage to explain these disorders, in other words, he is using a sort of theory of heredity.

Baudelaire, a great admirer of Poe, suggested in his essay on Madame Bovary in L'Art romantique, that the study of nervous disease would be an interesting way of explaining

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[4] La Bête humaine, p. 55

[5] As we have already seen in Chapter I, Olivier Bécaille suffered from a form of catalepsy.

literary characters, but it was not until somewhat later that serious attempts were made to use psychopathology to study character. Philippe Pinel, an early writer on psychiatry, had studied madness, neurosis and eroticism at the end of the eighteenth century. He is important because he tried to study these matters scientifically, and also because he applied psychiatry to literature. Then there is a lengthy space of time until Dr. Moreau took up the study of madness, treating it as a medical phenomenon rather than a moral or metaphysical one. In La Psychologie morbide (1859) he says that certain hereditary defects such as insanity may produce a variety of morbid symptoms such as crime, prostitution, sexual perversions, religious fanaticism or mysticism, and even genius. In 1850 Lucas produced his study of heredity and in 1864 Morel wrote De la formation du type dans les variétés dégénérées which discusses the hereditary nature of degeneracy.[6]

Nearly all writers on these phenomena treated their century as degenerate and decadent. The idea grew up as the century progressed that the age was one of decay and degeneracy, and was an idea especially cherished by the decadents. If we turn again to literature of the time, we can find many examples of hereditary degeneracy and the

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[6]For a full list of writers who studied the hereditary nature of degeneracy, see Carter, op. cit., pp. 65-67.

theory that the age was one of decay.

In 1884, Elémir Bourges' Le Crépuscule des dieux appeared. This novel illustrates particularly well the elements which made up what Mario Praz calls "the delicious death agony" obsessing many writers of the time.[7] It recounts how a noble German family, undermined by lust, murder and a tainted heredity, indulges in all forms of sadism, incest and murder. The novel ends when the head of the family attends a performance of Wagner's Gotterdammerung at Bayreuth and sees in it a symbol of the end of the whole world: "Tous les signes de destruction étaient visibles sur l'ancien monde, comme des anges de colère au-dessus d'une Gomorrhe condamnée".[8]

Volume one of Barbey d'Aurevilly's La Décadence latine appeared in the same year and reflects a similar mood of cosmic catastrophe. The decay of German families seems to have been a common theme, and appeared in Toulet's Monsieur du Paur. Princess Leonora d'Este of Péladan's Le Vice suprême (1884) is the degenerate descendant of the Dukes of Ferara, and her husband, Prince Sigismondo Malatesta is a debauched masochist who represents a dying civilisation. The same writer produced several other novels, all dealing with degeneracy of some kind.

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[7]Mario Parz, op. cit., p.382.

[8]Quoted by Praz, ibid., p. 328

Now degeneracy is also the very basis of the Rougon-Macquart cycle, which tells the story of tainted heredity. But even before beginning the cycle Zola had shown an interest in nervous disease, decadence, and their manifestations in literature. In his essay La littérature et la gynnastique (1865),[9] he speaks of "notre génèration d'esprits affolés et hystériques". He goes on to define the nineteenth century thus:

> Le corps . . . est singulièrement en déchéance chez nous. Ce n'est plus l'âme qu'on exalte, ce sont les nerfs, la matière cérébrale . . . Nous sommes malades . . . de progrès. Il y a hypertrophie du cerveau, les nerfs se développent au detriment des muscles.[10]

Insistance on nerves and neurosis is one of the main themes of Zola's work. Thérèse Raquin is dominated by her nerves and nearly the whole of the Rougon-Macquart family have neuroses and defects inherited from their progenitors. Nana's main characteristic is vice, and she personifies the Second Empire.[11] Sexual aberrations are Jacques Lantier's defect, while Etienne Lantier (Germinal) has to forego alcohol because it unleashes his blood-lust. In Claude Lantier (L'Oeuvre) the hereditary lesion becomes genius. Silvère Mouret (La Fortune des Rougon) owes his

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[9] In Mes Haines, pp. 47-53.

[10] ibid., p. 47.

[11] It should be noted that the whole of the Rougon-Macquart cycle deals with one form of decay other than that of the family: the decline of the Second Empire.

republican ardor to the same nervous disorder which leads Nana to vice, and Marthe Mouret (La Conquête de Plassans), Serge Mouret (La Faute de l'abbé Mouret) and Angélique (Le Rêve)to mysticism.

There are many other characters in les Rougon-Macquart who can trace their degeneracy to an hereditary lesion. The important thing is that, although Zola's degenerates do not have the self-conscious taste for corruption which distinguishes truly decadent characters, Zola's "scientific" interest in degeneracy often comes close to morbid fascination. This is demonstrated especially by the fact that many of his characters who are not of Rougon-Macquart stock are shown as degenerate. Likewise, in Les Trois Villes and Les Quatre Evangiles, where Zola is not studying degeneracy, the themes of hysteria, nymphomania, madness and degeneracy reoccur.

The characters of La Joie de Vivre do not follow this pattern. Pauline is a happy, healthy woman, and Lazare's morbid fancies and neuroses do not seem due to heredity. Nevertheless, there is an air of decay and death in the novel. It is no exaggeration to say that death is one of the principal protagonists. Maupassant noted this when he wrote: "Et sur le livre entier plane, oiseau noir aux ailes étendues: la mort."[12]

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[12]Review of La Joie de Vivre in le Gaulois, April 27, 1884, quoted by Le Blond, La Joie de Vivre, p. 381.

The novel begins shortly after the death of Pauline's parents, one of its most striking scenes depicts the death of Mme. Chanteau and it ends with the suicide of the servant, Véronique. Most of all, the presence of death is felt through Lazare Chanteau's fear of it. Contemporary critics were not slow to point out this aspect of the novel, and typical of their reaction is the following review by Sarcey in his Le XIXe siècle:

> Zola s'est plu à rassembler dans un petit coin de Normandie tout ce que l'étroitesse d'esprit, tout ce que les diverses maladies qui affligent notre pauvre humanité, tout ce que l'angoisse de la mort, tout ce que les déceptions, les désillusions et la pauvreté hargneuse qui en est la suite, traînent après elles d'ennuis, de souffrances et de larmes.[13]

As for the sense of decay, this is provided by the setting of the book. Slowly the hovels of the villagers, who have long since abandoned all hope, are engulfed by the sea. One is reminded of Poe's City Under the Sea and legends of "willes englouties". Even Lazare's factory and his barrier are left to decay on the beach. The destruction of the village is in fact a minature version of the cosmic destruction and decaying world which are so often themes for the decadents.

These many parallels between Zola and the decadents do not mean that he can be classed as a decadent. On the other hand, he must obviously have been influenced by

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[13] ibid., p. 379.

contemporary movements and trends. It is as well to remember that his disciple Huysmans turned to decadent writing and much of what he always admired in Zola consists of those apects of his writing most influenced by the decadents. Zola himself admitted in Mes Haines:

> Mon goût, si l'on veut, est dépravé. J'aime les ragoûts littéraires fortement épicés, les oeuvres de décadence où une sorte de sensibilité maladive remplace la santé plantureuse des époques classiques.[14]

B. The Influence of Schopenhauer

If critics were quick to see the pessimistic side of La Joie de Vivre they were just as quick to attribute it to the influence of Schopenhauer. In the letter already quoted,[15] Francisque Sarcey wrote: "Il [Zola] a, en quelque sorte, versé sur cet humble et effroyable ménage toute la bile amère et noire de Schopenhauer."

Zola himself had also mentioned to Edmond de Goncourt[16] that he was thinking of incorporating into the novel an evolution in his philosophical ideas which had been caused by his mother's death. It may well be that when he said this (the entry in the Journal is dated February 20, 1883) he was toying with Schopenhauer's ideas. We know that Céard wrote to Zola on January 13, 1880 saying that he

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[14] Mes Haines p.66

[15] On p.39.

[16] See p. 14.

would lend Zola a copy of Schopenhauer's Pensées, Maximes et Fragments.[17] Whether in fact Zola ever read this work is not certain, but even if he did, by the time he came to write La Joie de Vivre, he had planned to make Lazare something other than a mouthpiece for Schopenhauer's philosophy.

According to Maurice Le Blond,[18] Zola read Schopenhauer shortly before writing the novel, but this was merely part of the usual painstaking process of documentation which he undertook before beginning any novel. He had to know what Schopenhauer had to say in order to make sure that he could represent the philosopher's ideas in the way he chose. The fact is that he did not choose to make Lazare represent accurately these ideas.

Although Lazare proclaims himself on several occasions an admirer of Schopenhauer, as Zola pointed out to one of his critics, Lazare is not a true disciple of the German philosopher:

> Merci, mon bon ami, de votre excellent article du Fanfulla, que j'avais lu avant de recevoir le numéro envoyé par vous. Mon orgueil, si j'en avais, y trouverait trop de fleurs, et pourtant j'aurais discuté volontiers vos restrictions sur Lazare, si je vous avais tenu là. Jamais de la vie je n'ai voulu en faire un métaphyicien, un parfait disciple de Schopenhauer, car cette espèce n'existe pas

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[17]Henry Céard, Lettres inédites à Emile Zola, Publiées et annotées par C.A.Burns, Paris: Librairie Nizet, 1958, p.132

[18]Notes to La Joie de Vivre, p.262

> en France. Je dis au contraire que Lazare a "mal digéré" la doctrine, qu'il est un produit des idées pessimistes telles qu'elles circulent chez nous. J'ai pris le type le plus commun, pourquoi voulez-vous que je me sois lancé dans l'exception en construisant de toutes pièces le philosophe allemand selon votre coeur?[19]

Here we have Zola's complete answer to the criticism that he was creating in Lazare a disciple of Schopenhauer. Like all great philosophers, Schopenhauer had certain of his ideas seized upon by the popular mind and emphasised to the point that many of the other things he said were forgotten. When dealing with the influence of Schopenhauer at this time, what we are in fact really dealing with is the popular conception of his ideas.

René Ternois points out that it was not for a while after his death in 1860, that Schopenhauer became known in Germany, replacing the then popular ideas of Hegel.[20] His philosphy subsequently penetrated France, for Schopenhauer was an admirer of the French, had been partly educated in France and spoke the language fluently. There he was introduced to the public by various commentators who tended to give a one-sided picture of his philosophy by stressing its purely pessimistic and gloomy side. In the Revue des deux mondes of 1870, for example, P. Challemel-Lacour attempts to sum up

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[19]Letter to Edmond Rod, dated March 16, 1884. Correspondance II, p. 611.

[20]Ternois, Zola et son temps, Paris: Publications de l'Université de Dijon, 1961.

Schopenhauer's philosophy, which he says has been talked about in France for some time, but not really understood. He points out that the basis of this philosophy seems to be the absurdity of life, and that:

> La sagesse consiste à comprendre l'absurdité de la vie l'inanité de toutes les espérances, l'inexorable fatalité du malheur . . . et que le repos réside dans l'absolu détachement . . . l'anéantissement de la volonté.[21]

Another influential writer in the spreading of Schopenhauer's ideas was Caro, whose Le pessimisme au XIXe siècle, Leopardi, Schopenhauer, Hartman, which appeared in 1878, was based according to Ternois, not so much on Schopenhauer as on English and German commentaries about him.[22] Caro says that Schopenhauer's philosophy can be summed up as "le mal, c'est l'existence". He goes on to say that Schopenhauer sees man as the plaything of superior interests. Women are intruments of evil, he adds, and man can only reduce suffering by annihilating his will. The only service which science can provide is the means to produce the eventual destruction of everything.

