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## ABSTRACT

An examination is made, in this dissertation, of the art criticism of Zola and Huysmans. Chapter One provides a biographical framework; this is based mainly on correspondence between Zola and Huysmans.

Chapter Two contains an expose of Zola's literary theory, with especial reference to Le Roman expérimental, and includes a discussion of realism and Naturalism making reference to the writings of Balzac, Flaubert and Goncourt. The particular characteristics of Zola's literary theory are pointed out: his insistence upon truth and the author's individuality; this is paralleled in his art criticism, as Chapter Four illustrates.

Chapter Three examines Huysmans' literary theory with reference to his novels and the differences between Huysmans' Naturalism and Zola's. The increasing importance of the spiritual element, yet continued adherence to Naturalist practice is illustrated.

Chapter Four begins with a description of the world of the arts in Paris when Zola wrote his "Salons". This is followed by an account of Zola's relationships with Independent painters of his time. Finally an examination of Zola's writings on art is made, and the formula by which he expressed his art theory is discussed: "Une œuvre d'art est un coin de la création vu à travers un tempérament." The qualities Zola admired in a painter (and which reflected characteristics of his own writing) are observed: the vigour and solidity of Courbet, the sincerity of Manet and the Impressionists. It is further observed that the avant-garde realist painters appealed to a democratic sense in Zola, although his views on the technique of painting, essentially conservative, could not fully embrace the Impressionists' avant-garde technique.

Chapter Five follows a similar pattern to the previous chapter and contains a discussion of Huysmans' writings on art, commenting on his acumen and objectivity as critic in appreciating the work of Impressionists, Cézanne, Gauguin and others. The increasing subjectivity, however, and preoccupation with spiritual rather than artistic matters parallels the development in his novel-writing, as illustrated in Chapter Three.

In conclusion, an assessment is attempted of the critical writings on art of Zola and Huysmans.

A STUDY OF THE LITERARY THEORIES AND ART CRITICISM

OF EMILE ZOLA AND JORIS-KARL HUYSMANS

BY

JENNIFER BURDON

Submitted for the degree of Master of Arts

June 1975 University of Durham

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from it should be acknowledged.

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### ABBREVIATIONS

**O.C. - ŒUVRES COMPLETES**

The volume number of a work to which the reader is referred is given before the page reference. e.g. Zola: O.C., 7, p. 34.

**B.N. - Bibliothèque Nationale.**

n. in the Index refers to a footnote.

Only the author and title of a work and where necessary the title of the newspaper in which an article was printed are given in the footnotes. For full publication details, the reader is referred to the Bibliography.

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(continued)

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## INTRODUCTION

Il y a plus de véritable critique dans l'appréciation inspirée d'un artiste ou d'un poète que dans toutes les combinaisons systématiques des professeurs et des érudits. (1)

The most perceptive art critic of mid-nineteenth century France was, without doubt, Baudelaire. (2) His writings on art bear out the thought expressed above by Moreau. Zola and Huysmans both owed much to Baudelaire. Like Baudelaire, they gave their opinions, as literary men, on the artists of their period. In their individual ways, each contributed to the changing artistic attitudes of the second half of the century; and, remarkably, each had the gift of appreciating the qualities of contemporary artists whose names are still respected today - Manet, Degas, Redon and others.

It is proposed, in this dissertation, to examine the art criticism of Zola and Huysmans, and to evaluate its importance. Chapter One is concerned with the biographical relationship between the two authors. Since it has been found desirable to take into account the literary theories of Zola and Huysmans, which, in both cases, have a direct relationship to their art theory, Chapters Two and Three deal with the literary attitudes of Zola and Huysmans respectively. Chapter Four contains an analysis of Zola's writings on art and artists, Chapter Five an examination of Huysmans' art criticism. In conclusion, an attempt is made to assess the significance of the two authors' opinions. The implications and further possible lines of thought developing from these are also discussed.

The period when the two novelists were formulating their critical views (approximately 1865 to 1890) was one of change and renewal in the

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(1) Moreau : Cahiers, vol. 2, p.55.

