

# Zola's "champ limité de la réalisation"

## *La Débâcle* and the Commune

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Émile Zola explains the inclusion of the Paris Commune of 1871 in his novel, *La Débâcle* (1892) in terms of his Naturalist epistemophilia: "Je veux tout mettre, je suis toujours désespéré du champ limité de la réalisation." But Naomi Schor has called this fictional representation of the Commune a "pons asinorum," or stumbling block, for Zola's critics. This article responds to Schor's challenge by tracking the aesthetic and ideological ambiguities of the final two chapters of Zola's novel through close reading of allegory and intertextuality (in particular, Edmond de Goncourt's response to Zola and the Commune). The article examines how Zola's denouement brings into focus the fall of the Commune during the Bloody Week (i.e. the culmination of the political plot) through the exquisite pain of the Jean/ Henriette/ Maurice love triangle (the romance plot).

*Vous me demandez si cela ne m'a pas ennuyé de dépasser 1870, en poussant le récit jusqu'à la Commune. Mais mon plan a toujours été d'aller jusqu'à la Commune, car je considère la Commune comme une conséquence immédiate de la chute de l'empire et de la guerre. [. . .] Je veux tout mettre, je suis toujours désespéré du champ limité de la réalisation.*

Émile Zola, letter to Jacques Van Santen Kolff, January 16, 1892.

*Yet each man kills the thing he loves.*

Oscar Wilde, *The Ballad of Reading Gaol* (1897)

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## The "Pons Asinorum" of Zola's Commune

No account of cultural responses to the Paris Commune of 1871 can claim to be complete without an analysis of its treatment in the closing pages of Emile Zola's *La Débâcle* (1892). The penultimate novel in *Les Rougon-Macquart* provides historical closure in this *Histoire naturelle et sociale d'une famille sous le second Empire*. Yet that very subtitle points to the awkward supplementarity of the Commune above and beyond that historical arc of the Second Empire. Contemporary critics found the novel's denouement to be at best curious and at worst scandalous. One of the first reviewers, Gustave Geoffroy, suggests in *Le Gaulois* on June 23, 1892 that "le romancier aurait pu [. . .] se priver des aventures de la fin du livre, de la Commune écourtée [. . .]. Une philosophie suffisante des événements s'affirmait par le seul

récit de Sedan” (cited in Zola, *La Débâcle*, 2012, 45). Though the eminent critic Émile Faguet takes the novel to be “une très grande œuvre, la plus grande, je crois, de toute la bibliothèque que M. Zola a écrite,” the depiction of the Bloody Week seems to Faguet to be out of proportion to the rest of the novel: “elle a l’air, ainsi arrivant, d’un récit d’un autre pays et d’un autre hémisphère. Elle aura toujours l’air d’un hors-d’œuvre” (*Revue politique et littéraire* on June 25, 1892, cited in Zola, *La Débâcle*, 1967, 1431–34).<sup>1</sup> In the *Revue des Deux Mondes* on July 15 Eugène-Melchior de Vogüé notes disdainfully: “c’est servir l’écrivain de passer cette fin sous silence” (Zola, 1967, 1441). In *L’Univers* on July 20 François Veuillot criticizes the “voile de rêve idéal et de généreuse folie sur les monstruosité de la Commune” (Zola, 2012, 53). In *L’Université catholique* on December 15, as 1892 comes to a close, the abbé Théodore Delmont blames Zola for having “amnéstié” in the last two chapters of the novel the “scélérats” and “meneurs” of the Commune (Zola, 1967, 1449). The critical stakes for a close reading of the novel’s final two chapters are revealed in the section on “The Polemological Axis: Friend/Foe” (103–19) of Naomi Schor’s classic account of *Zola’s Crowds*:

Many critics have strongly suggested that Zola would have done well to have ended his novel there [at Sedan]; or, at least, to have concluded part III short of the two final chapters on the Commune. Attacked both on ideological and aesthetic grounds—as either inadequate or superfluous—these chapters constitute a *pons asinorum* [or stumbling block] for Zola scholars. If my reading of *La Débâcle* as a crisis of distinctions of epic proportions has any *telos*, it is the reintegration of the final chapters, a “revisionist” affirmation of the coherence of Zola’s war novel. (114)

To criticize the aesthetic completeness of the novel, Schor suggests, is to disregard the political point made in Zola’s letter to Van Santen Kolff, cited above, about the causal link between the fall of the Second Empire and the emergence of the Commune.

The awkwardness of this critical engagement with these chapters has been compounded by the obscurity of the novel since the First World War, this in spite of the fact that the novel was the bestselling Zola novel in his own lifetime.<sup>2</sup> The specificity of the

twentieth-century experience of world war may well explain why *La Débâcle* was pushed into the background before its author was properly embraced in the middle decades of the twentieth century by *la critique universitaire* (not least in the Gallimard Pléiade edition). The novel's position on the edge of the literary canon also reflects the ideological difficulty in pigeon-holing Zola politically. To the Radical Left, he was to be chastised because he failed to support the Commune; to the Right, he was the critic of restored monarchy and Napoleonic empire who refused to yield the centerground from which he wielded so much influence. The danger of being middle-of-the-road is, as they say, that one risks being run over. And yet, his contemporaneous journalistic accounts of the Commune insist on a partial sympathy which, as we shall see, does not in fact disintegrate in *La Débâcle*, where Jean Macquart sides with the Versaillais army of the new Republic and Maurice Levasseur joins the Paris Commune.<sup>3</sup> For Maurice nevertheless channels some of Zola's own views on the Darwinian necessity of war, and as we shall see, the Jean/Henriette/Maurice love triangle holds in its ultimately untenable embrace both Versaillais republicanism and Communard radicalism. Equally, the Zola so despised by anti-republicans of the Right insists on a critique from within of the new Third Republic regime. This critique culminates in the Dreyfus Affair, which intensifies Zola's attack on the French military elite.

The tripartite structure of the novel begins with an account of the disorientating displacements of one French army unit between Mulhouse, Paris, Reims and the fields of eastern France, in the direction of Sedan, which forms the centerpiece of the fictional enterprise. In returning to the historical origins of the Third Republic, Zola is also returning to the beginning of this twenty-novel publishing project, the publication of the first novel interrupted by the war, only to have its preface added subsequently, bearing the date July 1, 1871 (Zola, *La Fortune* 3–4).<sup>4</sup> As such, the preface explains how the historical “cercle fini” signaled by the fall of the Second Empire completes an aesthetic circle. Indeed, the account

of 1870–71 in this nineteenth novel will bring Zola back to the historical period in which the series came into being (just as the first novel could rightly be retitled “scientifically” as “*les Origines*,” so Zola tells us in its preface [4]). Among other functions, *La Débâcle* contextualizes the writing of the first novels in the series in terms of national history. But that national history stops, in the terms of this preface, before the end of *La Débâcle*, with the Battle of Sedan and the birth of the Third Republic (“du guet-apens du coup d’État à la trahison de Sedan,” 3). The preface to *La Fortune des Rougon*, by a novelist who usually avoided writing such paratexts, has come to serve *de facto* as an introduction to the entire series for generations of critics, yet it makes no mention of the Commune itself. It is this road from Sedan (September 1, 1870) to the Bloody Week (between two Sundays, from May 21 to 28, 1871) that is mapped out in the third and final part of *La Débâcle*.