Obvious similarities can be seen between the views of these two commentators, whom we may take as representative disseminators of Schopenhauer's ideas at the time, and the ideas which Lazare expresses. He speaks, for instance, of

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[21] Revue des deux mondes, ser. 8, vol. 86 (1870), p.331

[22] Ternois, op. cit., p. 17.

the uselessness of science, except as a means to end the world, and agrees with the Indian religions that the only response to life's misery is complete "anéantissement".[23] He talks of the misery of life in these terms:

> Toujours le cri du mal monterait, le hurlement des êtres emplirait le ciel jusqu'au chant final de la délivrance, un chant dont la douceur céleste exprimerait la joie de l'anéantissement universel.[24]

Furthermore, he sees woman as being the source of most of the evil in this world, and describes love as "une duperie".[25]

Many of these popular ideas and the ones expressed by Lazare are indeed close to those of Schopenhauer.[26] By Schopenhauer's own definition, Lazare is in fact a philosopher, since Schopenhauer claims that a man becomes a philosopher by reason of a certain perplexity from which he seeks to free himself. The perplexity which torments the philosopher most, as it does Lazare, is the knowledge that man must inevitably die and that his life is full of suffering and misery:

> Without doubt it is the knowledge of death, and along with this the consideration of the suffering and misery of life which gives the strongest impulse to philosophical reflection and metaphysical explanation of the world. If our life were endless and painless,

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[23] La Joie de Vivre, pp. 89-90

[24] ibid., pp. 92-93.

[25] ibid., p. 153.

[26] The summary of Schopenhauer's ideas found in this section is based mainly on Gardiner, Schopenhaur, London: Penguin Books, 1953

> it would perhaps occur to no one to ask why the world exits and is just the kind of world it is.[27]

One can therefore call Lazare a disciple of Schopenhauer in that he is profoundly aware of these problems and in agreement with the German philosopher's assessment of life. We can also see certain similarities between Lazare's ideas and those of Schopenhauer when it comes to the discussion of science.

Schopenhauer says that there are two types of science. The first of these he terms morphological, by which he means sciences such as botony and zoology, which seek to classify and arrange particular types of natural phenomena. But these sciences do not seek to explain, and must therefore be distinguished from what may be called aetiological sciences. In the latter, attempts are made to understand, not just to arrange and organise data. Such sciences as mechanics, physics, chemistry and physiology all belong to the aetiological group.

The question now arises, Schopenhauer adds, as to the sense in which these latter sciences can be said to explain features of the world with which they deal. He argues that any explanations they may offer are causal in nature and show "how, according to an invincible rule . . .

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[27] The World as Will and Idea, trans. R.B.Haldane and J.Kemp, London: Kegan Paul, 1891, II, 360.

one change necessarily conditions and brings about a certain other change".[28] They merely show the orderly arrangement in which phenomena occur. This being the case, what the sciences achieve is rather dissatisfying, since the phenomena they describe are still inexplicable to us. But Schopenhauer does not deny altogether the utility of science, since to be told that events take place in determinate sequences and that there are universal rules governing these conditions and circumstances can be very useful. We can as a result attain a variety of practical aims.

For Schopenhauer scientific knowledge has as its function the prediction of the manner in which nature proceeds whenever certain definite circumstances occur. Science is for him a system of techniques for the attainment of practical objectives. It is therefore far from useless, which means that Lazare's denial of the utility of science is not an idea expressed by Schopenhauer, but is rather nearer to the ideas put forward by the philosopher's less well-informed commentators.

Nevertheless, both Lazare and the early commentators are right in seeing Schopenhauer's philosophy as profoundly pessimistic. Schopenhauer does see the world as governed by forces beyond the control of man. He claims that

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[28] *ibid.*, I, 125

the character and working of natural forces cannot ultimately fall within our knowledge or control, and as examples of these forces he gives magnetism and chemical properties. Such forces must not be confused with causes in the proper sense of the word, rather they manifest themselves in various causal sequences. Thus, when a piece of iron attracts another piece of iron it has the effect of bringing the second piece closer. In such a case we may speak of magnetism, but magnetism is not the cause of what happens. The language of cause and effect is only applicable to observed phenomenal data - the second piece of iron drawing near to the first, for example. Magnetism is not therefore a causal explanation of the observed phenomena. Schopenhauer says that such forces as magnetism are the "inner nature" of phenomena, and scientific investigation can obtain no knowledge of them, only of their manifestations.

Scientists are, therefore, confined to exhibiting the order of our experience and accounting for phenomena solely in terms of other phenomena. In every case they leave behind an unresolved residue which it is beyond their power to explain or control. This does not mean that they have failed as scientists since the questions left over are not properly speaking scientific questions at all. Lazare's contention that science is bankrupt is not therefore born out by Schopenhauer, although when

he speaks of the world being governed by forces beyond man's control, his position is near to that of Schopenhauer.

It is also near when we examine what Schopenhauer says about human behaviour, since he was very impressed by the fact that men seem to behave as though they were controlled by some force beyond them. He realised that people do not always act in conformity with their beliefs and intentions, and that the desires they attribute to themselves, often sincerely, do not correspond to their real desires. He notices that we are often surprised at the way we behave in certain circumstances. We imagine that our deeds spring from deliberate choices made in the light of desires we think we find within ourselves. He concludes that the slips and changes of action we so often make are probably not so innocent as they may seem.

Schopenhauer is here anticipating much of what Freud was to say later, but since the terminology of psycho-analysis was not available to him, he sought to explain men's actions in the following two ways. Firstly he explains that terms such as "resolve" and "decision" refer to some sort of future course of conduct we plan for ourselves, yet it is obvious that we have no control over our future behaviour. Secondly he explains that what we call coming to a decision is merely a prediction made in advance of an event. It consists of putting before oneself the facts relevant to a situation, reviewing them

and the courses of action open in the light of these facts, and making some sort of forecast about what one will do when the moment for action comes. The intellect furnishes the will with considerable data on the choice, but the intellect is ultimately a stranger to the decisions of the will. It remains so completely excluded from the actual resolutions of the will that it must act almost as a spy and catch the will in the act of expressing itself in order to get at its real intentions. This is, of course, very close to Freud's theory of the unconscious.

But it is perhaps Schopenhauer's ideas on sexual drives (again very close to Freud's in many respects) which made so many readers think he was saying that men were the playthings of powers beyond their control. His ideas on this subject may also explain to some extent his undoubted misogyny. He writes that sexual impulse and its satisfaction is "the focus of the will and its concentration and its highest expression."[29] Next to the love of life, it is the strongest drive and goal of an immense amount of human effort. He believes it impossible, however, to reach final contentment or satisfaction of sexual urges because pleasure is not their purpose, but the preservation of the species. The maintenance of the species is found concealed in all sexual passion and presents the possession

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[29] ibid., III, 380

of the loved object as the supreme good, thus deceiving man as to its true nature. Man is therefore impelled by fundamental drives of self-perservation and reproduction. It is to be noticed, however, that despite this view of human nature, Schopenhauer does not deny that pleasure as well as suffering are to be encountered in life. Unfortunately, suffering and disappointment outweigh the pleasure, but even so Lazare is not justified in seeing in Schopenhauers philosophy nothing but "une poésie noire".[30]

It is equally untrue to say that Schopenhauer thought man had no control at all over his destiny. Although he believed in determinism, he thought it possible to reconcile it with the idea of human liberty. The basis of his idea is the concept of character. We all behave in accordance with familiar patterns and our responses to typical situations do not change. In the light of this we may attribute to ourselves, or to others, certain characteristics. In other words, character is the general fashion in which we conduct ourselves and the term can be used to describe not only how we did act but how we may act in a given future situation. Thus character imposes restrictions on man's freedom and possibility of choice, and to this extent he has no choice in his actions.

Now Schopenhauer believes that a man's character never

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[30] La Joie de Vivre, p. 89.

changes. It may appear to undergo alterations, but this is an illusion. One may behave in a way unlike that in which one previously intended to, but this is due to some change in circumstances, never in character. Thus it is impossible to change what one is. What one can do, however, is discover through the observation of one's own behaviour and reactions the nature and limits of one's personality, and one may come to accept them. One is therefore free in that one can accept and acquiesce to what one is. A limited degree of freedom does exist.

According to Caro's account of Schopenhauer's ideas, the ultimate goal science could achieve is the annihilation of the world. Lazare also remarks that "la science aurait seulement une utilité certaine si elle donnait jamais le moyen de faire sauter l'univers d'un coup."[31] What in fact Schopenhauer says is that escape from the misery of life is only possible for a just man, a man of understanding benevolence and is to be found in what he calls "the denial of the will to live".[32] This occurs through a transition from moral virtue to asceticism. Such a man will try to assuage the suffering of others at first, then he will reach the stage where he has a knowledge of the true nature of the world and will become "the quieter of all and every

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[31] ibid., p. 90

[32] Schopenhauer, op. cit., I 489-496

willing" and then the affirmation of life and its pleasures becomes objectionable. He will turn from life and its pleasures and reach a state described as involving "voluntary renunciation, resignation and true composure and willlessness."[33] He thus reaches a sort of Nirvana which is far more complicated a state of being than what Lazare and Challemel-Lacour in his article call "anéantissement", and certainly does not involve the destruction of the whole world.

As for suicide, Schopenhauer catagorically rejects it as the direct opposite of any true solution. What drives a man to suicide is the wish to avoid personal sorrows and is therefore an expression of the affirmation of the will. What Schopenhauer seeks is complete denial of the will, whereas suicide is as much an affirmation of it as any activity directed towards self-perservation.

We can see from this, as from the other points dealt with in this section, that the ideas picked out from Schopenhauer's work by his contemporary commentators were the more sensational ones, which they then proceeded to simplify and distort. Lazare can only be said to be a disciple of Schopenhauer in that, as Zola points out, he has taken hold of some of these ideas and followed current fashions by openly expressing them. It so happens that

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[33] ibid., I 489-490

any pessimistic set of theories fits his temperament, and Schopenhauer's theories were conveniently in the air. To call him a disciple of Schopenhauer is to simplify a character who is in many ways, as we shall see subsequently, quite complex.

V

THE CHARACTERS

A. Zola's Method of Characterisation

Zola utterly rejected the idea that it was possible to study the psychology of a character, claiming that such an idea was "unscientific". In the place of psychology, he wanted to use what he considered the more modern notion of the "physiological" study of character. What exactly Zola meant by these terms and whether in fact he did with his characters what he claimed to be doing is best seen if we look first at the development of his ideas from the time he was about eighteen to the period of his maturity.

Zola's early letters from Paris to his friends Cézanne and Baille show, as we have seen, a certain amount of Romantic "ennui". He also shows in these letters that his taste in literature is definitely inclined towards Musset and Hugo. When he was about twenty he wrote a rather pedestrian poem of some thousand lines called Rodolpho. Its subject is the pure love of Rodolpho for Rosita. The hero is betrayed by Rosita, so he kills her, his rival and himself. Musset's imprint is obvious! Two other poems in a similar vein called Paolo and L'Aérienne followed this first attempt. Extracts from all three

poems were published at the end of Alexis's biography of Zola.

It seems that at about the same time he was contemplating writing an epic poem in three sections.[1] The first was to tell of the birth of the world, the second to deal with the complete history of humanity, and the third to describe the Man of the Future. The poem was to be called Genesis. He apparently wrote eight lines before abandoning the project.

Zola's early published works also show the obvious influence of Musset. La Confession de Claude (published in 1865, but the first part of which was composed in 1862) and the Contes à Ninon are the works in question. However, it must be admitted that these two works show that Zola was undergoing a fundamental change. La Confession de Claude shows this change expecially since it is based on Zola's own experience and shows in places life observed at first hand instead of through a cloud of Romantic dreams. He had begun to work for Hachette in 1862 and was learning the tricks of the book trade and just what type of literature was a commercial proposition. It soon became clear to him that there was little market for poetry, and even prose if written in the Romantic vein, did not sell

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[1] According to Josephson, Zola and his Time, New York: Garden City Publishing Co., 1928, pp. 71-72.

well. At the same time, he had turned to journalism, to producing articles on contemporary writers, and was in this way brought into contact with whole new fields of literature.

But what of his claim to be "scientific" in his later works? It was in Balzac that Zola first discovered a writer whom he thought a true scientist. He saw Balzac as an anatomist, as someone who dissects men, experimenting and analysing like a scientist. It is doubtful that Zola was suddenly "converted" to Balzac, but the latter was certainly one of the main reasons for the change we find in Zola's ideas, a change which reflects the growing enthusiasm of his time for science and scientific writers.