(2) Baudelaire : O.C., vols. L'Art romantique and Curiosités esthétiques.

fields of art and literature. The work of Realist painters shook the roots of the established school of painting, while Zola's Naturalist novels created both controversy and the inspiration for a new group of writers - the "groupe de Médan" as they became known - of which Huysmans was an enthusiastic member. Zola's writings on art played a leading part in defending Manet during the scandal raised by the painter's work. Huysmans' critical writings span the work of Manet and the Impressionists and also of painters who reacted against the Realist movement of the fifties and sixties. In some ways, Huysmans' later art criticism forms the opposite partner to Zola's, the contrast being between Symbolism (or dream-painting) and Naturalism. (1)

However, the two critics do not fall comfortably into these simple categories. There are elements of the idealist and of the realist in both. Their criticism is enlightening from two points of view: firstly, it widens our appreciation of the artists discussed and, secondly, it gives insight into their own particular artistic beliefs and tastes.

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(1) These two terms will be defined during the course of the dissertation.

CHAPTER ONE

RELATIONS BETWEEN ZOLA AND HUYSMANS

This Chapter contains a brief account of the relationship shared by Zola and Huysmans in social, literary and artistic affairs. The evidence cited is mainly that found in letters exchanged by the two men. (1) Huysmans, eight years younger than Zola, became first an admirer, then a literary collaborator with the latter and an ardent exponent of Naturalism (as Chapter Three will illustrate). However, the association between the two literary figures was to diminish in later years after the publication of A Rebours, the novel in which Huysmans betrayed his anti-Naturalist tendencies. (2) The contents of this Chapter are largely factual, the intention being to give a biographical basis to the literary and artistic views of Zola and Huysmans contained in the following Chapters.

Huysmans met Zola in 1876, when Henry Céard accompanied him to Zola's house in the Rue St. Georges. (3) A letter of the 13th. December 1876 from Zola complimented Huysmans on the novel he had brought with him on that occasion: Marthe. Zola expressed reservations about Huysmans' rather over-done style:

... je crois que le livre gagnerait à être écrit d'une façon plus bonhomme. Vous avez un style assez riche pour ne pas abuser du style. (4)

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(1) Zola: O.C., 14 (Correspondance); Huysmans: Lettres inédites à Emile Zola.  
 (2) Huysmans: O.C., 7.  
 (3) Baldick: The Life of J. K. Huysmans, p. 36.  
 (4) Zola: O.C., 14, p. 1390 (letter to Huysmans dated 13th December 1876).

Zola's attitude in the letter is one of encouragement and friendly advice. Huysmans became a regular visitor to Zola's Thursday "soirées", which were also attended by Alexis, Hennique and Maupassant, and where Zola was happy to be the presiding figure. This group of friends gave Zola their support during the controversy provoked by L'Assommoir. The novel was serialised partly in Le Bien public and partly in La République des Lettres after the editor of the first paper had bowed to public opinion and discontinued publication of L'Assommoir in serial form. (1) A letter from Huysmans praised the novel for its beauty, poignancy and power. (2) Huysmans's sympathy with Zola's naturalistic aims is shown in a letter from him to Zola dated "fin juillet 1877" in which he quotes the opinion of a woman of the working class about L'Assommoir :

...c'est trop vrai, moi je n'aime pas ça, je le vois trop tous les jours! - Cet avis venant d'une ouvrière qui déclare que c'est absolument vrai, et qui a pleuré comme une madeleine, dit-elle, à la mort de Lalie, me semble précieux; d'autant que cette femme a fréquenté des ouvriers toute sa vie. (3)

The 16th April 1877 has been taken as the date of the launching of the Naturalist school. (4) It was then that the much-publicised "dîner Trapp" was held, attended by Octave Mirbeau, Huysmans, Paul Alexis, Léon Hennique, Henry Céard and others, along with the writers admired by these men; Zola, Flaubert and E. de Goncourt. (5) Huysmans continued to associate with such literary figures, visiting Flaubert's Sunday gatherings where Edmond de Goncourt and Zola were usually present. (6) Zola saw in Huysmans a potentially powerful

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- (1) Hemmings: Emile Zola, p.134, describes the uproar caused by L'Assommoir, and the charges of immorality it provoked.  
 (2) Huysmans : Lettres inédites à Emile Zola, letter dated c. 7:1:1877  
 (3) Ibid., letter dated "fin juillet 1877".  
 (4) Hemmings : Emile Zola, p.166.  
 (5) v. Ceard's article in La Revue hebdomadaire, 21:11:1908.  
 (6) Baldick : The life of J. K. Huysmans, p.39

combatant in the cause of Naturalism, the movement which, under Zola's leadership, would carry realism in the novel to its ultimate expression, by describing the life of the working classes of Paris accurately and frankly. (1) Zola thus urged Céard to encourage Huysmans to continue writing his novel Les Soeurs Vatard :

