

Émile Zola

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Mirroring Feminine Identity: Specular Constructions of Gender and Class in Zola, Manet, Morisot, and Cassatt

The theme of woman contemplating herself in the looking glass proliferates as a commonplace in late nineteenth-century art and literature, and for many fin-de-siècle authors and painters, the mirror served as an emblem of feminine self-containment, offering glimpses of woman's solipsistic soul, and indicating her refusal to surrender her ego to man's superior will. Hence, from Salon paintings to Symbolist poetry, the mirror primarily appeared in late nineteenth-century literary and artistic representations as a symbol of feminine vanity and narcissism, and served as a denominator of woman's passivity, imitativeness, and perverse sexuality. Similarly, the Naturalist text, a powerful voice of patriarchal hegemony informed by scientific discoveries of the period, was not free of this aesthetic convention, and at various instances of his 1880 experimental novel *Nana*, with startling eroticism and provocative details, Zola presents his title heroine at moments of self-absorption and abandonment in front of the mirror. A few years before the serialized appearance of Zola's *Nana*, painter Édouard Manet introduces a note of ambiguity in his renditions of the mirror theme, while his younger colleagues Berthe Morisot and Mary Cassatt challenge the stereotypical representations of woman gazing at her own reflection through alternative perspectives and manipulation of cultural clichés.

As early as in 1868, after reading Lucas' *Le Traité de l'hérédité naturelle*, Zola notes that the most beautiful courtesans in Rome came from the people, and jots down his idea to make a working-class novel the birthplace of a beautiful courtesan. Later, in the *Ébauche* of *Nana*, Zola states his intent to make his celebrated courtesan "la vraie fille," that is to say, an authentic representation of femininity, an accurate reflection of womanhood. Zola's *Nana* can therefore be perceived as both, a mirror of her gender as well as her class. Hence the mirror scenes in *L'Assommoir*, and *Nana* prove all the more relevant to us in providing valuable insights into fin-de-siècle discourse on gender and class. Guided by Zola's portrayals of *Nana* in front of her mirror both in *L'Assommoir*, and *Nana*, this study sets out to explore the social and ideological constructions of gendered and classed identities in a number of paintings on the motif of women and mirrors completed between the 1870s and the 1890s. Specifically, I will investigate relevant works by three Modern painters, namely Manet, Morisot, and Cassatt, with the view to determine whether fin-de-siècle visual culture conformed to the prevalent hegemonic discourse on class and gender as reflected in the two Zola novels, or disrupted this representation through the inscription of alternative viewpoints, ambiguity, or subversion.

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Empire Wastes: Fashion, Sex, and Speculation in Zola's *La Curée*

In Zola's 1872 novel *La Curée*, the story of the moral and financial downfall of Renée Saccard can be read in the details of her fashionable clothing. Her excessive fortune and libido are repeatedly suggested by the decadent copiousness of her crinolines; her epitaph in the last sentence of the novel is the disclosure of her staggering debt to the couturier Worms. Considering the pride of place given to fashion by Zola, how can we understand its role in the larger story of Saccard's corrupt real estate speculation? While most scholarship on *La Curée* situates the novel in the context of the financial and topographical transformation of Paris, this paper will analyze the importance of fashion as a similarly profound discourse of social transformation in the novel. As the most important visual sign of class in the nineteenth century, fashion changed the social landscape of imperial France by privileging the mobility of the well-dressed over the well-born. The elite status of the elegant—irrespective of origin or reputation—represented the rapprochement of the beau monde and the demi-monde through a common devotion to couture. This paper will explore how *La Curée* powerfully illustrates the permeability of these social and vestimentary boundaries as exemplified in Saccard's purchase of a courtesan's diamonds for his wife. I argue that it is through cultivating Renée's lust for luxury that Saccard ensures the success of his business ventures as her coquetry secures lovers for her and potential investors for him. This paper will also discuss the relation of Renée's clothing to French colonial history: only when Renée strips off the exotic spoils of France's imperial exploits does she recognize her own status as a commodity. It is in these complicated financial and libidinal transactions that Zola exposes the role of fashion in French economic history and in the nexus of the sexual and social politics of the Second Empire.

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Naturalist Selection: Raciology and Republican Identity in Zola's Fiction"

Recent scholarly interest in the scientific origins of French racism has curiously neglected the work of Emile Zola. Yet genetic determination is nearly synonymous with the work of this foremost literary naturalist: his writing demonstrates the serious intellectual engagement between literary naturalism and the work of raciologists like Renan, Taine and Letourneau. My purpose in this paper is to challenge the dominant notion that Zola's fiction merely reflects intellectual trends or misinterprets scientific theory. In fact, his representations of race and national destiny employed the theories of raciological scientists, historians and politicians for his own ideological purposes.

In this paper, I examine the ways in which Zola's broad use of the term "race" as genetic, national and historical categories sheds light on the relationship between raciology and republican identity in his vision of French national progress. A clearer understanding of Zola's notion of race is important, given the apparent contradiction between Zola's simultaneous condemnation of anti-Semitism and assertion of French racial superiority in his late journalism and fiction. Through comparative readings of representations of European, Arab and African

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racism in *Thérèse Raquin*, *L'Argent* and *Les Quatre Évangiles*, I argue that what Zola glorifies as the “race républicaine” is created through a process of racial purification that simultaneously excludes non-Whites in the French colonies in Africa and the Middle East and assimilates Jews in the metropole. At stake in Zola’s naturalist utopia is an understanding of the Third Republic’s imperialist “civilizing mission” and its relationship to the racism inherent in French universalism.