Although Zola spent the Franco-Prussian War in the south of the country at some distance from the action, leaving for Marseille on September 7, 1870, and for Bordeaux on December 11, he did return to Paris on March 14, 1871, in time to witness some of the events of Spring 1871, and thus to fulfil in some degree at least the Naturalist imperative of documentary observation.<sup>5</sup> In Ms. 10.287 Zola organizes his notes on the Siege and the Commune in f<sup>os</sup> 449–84, relying in particular on volume 2 of Théodore Duret’s *Histoire de quatre ans, 1870–73*. In writing his novelistic account of events some twenty years later, Zola was able to take a distant view, historically but also aesthetically, via the omniscient narrative organization of the proverbial chaos of war. Such omniscience finds its self-reflexive metaphor within the texture of the novel beyond the bounds of national affiliation, less in the military impotence of Napoleon III than in the long lenses of Bismarck and Guillaume (soon to preside over the newly formed German Empire). This historical “long view” may have allowed for a retrospection informed by two decades of republican government (either side of the Communard amnesty of 1880), but it has allowed it to fall outside the chronological

parameters of some modern accounts of representations of the Commune.<sup>6</sup>

Zola brings otherwise distant detail into focus through the allegorical force of its chief protagonists, Jean Macquart and Maurice Levasseur. In his journey from *La Terre* to *La Débâcle*, Jean already follows that trajectory from peasant into Frenchman which Eugen Weber will map onto the period 1870–1914. In an inversion of the social order, this illiterate farmer leads the troop to which the educated urban bourgeois, Maurice, belongs. The ill-feeling harbored by Jean's social superior (but institutional inferior) is transformed by the experience of war into a relationship of profound friendship, as they survive the defeat at Sedan and subsequent imprisonment, only then to go their separate ways. After defeat and imprisonment, the injured Jean is nursed back to health by Henriette, Maurice's twin sister. Both have lost their spouse: Jean in the brutal agrarian world of *La Terre*, Henriette in Part II Chapter 4 of *La Débâcle* in Zola's version of the Bazeilles massacre which had been made famous by Alphonse de Neuville's oil painting, *Les Dernières Cartouches* (1873). In the tenderness of male vulnerability and female care, love emerges. As such, both twins experience, in war and its aftermath, very close, but unconsummated, physical contact with Jean.

The force of allegory, which Eléonore Reverzy rightly identifies in Zola's work, finds no stronger expression, as we shall see, than in the politicization of this triangular structure which pivots around Maurice's two major relationships, of hetero-siblinghood with Henriette, and of homosocial friendship with his brother-in-arms, Jean.<sup>7</sup> Ultimately unrealizable, however, is the nascent heterosexual love between Jean and Henriette. For these relationships of literal and figurative siblinghood provide a sustained metaphor in the novel for the very crisis of republicanism triggered by the Versaillais-Communard conflict.<sup>8</sup> The allegorical potential of this triangle is harnessed by the parallelism between the plots of love and of politics, such that the impossibility of heterosexual consummation between Jean and

Henriette is asserted only in these two final chapters when, during the Bloody Week itself, on Tuesday, May 23, the Versaillais Jean wounds a Communard on a barricade on the Left Bank, only to discover that it is none other than Maurice. Although Jean manages to haul his friend heroically, by foot and by boat, past the landmarks of what Ferguson calls *Paris as Revolution* to a place of greater safety, namely Maurice's apartment on the Right Bank, where Henriette can nurse him, the subsequent death of Maurice imposes an irresolvable taboo on the heterosexual love between Jean and Henriette.<sup>9</sup> By the logic of allegory, both the heterosexual love plot and the politics of civil war ask the same question: how is it possible to love the man who has killed your brother? It is the logic of this allegorical quandary which we will now pursue in our close attention to the final chapters of Zola's novel.

## “Au Lendemain de Sedan”

After the account of Sedan in Part II of the novel, the third and final section begins by following Maurice and Jean in prison on the Iges peninsula, then in their escape. Once more Maurice repays Jean's paternalistic generosity, this time by taking him to Remilly where Henriette nurses his injured foot. With Jean safe in his sister's care, Maurice returns to his military duties in Paris, the brotherhood of these soldiers-in-arms asserted in Maurice and Jean's farewell embrace:

Il y avait, au fond de ce baiser, la *fraternité* des dangers courus ensemble, ces quelques semaines d'héroïque vie commune qui les avait unis, plus étroitement que des années d'ordinaire amitié n'auraient pu le faire. [. . .] Est-ce que jamais deux cœurs peuvent se reprendre, quand le don de soi-même les a de la sorte fondus l'un dans l'autre? (793, my emphasis)

Will this synthesis of male identities, so the novel asks, be possible on the political stage of republican identity? And in anticipation of their fateful and fatal encounter in Paris, the men ask through the voice of the narrator: “Se reverrait-on, un jour? Et comment, dans quelles circonstances de douleur ou de joie?” Maurice then turns to his twin sister and, in the chapter's final words, instructs her with an imperative of love that confirms the triangle:

“C’est mon *frère* que je te confie. Soigne-le bien, aime-le comme je l’aime!” (794, my emphasis).

The irony of that care is that Henriette unwittingly brings back to full force her brother’s future killer, and by the end of Chapter 6, Jean returns to service, but not in Paris like Maurice:

Le désir de Jean était d’aller rejoindre l’armée du Nord, que le général Faidherbe venait de reconstituer. [. . .] Cette armée défendait trois départements séparés du reste de la France, le Nord, le Pas-de-Calais et la Somme [. . .] Il entendait dire que le général Faidherbe reprenait l’offensive. (855)

Jean and Henriette, widower and widow, have never embraced, but in this farewell whose only words are “Adieu! adieu!,” their first embrace is less an expressive affirmation of love and more a repression of the language of love in which their very heterosexuality is muted, in the transposition by Maurice of Henriette into the fraternal subject position hitherto inhabited by her own brother: “Il voulut la remercier de ses bon soins, de l’avoir soigné et aimé comme un frère. Mais il ne trouva pas les mots, il ouvrit les bras, il l’embrassa en sanglotant” (857).