Zola's first two novels of importance, Thérèse Raquin (1867) and Madeleine Férat (1868) are based on ideas which passed as scientific at the time. The first is based on the theory of temperaments: the idea that a person of strong temperament dominates and controls the actions of someone of weaker temperament. The second has as its hypothesis the theory of impregnation: the notion that once a woman has had a lover, she remains tied to him by unbreakable bonds, and if she meets him again, will be unable to resist him. Both theories, even though they may seem unscientific in many ways to us, were at

least materialistic.[2] The characters are governed by physiological laws rather than by vague Romantic dreams, although it is true that these laws play in many ways the rôle of Fate or Destiny so dear to the Romantics.

The belief that laws could be found to explain human behaviour is a reflection of the positivism of Zola's times. It also shows that he had begun to read the works of Taine, a scientific positivist who taught that everything could be reduced to a cause. Taine applied this teaching to human behaviour among other things, saying that, like all physical phenomena, it must be governed by laws. The whole of the Rougon-Macquart cycle represents, in effect, an attempt by Zola to apply Taine's ideas to literature, to dissect and examine clinically his own times, and to discover in the process just why they were as they were.

Zola also read the Traité de l'hérédité naturelle by Prosper Lucas (probably because Taine recommends the work in a footnote to his Introduction à l'histoire de la littérature anglaise). In this work he discovered certain "laws" of heredity which Lucas put forward and which must have seemed acceptable to Zola as possible causes of human behaviour, although no scientist today would accept

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[2] Zola may well have been influenced in accepting the second theory by fear of what might happen if the former lover of his mistress (who later became his wife) returned.

them as scientifically sound. The details of how Lucas sought to explain the way hereditary characteristics are passed on are unimportant. The important thing is that by using these "laws" Zola was able to portray a host of descendents of Adélaïde, Pierre and Antoine all bearing certain of the characteristics and defects of their progenitors. Because these three are such unusual characters, he was generally prevented from creating "normal" people to put in his novels. They tend to be exceptional creations with unusual characteristics.

The hereditary nature of their characteristics is not always obvious, since Zola also accepted Taine's theory that environment governs human behaviour as well. In Gervaise of L'Assommoir, for instance, Zola blends the theories of heredity and environment. Hence he is able to depict her as having inherited a fatal weakness for drink from her father, but it is a flaw which is only brought out by the conditions in which she is forced to live and by the circumstances in which she eventually finds herself.

Each of Zola's novels depicts a particular world and its influence upon the characters. The Rougons tend to be parvenus because they have inherited from Pierre their energy and desire to advance in the world. The milieu they live in is somewhat more comfortable than that in which the other two branches of the family live, so the

Rougons tend at the same time to suffer less because of their environment. The Macquart branch of the family suffers because of its descent from a drunken father and a mother who becomes insane. Since theirs is the world of the working classes, their squalid environment plays upon their flaws and they suffer in life. The Mourets, on the other hand, suffer less because of their descent because they had the good fortune to be born on a rather higher social plane than the Macquarts. As a result, they do not sink to the depths which the latter do. Pauline's mother, incidentally, is a Mouret.

Zola's method when beginning his plans for a novel would therefore be to select a character whose inherited temperament and social milieu were fixed in their broad outlines in his own mind, then he would build his story round this material. It would eventually contain in addition to this basic material some scenes representative of the setting chosen and certain subsidiary characters whose main purpose was to set off the peculiarities of the leading protagonists. (This is more or less what was said in Chapter II when it was pointed out how much Zola made plot depend on character.)

The net result of all these attempts to be "scientific" and "materialistic" is a collection of what Jules Lemaître called epic characters.[3] He gave them

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[3]In an article in La Revue bleue, reprinted in Les Contemporains, Ière Série, pp. 249-284.

this name because he considered that they have the same primitive simplicity as the heroes of epic literature. They are, he says, simplified to the extent that they become archetypal. Nana, for instance, is the courtesan, with none of the psychological refinements which distinguish a Manon Lescaut from , say, a Mme. Marneffe. The old epic writers deified their characters, whereas Zola animalises his, but the tendency to simplify remains the same.

Zola agreed with Lemaître's description of his work as "une épopée pessimiste de l'animalité humaine" except for the use of the word "animalité". He says that Lemaître's use of this word draws a false distinction between mind and body and wrongly isolate's man's spiritual nature from his material environment. For him, Zola says, the soul is everywhere: in nature, in animals, in stones, in everything.

This sort of pantheism can indeed be seen in Zola's work. In La Faute de l'abbé Mouret and La Terre, nature becomes a living thing with a soul of its own, in Le Rêve the cathedral becomes almost human, and in Germinal the mine has its own personality. Sandoz in L'Oeuvre best sums up this conception of the soul when he says that it is nonsense to talk of the individual's soul when there exists the great Soul which is everywhere. One cannot talk of the brain in isolation, he says, since

thought is a product of the whole body. The brain cannot think by itself and remain unaffected by, say, a sick stomach. Here in a nutshell is Zola's argument against the psychological novel which seeks to study the functioning of the mind or brain in isolation from environment, the body, heredity and other governing factors. It remains to be seen to what extent Zola applied his theories in La Joie de Vivre.

B. The Principal Characters

Pauline

Zola says in his rough plan for La Joie de Vivre that the real subject of his novel is to be the study of Pauline: "Tout le roman va être l'action de cette enfant dans la famille Chanteau."[4] The characteristics of his heroine were to be charity and "bonté", and we have already seen how these characteristics were arrived at after several alterations in Zola's original plans.[5] It has also been shown how Zola, having settled the broad outline of what his characters were to be like, would build the story round them in such a way that these characteristics would be clearly displayed by their interaction with other characters and with the environment.

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[4]Notes to La Joie de Vivre, p. 367.

[5]See Chapter II.

Although environment does not play the rôle in La Joie de Vivre that it does in such novels as Germinal and L'Assommoir, it is nevertheless important. It is due to the decaying conditions in which they are forced to exist that the villagers of Bonneville live in poverty and squalor. It is because of their need that Pauline is enabled to demonstrate her charity. On the very night that she arrives in Bonneville, she hears of the plight of some of the villagers whose home has been destroyed by the sea. Her immediate reaction is a feeling of sympathy for them, as indeed it is to all those in need. Dr. Cazenove sums her up on first meeting her by saying: "Voilà une gamine qui est née pour les autres".[6]

Pauline herself feels an easy sympathy towards the doctor. This may well have its origin in her wish that she had been born a man so that she could have been a doctor. The only reason she wishes this is because it would have put her in a better position to help others.

It is not long before Pauline's nature becomes obvious to the villagers. Eventually, as their condition deteriorates, they turn more and more to her for help. She cares for their need with money from her inheritance until they come to abuse her good nature, sending their children to her so that they may obtain money for drink,

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[6] La Joie de Vivre, p. 40

or to ask blatantly for wine, claiming that it is for medicinal purposes. When they gloat over the destruction of Lazare's barrier, she can only pity them, instead of showing anger as Lazare does. This is because she is especially aware of the suffering of others and can only see suffering when she looks at the villagers. Her dislike of suffering is carried to the point where she puts out bowls of soup at night for stray cats: "C'était, chez elle, un continuel souci des souffrants, un besoin et une joie de les soulager."[7]

Among the other characters, it is Lazare who, because of his very nature, brings out the true character of Pauline. She at once likes him and plays with him until one day she realises that it is more than sisterly affection which she feels for him. She admits to Mme. Chanteau that she loves Lazare, and is pleased when the arrangement for her marriage to him is agreed upon. But because of Lazare's deep pessimism, her feelings for him are often mixed with pity and motherly concern as she tries to refute his gloomy predictions and brighten his moods of despair. She feels at such times a need to comfort him, although not always fully understanding why his attitude to life is so despairing and different from her own:

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[7] ibid., p. 105.

> Lorsque Pauline le regardait, ne comprenant pas toujours les sauts de son caractère, aux heures où il cachait sa plaie avec une pudeur inquiète, elle éprouvait une compassion, elle avait le besoin d'être très bonne et de le rendre heureux.[8]

She is unable to understand Lazare's pessimism because it is so contrary to her own nature. She sees in life only that which is sane and healthy, having a sort of pantheistic communion with the world, or with what Zola terms the great Soul round her. In nature she finds no dark despair, but only an incentive to be happy and to give herself to those who for some reason seem to have suffered in life. This pantheistic communion with nature is shown most clearly in her love of animals, from whom she learns, like Désirée in La Faute de l'abbé Mouret, to adopt a healthy attitude towards the processes of nature. This contrasts with the attitude of Mme. Chanteau who finds these things so shameful that she attempts to keep them from Pauline by hiding Lazare's medical books. From animals and their ways Pauline finds only reason to strengthen her own love of life:

> C'était, chez Pauline, un amour de la vie qui débordait chaque jour davantage, qui faisait d'elle 'la mère des bêtes' comme disait sa tante. Tout ce qui vivait, tout ce qui souffrait, l'emplissait d'une tendresse active, d'une effusion de soins et de caresses.[9]

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[8] ibid., p. 92.

[9] ibid., p. 60.

It is not long, of course, before Lazare and his mother turn to Pauline for financial assistance. She lends Lazare the money for his plans to extract chemicals from seaweed and to build a barrier against the sea. Lazare's weakness for peculiar, ill-conceived projects enables Zola to bring out in Pauline's dealing with him that same generosity with her money that she shows towards the villagers. Even the fact that she falls in love with Lazare enables Zola to show her generosity of heart. At first she is suspicious and jealous when seeing Lazare and Louise together, feeling instinctively that Louise is a rival. When she finds Lazare kissing Louise, she threatens to leave the house unless Louise does. After this, some time elapses, the time for her wedding approaches, but no mention of it is made. Pauline tries to hide her dismay in outer calm, but underneath she is deeply disturbed, and spends much time weeping in the privacy of her room.

These quite natural feelings of jealousy and dismay are however, less strong in her than her natural goodness, and merely serve to throw it into relief. She decides despite certain qualms to become reconciled with Louise, and eventually reintroduces her into the Chanteau home. She realises after a while that Lazare's desire for Louise has only been increased by his mother's death, and in a movement of supreme abnegation, decides that the best she can do to comfort Lazare and make his future happy is to

release him from his vows so that he can marry Louise. Since her own kindness and attempts to console Lazare do not succeed, she gives him to a rival who seems more likely to succeed where she failed. Her attitude is summed up in her own mind as: "Qu'importait sa souffrance pourvu que les êtres aimés fussent heureux".[10]

This also sums up her relationship with the other two members of the household. Pauline's heart goes out to Lazare's father the moment she sees his suffering, and from that moment she becomes the only person who can nurse him. It is because M. Chanteau suffers a particularly severe attack of gout that she eventually leaves her own sick bed after her serious illness. Chanteau in his pain curses her for being clumsy, and Pauline is naturally saddened. Yet her sadness is not due to the feeling that her efforts are not appreciated, but rather to the realisation of how great must be Chanteau's pain to have driven him to such an uncharitable action.

It is perhaps Pauline's relationship with Mme. Chanteau which best demonstrates her quality, "bonté", especially since this quality is not appreciated. At first Mme. Chanteau is charmed by the little girl she has brought home. From the moment she suggests Lazare borrow money from Pauline things begin to deteriorate. She

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[10] ibid., p. 240

slowly takes advantage more and more of the girl, borrowing money from her, and eventually taking it without even asking. There is no longer any talk of repaying the money, and Mme. Chanteau begins to feel a sort of resentment that Pauline can be so angelic.

When Mme. Chanteau becomes ill it naturally falls to Pauline to look after her. She cares unselfishly for the old woman's needs, nursing her carefully and seeking to comfort her. The great test comes when Mme. Chanteau in her delirium accuses Pauline of trying to poison her and shows in return for the girl's kindness what can only be described as hatred. In the face of this even Pauline's gentle nature is offended, and she continues to care for Mme. Chanteau out of a sense of duty more than anything else: "L'affection ne revenait pas, seul le devoir la tenait dans cette chambre."[11] Yet when she realises what must be the woman's state of mind to make her think these things, the old feeling of kindness and affection returns, mingled this time with a sense of pity.