Que me dites-vous? Huysmans a lâché son roman sur les brocheuses! Qu'est-ce donc? Un simple accès de paresse, n'est-ce pas? une fainéantise causée par la chaleur? Mais il faut qu'il travaille, dites-le-lui bien. Il est notre espoir, il n'a pas le droit de lâcher son roman, quand le groupe a besoin d'œuvres. (2)

The novel was eventually completed by Huysmans and dedicated to Zola, who reviewed it in Le Voltaire on the 4th March 1879:

Je voudrais bien que les faiseurs de romans et de mélodrames ineptes sur le peuple eussent l'idée de lire Les Soeurs Vatard de M. J. K. Huysmans. Ils y verraient le peuple dans sa vérité. (3)

The highly-detailed descriptions of Parisian scenes contained in Les Soeurs Vatard were in the Naturalist spirit, akin with descriptions by Zola and by the Goncourt brothers. (4) Huysmans showed his enthusiasm for Naturalism when he wrote to Zola in September 1878, at the time when Nana was in the process of publication: "Ça va faire un fier argument pour le naturaliste, ce livre-la! les bons hugolistes n'ont qu'à se tenir." (5).

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- (1) Naturalism will always be spelt with a capital when it is used to refer to the literary movement, developing from the realism of Balzac and Flaubert, associated with Zola and his circle and with the Goncourt brothers, which, in a broad definition, sought to depict everyday life, including that of the working classes, in as truthful a manner as possible. The different emphases present in the Naturalism of Zola and of Huysmans are examined in Chapters 2 and 3.
- (2) Zola : O.C., 14, p.1396, letter to Céard dated 16:7:1877.
- (3) Zola : O.C., 10, p.1307. The text is that of Zola's Le Voltaire article which was reprinted under the title "Trois débuts", "ii M.J.K.Huysmans".
- (4) Examples of Huysmans' Naturalist style are contained in Chapter 3.
- (5) Huysmans : Lettres inédites à Emile Zola, letter dated c. 10:9:1878.

The series of articles concerning the Salon of 1879 which Huysmans wrote for Le Voltaire further demonstrates his closeness to Zola's attitudes. (1) It was Zola who recommended to the editor of the newspaper, Laffitte, that Huysmans should undertake the Salon reports. Collaboration between the two writers continued with the publication of the volume entitled Les Soirées de Médan, the collection of short stories (based on the invasion of 1870 and subsequent events) written by Zola, Huysmans, Céard, Hennique, Alexis and Maupassant. (2) Huysmans was encouraged by Zola's favourable review of his prose-poem "Le Gousset" (included in Croquis Parisiens published in 1880). "Le Gousset", being a discussion of feminine armpits, had earned Huysmans a reputation with the critics, as he told Zola in a letter at the time: "L'on commence à me considérer comme un érotomane qui aurait fort besoin de douches et de potions camphrées. (3).

The year 1880 saw the conception and collapse of a project to publish a Naturalist newspaper to be called La Comédie humaine. Huysmans was to have been the editor. (4) The financial difficulties caused by the intended publisher, Derveaux, have been clearly recorded by Pierre Lambert in his notes to the edition of Huysmans' letters to Zola already cited. (5) It is sufficient here to say that the project never got under way through lack of funds. Huysmans, disappointed, considered Zola's suggestion that they should issue a four-page edition, then finally resigned as editor. It is interesting, however

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(1) These are discussed in Chapter 5.

(2) v. Deffoux and Zavia : Le Groupe de Médan, pp.10,11.

(3) Huysmans: Lettres inédites à Emile Zola, p.38 (letter xv).

(4) v. Hemmings: Emile Zola, p.167 for further details.

(5) Huysmans: Lettres inédites à Emile Zola, pp.54 et seq.

to note some of the intended contents of the "premier numéro":

"Lettre-Manifeste" de Zola

"La politique et le nihilisme d'Herzen" par J.K.Huysmans.

"Sensations inédites" par Edmond de Goncourt.

"Croquis Parisien: Pantin" par J.K.Huysmans.

"Psychologie des Jésuites" (ou une très courte nouvelle)  
par Guy de Maupassant.