The first words of the next chapter, the penultimate in the novel, take us on a journey with Maurice, “Au lendemain de Sedan” (857), back to Paris. Indeed, as much as the politics of the novel and its author may lead us to associate Zola with Jean Macquart (and thus back to the family tree at the heart of the series), it is telling that these final two chapters explore the workings of Maurice’s mind in his adherence to the Paris Commune. The importance of this process of understanding, as these chapters move month-by-month from September 1870 to May 1871, is underlined in its entry in the “Plan définitif” of Ms.10286: “A Paris, avec Maurice. Toute la fin du Siècle, puis la Commune. La grande analyse, dans Maurice, de ce qui a déterminé la Commune. Jean cherchant Maurice, à la veille du 18 mars et ne le trouvant pas. Lui avec Versailles, l’autre restant à Paris. (f<sup>o</sup> 138)”.<sup>10</sup>

Chapter 7 begins by asserting the isolation of a capital city as it falls under siege by the Germans: “Paris était séparé du monde. [. . .] Paris n’était plus qu’un immense camp

retranché [. . .] Même sans espoir de vaincre, Paris devait se défendre, pour que la patrie vécut” (857–58). One Sunday toward the end of September, Maurice has to travel from one end of the city to the other. He notes how the movement from empire to siege seems to have carried the city from hedonism to self-sacrifice: “Ah! Ce Paris qu’il avait connu si âpre à jouir, si près des dernières fautes, il le retrouvait simple, d’une bravoure gaie, ayant accepté tous les sacrifices” (858–59). But via a simile of mechanical time misfiring, “comme une horloge géante dont le ressort éclate” (859), such virtue is reformulated in the language of pathology, as if in residual reflection of the empire that has fallen:

Les illusions emportaient les âmes, une tension jetait ce peuple au danger des folies généreuses. C’était déjà toute une crise de nervosité malade qui se déclarait, une épidémique fièvre exagérant la peur comme la confiance, lâchant la bête humaine débridée, au moindre souffle. (859)

This referencing of the human beast by the author of *La Bête humaine* underlines the point that the traits of empire have not simply evaporated with the defeat at Sedan. Even before the Commune, Paris is torn between the energy of the street and the perspective of the aerial view, as evoked by Ferguson’s contrast between Victor Hugo’s *Quatrevingt-treize* and Jules Vallès’s *L’Insurgé*:

In contrast to the visionary mode of Hugo’s characteristic bird’s-eye view from the towers of Notre-Dame or from even further in *Quatrevingt-treize*, Vallès places himself, and his text, squarely in the street. (184)<sup>11</sup>

As early as the first siege of Paris in the autumn of 1870, that distinction between perspectives is already evident in Zola’s novel, and presented as the axis of social and political tensions. For Maurice is captivated by the sight, on the rue des Martyrs, of

une bande furieuse se ruant contre une maison dont on avait vu une des fenêtres hautes, la nuit entière, éclairée d’une vive clarté de lampe, un évident signal aux Prussiens de Bellevue, par-dessus Paris. Des bourgeois hantés vivaient sur leurs toits, pour surveiller les environs. (859)

Is this long view, we may ask, one of insight or oversight—aesthetically or politically? The stakes for such a question are exposed in Zola’s relationship with Edmond de Goncourt. On

October 14, 1890, Zola writes to Goncourt in praise of the description of the Commune to be found in the volume of the latter's *Journal* published six days earlier, which covered 1870–71:

Avant de quitter Médan, je relis, dans le volume que vous m'avez fait le grand plaisir de m'envoyer, vos Mémoires du Siège et de la Commune; et c'est bien certainement ce qui a évoqué en moi, avec le plus de vie intense, ces terribles mois que j'ai vus. [. . .] J'en retrouve, dans votre livre, le souvenir. Vous m'avez écrit là de l'histoire, de la vraie et de la grande. (*Correspondance*, 93)

What did Zola find to praise in this memoir? On the evening of May 21, 1871, at the start of the Bloody Week, Goncourt describes how he takes up “mon observatoire ordinaire, la place de la Concorde” (*Journal*, II, 440)—a location through which Jean and Maurice will pass in the novel's account of the morning of Wednesday, May 24. From his bedroom window, Goncourt bemoans “l'agonie de l'odieuse tyrannie” of the Commune (441). He takes sanctuary the next day at the house of his friend, Philippe Burty. Goncourt and Burty find a view of the city “dans le belvédère de verre qui domine la maison” (442), not unlike the “bourgeois hantés” of *La Débâcle*. Having stayed the night, on the morning of Tuesday, 23 May, they return to this exquisite emblem of mimetic transparency and narrative overview, the glass belvedere, “notre observatoire de verre”, in order to take stock:

Nous montons au belvédère, où par le clair soleil qui illumine l'immense bataille, la fumée des canons, des mitrailleuses, des chassapots nous fait voir une série d'engagements, qui s'étendent depuis le jardin des Plantes jusqu'à Montmartre. (443)

One of Goncourt's group even spies, above Montmartre, the tricolor flag through theater glasses, political violence aestheticized through “une lorgnette de spectacle,” as it will also be in the final paragraph of the diary entry for Wednesday, May 24:

Toute la soirée, vu par la trouée des arbres, l'incendie de Paris, un incendie ressemblant, sur le ciel de la nuit, à ces gouaches napolitaines d'une éruption du Vésuve sur une feuille de papier noir. (447)

By the end of the week, on Sunday, May 28, the day on which Zola's novel will end, Goncourt allows his political disdain for radical politics to filter through his aestheticized

vision of the ruins of the Hôtel de Ville:

La ruine est magnifique, splendide. La ruine aux tons couleur de rose, couleur cendre verte, couleur du fer rougi à blanc, la ruine brillante de l'agatisation, qu'a prise la pierre cuite par le pétrole, ressemble à la ruine d'un palais italien, coloré par le soleil de plusieurs siècles, ou mieux encore, à la ruine d'un palais magique, baigné dans un opéra de lueurs et de reflets électriques. [. . .] Dans la dégradation du monument brille, sur une plaque de marbre intacte, dans la nouveauté de sa dorure, la légende menteuse: *Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité*. (451)

By the following Wednesday (May 31), Goncourt takes solace in the brutal victory of the Versaillais troops:

C'est bon. Il n'y a eu ni conciliation ni transaction. La solution a été brutale. C'a été de la force pure [. . .] C'est vingt ans de repos que l'ancienne société a devant elle, si le pouvoir ose tout ce qu'il peut oser en ce moment. (453)