In the light of what we have seen of Pauline's character, we are entitled to wonder whether Huysmans was not justified in writing to Zola:

> Pauline est bien dévidée, mais peut-être un peu bien angéliquement séraphique d'âme, dans sa grosse chair. L'esprit de sacrifice dont elle est animé peut évidemment se produire, mais

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[11] ibid., p. 178.

have inherited something approaching avarice from her thrifty parents. It is not without an inner struggle that she first agrees to lend money to Lazare. From this point on, however, she overcomes her scruples and allows herself to be despoiled by the family with more and more ease. The fact is that she is far enough removed in her descent from Adélaïde and Antoine not to have inherited, to any important degree, their bad characteristics.

Towards the end of the novel, another facet of Pauline's character becomes apparent. She begins to show regret that she has always been so generous. One cannot therefore, agree with Maupassant when he wrote that: "Elle se sacrifie toujours, avec joie sans regret".[14] She does, in fact show regret at having sacrificed Lazare to Louise when she returns from their wedding. The passage which describes her regret seems to support Lemaître's contention that Zola animalises his creations, for Pauline's regret is due entirely to animal instinct. She contemplates her body, which has never known Lazare's touch, and thinks of Louise, who is now in his arms:

> Elle était mûre pourtant, elle voyait la vie gonfler ses membres, fleurir aux plis secrets de sa chair en toison noire, elle respirait son odeur de femme comme un bouquet épanoui dans l'attente de la fécondation. Et ce n'était pas elle, c'était l'autre, au fond de cette chambre,

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[14] Article in Le Gaulois, April 27, 1884, Quoted by Le Blond in notes to La Joie de Vivre, p. 381

> là-bas, qu'elle évoquait nettement, pâmée entré les bras du mari dont elle-même attendait la venue depuis des années.[15]

Her despair reaches such depths that at one point she contemplates self-mutilation rather than let her body waste, as it were, untouched by the love she is waiting for.

When Lazare returns just before the birth of his son, Pauline realises her true situation once more: "elle l' [Lazare] avait donné à une autre, et elle l'adorait."[16] Lazare also seems to realise the situation, for he presses Pauline with kisses, and she, almost overcome with ecstasy, nearly gives in to his advances. She escapes him, but is still filled with longing: "Oh! dormir dans l'ombre au cou l'un de l'autre, le tenir à elle, ne fût-ce qu'une heure. Oh! vivre, vivre enfin!"[17] Her longing and despair are reawakened even more keenly by the birth of Lazare's son. She coaxes life back into his feeble body, only to find herself thinking that she could have presented Lazare with a far healthier child. Physical regret at having lost Lazare's love fills her again, and she asks herself:

> A quoi bon sa puberté vigoureuse, ses organes et ses muscles engorgés de sève, l'odeur puissante qui montait de ses chairs, dont la force poussait en floraisons brunes? Elle resterait comme un

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[15] La Joie de Vivre, p. 295.

[16] ibid., p. 295.

[17] ibid., p. 295.

champ inculte, qui se dessèche à l'écart.[18]

It is not until the end of the novel that Pauline's thwarted maternal instincts seem to be fulfilled to some extent as she cares for Lazare's son.

Pauline's animality shows through her angelic goodness quite clearly at times, and if it does not triumph it is mainly because Zola was limited by the original plan for the Rougon-Macquart cycle which he submitted to his publisher in 1869. In this plan he had decided that the heroine of what became La Joie de Vivre was to have as her main characteristic "honnêteté". As a result, when it came to writing the novel Zola was unable to allow Pauline to give in to Lazare's advances or his original plan would have been falsified. This much he admits in his plans for La Joie de Vivre: "Je voudrais, dans Pauline, faire plus encore la bonté que l'honnêteté. Ne garder l'honnêteté que pour justifier mon arbre généalogique."[19]

By these very words, however, Zola shows that he looks upon "bonté" as being Pauline's prime characteristic, and despite her regrets, jealousy and animal instincts, this is the characteristic which remains in the reader's mind. One closes the book after reading a description of Pauline looking after Lazare's child, old Chanteau, and practically

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[18] ibid., p. 328

[19] Quoted by Hemmings, "The Genesis of Zola's La Joie de Vivre", French Studies, VI (1952), 114-125

the whole of Bonneville in a charitable, motherly fashion. This is the picture which lingers despite the other, less gentle side of Pauline's character. If we look again at Zola's draught of the novel there is other proof that it was indeed his intention to make the impression of Pauline's charity and goodness the dominant one. The following passage gives ample proof:

> Il faut la [Pauline] montrer, elle, avec la joie de vivre, par-dessus toutes les catastrophes, se relevant chaque fois et relevant les autres (plus ou moins) . . . Il faudra rendre cela sensible à la fin par une scène berçant l'enfant et soignant le vieux.[20]

Whereas Nana's simple animal nature impresses itself upon the reader and her animality becomes acceptable, Pauline's simple goodness is far less easy to accept. Zola had obviously to face in La Joie de Vivre the old artistic problem of presenting goodness convincingly, and like many another writer found that it was far less easy than the depiction of vice.

Pauline is the nearest Zola came to depicting a saint, yet her attitude to life is far from religious. Indeed, there are many reasons for calling La Joie de Vivre an anti-religious novel. Even as a little girl, Pauline sees no reason to turn to religion, and although an intelligent child who is willing to learn, she finds the catechism the most boring of all books. As for her idea of God at

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[20]Le Blond, Notes to La Joie de Vivre, p. 368

this stage, she merely sees Him as a sort of Supreme Being about whom it is not really her business to enquire. Her philanthropy and kindness are, as we have seen, instinctive, and all her generous actions are carried out with no hope of eternal rewards. The idea of an after-life seems hardly to enter her head, for she deems it not worth bothering about since the idea of the unknown holds no terror for her. She achieves a calm agnosticism in her maturity, placing her hope in future generations on this earth. For her, hope lies not in eternal life, but in the future of Lazare's child and its generation. Refuting Lazare's dark predictions about the child's future, she predicts:

> Celui-là sera peut-être d'une génération moins bête, dit-elle tout à coup. Il n'accusera pas la chimie de lui gâter la vie, et il croira qu'on peut vivre même avec la certitude de mourir un jour.[21]

Pauline is, then, a fairly simple character based on one dominant trait, to the almost complete exclusion of other characteristics. She is so good that she is often unconvincing, and is an example of Zola's method of characterisation when it does not work very well. Perhaps it is not too far-fetched to see in Pauline's failure to be convincing one reason why La Joie de Vivre is not the most popular of Zola's novels.

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[21] La Joie de Vivre, p. 356.

Lazare

Although Zola intended to make Pauline Quenu the real subject of La Joie de Vivre, this does not reduce the importance of Lazare's rôle. He is a character in his own right, and it is only part of his function within the framework of the novel to throw into prominence certain of Pauline's virtues and character traits. His is not a character which can be reduced to one single element. He is not a simple pessimist or a simple disciple of Schopenhauer. One cannot say that he is the embodiment of a specific characteristic in the sense that Pauline is the embodiment of goodness. He has a complexity which we do not find in Pauline, and this must be due at least in part to the fact that Zola put much of his own personality and experience into creating his character. However, the various facets of his personality do spring from one dominant trait: his fear of death.

In his earliest plans for the novel, Zola had intended fear of death to be part of Lazare's makeup. In his second plan for the novel he writes:

> Je voudrais avoir le type du neveu ainsi conçu: La pensée de la mort continuelle, gâtant la vie, arrêtant l'effort, désolant tout, atteignant ceux qu'on aime.[22]

As his plans for the book developed, Zola gradually made

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[22]Quoted by Hemmings, "The Genesis of Zola's La Joie de Vivre," French Studies, VI (1952), 118

this fear of death become Lazare's dominant trait, and in one of the later plans he writes:

> Je tiendrais beaucoup à garder, pour avoir un type général, mon type de l'homme moderne, et hanté par la mort, et ravagé par cette obsession secrète qu'il cache comme son pudendum.[23]

The increase in importance of fear of death in Lazare's character is no doubt due to some extent to the events of the years during which Zola was planning his novel.

The first hint in the text of Lazare's fear comes when he is on the beach with Pauline and, looking at the stars, is reminded that they may be eternal, but he must die one day. The second comes when he returns from his studies in Paris, and, depressed at having failed his examinations, tells Pauline that he finds all occupations in life equally futile, since whatever he does now, he will still have to die. Pauline sums up his attitude at this stage by saying: "Il voyait la vie comme les vieux".[24] His preoccupation with death grows and is made worse by the failure of his project to build a chemical factory. When Pauline tries to dispell his gloom, his only reply is: "On meurt à tout âge."[25] The slightest detail is sufficient to remind him that he must die, and it only

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[23] ibid., p. 119

[24] La Joie de Vivre, p. 54.

[25] ibid., p. 91.

takes Pauline to read aloud from a newspaper a forecast of what life will be like in the twentieth century for Lazare to tremble at the thought that he will not be alive then.

It is most of all at night that Lazare's fear of death manifests itself. He often wakes up with the same thought torturing his mind, the thought that one day he will have to die. Like Olivier of La Mort d'Olivier Bécaille, he is unable to go to bed at night without the thought occuring to him that he may never wake up again.[26] When his mother is on her deathbed his fear reaches the point where he cannot bear to go to bed without having a light in his room.

Much of this fear is Zola's own, and there are striking similarities between Zola's experience and Lazare's. Edmond de Goncourt writes that Zola told him one day that when his mother's coffin was taken downstairs at Médan, it was found that the staircase was too narrow. As a result it had to be lowered from a window. From that day on the window became for Zola a reminder of death, just as many tiny details and events become so for Lazare. Goncourt goes on to quote Zola as saying:

> Oui, la mort depuis ce jour, elle est toujours au fond de notre pensée, et bien souvent - nous avons maintenant une veilleuse dans notre chambre à coucher - bien souvent la nuit, regardant ma femme

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[26] See Chapter I, p.10

> qui ne dort pas, je sens qu'elle pense comme moi à cela, et nous restons ainsi les deux . . . par pudeur, oui, par une certaine pudeur . . . oh! c'est terrible cette pensée - et de la terreur vient à ses yeux - Il y a des nuits où je saute tout à coup sur mes deux pieds, au bas de mon lit, et je reste une seconde, dans un état d'épouvante indicible.[27]

There are striking similarities between this and the following passage from La Joie de Vivre where Zola describes Lazare when he has returned to his usual fears after forgetting them for a while during the first few days of marriage:

> Il ne pouvait dormir sans veilleuse, les ténèbres exaspéraient son anxiété malgré la continuelle crainte que sa femme ne découvrît son mal. Même il y avait là un redoublement de malaise qui aggravait les crises, car jadis quand il couchait seul, il lui était permis d'être lâche. Cette créature vivante dont il sentait la tiédeur à son côté l'inquiétait. Dès que la peur le soulevait de l'oreiller, aveuglé de sommeil, son regard se portait vers elle avec la pensée éperdue de la voir les yeux ouverts, fixés touts grands sur les siens . . . Une nuit il la trouva comme il l'avait redouté si longtemps, les yeux grands ouverts . . . Désormais ils furent hantés tous les deux. Aucun aveu ne leur échappait, c'était un secret de honte dont il ne fallait point parler.[28]

The events of Lazare's life often seem to increase his fear of death for they give him cause to brood and feel sorry for himself. His failure to pass his examinations is one such event, and this also has its counterpart in the life of the young Zola whose hopes were twice

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[27] Journal des Goncourts, March 6, 1882.

[28] La Joie de Vivre, pp. 275-276

dashed by failure in the baccalauréat examination. Another is the death of his dog, which affects him deeply with a sense of the brevity of life. Zola was also deeply grieved when his old dog Bertrand died, and this is the counterpart in his life.[29] One can find many other similarities between Zola's disappointments and Lazare's. Both, for example, want to found a newspaper, only to find their plans coming to nothing. Both think then of turning to politics, but with no success. These examples may be multiplied.[30]

One should beware, however, of drawing too many parallels between Zola and Lazare. A complete identification between the two is impossible, for Lazare reflects only certain elements of his creator's personality. Within the limits Zola set himself, he was a very successful man, and despite moments when he doubted his ability to finish the task of writing the Rougon-Macquart series, he did not allow his fears to stop him working. Indeed, work was a consolation to him. Lazare, however, is more faithful to the logic of his obsessions, and this is why he abandons so many projects. He realises that death may intervene before he can finish the task in hand, so everything he is engaged

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[29]Mentioned by Le Blond in Notes to La Joie de Vivre, pp. 373-374.