Zola's manifesto was very much in the fighting spirit,  
proclaiming the newspaper contributors' ambition to speak the truth;

Ainsi, vous êtes résolu à lancer le journal de combat, dont nous  
avons parlé souvent. Allez donc, puisque le besoin et l'ambition du  
vrai vous emportent! (1)

He revelled in the thought of the insults which he anticipated the  
newspaper would provoke:

Mais je vous plains autant que je vous encourage, car les  
vérités se paient chèrement en injures, et il est si aisé de vivre  
prudemment à l'écart, qu'il faut avoir la passion du sacrifice pour  
rêver de se mettre en travers de la bêtise humaine. Croyez-en un  
homme qui a bientôt vingt années de huées et de boue, sur les épaules.(2)

After the non-publication of La Comédie humaine, Huysmans turned  
to his novel En Ménage. (3) Zola involved himself in writing Pot-Bouille,  
aided by Huysmans among others in the gathering of documentation.  
Letters from Huysmans to Zola of June 1881 contain diverse information  
about architects, copyists and the houses of the rue St. Roch  
inhabited by the clergy. (4). Thus, Zola did not hesitate to 'use' his  
friend in his search for authentic background material. There is no  
evidence in his letters to Zola that Huysmans found this irritating;  
his opinion of the finished novel paid tribute to its Naturalism  
(i.e. its accuracy in conveying the impression of everyday life):

(1) Ibid.

(2) Ibid.

(3) published Feb. 1881.

(4) Huysmans: op. cit., letters xxvi to xxix.



Ce que ça tapage! Ce que ça sent l'évier et le grailon des cuisines...  
...c'est la vie, elle-même, rendue avec un grand accent. (1).

A parallel may be drawn here between the Naturalist novel and Impressionist painting. The description of Zola's Naturalism by Huysmans holds much of the essence of the Impressionist aim - to capture the feel of a scene, the immediate whole. The realism of Impressionism will be discussed in Chapters Four and Five. It may simply be remarked, in passing, that "la vie, elle-même, rendue avec un grand accent" is an apt description of Zola's writing, but might equally be applied to the Repasseuses of Degas or the Moulin de la Galette by Renoir.

Returning, however, to Huysmans' letter of the sixteenth of April, it is noticeable that he was not, by this time, afraid of criticising certain points in Pot-Bouille - the lack of realism in the language of Zola's female bourgeois characters, for example. Their speech, he observed should be "plus jésuite que cela et plus faussement distingué". (2). Since April 1879 Huysmans has dropped the more humble opening "Mon cher maître" and prefers to begin his letters "Cher Zola", apparently feeling himself to be more of an equal to Zola than a disciple. Zola's encouragement of Huysmans in his career as novelist continued. He published a favourable review of Huysmans' work En Ménage. (3) In 1882, following the publication by Huysmans of A Van l'Eau, Zola wrote to his friend saying "Vous avez une originalité qui s'affirme". (4). The tone of Zola's letter is somewhat patronising - it is evident that Zola still considered himself as the leader of the Naturalist group, urging on a less-experienced author.

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(1) Ibid., letter dated 16:4:1882.

(2) Ibid.

(3) in Le Figaro, 11:4:1881.

(4) Zola: O.C., 14, p.1415 (letter to Huysmans dated 27:1:1882).

The publication of Huysmans' L'Art Moderne in 1883 provoked a letter in which Zola showed himself to be aware of the difference in their tastes, especially as far as Courbet and Degas were concerned:

Je n'en suis pas à jeter Courbet aux démolitions et à proclamer Degas le plus grand artiste moderne.  
... Je connais beaucoup Degas, et depuis longtemps. C'en'est qu'un constipé du plus joli talent. (1).

Since Huysmans, as will be illustrated in Chapter Five, held Degas in high regard, here was obviously a divergence of opinion. As for the rest of Zola's comments on L'Art Moderne, he was on safer ground in praising Huysmans' hatred of "le faux et le bête." (2). This was the same academic, mediocre painting Zola himself had campaigned against in his own Salon reviews. (3).

It was with the publication of Huysmans' novel A Rebours that the differences in taste between the two authors were finally made clear. Huysmans had broached the subject of his anti-naturalistic novel in a letter written to Zola in 1882:

...je me suis remis au travail - plongé dans une sorte de roman-fantaisie bizarre, une folie nerveuse qui sera, je crois, assez neuve, mais qui fera demander mon immédiat internement à Charenton... (4).

He excused himself, jokingly, in a letter of the following year, by insulting his own creation: "Je suis toujours, pour ma part, attelé dans mon absurde bouquin..." (5). When the novel was finally published in 1884 Zola wrote a slightly accusatory but tactful letter to his friend, giving his impression of A Rebours. He recognised the divergence of their ways:

(1) Zola: O.C., 14, p.1427 (letter to Huysmans dated 10:5:1883.)