Twenty years later, however, Zola attempts a symbolic “conciliation” and “transaction” in *La Débâcle*. Zola had continued to write courteously to Goncourt as the volumes of the latter's *Journal* and other publications appeared.<sup>12</sup> Goncourt's diary entry for July 4, 1892, was withheld from the final volume of Charpentier's edition of the *Journal*, published in May 1896, two months before the author's death. Only published long after Zola's death, this less courteous response to *La Débâcle* suggests that its aesthetic quality was undermined by Zola's failure to see war in the flesh:

Ça et là, un épisode d'un gros drame de Boulevard ; mais dans tout le volume, pas une page de grand écrivain, pas même un détail apportant la réelle émotion d'une chose vue ou soufferte, tout de la bonne littérature grossoyée d'après des racontars. Oui, je le répète, je crois que si moi, si Zola, nous avions vu la guerre—et la guerre avec l'intention de la peindre dans un bouquin—, nous aurions pu faire un livre original, un livre neuf. Mais sans l'avoir vue, on ne peut faire qu'un volume intéressant, mais ressemblant à tous ceux qui ont été fabriqués avant vous sur le même sujet. (III, 728)

Zola, of course, could not respond.

## “Une Impatience des Violents”

As October unfolds, Maurice is—like Paris itself—infected by “cette maladie du soupçon” (859). Free indirect discourse is appropriated, here as elsewhere in the novel, by the rhetoric

of *interrogatio*, the narrator's question articulating Maurice's fears and pinning them to the collective experience of the *peuple*: "Est-ce qu'après l'empereur et le maréchal de Mac-Mahon, le général Trochu, le général Ducrot n'allaient pas être les chefs médiocres, les ouvriers inconscients de la défaite?" (859–60). But the very next sentence allows Zola to take a certain distance from this logic in the reference to the impatience of the violent and in the assimilation of the new regime to a recurrent historical process: "Le même mouvement qui avait emporté l'Empire, menaçait d'emporter le gouvernement de la Défense nationale, toute une impatience des violents à prendre le pouvoir, pour sauver la France" (860). Here the narrator constrains the view of the *peuple* by reinstating control over the narrative, and its values as well as voice.

The failure of this new government to defend the nation is met here by the "impatience" of this radical patriotic movement, which immediately summons, in a reference to antiquity, the elemental force of fire which will loom so large in the history of the Commune: "les inventeurs qui offraient de miner la banlieue ou d'anéantir l'ennemi sous une pluie nouvelle de feu grégeois" (860).<sup>13</sup> Indeed, events leading up to and including October 31, 1870 mark Maurice's radicalization in the direction of the Commune (in this key paragraph: "A la veille du 31 octobre [. . .]" (860–61), punctuated, in two long sentences, by the half-breaths of repeated semi-colons).<sup>14</sup> After the first sentence of this type, which recapitulates the arc of Maurice's experiences through the war, the narrator describes this movement away from Bonapartism as an evolution towards revolution:

En lui, s'achevait *l'évolution* qui, sous le coup des premières batailles perdues, avait détruit la légende napoléonienne, le bonapartisme sentimental qu'il devait aux récits épiques de son grand-père. Déjà même, il n'en était plus à la république théorique et sage, il versait dans les violences *révolutionnaires* [. . .] (860, my emphasis)

October 31 confirms, in the second semi-coloned sentence, this culmination of Maurice's disappointment: the loss at Le Bourget; the arrival of Thiers at Versailles; and finally, the surrender of Metz. The next day Maurice learns of the radicals' failure to hold the Hôtel de

Ville and bemoans “cet avortement, cette Commune, d’où le salut serait venu peut-être” (861). The word “Commune” appears with a capital letter here for only the second time in the novel, as if in anticipation of the movement Maurice will embrace in the spring of 1871.

At the start of December, the failure to break out of the Prussian Siege of Paris at the Battle of Champigny, where Maurice fights alongside the 115<sup>th</sup> division, is described in similar terms (“l’avortement de cet immense effort,” 862). But the persistence of this patriotic delusion that the Prussians can be defeated is still entertained by the people of Paris: “le peuple entier, les femmes, les enfants eux-mêmes, se ruant sur les Prussiens, en un fleuve débordé qui renverse et emporte tout” (863). As the year which has seen the demise of the Second Empire draws to a close, this lexis of the overflowing river harks back to the characterization of the Second Empire’s “débordement des appétits” in the preface to *La Fortune des Rougon* (3).

In this association with the masses, Maurice becomes isolated from his fellow soldiers, and indeed from the memory of Jean and Henriette, “des affections laissées dans une autre existence.” The reader will look back with irony at Maurice’s anger against “ces barbares,” the Prussians “qui menaçaient de brûler les musées et les bibliothèques” (864) given the notorious incendiary impulses of the Commune which he will join merely pages later. After the defeat at Buzenval on January 19, 1871, Maurice concludes that “c’était la fin” (865). On the rue de Rivoli, he meets crowds proclaiming “A bas Trochu! vive la Commune” (865). The armistice ensues on January 28. The weeks between the armistice and the preliminary peace treaty, signed at Versailles on February 26, provide Maurice with a space to read and to dream: “une existence vague, pleine de paresse et de fièvre” (866). Rather than obey the treaty stipulation that French soldiers be disarmed and returned home, in late February Maurice decides to desert and disappears into “ce Paris glorieux” and rents a room on the rue des Orties on the butte des Moulins which offers its own Goncourtian

“belvédère, d’où l’on voyait la mer sans bornes des toitures, depuis les Tuileries jusqu’à la Bastille” (867). Indeed, the novel’s mobile narrator reminds us of Maurice’s bourgeois origins by noting that to permit him to lead this life, his old friend from law school has lent him money.

The days of “folie” in “Paris, alcoolisé” between the Versailles treaty of February 26 and the installation of the Commune on March 18 is depicted as a time of lawless hedonism: “La liberté illimitée, dont on jouissait, achevait de tout détruire”, as if in decadent perversion of the very ideals of 1789. This ambivalent representation by the narrator is juxtaposed with a language which Zola’s final novels will reiterate: Maurice is prepared now to fight in “la défense de ce qu’il croyait être la vérité et la justice” (868). But Zola holds his narrator back from full identification through the subjectivity attributed to this belief. Nevertheless, in these final chapters the narrator’s reading of events through the experience of Maurice at least attempts the task, necessary to the Third Republic, of understanding the apparently incomprehensible Commune. Prussian triumph is asserted by the narrator in the march of these foreign troops down the Champs-Élysées on March 1, Paris feminized in bereavement, “la ville entière morte, voilée de l’immense crêpe de son deuil” (869).<sup>15</sup> Rather than find in these seeds of Communard revenge the contingent particularities of an unparalleled historical moment, the narrator contextualizes this new movement in accordance with the repeated patterns of the *longue durée*:

C’était une de ces crises morales, qu’on a pu observer à la suite de tous les grands sièges, l’excès du patriotisme déçu, qui, après avoir vainement enflammé les âmes, se change en un aveugle besoin de vengeance et de destruction. (868)

The narrator therefore comes close to trivializing the Commune in terms which contradict its desire for unique and immediate transformation.