[30]For further examples see Niess, "Autobiographical Elements in Zola's La Joie de Vivre", PMLA, LVI (1946), 1133-1149.

on is abandoned with the question "à quoi bon?"[31]

One project after another is embarked upon and each is abandoned after varying lengths of time. He gives up his plan to be a doctor. His projects to build a chemical factory, to construct a barrier against the sea, to become a writer, and then a teacher, are all rejected by him in time. At one stage he seems to think of and reject a new plan or a new career every day. Zola, on the other hand was able to stick doggedly to the tremendous task of completing the Rougon-Macquart cycle.

If Lazare's hesitations and turning away from his schemes is a result of his fears, so are most of his other characteristics. His very tastes and likings are governed by his neurosis. He does not just have a passion for music, he likes only that music which reflects the misery and evils of life. He plans to write a symphony which will have as its subject La Douleur and which will depict: "La plainte désespérée de l'Humanité sanglotant sous le ciel."[32]

As for Lazare's taste for the philosophy of Schopenhauer, we have already seen that he is attracted by certain vague, pessimistic notions which are not a fair

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[31]This is also a favourite question of Olivier Bécaille. See Chapter I, p. 11.

[32]La Joie de Vivre, p.45. This also recalls the fact that Zola himself wrote an opera libretto called Lazare which deals with the theme of death and suffering.

reflection of the philosopher's ideas. What he enjoys in Schopenhauer is his apparent despair and rejection of life with all its suffering. He repeats half-understood and vague generalisations which are really only remotely connected with Schopenhauer. Zola describes his attitude thus: "Le pessimisme avait passé par là; un pessimisme mal digéré, dont il ne restait que les boutades de génie, la grande poésie noire de Schopenhauer."[33]

Behind these formulae and generalisations taken from Schopenhauer, Lazare presents the portrait of a certain type of youth of his times, a youth overcome by pessimism and the decadent ideas which we have already seen were in vogue at the time. Zola himself planned Lazare to be typical of this type of youth, and says so in his rough plan for the novel: "Montrer en un mot un garçon très intelligent, en plein dans le mouvement actuel, et niant ce mouvement, se jettant dans le Schopenhauer. Pas de foi - Variété de Werther et de René."[34] Dr. Cazenove, who is a shrewd observer of his fellow men, sums up this side of Lazare's character when he says to him:

> Ah! je reconnais là nos jeunes gens d'aujourd'hui, qui ont mordu aux sciences et qui en sont malades, parce qu'ils n'ont pu y satisfaire les vieilles idées d'absolu, sucées avec le lait de leurs nourrices . . . Oui, c'est la maladie de la fin

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[33] ibid., p. 89

[34] ibid., p. 369

du siècle, vous êtes des Werther retournés.[35]

Lazare's denial of the utility of science or its ability to achieve anything worthwhile is, therefore, more than a half-digested idea taken from Schopenhauer. It is part of a new mal du siècle and a reflection of the disillusionment of the age. He represents an age which thought it had found in science the answer to all its problems, only to discover to its dismay that this was an error. This is what Zola means when he writes that Lazare represents:

> L'ennui des nouveaux héros du doute, des jeunes chimistes qui se fâchent et déclarent le monde impossible parce qu'ils n'ont pas d'un coup trouvé la vie au fond de leurs cornues.[36]

There are two possible solutions open to people in Lazare's predicament: they can turn to the consolation of religion (as did Zola's friend and disciple Huysmans) or they can turn to the denial of religious faith. Like the age he is meant to represent, Lazare has turned to science and rejected all forms of faith. In the place of religious or spiritual beliefs, Lazare has put materialism, the belief that science contradicts faith and will replace it. Unfortunately, his faith in science is not strong enough to withstand the trials and tests which it has to undergo. In the face of death and suffering, which science is unable to explain or avoid, Lazare's belief in science is shaken. He

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[35] ibid., p.210

[36] ibid., p.278

has rejected one form of faith and replaced it by another, only to find this latter belief inadequate for him. He is finally left with nothing in which to place his trust, and relapses into a cynical pessimism which scorns any attempt to make life bearable. He contradicts Pauline's words of hope at the end of the novel with the typically gloomy prediction that his son is born to suffer, as are all men. He seems unable to find any consolation in life, yet he is terrified of death.

In this aspect of his character more than in any other Lazare differs from his creator. Zola did have his moments of despair, as we have seen, but his belief in science and progress remained constant. For Zola, who like Lazare had rejected religious belief, science held great promise, and he was sure that it would ultimately enable man to solve many of his problems. His belief in the perfectibility of man through science was one of the things which sustained him during the many periods of stress in his life. Lazare really represents what Zola might have become if his materialism and belief in science had not been strong enough to withstand the stresses put upon them.

When Lazare's scientific beliefs are most shaken, at the time of his mother's death, he feels a certain nostalgia for religion, a desire to believe which he cannot logically justify. However, his rejection of religion is sufficiently sincere for him not to be able to return to

religion, and, as we have seen, he is eventually left devoid of any sort of faith or hope. Zola himself had felt a similar desire to believe after his mother's death. Goncourt reports him as saying that his mother's death "a fait un trou dans le nihilisme de ses convictions religieuses tant il lui était affreux de penser à une séparation éternelle."[37] As in the case of Lazare, this is only a temporary nostalgia, but unlike Lazare, Zola was able to fall back on his belief in science.

Hand in hand with Lazare's denial of God and his nihilism goes his revolt against suffering, and the question which is constantly on his lips is:"Pourquoi cette abomination de la douleur?"[38] Suffering is constantly before his eyes when he is at home, for his father is a martyr to pain. When his mother falls ill, his revolt is heightened. He realises that she is doomed, and this produces a state of utter despair, so that he wanders helpless round the house and is finally forced to flee and wander the countryside during her death agony. (This was also Zola's reaction when his mother was dying.)

His dismay is particularly acute when he realises that his mothers illness is due to a heart disease, since this is the disease he most fears will strike him down.

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[37] Journal des Goncourt, Feb. 20, 1883.

[38] La Joie de Vivre, p. 129

Hypochondria is another result of his fear of death. So afraid is he that he may die that he listens to himself living, constantly afraid that he may suddenly cease living. The same hypochondria which plagued Zola torments Lazare also and leads, once again as in the case of Zola, to certain irrational superstitions. He believes, for instance, that things should be arranged symetrically in his room, and touches them a certain number of times. This religion imbécile is practised by Lazare despite his avowed anti-religious feelings.

Lazare is not always a particularly sympathetic character. Because of his fears he is weak and vacillating, unable to stick to one course or carry through an enterprise to its conclusion. It is in vain that his mother looks to him to repair the family's fortune during her lifetime. He does eventually acquire wealth and a social position, but only by neglecting his promises to Pauline and marrying Louise. His treatment of Pauline is far from honourable. He is attracted to Louise despite his promises and yields without much resistance to this attraction. It is true that he cares for Pauline when she is ill, but this seems mainly due to the fact that the danger she is in makes him forget momentarily his own morbid fears. Once she has recovered, his old preoccupations return, and he feels attracted once more to Louise.

Later on, disappointed by his marriage and the

position he holds in his father-in-law's company, Lazare returns to Bonneville and expects Pauline to yield to his advances. His arrogance in expecting this is only matched by the way he forgets how much he owes her. His debt is partially a monetary one since he has borrowed so much from Pauline for his various projects. Now that he has money of his own, he still leaves her to pay for and run the household in Bonneville and never seems to think of repaying what he owes.

It should be said in mitigation that Lazare was pressed by his mother to accept Pauline's money, and he did hesitate before giving in to her. Nor is he completely unable to feel shame. He regrets deeply for a while that he turned away from Pauline and is angry with himself for not telling her of his sense of shame. He even succeeds at one point in admitting his shame to Pauline when he says: "Oui, je me méprise pour tout ce qui se passe dans cette maison depuis des années . . . Je suis ton créancier, ne dis pas non!"[39] Not only can he forget his inhibitions and admit his shame, at times he can even forget his fear of death. The instance of his caring for Pauline has already been mentioned, but an even more striking one occurs when he rescues a child from a burning house. The pity is that these are only momentary changes in a general picture

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[39] La Joie de Vivre, p. 258

which is far from flattering.

These slight contradictions within Lazare give his character a depth and roundness which is not to be found in Pauline. While this is no doubt due partially to the fact that Zola put so many autobiographical features into Lazare, it is also traceable to the fact that Zola departs slightly from his normal procedures when creating Lazare. He says in his notes for the novel: "Je voudrais écrire un roman 'psychologique' c'est-à-dire l'histoire intime d'un être, de sa volonté, de sa sensibilité, de son intelligence."[40] This does not mean that Zola suddenly determined to abandon his usual theories and practice of creating "physiological" characters. He merely means that he wants, with Lazare to pay more attention than he usually does to the thought processes of his character, and put less stress on the animal aspects of his personality. This is shown when he adds in his notes: "Mais je ne pars pas de la dualité des spiritualistes, l'âme et le corps."[41] He rejects once more in this passage the idea that a man's mind can be studied apart from his body. It is certainly true of Lazare that, although Zola studies his mind fairly closely, we do not have the detailed examination of every action and its motivation that would be given by, for instance,

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[40] La Joie de Vivre, p. 370

[41] ibid., p. 370

a Stendhal.

Zola sticks closely in his notes to the theories on which the whole Rougon-Macquart cycle is based, saying:

> Je veux seulement montrer mon être en lutte pour le bonheur contre les principes hérédi-taires qui sont en lui, et contre les influences du milieu.[42]

It would seem judging by this, that Zola originally intended to attribute part of Lazare's pessimism and fears to some hereditary streak. In the finished novel there is no hint of such a reason for Lazare's behaviour, and there seems to be no such preoccupations in the characters of his parents, so what became of this plan can only be a matter of conjecture. The influence of environment, on the other hand, is fairly obvious. The air of decay which Bonneville exudes can only increase Lazare's morbid fancies, for Bonneville itself is a reminder that everything faces death and destruction. The household he lives in is also one in which suffering is constantly present, and his father's plight cannot alleviate Lazare's pessimism. Only Pauline sheds a ray of hope in this household, but not enough to turn Lazare away from his obsessions.

Perhaps Lazare is the nearest Zola came to creating a "psychological" portrait, but it is one which is nevertheless treated with the usual naturalist procedures. He comes to life far more than Pauline and is a much more credible

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[42] ibid., p. 370

creation. No doubt the fact that so much of Zola himself went into Lazare accounts in some degree for this. Lazare is based on lived experience and to this fact owes much of his credibility.

C. The Secondary Characters

Mme. Chanteau

As in the case of the other subsidiary characters, the main importance of Mme. Chanteau is that she enables Pauline to display her goodness and charity. It is her treatment of Pauline which allows the author to show the latter's angelic qualities at their most impressive. She is not, however, a static character since there are certain developments in her during the course of the novel.

At the beginning of the novel she shows an obvious liking for Pauline and is keenly aware of the girl's charm. This is planned by Zola in his rough plan: "Elle est très honnête, adore l'enfant, la soigne".[43] Her honesty certainly cannot be questioned at this point for she makes perfectly sure that Pauline sees her put her money in a special drawer, and she tells the child that it will remain there until she is old enough to dispose of it as she sees fit.

She is not, however, unaffected by the sight of

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[43]Notes to La Joie de Vivre, p. 367

Pauline's money. She is the real head of the family, since her husband is an invalid, and on her shoulders falls the burden of running it.[44] The fact is that she is not happy about the state of penury in which she and her family are forced to live, being used to a more comfortable life. She thinks of Bonneville as "un trou" and blames her husband's gout for their position, calling it "la gueuse qui avait ruiné son fils, tué ses ambitions."[45] Her only hope rests on her son, who, she expects, will one day rescue them by pursuing a brilliant career. Meanwhile she is content to press Lazare to seek a responsible profession and turns a blind eye to his weaknesses: "Elle l'aimait jusqu'à la complicité de ses fautes".[46]

When Lazare decides to build his barrier against the sea, Mme. Chanteau is the one who, thinking no doubt of her son's future to the exclusion of all other considerations, suggests he borrow some of Pauline's money. This begins what Zola calls in his notes "la ruine d'une conscience par une première mauvaise pensée!"[47] When she guesses Pauline's feelings for Lazare, the idea of marriage

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[44] This is no doubt based on Zola's own experience, since after his father's death in 1847 his mother became the effective head of the family and was responsible for bringing him up.