(2) Ibid.

(3) v. infra chapter 4.

(4) Huysmans: Lettres inédites à Emile Zola, letter dated c. 15:11:1882.

(5) Ibid., letter dated 23:11:1883.

Quant à nous autres (i.e. Zola's Naturalist school), à la fin, nous sommes là un peu par complaisance de l'auteur n'est-ce pas? Des Esseintes communique très drôlement en Mallarmé. Une curieuse définition de Baudelaire. La tortue exquise, surtout avec sa branche de pierreries, qui est d'un joli raffinement... De belles pages de critique artistique sur les peintres aimés de Des Esseintes. Personnellement, je n'ai que de la curiosité pour Gustave Moreau. (1).

He further made a wry comment on the decadent hero, des Esseintes, of Huysmans' novel:

Le mieux pour lui serait de se laisser emporter par sa maladie d'estomac, puisque le monde ne lui paraît pas habitable. (2).

Huysmans' reply to Zola was an attempt to persuade him that the ideas expressed by des Esseintes were certainly not his own - "des idées diamétralement opposées aux miennes!" (3) However, the gap between the two authors' literary and artistic views was now apparent to Zola. (4). Not deceived by Huysmans' propitiatory words, Zola realised that he no longer had in Huysmans a fellow-combatant for Naturalism. The preface which Huysmans wrote for the 1903 edition of A Rebours tells of Zola's reproach that the novel was a "terrible blow" for Naturalism. (5)

Relations between Zola and Huysmans were hence forward less closely linked although they continued to correspond. If Zola had been offended by A Rebours, Huysmans' letters after this period still expressed admiration of Zola's novels - Germinal, La Terre, L'Argent. (6). Zola wrote a sympathetic letter to Huysmans in 1889 when the latter had fallen ill. (7) Huysmans, in 1892 and 1896 wrote further complimentary letters on the publication by Zola of La Débâcle and Rome. (8).

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(1) Zola: O.C., 14, p. 1433 (letter to Huysmans dated 20:5:1884).

(2) Ibid., p.1434.

(3) Huysmans: Lettres inédites à Emile Zola, letter dated c. 25:5:1884.

(4) An examination of this point is contained in the following Chapters.

(5) Huysmans: O.C., 7, p. xodi.

(6) v. Huysmans: Lettres inédites à Emile Zola, letters xliv (5:1885), lii (c. 2:6:1887) and lviii (26:3:1891) respectively.

(7) Zola: O.C., 14, p.1468, letter dated 6:3:1889.

(8) Huysmans: op. cit., letters lix (6:1892) and lx (14:5:1896).

When Zola died, in 1902, Huysmans expressed his grief in a letter to Céard:

Je ne suis pas allé, bien entendu, me mêler à cette cohue (i.e. at Zola's funeral) et ai préféré aller prier pour le pauvre homme, en un coin...  
Ces morts remuent tout de même de vieilles cendres, et je me sens pris, lorsque j'y songe, d'une immense tristesse et d'une horreur qui s'accélère de jours en jours, de mon temps... (1).

From this brief résumé of the relationship between Zola and Huysmans, we may go on to a consideration of the development of the literary theories of the two novelists.

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(1) Ibid., p.146 (letter to Céard dated 5:10:1902).

## CHAPTER TWO

### ZOLA'S LITERARY THEORY:

#### NATURALISM AND LE ROMAN EXPERIMENTAL

An examination is made, in this Chapter, of the various elements of Zola's literary theory. The intention is not so much to prove the inadequacies of Zola's "roman expérimental" idea or to point out the differences between his theory and his practice as novelist, but to present Zola's literary views as a basis for comparison with his views on painting. There are similarities, inevitably, between the two, and one complements the other in an understanding of Zola's meaning. The word Naturalism is connected with Zola more than with any other author and he, more than any other, imprinted the Naturalist movement in French literature with his own particular stamp. (1)

NATURALISM: Influence of realist novelists; the Goncourts and the "roman documentaire"; a definition of Naturalism.

Zola's reputation as the founder of Naturalism was disputed by Edmond de Goncourt. An entry in the Journal of 1891 is a testimony to Goncourt's claim to be the originator of the genre. Not only was he the originator, he claimed in reply to Huret's questions, but he was the first one to extract himself from the genre once it was exhausted.(2) Apart from being a revelation of Goncourt's character, the entry is not particularly significant. Neither Zola nor Edmond de Goncourt invented Naturalism. The movement was a direct progression from the realism of

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(1) The Naturalist movement is taken as lasting, approximately, from the late 1860s to the early 1890s.