Although Zola thought of *Pot-Bouille* as his version of *L’Éducation sentimentale*, the subject matter of failed revolutionary idealism at either end of the Second Empire, in both

Flaubert's novel and *La Débâcle*, also speak to each other.<sup>16</sup> In Flaubert's version of the February days of 1848, Frédéric Moreau fails both to seduce Mme Arnoux and to properly engage with the events of the revolution; and in proto-modernist fashion, Flaubert also makes these personal and political plots fail to interact in a manner that would build a cumulative narrative structure. Zola's novel provides its own version of impossible ideals in politics and love. But in contrast to Flaubert's anti-novel, Zola's allegorization of French politics through Jean and Maurice is less aesthetically provocative, indeed perhaps a little too obvious in the parallelism of its allegory. Nevertheless, it allows Zola's readers to *feel* through tragic empathy the political tensions of the spring of 1871, rather than simply to *know* such political history.

The personal and political plots of Maurice are interwoven on March 18, the very date on which the Commune was proclaimed. That morning, Maurice receives a letter from his sister in Remilly, beseeching him to find Jean and to send news of him. As she has been unable to give Jean the address of Maurice's haven on the rue des Orties, Maurice plans to spend the day looking for Jean. But as Maurice crosses the rue Saint-Honoré on his way to the military administration, he meets two comrades from the National Guard who inform him of the struggle over the canons of Montmartre, which leads him from this goal into a day of Communard engagement. Later that day on the boulevard Saint-Martin, Maurice sees Jean by chance, and they embrace "fraternellement" (871). Their fraternity turns sour when each insist that the other should follow their trajectory, back to the army in the case of Jean, or onward to "sauver la République" in the case of Maurice; then the crowd sweeps them apart, the pain of quasi-familial separation mapped onto the revolutionary street in their reciprocal "Au revoir." Hence the politics of the street rudely interrupts the freeze-framing here of their exasperated love for each other ("Et tous deux restèrent quelques seconds face à face"). As April unfolds, Maurice wonders with unwitting irony whether the next time he sees Jean, his

friend will be amongst “les morts du champ de bataille” (873). The next time they meet, on May 23, when Jean bayonets a Communard on the barricades, Maurice’s face will only be revealed to him after the mortal blow.

Just as the Paris of the first siege is described in terms of the contrast between the heat of fire and the cold of winter, so the brutal realities of conflict during the second siege are set against the particular beauty of the Spring of 1871, culminating in the blood-red sky of “le grand soleil de l’admirable mois de mai” (877). But if for Maurice, the Commune represents “le feu qui purifie” (874), he is in some part redeemed by his own doubts about the Commune, most particularly his view of the “grande médiocrité” (874) of those elected to the Commune: hence the “doute affreux où il sentit vaciller toute sa foi” when he realizes that his dishonorable fellow soldier Chouteau has risen to prominence in the wake of March 18 and ignited the first fire in the city at the Palais de la Légion d’honneur; and his “angoisse secrète” (875) at the toppling of the Vendôme column. Yet he self-diagnoses this “angoisse” as “une faiblesse d’enfant” which recalls his grandfather’s Napoleonic “récits épiques,” and Maurice’s nihilistic “grand rêve noir” of fire and brimstone is more “un sourd mécontentement contre la Commune elle-même” (876) and less an expression of an anti-Versailles threat on his part: “De toutes les réformes sociales qu’elle avait promises, [la Commune] n’avait pu en réaliser une seule, et il était certain qu’elle ne laisserait derrière elle aucune œuvre durable. [. . .] Et le grand effort social entrevue s’éparpillait, avortait ainsi” (876). However displeasing we might take Zola’s refusal of radical idealism to be, the narrator suggests, in this return to a language of abortion in the description of the short-lived nature of the Commune’s achievements, that perhaps Maurice’s point of view could have been recuperated within the new republic after all, if he had survived.

The remainder of Chapter 7 takes us from the first day of the Bloody Week, Sunday, May 21, 1871, to Jean’s bayonetting of Maurice on Tuesday 23. It says much for the

narrator's emphasis on the pathological metaphoricity of drinking in Zola's diagnosis of the Commune, that for the first time in Maurice's life, on May 21, he returns home drunk. The novel thus gives its own theory of why the Versaillais were able to enter the city without resistance on May 22, and take control of the Champs-Élysées, and then the quartiers Saint-Lazare and Montparnasse. The narrator offers Maurice's suicidal analysis of the situation on May 22: "la fin était venue, il n'y avait qu'à se faire tuer" (878), as indeed he will do—in a fulfilment of the narratological as well as historical metadiscourse—"dans l'attente anxieuse de l'inévitable dénouement" (877). The narrator identifies in the methods of the Versaillais troops an unwitting caricature of the Germans who have just defeated the French army, "exagérant la tactique que les Prussiens lui avaient si durement apprise" (879). Though Marx teaches us to read historical repetition as farce, the Prussian siege of Paris is in fact repeated by this second siege as tragedy.

The depiction of Maurice's "jour terrible," Tuesday May 23 straddles the end of chapter 7, and the beginning of the novel's final chapter (879–901). The notion of Paris as the "bivouac des révolutions," which Robert Tombs's book title borrows from Jules Vallès, is echoed in literal form throughout the novel, from the erection of tents outside Mulhouse in its opening paragraphs, to the bivouacking of the *fédérés* in the hotel gardens of the rue de Lille on the night of the 22–23. On the 23<sup>rd</sup>, the Versaillais take control of Montmartre, and the fires which Zola attributes to the Communards begin—notably at the Tuileries. More specifically, Maurice will fall on the "fortes barricades" where the rue de Lille and the rue du Bac meet (879).<sup>17</sup> The irresistible logic of allegory in "cette guerre fratricide" (883) is underlined by the parallel amnesia of Jean and Maurice with regard to each other, both so caught up in this Parisian tale that they lose track of each other in their thoughts. Indeed, as the evening of May 23 unfolds, Maurice loses track of place and time, the effect of incessant fighting compared to the inebriation associated, as noted above, with Maurice and the

Commune, “ainsi qu’un vin immonde qui revient dans l’ivresse” (882). But even the orderly, reasonable Jean is enraged and incensed by the fighting, “les yeux hors de la tête” (883), and bayonets a Communard on the barricade before the latter can turn round. The subsequent moment of recognition between Jean and Maurice is grotesquely illuminated, in the moralistic language of the narrator, by the “aveuglante clarté” of the fires spreading across the city. The hitherto incensed Jean immediately comes to his senses, “dégrisé” (883), and embraces his brother-in-arms. In a metaphor of the nation in civil war, from the buildings all around “on entendait, à l’intérieur, l’écroulement embrasé des plafonds” (884). According to *La Débâcle*, the political architecture of the nation is collapsing from the inside.