[45] La Joie de Vivre, p. 41

[46] ibid., p. 103

[47] ibid., p. 367

is probably unconnected in her mind with money. Eventually, however, it becomes a convenient way to solve the family's problems, and, as she takes more and more money from Pauline, a means of hiding from the child's other relatives what has been happening. By now the rot has set in, and she borrows money from Pauline without even bothering to ask her first.

Mme. Chanteau now begins to turn against Pauline, and what is at first annoyance at having to borrow money turns into hatred for her ward. The situation is made worse when she hears gossip that Pauline has brought wealth to the family. She begins to resent Pauline's having taken Lazare from her and does her best to push her son into Louise's arms. Whether this is due to the realisation that Louise is a more profitable match or whether it is merely to spite Pauline is not clear from the text. Probably it is a mixture of the two motives.

Her hatred for Pauline reaches its height during the delirium of her illness when she accuses Pauline of trying to poison her. Here again certain events in Zola's life must have influenced him when writing these scenes. The symptoms of Mme. Chanteau's illness are exactly the same as those of Zola's own mother's illness as described in Denise Le Blond-Zola's biography of Zola.[48] The same

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[48]Denise Le Blond-Zola, op. cit., p. 119

writer says that there had been a difference of opinion between Zola's wife and his mother over the habit which Zola's relations had of borrowing money from the novelist.[49] His wife tried to put a stop to this and in the process quarrelled with his mother. The ill feeling which Mme. Chanteau shows towards Pauline, is of course, more serious, but it is due also to money problems. It also seems that the illness of Zola's mother followed the same course as that of Mme. Chanteau's. Zola's wife looked after his mother during this period with great devotion, despite the fact that the dying woman, like Mme. Chanteau, accused her of trying to poison her. This was followed by a period of apparent lucidity, once again as in the case of Mme. Chanteau, during which Zola's mother recalled memories of the past.

This means that, as in the case of Lazare, many of the elements which add a certain depth to Mme. Chanteau's character are taken from Zola's own life. Her hatred of Pauline, although not completely the same as Zola's mother's feelings towards his wife, is at least based on this, and their illnesses are almost identical. All of this goes to prove once again how much Zola relied on his memories when writing La Joie de Vivre.

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[49] ibid., pp. 119-120

M. Chanteau

It is Chanteau who first enables Pauline to display her feeling of pity at the sight of suffering. Chanteau can almost be said to represent suffering in the novel, and he certainly has few psychological refinements or enough depth of character to raise him above the level of a symbol.

He has been forced by ill health to sell his timber business and retire to Bonneville, where he becomes mayor. He does not take this post very seriously since he is unable to move because of his gout and has only been given the post because his social standing is higher than that of anybody else in the village. Most of the time when he appears in the novel, it is during one of his painful attacks of gout. His almost constant cry, the one one comes to associate with him is "Mon Dieu! que je souffre!"

Between attacks of gout his one consolation is to play chess with the abbé Horteur. During his attacks, he has no consolation or relief from his pain, but relies upon Pauline to try to comfort him. He comes to rely more and more upon her, and is not too happy about his wife's treatment of her. When he hears that Lazare is going to marry Louise, his immediate fear is that Pauline may leave, a fear which returns when Lazare comes home, and again when Louise arrives. He has now reached the point where he relies completely on Pauline.

The strange thing about this old man is that,

despite the fact that he is an invalid tortured by pain and has little in life to attract him, he remains firmly and passionately attached to life. When he learns that Véronique has hanged herself, his reaction is one of incomprehension. His exclamation "Faut-il être bête pour se tuer" is in many ways a summary of the "message" of the novel.

Dr. Cazenove

Dr. Cazenove represents common sense, level-headedness and prudence. His function within the framework of the novel is to sum up the other characters for us and to give a clear interpretation of events. A man of science, he is practical and unmoved by the wild schemes of Lazare, sees through the machinations of Mme. Chanteau, and is the only character in the novel to always see Pauline as she really is.

He is aged fifty when we first meet him, and has served thirty of these years as a naval surgeon. Perhaps it is this nautical training and the primitive methods of medicine which it must have entailed which have taught him to have no illusions as to what medicine can achieve. He realises that Chanteau's gout is incurable and will get progressively worse. He knows that any treatment he may try will only increase Chanteau's pain, and that all he can do is let nature run its course. As Zola says of him in his rough draught of the novel: "Il a trop pratiqué pour ne pas connaître au fond son impuissance. N'ayant

d'espoir que dans la nature."[50]

This does not mean that he is a bad doctor. He has, after all, saved his servant from gangrene by the drastic but only possible method of amputating his leg. He is quick to sum up Mme. Chanteau's illness, and is moved by pity when Pauline is ill, although in this case also he feels his own powerlessness and merely has to let the illness run its course. When he is called upon to deliver Louise's baby, he frankly admits his perplexity. He realises that the delivery will be dangerous and that, although he has practised medicine ashore for some while and has delivered babies before, his training as a naval surgeon hardly makes him a specialist on the subject. He knows enough, however, to realise that the child or the mother may die, and when Lazare cannot decide which of the two he wants saved, Dr. Cazenove has to make the decision himself. As it is, he makes the courageous decision to try and save both. The fact that he succeeds, however, is due as much to Pauline's attempt to save the baby as to his skill as a doctor.

His affection for Pauline is immediate and does not change with circumstances as does the affection felt by many of the other characters. As soon as he sees her, he sums her up: "'Voilà une gamine qui est née pour les autres'

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[50]Notes to La Joie de Vivre, p. 373

déclara-t-il avec le coup d'oeil clair dont il portait ses disgnostiques."[51] He regrets that Pauline is so kind-hearted and sees that she will ruin herself in the service of the Chanteau family. He advises her against putting money into Lazare's schemes, thinking it safer to have a settled income. He tries in vain to warn her that she is being exploited by Mme. Chanteau and Lazare, and is deeply touched when he learns of her plan to release Lazare from his vows and marry him to Louise. It is he who finds her a position elsewhere, feeling no doubt that she will in the long run be better off away from the family which has exploited her so much.

Dr. Cazenove is probably the most sympathetic of the minor characters. A man who knows his own limits, he is outspoken and above all represents common sense.

The Abbé Horteur

In view of Zola's atheism and anti-clericalism, it is surprising to find that he deals sympathetically with the abbé Horteur. This is no doubt because the abbé Horteur is not what Zola considered a "typical" priest. He is not, for instance, like Archangias of La Faute de l'abbé Mouret, who continually pursues his parishioners with threats of eternal damnation and indulges in a militant kind of Catholicism which was by no means to Zola's liking.

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[51] ibid., p. 46

The abbé Horteur has come to terms with the situation in which he finds himself. He realises that the villagers of Bonneville have no care for religion, and is content in the light of this to look after his own salvation and leave the villagers to be damned. He had at first tried to convert them, but after fifteen fruitless years has come to be content if they merely observe outward signs of devotion. His philosophy is summed up thus: "Personnellement, il soignait son salut, quant à ses paroissiens, tant pis s'ils se damnaient!"[52]

He is, in fact sure that his parishioners are damned since he sees the erosion and gradual destruction of Bonneville as divine retribution - the equivalent of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. Perhaps it is because he is himself the son of a peasant that he comes to realise what the situation is, for in La Terre we have much the same thing: the peasants maintain a certain respect for their priest, but as for living decent, Christian lives, they would never dream of it. The villagers of Bonneville adopt much the same attitude.

The abbé Horteur is a kindly, tolerant man of whom Pauline especially is very fond. He helps Chanteau pass the time and forget his pain by playing innumerable games of chess with him. His parish is not, of course, a rich

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[52] La Joie de Vivre, p. 52.

one, and much of his money goes in charity. As a result, he has to keep a little plot of land where he can grow vegetables. Often, while tending his plot, he will surreptitiously take out his pipe and smoke it. This, of course, is only done when he thinks he is unobserved, since he considers it a bad vice. He is therefore rather shocked when Lazare discovers him smoking it one day, but he overcomes his embarrassment, and the two men take to smoking and talking together in the abbé's garden. It may be that these incidents are based on Zola's own friendship with the priest at Médan, with whom, despite his anti-clericalism, he was on quite good terms and whom he would visit fairly frequently.[53]

It is during these conversations with Lazare that the abbé's simple faith is expressed. Lazare tells him of his own fear of death and of his obsession with pain and suffering. The abbé's answer is simple and quietly confident, as befits his rôle in the novel: "Nous sommes tous dans la main de Dieu."

Véronique

Véronique is not an easy character to study since she is not very talkative and undergoes certain changes during the course of the novel. Perhaps it is as well to

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[53]According to Denise Le Blond-Zola, op. cit., p.120

begin with a physical description of her. When she first appears in the novel she is described as "une grande fille de trente-cinq ans, avec des mains d'homme et une face de gendarme". In other words, she is not the most physically attractive of people. Nor is her nature of the most attractive, and she can best be described as gruff.

Her reaction to Pauline is one of immediate suspicion and jealousy. It can be imagined, then, that she is overjoyed at the first sign of a flaw in the angelic Pauline. When she sees the girl hitting the dog for showing affection to Louise, she cries out to Mme. Chanteau: "Ah! bien Madame qui trouve sa Pauline si bonne! Allez donc voir dans la cour."[54]

Her anger and jealousy reach their height when she hears of the proposed marriage of Pauline and Lazare. In the midst of the general rejoicing at the news, she leaves the room, slamming the door behind her.

Then a change comes over her. As Mme. Chanteau begins to take Pauline's money, the maid starts to feel sympathy for Pauline. She obviously has a sense of justice, for when Mme. Chanteau comes to Pauline for money on one occasion, Véronique says in her blunt manner: "Encore votre argent qui la danse . . . C'est moi qui l'aurais envoyée chercher sa monnaie! . . . Il n'est pas Dieu permis

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[54] La Joie de Vivre, p. 48.

qu'on vous mange ainsi la laine sur le dos."[55]

When she realises that Mme. Chanteau is trying to push Lazare and Louise into each other's arms, she begins to find fault with Louise, comparing her unfavourably with Pauline, calling her "la duchesse" and speaking disparagingly of her makeup and perfumes. Finally, she can contain herself no longer and tells Pauline openly that Mme. Chanteau is now against her because her money has diminished, and adds: "La patience m'échappe à la fin mon sang bout quand je l'entends tourner en mal le bien que vous avez fait."[56]

However, as it becomes apparent that Mme. Chanteau is very ill, her attacks on her turn to sympathy and devotion. After her mistress's death, her affection turns away from Pauline and she becomes devoted to Mme. Chanteau's memory. She is especially angry with Pauline when the latter brings hordes of starving children into the house. Véronique obviously knows how these children's minds work as she is constantly watching lest they steal something, and when one does, she pounces on the child in triumph.

At the end of the novel she suddenly disappears. Speculation as to where she may be is finally settled when it is discovered that she has hanged herself from a pear-tree in the garden. Dr. Cazenove suggests that she has

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[55] ibid., p. 110

[56] ibid., p. 169

probably done this because she has never got over the death of Mme. Chanteau. Probably, however, there is no reason, for Zola writes in his notes: "Il faut que son suicide n'ait aucune raison".[57] Her suicide is just another inexplicable act in the life of a servant whose moods change quickly and whose motives are often obscure.

Louise

Zola gives us a complete description of Louise in his rough plan:

> Une blonde, pas belle, petite et gracieuse, et très câline, très chatte, C'est sa caractéristique. Tempérament voluptueux, faite pour le baiser, très séduisante, ni bonne ni mauvaise, bonne quand on l'aime, pouvant devenir mauvaise si on ne l'aime pas.[58]

This points to the rôle of Louise in the novel: she forms a complete contrast with Pauline. They are dissimilar by nature and Louise's characteristics throw into prominence all the good and enduring aspects of Pauline. Her upbringing has made her full of "pudeur" (whereas Pauline's attitude is more sane and natural), so that when she is in labour she does not want a doctor called at first because she is ashamed that a man should see her in her state.