## “L’abominable Holocauste”

Zola had aimed, in his *Plan définitif*, to postpone the bayonet scene until the final chapter of the novel:

Les incendies. Henriette à Saint-Denis, dès les premières flammes. Conversation avec Gunther. Elle vient à Paris, chez les amis de Ménilmontant. La bataille des rues, les incendies continuent, la barricade prise et Jean tuant Maurice d’un coup de baïonnette. Puis, Jean, Maurice et Henriette dans la chambre, en face de Paris qui brûle. L’immense espoir au-dessus des flammes. (Ms.10286, f<sup>o</sup> 138)

The fateful day of May 23 straddles the chapter break, as we have noted, Chapter 8 beginning with two contemporaneous journeys to the same destination, the rue des Orties: first, Henriette travelling from Remilly via the train station at Saint-Denis where she must disembark because of the fighting in Paris (884–89); second, the arduous journey of Jean and Maurice (889–97); whence the triangle will be reformed.

At Saint-Denis Station, Henriette has a chance encounter, already planned by Zola on f<sup>o</sup> 138, with her German cousin, Otto Gunther. Cousins in Zola’s series sometimes bring into cohabitation opposing sides (e.g., the cousin marriage which connects the legitimate and illegitimate side of the family tree in *La Conquête de Plassans*); but this Franco-German

familial relationship offers little sympathy from him, “si froid” (885). Indeed, he is more excited by the “spectacle de la Babylone en flammes” from the plain of Saint-Denis. He is unwilling to help her reach the city center, as if his palindromic first name codifies stalemate in a mathematical notation: 0++0. Henriette is ultimately taken to Paris in a coach hired by a Frenchwoman whose destination points back to the Ancien Régime: rue de Richelieu. Via the equally evocative rue du Hasard, Henriette reaches her own destination.

The narrative then circles back that same evening to Maurice and Jean’s journey from the Left Bank. In the context of increasing Versaillais domination, Jean faces a problem of life or death, namely: how to save a Communard in this city? Few taboos remain, as Jean steals a cloak and cap from a Versaillais corpse so as to keep Maurice alive, in an act of political cross-dressing. The protagonists of *La Débâcle* (like republican France itself, the novel implies) should not follow the obvious road back through the Ancien Régime theme-park of the Pont Royal, the Tuileries and the Louvre. Instead, Jean, who has previously spent six months in Paris, unlocks a rowing boat from the foot of the Pont Royal and rows Maurice, in what might seem a parody of the Parisian river trips of tourists under the Pont de Solférino (replaced today by the Passerelle Senghor).<sup>18</sup> As Jean starts to row downstream, the narrator begins the description of their voyage by devoting two paragraphs to the identification of landmarks as they burn (892–93). On the left (presumably because Jean is facing backwards in order to row westwards) the Tuileries; and on the right the Palais de la Légion d’honneur, the Palais du Conseil d’État, the caserne d’Orsay, and looking back towards the site of their encounter on the barricade, houses on the rue du Bac and the rue de Lille. With a comparison between imperial Paris and Sodom and Gomorrah, Maurice suggests that the Tuileries, like these cities of biblical times, have brought destruction upon themselves: “ils s’étaient incendiés eux-mêmes” (894).<sup>19</sup>

Jean’s plan being to reach the rue des Orties, via the place de la Concorde and the rue

Saint-Honoré, he astutely moors up not at the Pont de la Concorde, in full view, but beyond the elbow of the river on the quai de la Conférence. Once Zola's protagonists reach the square itself, the Commune's barricades block Jean's plans to bring Maurice home. Their passage across the square at dawn on the morning of Wednesday May 24 is haunted by those bullet-strewn architectural ghosts, "les fantômes du Palais-Bourbon et de la Madeleine" (895).<sup>20</sup> Particularly striking is Zola's foregrounding of this north-east quadrant of the square, through the referencing of two of the eight statues of women, Lille and Strasbourg, who allegorize the nation as symbols of its provincial cities. James Pradier's Strasbourg statue had in September 1870 immediately become the site of collective mourning. As Zola writes:

Sur la place même, des balles avaient troué le bronze des fontaines, le tronc géant de la statue de Lille gisait par terre, coupé en deux par un obus, tandis que la statue de Strasbourg, à côté, voilée de crêpe, semblait porter le deuil de tant de ruines. Et il y avait là, près de l'obélisque intact, dans une tranchée, un tuyau à gaz, fendu par quelque coup de pioche, qu'un hasard avait allumé, et qui lâchait, avec un bruit strident, un long jet de flamme.

Civil war is presented here as an ironic commentary on the very grandeur of the imperial city of light. For, in the strange *son et lumière* of battle, this very destruction satirizes the role of the Place de la Concorde and its famous streetlamps in the illumination of nighttime Paris. The statue of Strasbourg, meanwhile, is creped in black, as it was in 1871, and would continue to be until the return of the lost provinces at the end of the First World War; but in the narrator's hands here, it stands in bereavement not so much for its loss to the Germans at the hexagonal margins as for the city in ruins. Intuitively, Jean rightly senses that they have more chance by avoiding the barricade between those two grand eighteenth-century edifices at the bottom of the Rue Royale (leading up to the Madeleine), which (in a manner hitherto unremarked by critics) Zola wrongly collapses into the one to the east: "la barricade qui fermait la rue Royale, entre le ministère de la Marine et le Garde-Meuble, sauvés du feu" (896). In fact, after the Revolution of 1789, the naval ministry took over the building of the body responsible for the administration of furniture and objects in royal residences, Zola thus

overlooking the identity of the western edifice dominated by the Hôtel de Crillon (where Marie-Antoinette spent afternoons relaxing and taking piano lessons). Instead the pair go up the parallel rue Saint-Florentin, through the barricade at the west end of the rue de Rivoli. Though they reach the rue des Orties, Maurice dies there four days later May 28, the last day of the Bloody Week, thus rendering impossible the consummation of the love between Jean and Henriette.

This proverbial room with a view on the rue des Orties, “comme à cent lieues de la bataille” (897), offers a final downward gaze over the city, “la fenêtre,” which Jean flings open for air, “dominant Paris,” Zola once more staging his narrative model of omniscience: “De cette hauteur de la butte des Moulins, toute une grande moitié de Paris s’étendait sous eux” (899). Having previously nursed Jean, Henriette now nurses her twin brother. Jean enlists help from a high-ranking military doctor, Bouroche, whose initial anger at the sight of a Communard is deflected by Henriette explaining to Bouroche that her brother is “un de vos soldats de Sedan,” 900).

On Wednesday, May 24 (901–03), when the Versaillais take control of “la moitié de Paris, du parc de Montsouris à la gare du Nord, en passant par les grandes voies” (902), Maurice continues to dream with the insistent refrain “Paris brûle.” The previous night has seen the Ministry of Finance ablaze, its mass of paperwork and records producing an ominous black smoke. As in the accounts of paper money, brokers’ chits and promissory notes in *L’Argent*, modernity is associated with a sheer mass of paper. Here, the “pluie fine” of “une nuée de papillons noirs, des vols incessants de papiers brûlés,” (902) still emanating from the Ministry the next day forces Jean to close the window which opens on to this shocking panorama. The long paragraph describing this view concludes with the narrator giving voice, if not assent, to Maurice’s Communard fantasy:

Détruire pour détruire, ensevelir la vieille humanité pourrie sous les cendres d’un monde, dans l’espoir qu’une société nouvelle repousserait heureuse et candide, en plein paradis terrestre des

primitives légendes! (902)

In turn, Zola has Maurice voice a Darwinian sense of the necessity of bloodletting in finding a political solution to the failings of the Second Empire which Zola himself finds compelling:

“La guerre, c’est la vie qui ne peut pas être sans la mort” (903).<sup>21</sup>

The novel passes quickly over Thursday, May 25 (903–04), invoking the death of Delescluze, but then pauses for longer on Friday, 26 (904–07). As Jean returns to Maurice, the reader sees through his eyes what the narrator calls the “boucherie” of bourgeois revenge against the Communards (904), and the acts of injustice symbolized by Chouteau now denouncing others “sous l’honnête blouse blanche d’un ouvrier,” in another act of political transvestism which hides Communard colors (905). The difficult ethical position of the Third Republic reader is amplified in a grotesque caricature of war tourism by the image of sightseeing Parisians looking on as “une de ces pétroleuses dont la peur hantait les imaginations hallucinées” is buried in a hole in the ground: “Des promeneurs regardaient, une dame s’était arrêté avec son mari, tandis qu’un mitron, qui portait une tourte dans le voisinage, sifflait un air de chasses” (905).<sup>22</sup> Maurice reminds Jean of his own words, the day after Sedan, about the need to sever “un membre gâté” in order to stop “la pourriture” (906); Maurice justifies his own demise by explaining that he is himself that “membre gâté” (907). The sacrifice in this pre-twentieth-century reference to “l’abominable holocauste”—or, in other biblical terms which coincide with his earlier Darwinian argument, the “calvaire” of this “nation crucifiée”—is, he argues, simply necessary. Saturday, May 27 (907–8) offers a glimmer of hope for the “cendrillon,” Henriette, who reprises her dream of “leur intimité à trois.” Jean too can find “un plaisir étonné et tremblant” in spite of his awareness of the endgame of Père-Lachaise which awaits, and the report he has heard about the leisured disdain of the Versailles bourgeoisie greeting Communard prisoners “avec des huées, à coups de canne et d’ombrelle” (908).

That endgame of Sunday, May 28, brings both the novel and the Bloody Week to the same moment of denouement (908–12). This bloodlust is associated by the narrator with Thiers (“le légendaire assassin de Paris”) more than Mac-Mahon (merely “le vainqueur du Père-Lachaise”). History is presented once more as immediate spectacle, war as entertainment on this macabre Sunday of leisure, the present already past, without the perspective that two decades since had apparently given to the novel’s author: “Paris ensoleillé, endimanché, paraissait en fête, [. . .] des promeneurs allaient d’un air de flânerie heureuse voir les décombres fumants des incendies” (909). Through the open window of the rue des Orties filters “l’adieu rouge” of the sun, as the red politics of the Commune are extinguished. So exquisite and intense is the pain of Maurice’s death that the narrator can only bear to recount it in hindsight, Jean returning to find Henriette kneeling beside her twin, her widow’s clothes referencing not only her spouse Weiss, and her brother, “un autre elle-même,” but also the death of hope for her and Jean. The narrator realizes that Maurice’s bottomless grave will stand between them: “La tombe de Maurice les séparait, sans fond.” The terms of their agony, articulated only in the voiceless agony of their reciprocal gaze, allows the reader to *feel* the political schism at the heart of republicanism: can Henriette *pardon* Jean? Is it possible to forgive the man who has killed your brother? The “vous” that separates Henriette and Jean will not attain the intimacy of the “tu” that Maurice has shared with each of them. Even as Jean and Henriette exchange *adieux*, her head in her hands, with shared language now displacing their reciprocal gaze, the final lines of the novel rehearse a cycle of ending and beginning. Jean looks forward, in anguished hope, to the future reconstruction of France.

This political hope is naturalized by Zola in the insistent image of the new growth of the tree, to which Zola returns in Chapter V of *Le Docteur Pascal* which picks up the loose ends of the novel series. Here some of the very lexis of the previous novel also returns,

Maurice framed as “l’holocauste destiné à l’expiation” (1014). Maurice, it transpires, is not the only Communard in the cycle. The paragraph which summarizes Pascal’s account of the living members of the family tree concludes with two more semi-coloned sentences: the second of these explains Jean’s return to the area around Plassans where he marries Mélanie Vial, the daughter of a peasant farmer. As her family name promises, she has given life to their son, and is once again pregnant. But this case of “fécondité pullulante” (1017) is matched in the previous sentence by the tale of Étienne Lantier who, after the strike at Montsou in *Germinal*, has joined the Paris Commune, been deported to Nouméa, and apparently married and had a child, though its sex is unknown, even though Pascal has written in vain hope of information to a colleague in New Caledonia, thus leaving the family tree incomplete. Pascal hypothesizes that perhaps the healthiest branch of the tree will emanate from Jean, “son plus solide espoir” (1018). But the tree, like the future, remains open, these small children as yet beyond taxonomy; and as Zola’s Third Republic readers know only too well, between the setting of this twentieth novel in the early years of the 1870s and its publication in 1893 stands the Communard amnesty of 1879–80, which may well have allowed Étienne and his family to return to France.