Louise remains a child. She is in Zola's words "une femme enfant".[59] Such a woman is unable to distract

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[57] ibid., p. 373.

[58] Notes to La Joie de Vivre, p. 372

[59] ibid, p. 372.

Lazare for long from his morbid fancies, despite Pauline's hopes that this will happen. As a result, their marriage is not too successful, and at the end of the novel it is obvious that it will continue in bickering and quarrels. Louise remains a living reminder to Pauline that her plan has not worked and that she could have married Lazare.

Mathieu and Minouche

We have already noted in Zola's work a certain pantheism which results in his giving inanimate objects, such as the mine in Germinal, or the sea in this novel, a life of their own. The same pantheism leads him to treat Mathieu, the dog, and Minouche, the cat, almost as human beings. In his notes for the book Zola lists in detail their characteristics after he has dealt with the human characters. They each have their own idiosyncrasies, just as Pauline, Lazare and the other people in the book do.

The dog is especially human, and is based on Zola's own dog, Bertrand, for his notes say: "Prendre mon vieux B . . . [Bertrand]."[60] There follows a list of almost human characteristics which also appear in the novel. He snores like a man, for instance, and looks into people's eyes as though reading their character. Zola planned that he become especially human in his old age:

Montrer l'âge arrivant pour lui, en faire une

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[60]Notes to La Joie de Vivre, p. 373

> personne, et plus lourd, ses yeux s'obscurcissant, il voit encore, ses pattes de derrière se paralysent, quand il veut tourner il tombe, il devient un peu sourd.[61]

The cat also has its almost human side, seen especially in the way it sits and watches old Chanteau when he is in pain, its eyes expressing surprise, until finally it leaves the room because Chanteau's cries are too loud for it. It does not, however, have any maternal feelings, since it is constantly producing kittens which are drowned by Véronique without it causing Minouche much sorrow.

Mathieu and Minouche must take their place alongside the horses Bataille and Trompette of Germinal as prime examples of Zola's pantheism. They are an interesting comment on Zola's conception not just of animal nature, but of human nature: he makes little distinction between the two.

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[61] ibid., p. 373

VI

THE COMPOSITION AND STYLE OF LA JOIE DE VIVRE

Zola was the most methodical of writers and took great care with the composition of his novels. It is well known that he very carefully documented himself on the social milieu, physical environment and technical aspects of every novel before he began writing it. His famous ride on the footplate of a locomotive travelling from Paris to Mantes before he began writing La Bête humaine is typical of the care he took to find out all he could about what would be going into his novels. La Joie de Vivre is no exception. According to Maurice Le Blond, before beginning La Joie de Vivre, Zola consulted Wurtz's Chimie, Gavaret's Physique biologique, Baillon's Traité de botanique, Longuet's Traité de physiologie and L'Anatomie descriptive by Cruveilhier and Sappey.[1] In order to be sure that his information about seaweeds and their industrial uses was correct, he consulted the naturalist Edmond Perrier, who supplied him with abundant information about the industrial uses and chemical properties of seaweeds found off the Norman coast.

Although when one first reads Zola's novels their

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[1] Notes to La Joie de Vivre, p. 363.

careful constuction is not immediately apparent, when one comes to examine them closely, it can be seen that they have an almost mathematically precise construction. Paul Alexis pointed to the fact that there was a real order under the apparent confusion of Zola's novels when he wrote:

> On croit d'abord à une grande confusion; on est sur le point de s'écrier qu'il n'y a là ni composition ni règles. Et, pourtant, lorsqu' on pénètre dans la structure même de l'oeuvre on s'aperçoit que tout y est mathématique, on découvre une oeuvre de science profonde, on reconnaît un long labeur de patience et de volonté.[2]

Sometimes, of course, the mathematically symmetrical construction of a novel by Zola is obvious, as in the case of Une Page d'amour, for example. In this novel Zola describes Paris at some length on five separate occasions, and each description is in the fifth chapter of each of the five parts into which the novel is divided. Fortunately, however, such geometrical rigidity is not common in Zola's novels. L'Assommoir provides an example of his technique at its very best. Here the line of the story corresponds with the fortunes of the heroine, Gervaise. It begins in the depths when Gervaise has been deserted by Lantier, then mounts as her fortunes improve, and reaches its zenith midway through the novel. Now it descends as her husband takes to drink, Lantier comes back, and she

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[2]Paul Alexis, op. cit., pp. 166-167.

herself turns to drink. It finishes in the depths again with Gervaise dead from hunger, cold and general neglect, and so forgotten by her neighbours that they only find her when the smell of her rotting corpse attracts their attention.

In La Joie de Vivre Zola's method is to build his story round three important scenes: the death of Mme. Chanteau, the section which tells of Lazare's suffering after the death of his mother, and the scene depicting the birth of Lazare's son. Zola must have considered these three scenes to be scènes à faire since he altered more details of them in the first edition of the book than of any other portions.[3] All the alterations in question are ones of stylistic detail and tend to make the scenes more vivid, another indication that Zola attached particular importance to them.

The first of these scenes is, as has been pointed out already, based on the death of the author's own mother, and owes much of its force to the fact that it is born of personal experience. The symptoms of Mme. Chanteau's illness - swelling of the legs and stomach, period of apparent lucidity followed by the final delirium - are all details taken from Zola's memory of his mother's illness.

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[3] According to Niess "Zola's Final Revisions of La Joie de Vivre", Modern Language Notes, LVII (1943), 532-539.

The second of the scenes is also largely autobiographical, being based on Zola's own feelings after his mother's death, feelings of despair and fear, and also the feeling that the house he lives in is now empty or has something missing.[4]

It is probably the birth scene which evoked the most response, much of it hostile, when the book was first published, and which is in some ways the most memorable in the novel. It is a fact worth remembering that birth scenes seem to have a special place in Zola's works and reflect his interest in purely physiological, animal functions. In Pot-Bouille, he depicts Adèle, the servant-girl, giving birth to a child in her tiny room and hardly realising what is happening. In La Terre, Lise gives birth to a child at the same times as the family's cow gives birth to calves. As the birth scene in La Joie de Vivre is the only one of the three scenes around which La Joie de Vivre is built, which is not based on personal experience, perhaps it would be as well to look at it more closely and see how Zola writes when unaided by his memories.

From the time that Louise's labour pains start until the beginning of the scene proper, some time elapses. During this time Louise says she does not want a doctor, and there are various short episodes centred on M. Chanteau,

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[4]Zola and his wife also had this feeling when they returned to Médan after the funeral of Zola's mother. See Correspondance II, pp. 549-550.

Lazare or Pauline. This lapse of time serves to build up tension until the doctor finally arrives and the main scene begins. It is obvious from then on that Zola intends to strip the process he is describing of its customary mystique and air of the miraculous. He concentrates almost entirely on physical details, piling them up in a series of not very attractive pictures. The tendency here is to animalise, just as it was in the scenes where Pauline expressed her feelings of regret.[5] In the following passage, for example, Zola describes the process of birth in its purely physical details with, as he says himself, all idea of its mystery stripped from it:

> Le mystère troublant s'en était allé de la peau si délicate aux endroits secrets, de la toison frisant en petites mèches blondes, et il ne restait que l'humanité douleureuse, l'enfantement dans le sang et dans l'ordure, faisant craquer le ventre des mères élargissant jusqu'à l'horreur cette fente rouge, pareille au coup de hache qui ouvre le tronc et laisse couler la vie des grands arbres.[6]

It is clear that, despite his reference to "l'humanité douleureuse", Zola sees the process he is describing as primarily an animal one. No idea of Louise's humanity is conveyed throughout the scene.

However, if Zola dwells upon the birth of Lazare's son for some time and puts birth scenes in other novels,

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[5]This animalisation is even more obvious in La Terre, where the birth of Lise's child is simultaneous with that of the calves.

[6]La Joie de Vivre, p. 321

it is not solely in order to emphasise man's animality. The act of generation was for Zola a fascinating one because it fitted in with so many of his beliefs.[7] It seemed to symbolise hope in the future, a hope which Zola never abandoned despite his periods of depression. He firmly believed that science would provide a better life for man one day, and placed considerable faith in what the twentieth century would bring. He saw man as a being who would gradually evolve and perfect himself with the tools which science would provide, and therefore looked upon birth as a particularly important process. What is probably his most famous novel, Germinal, has a title which reflects Zola's belief that from the man of his time would spring a more perfect being.

Another important aspect of the scene is that in many ways it sums up the whole book. La Joie de Vivre is the story of human suffering, and it is suffering which permeates this scene, as indeed it does the other two scenes around which the book is constructed. The agony which Louise has to undergo is symbolical of the pain and suffering of mankind. The child is born amidst this pain and enters a world where it will encounter pain throughout its life. Cazenove says of it: "Celui-là pourra se vanter de

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[7] Also, perhaps, for the psychological reason that his marriage never produced any children, and it was not until he formed a liaison with Jeanne Rozerot that he became a father.

n'être pas venu au monde gaiement."[8] Lazare's son makes a start to life which foreshadows much of what life holds for it.

But although this scene and the other two descriptive passages mentioned are so important, equally important is the manner in which Zola creates an atmosphere of melancholy and gloom. The novel begins with a storm, and this storm, reminiscent of Poe or a modern horror film, sets the mood:

> Et la plage . . . cette lieue de rochers et d'algues sombres, cette plaine rase salie de flaques, tachée de dueil, prenait une mélancolie affreuse, sous le crépuscule tombant de la fuite épouvantée des nuages.[9]

Added to the feeling of melancholy is the smell of decay, for Bonneville, a miserable little village of less than two hundred inhabitants living in about thirty hovels, is slowly being engulfed by the sea. Each new storm brings the destruction of more houses, until at the end of the novel there are none left. This sense of decay and destruction is, of course, linked to the influence of the decadents and their obsession with decline and fall which is discussed in Chapter III.

The atmosphere of gloom and impending destruction is only occasionally brightened, as for instance when Pauline and Lazare play on the beach. On the whole, the atmosphere

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[8] La Joie de Vivre, p. 325

[9] ibid., p. 9

does not change, unless it is to give the impression of isolation and suffocation. If Zola emphasises the immensity of the horizon and the boundless expanse of the sea, it is not in order to give the idea of the openness of vast spaces, but rather to create the impression that Bonneville is isolated and stands alone against the forces of nature.[10]

It is the sea which represents these forces, and it is significant that when Zola describes the sea in La Joie de Vivre, it is almost always the sea during a storm, for it is the destructive nature of natural forces which he wishes to bring out. The sea is nearly always pictured as being black and rising in mountainous waves; the sky is cloud-covered and the beach wind-swept. Against such forces as these, Lazare's barrier cannot withstand, nor can the village itself.

But the sea is not something impersonal. We have already seen how the earth in La Terre and the pit in

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[10]Much of the descriptions of Bonneville's isolation and of the wildness of the sea is probably due to Zola's memories of holidays in Northern France. In August 1875, Zola and his family stayed at Saint-Aubin in Normandy, and in August 1876 they went to Piriac in Brittany. Being a man of the south and used to the gentle seas of Provence, Zola was much impressed by the wildness of the northern coasts, and in Piriac he had the feeling of being cut off from the rest of the world. These feelings are expressed in several of his letters. See Correspondance I, pp. 429, 431, 432, 433, and 437.

Germinal have a life, a "soul" of their own.[11] The sea in La Joie de Vivre is likewise turned into something nearly on the same level as the men against which it is pitted, and the dramatic effect achieved by this device is most striking. The sea is almost personalised and made a character of the novel, but a character whose presence is always dimly felt, hostile and destructive, behind the actions and lives of the characters proper. They cannot remain indifferent to it, and the villagers in particular stand in a special relationship to it. It moulds their very lives and is the environmental factor which makes them what they are, just as the pit country of Germinal moulds the lives of the miners.

The sea destroys the homes of the villagers and forces them to take refuge in makeshift shelters made of upturned boats, or just to seek protection under rocks. Eventually the whole village is living in these miserable conditions which, as in the case of the slums in L'Assommoir, lead to promescuity and immorality of all kinds. Parents turn to drink and beat their children, who in their turn imitate the drinking habits of their elders. In some cases they also copy their sexual habits, and one child finds herself pregnant at the age of thirteen. This is how Zola describes their state: "C'était un dénuement pitoyable,

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[11] Chapter V.

une promiscuité de sauvages, où femmes et enfants grouillaient dans la vermine et le vice."[12] It is almost as though these people are held prisoner by their environment. They are in theory free to leave Bonneville, to go and seek homes elsewhere. Yet they will not leave, saying that Bonneville is their home. They are so used to living in the knowledge that one day their home will be destroyed that when it does happen, they still remain. In the words of one of them: "Fallait bien toujours être mangé par quelque chose."[13]

The sea often seems to represent the forces of evil, one might almost say the Devil. It rages against the forces of man, and its malignant force is seen in such descriptions as the following:

> Les vagues de plus en plus grosses, tapaient comme des béliers, l'une après l'autre; et l'armée en était innombrable, toujours des masses nouvelles se ruaient. De grands dos verdâtres, aux crinières d'écume, moutonnaient à l'infini, se rapprochaient sous une poussée géante; puis, dans la rage du choc, ces monstres volaient

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[12] La Joie de Vivre, p. 219

[13] ibid., p. 219. It is also interesting to note the peculiar love-hate relationship between the villagers and the sea. When a storm comes they shake their fists at the sea and curse it, yet there is a grudging admiration for its strength. This dual attitude is seen in their description of it as "la gueuse", a sort of half curse, half term of affection. For Lazare to try to tame the sea seems to them to be almost a personal affront, and they are delighted when his barrier fails to withstand the storm.

> eux-mêmes en poussières d'eau, tombaint en une bouillie blanche, que le flot paraissait boire et remporter.[14]

It is against these forces of darkness that Lazare struggles when he builds his barrier and when he seeks to gain wealth from the sea with his seaweed factory. Unfortunately, he is not strong enough to overcome them and very soon admits defeat.

There is one occasion, however, on which the sea is not so fierce and destructive. At the end of the novel it is calm and serene. This is how Zola describes the scene: "Ce grand ciel bleu, cette mer de satin, ces journées tièdes et claires qui luisaient maintenant, prenaient une douceur infinie".[15] It seems as though the evil forces have at last been conquered, but not by Lazare's devices. The symbolism is clear, for Pauline and the baby are the main figures in the scene. The forces of evil have been conquered by Pauline's belief in the future of the child. The serenity of the sea matches Pauline's calm confidence. Zola's pantheism, his tendency to personalise the inanimate serves not only to create dramatic effects in his depiction of the sea, but also to lend force to the "message" of the novel.

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[14] La Joie de Vivre, p. 200. The use of such expressions as "grands dos verdâtres" and "crinières d'écume" shows one way in which Zola turns the sea into something which is almost living.

[15] ibid., p. 333

The atmosphere and environment of the novel are, to say the least, unusual. In order to introduce them to the reader and familiarise him with them, Zola uses a device which is also found in some other of his novels. He introduces a stranger, in this case Pauline, to the new environment, and it is though her eyes that we see Bonneville at the beginning. She is used to Paris, and when she arrives at Bonneville, she finds herself in a totally new environment. As she discovers Bonneville and its inhabitants, so does the reader. The same device is also used effectively in Germinal, where Etienne Lantier, an outsider like Pauline, is introduced to the special atmosphere of the mines, and in La Terre, where the reader is shown the region of the Beauce, the peasants and their way of life through the eyes of the outsider Jean Macquart.

Zola is not noted as a stylist, and many almost abusive statements have been made about his way of writing. Typical of such comments is the one by Anatole Claveau, who wrote "Il [Zola] s'est servi de sa plume comme d'un pilon ou d'un hachoir pour broyer la langue française et la réduire en chair à pâté."[16] Even sympathetic critics tend to look upon Zola's style as a weak point, and Levin, for example, calls it "coarse grained".[17] Yet he does at

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[16]Quoted by Le Blond in notes to Germinal, p.573.

[17]Levin, op. cit., p. 348

times achieve astonishing effects, the most famous being the "vegetable symphony" of Le Ventre de Paris and the crowd scenes in Germinal.

In the three descriptive scenes around which Zolla built La Joie de Vivre, and in the depiction of the sea, there are no effects quite so powerful as these. Nevertheless, these scenes are memorable and show that despite what many critics say about the technical aspects of Zola's style, he is capable of writing impressive passages. The birth scene especially impresses itself on the memory, if only because it comes so near to being repulsive. One should not let the limitations of Zola's style blind one to the overall effect he achieves. Detailed analysis may show that his style is wanting in many respects, but when one looks at the whole effect, it is obvious that Zola's writing has great power.

CONCLUSION

Much of the interest of La Joie de Vivre lies in its connections with Zola's life. As has already been pointed out, work was for Zola a means of fortifying himself against the blows and disappointments he met. Believing that life ended in the annihilation of the self, he must increasingly have looked upon his literary output as a monument which would achieve for him the only immortality possible. This goes a long way towards explaining his attitude to Victor Hugo. If Zola turned against Hugo, poured scorn on each new book of Hugo's as it appeared, and heaved a sigh of relief when he died, it was because he himself sought the place Hugo undoubtedly held as the Great Man of French literature. Hugo had achieved immortality, and Zola wanted to do the same by taking his place at the head of French men of letters.

But even though La Joie de Vivre may have meant a lot to Zola by saving him from his own fears, and even though it may form a small part of that monument to him which is the Rougon-Macquart cycle, does it not have any meaning beyond that? Is there no "message" in it for the reader? There must surely be beyond this story of a bourgeois family and its misfortunes some kind of truth, some moral value put forward by the author. In his best

novels Zola is never didactic, but he does nevertheless hint at some lesson to be learned from what he has written.

Francisque Sarcey, who was admittedly not the most sympathetic of Zola's critics, looked for the moral value of La Joié de Vivre, and could only find passages which shocked his sense of moral values. Chief among these was the passage describing the advent of Pauline's puberty. He claimed that he was not alone in this reaction to Zola's descriptions, saying: "Il y a deux ou trois pages qui ont, je le sais, arrêté net un grand nombre de lecteurs et que beaucoup de lectrices n'ont pas traversé sans dégoût."[1]

Some critics, on the other hand, admired these descriptions. Huysmans wrote to Zola: "Quel splendide morceau magnigiquement élevé qu ce morceau des règles de Pauline, après le mariage de Lazare et de Louise".[2] The scene where Lazare's son is born was singled out for praise by Louis Desprez, who wrote: "C'est là une des grandes originalités de M. Zola; ne plus considérer la fécondité et la naissance comme des obscénités sur lesquelles il faut tirer le rideau."[3] Paul Alexis goes even further and

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[1]Article in Le XIXe. Siècle, March 10, 1885 quoted by Le Blond, notes to La Joie de Vivre, p. 379.

[2]Letter dated March 1884, Huysmans, op. cit., p. 100

[3]Article in Le Mot d'ordre, March 14, 1884, quoted by Le Blond, notes to La Joie de Vivre, p. 380.

claims that Zola is essentially a moralist and that all his works put forward a moral lesson.[4] He cites as examples L'Assommoir, which points to the danger of drink for the working classes, Nana, which puts the case against prostitution, Pot-Bouille, which proves how dangerous to social order adultery is, and Au Bonheur des Dames, which puts forward Denise Baudu as an example of uprightness worthy to be followed.

Alexis finds the moral of La Joie de Vivre in its ending. When it is learned that Véronique has hanged herself, old Chanteau's reaction is to cry out: "Faut-il être bête pour se tuer". Now Chanteau of all people is well acquainted with pain and suffering, yet he is deeply attached to life. Zola seems to be saying here that life is worth living despite all the miseries which it holds for man. Chanteau's cry is an affirmation of the will to live, and points to Zola's belief that only the weak will turn away from life as Véronique does. Alexis sums up the ending thus: "La Joie de Vivre est une réfutation par les faits et une condamnation du pessimisme et de ses maximes stérilisantes."

It can, however, be argued that the ending of La Joie de Vivre is not as optimistic as it looks at first

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[4] Article in Le Réveil, February 18, 1884, quoted by Le Blond, La Joie de Vivre, p. 378.

since Zola depicts life as being full of pain and suffering. The same has been said of the other famous optimistic endings which Zola wrote, the endings of Germinal and La Débâcle. At the end of Germinal Zola depicts Etienne Lantier walking towards a new life and a fresh start away from the misery of the mines, while the sun symbolically rises over the horizon. One could say that this ending is not as optimistic as it would at first seem, since Etienne is leaving behind him thousands of men who cannot escape as he has, who have to continue working in the appalling conditions of the mines. At the end of La Débâcle, Jean Macquart looks out over Paris where fires lit by the communards are still burning, and dreams of the rebirth of France from these sacrificial fires. The same argument can be applied to this ending since, although France may one day rise anew from defeat, the fires are burning now and men are fighting and dying now.

If, however, one bears in mind Zola's belief in science and progress, it will be seen that these endings must be interpreted optimistically. Zola had great faith in the future and believed that the twentieth century would solve many of man's problems. As we have seen, this belief was a great comfort to him and reconciled him to the suffering of humanity in his own time. He believed that from men like Etienne and Jean would spring other men who would be able to solve many of the problems which these two could not. Even the title of Germinal suggests the

springing up of a new race of men.

As for La Joie de Vivre, it expresses an even more explicit hope in the future. Pauline openly voices the hope that Lazare's son will belong to a happier generation. The child becomes a symbol of Zola's own hope in the future, of his belief that science will one day achieve what it cannot in his own time. Chanteau's cry was the reflex response of someone attached to life, someone who instinctively realised that life is the only gift bestowed on man and must therefore never be thrown away. The symbolism of the child represents the more long-term answer to man's condition: hope must be placed in the future and all facile pessimism rejected.

Despite this optimistic ending, Zola paints a picture of life which is not very appealing. It is shown as being full of pain and misery, and the overall impression of the book would be unbearably gloomy were it not for Pauline. It is through Pauline that Zola shows the reader how he thinks one can make life a little more bearable here and now while placing one's hope in the future. Her life is devoted to helping others, and it is this altruistic activity which makes life a little more pleasant for these ohers and for herself. She shows that life is worth living when devoted to helping ones fellows and to increasing the sum of happiness of mankind. It is only evil if one yields to despair as Lazare does, since this

despair prevents him from doing anything worthwhile.

The fact that Zola wants the message of his book to be interpreted as a basically hopeful one is best shown by the way he depicts the sea at the end. As we have already noted the sea is here calm for the first time, and matches Pauline's own serene confidence in the child's future. The sea represents the forces of evil which Lazare was unable to overcome because he did not have sufficient faith in himself or in the power of science. Pauline, on the other hand has found the way to defeat the forces of evil and the book ends with the sea tamed and the whole day radiant with hope.

But although the ending is optimistic, the rest of the book gives an overall impression of gloom. It may well be this gloom which has prevented La Joie de Vivre from being better known and appreciated than it is. However, even without this one could not place it on a level with Zola's greatest novels. It does not have the epic grandeur of Germinal, the brute force of La Bête humaine or the tragic beauty of L'Assommoir. It does, however, have some very important qualities. The amount of autobiographical material which Zola put into the work makes it unique among his novels. It also shows great depth of compassion for the suffering of its characters. Above all it has wide implications, since it is not just the story of the suffering of Pauline and a few other isolated

individuals. Through these people we can glimpse the suffering of the whole of mankind. Guy de Maupassant sums up the novel in these words:

> L'histoire de cette jeune fille devient l'histoire de notre race entière, histoire sinistre, palpitante, humble et magnifique, faite de rêves, de souffrance, d'espoirs et de désespoirs, de honte et de grandeur, d'infamie et de désintéressement, de constante misère et de constante illusion.[5]

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[5] Article in Le Gaulois, April 27, 1884, quoted by Le Blond, La Joie de Vivre, p. 381.

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