Only history, rather than fiction, can write that future. By the first years of the twentieth century, the Strasbourg statue, which Jean and Maurice have passed on their route to the rue des Orties, had become the site of palpable tension between the Ligue des patriotes (with its revanchist moniker “Quand même”) and the forces of Republican order. To the disgust of the Right, Zola had been pantheonized, and on November 17, 1918 crowds of some 150,000 people thronged around Pradier’s statue to celebrate the return of Alsace and Lorraine. For once, war had not bought regime change in France, though in 1940 it would. That too would be another *débâcle*.

## Notes

1. References to the novel will be made to Mitterand's Pléiade edition (1967) although reference will also be made to Baguley's extremely useful Classiques Garnier edition (2012).
2. As Baguley notes, "l'énorme succès de *La Débâcle*, dont la vente dépassera, bien avant la fin de l'année, même celles de *L'Assommoir* et *Nana*, lui apporte une grande satisfaction, et quelque consolation. Un premier tirage de 66 000 exemplaires, suivi de neuf tirages au cours de l'année 1892 qui permettront d'atteindre un total de 176 000 exemplaires" (Zola, 2012, 41). Pagès and Morgan define the novel as "le plus grand succès de Zola au XIXe siècle (164 000 exemplaires en 1892, 182 000 en 1894)" (145).
3. On Zola's articles for *Le Sémaphore de Marseille*, see Baguley's comments in Zola, 2012, 16.
4. For accounts of the subterranean workings of the Commune in the first novels of the series, see Charles and Matlock.
5. As Pagès & Morgan note, on May 10, 1871, "menacé d'être arrêté par la Commune à titre d'otage, il se réfugie à Saint-Denis et se rend ensuite à Bennecourt," returning to central Paris on May 26 or 27 (499). For a full account of Zola's movements during the war and the Commune, see Part 5 Chapter 5 of Mitterand, 1999, 754–822.
6. See Wilson and Charles. For a psychoanalytically-informed account of Zola's account of the Commune, see Chapter 2 of Starr, "if the general trajectory of Zola's plot moves from the anxious mourning for an ambivalently loved France to a paranoid rejection of that anxiety— both in the Commune and in the plot's apparent scapegoating of Maurice Levasseur— the novel as a whole strikes a note of depressive ambivalence, captured most poignantly by the suicidal self-sacrifice of its deliriously insightful protagonist" (59).
7. For the classic articulation of homosociability in literature, see Sedgwick.
8. See Ozouf for an account of the Third Republic discourse on fraternity as a Republican value.
9. See Ferguson, 200–05, for a close reading of the novel in the wider context of nineteenth-century literary representations of Paris as the capital of revolutionary politics.
10. As Baguley rightly notes in his edition of the novel, a subsequent "erreur de numérotage" on the manuscript has this folio read as 136 instead of the correct 138 (Zola, *La Débâcle*, 743).
11. For an evocative Deleuzian comparison between *L'Insurgé* and *La Débâcle* itself, see Stivale. As elsewhere, Hugo and Zola find themselves in uncomfortable proximity here. See, for instance, their discord over the comparison between *Les Misérables* and *L'Assommoir*.

12. On March 1, 1891, in response to the volume of the *Journal* covering 1872–77 (*Correspondance*, 123); on May 15, following a new edition of *Les Frères Zemganno* (141); on June 5, agreeing to sponsor Goncourt’s admission into the Société des auteurs et compositeurs dramatiques (156-57); on June 21, in praise of *Outamaro* (165); on March 5, 1892, in response to the volume of the *Journal* covering 1878–84 (253).
13. This emphasis on fire informs the very title of Michel Serres’s classic account of Zola’s fiction, *Feux et signaux de brume*.
14. In order to convey the parallel paths of his protagonists, Zola employs what is for him the usual narrative strategy of going back in time in this chapter. The first capitalized reference to this first notion of a Commune comes in Chapter 4 when the convalescent Jean reads in a Belgian newspaper about these disastrous events and “la crainte de voir triompher les révolutionnaires qui réclamaient la Commune” (809). Jean shares the newspaper’s critique of “Paris, que la guerre civile déchirait, au moment où l’ennemi était aux portes.” Although Henriette usually avoids politics, she exclaims the hope against hope that “Maurice, qui a mauvaise tête, ne se mêle pas à toutes ces histoires.” Chapter 7 underlines the vanity of such hope.
15. This image of bereavement anticipates the history of the Strasbourg statue on the Place de la Concorde, passed by Jean and Maurice on their later journey during the Bloody Week.
16. Hence Zola’s comment in a letter dated 24 August 1881 to Henry Céard: “je suis très satisfait de *Pot-Bouille*, que j’appelle mon *Éducation sentimentale*.”
17. Tombs’s *Paris, bivouac des révolutions* borrows its title from a phrase used by Jules Vallès in his newspaper *Le Cri du peuple*, March 28, 1871. Zola’s mapping of the geography of the nation onto the microcosm of the capital city (so here, Lille referenced in the streetnames of Paris) will be amplified in Chapter 8 of the novel, as we shall see below, when Jean and Maurice reach the Place de la Concorde, with its eight statues of provincial cities. In the north-east quadrant of that square, Lille sits alongside the most significant point of reference in 1871, Strasbourg, which will become a site of national mourning until the conclusion of the First World War.
18. Equally parodic are the novel’s panoramas of the city such as Gunther’s from Saint-Denis.
19. Peter Brooks compares this “left, secular version in Zola’s vision of Paris burning in expiation of the luxury and corruption of the Second Empire” to the Catholic version of 1870–71 as a “divine chastisement” only to be redeemed by the construction of the Sacré-Coeur (125). Zola would depict the basilica in *Paris* (1898).

20. Along the very north-south axis of George Duroy's Rabelais-style fantastical stride in the political fantasy which closes Guy de Maupassant's *Bel-Ami*, penned seven years earlier.
21. Darwin is already present in Zola's *ébauche*: "je fais se dresser la vision vraie de la guerre, abominable, la nécessité de la lutte vitale, toute l'idée haute et navrante de Darwin dominant le pauvre petit, un insect écrasé dans la nécessité de l'énorme et sombre nature" (Ms.10286, f<sup>os</sup>.6-7). In the Pléiade edition of the novel, Mitterand notes how "Zola fait sienne l'idée de Darwin, selon laquelle la lutte violente est une loi de nature qui régit tous les êtres" (1377). As Baguley writes: "In this novel [Zola's] Social Darwinism is the most explicitly articulated, as he sought to provide an overarching explanation of France's defeat" ("Zola and Darwin: A Reassessment," 209).
22. The grotesqueness of Zola's version of touristic Paris, or what Albert Boime calls "Impressionland" (95), brings into question Boime's association of Zola with "the ambiguous position of the Impressionists" (43). It is worth noting incidentally that the Place de la Concorde is also a key location in the "Impressionland" of Paris which Boime describes.

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