(2) Goncourt: Journal, 1.6.1891. Huret's Enquête sur l'évolution littéraire was published in 1891.

Balzac and Flaubert. These were the writers most admired by the Goncourts, Zola, Huysmans and their friends. The "bible" of Naturalist novelists, as Huysmans acknowledged, was Flaubert's l'Education sentimentale. (1) The projected Naturalist newspaper of 1880 was to have been called La Comédie humaine, a tribute to Balzac. (2)

The ambition common to realism and to Naturalism was that of depicting real contemporary society in as impartial and accurate a manner as possible. Naturalist writers followed the example of Balzac and Flaubert in their scrupulous collecting of relevant detail in preparation for their novels. (3) Lionnet's definition of the "realist novel" (examples of this might be La Cousine Bette by Balzac, or Flaubert's Madame Bovary) might be applied equally to the Naturalist novel:

La formule du roman réaliste était à peu près celle-ci: personnages ordinaires, événements ordinaires, style impersonnel. (4)

The Goncourt brothers frequently expressed a similar idea to the one which Balzac had put forward in his foreword to the Comédie humaine: the conception of the novelist as "historian of the present." In the Preface to Germinie Lacerteux, for example, the brothers defined the novelist's task as the writing of "l'histoire morale contemporaine." (5) This phrase is reminiscent of Balzac's ambition

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(1) Huysmans: O.C., 7, p.vii (Preface to A Rebours).

(2) v. supra p.6.

(3) Martino: Le Naturalisme Français, p. 15 describes Flaubert's scientific method of collecting information for his novels.

(4) Lionnet: L'Evolution des idées chez quelques-uns de nos contemporains, p.207.

(5) Goncourt: Préfaces et Manifestes littéraires, p.22.

to write "l'histoire des mœurs." (1) "La société française allait être l'historien, je ne devais être que le secrétaire" might have been a citation from a Goncourt preface; it was, of course, Balzac's expression. (2) Goncourt wrote:

Les historiens sont des conteurs du passé; les romanciers des conteurs du présent. (3) Similarities are thus evident between Balzac's theory and that of his realist successors the Goncourts, who might be classed as the last of the nineteenth century realists or the first of the Naturalists.

However, it is important to make the point that although Balzac and Flaubert might be referred to as realist novelists, they did not put the consideration of realism above all others. Balzac had an ambition to organise his observations and classify the society he studied into its various types ("Espèces sociales"). (4) He wished, moreover, to formulate the laws of human behaviour:

En dressant l'inventaire des vices et des vertus, en rassemblant les principaux faits des passions, en peignant les caractères, en choisissant les événements principaux de la Société, en composant des types par la réunion des traits de plusieurs caractères homogènes, peut-être pouvais-je arriver à écrire l'histoire oubliée par tant d'historiens, celle des mœurs. (5)

Flaubert, in his correspondence, made it clear that he put the consideration of art above that of truth (or realism). He wrote, in

(1) Balzac: O.C., 1, p. 7 ("Avant-propos" de la Comédie humaine).

(2) Ibid.

(3) Goncourt: Journal, 24.10.1864.

(4) Balzac: O.C., 1, p. 4.

(5) Ibid., p.7. The similarity between Balzac's ambition, as expressed in his "Avant-propos" and Zola's, as stated in Le Roman expérimental, are further discussed in the second section of this Chapter.

1856, for example:

"La morale de l'Art consiste dans sa beauté même, et j'estime par-dessus tout d'abord le style, et ensuite le Vrai.(1)

Both Balzac and Flaubert departed, in practice, from realist tenets.

The Romantic aspect of Balzac's work is apparent in his novels and short stories concerned with the supernatural: "Les Deux Rêves,"

La Peau de Chagrin, "Séraphîta," "Les Proscrits". In the works of

Flaubert the realism of L'Education sentimentale and Madame Bovary

is counter-balanced by the Romantic Salammbô and La Tentation de Saint Antoine.

There is a gap, similarly, between Zola's theory and his novels, which often neglect the scientific claims he made for the novelist.(2)

The Goncourts, however, and other Naturalist writers such as Céard, Alexis and Huysmans kept closer to realism. In his work on Naturalism, Martino observes that the Goncourts had "si complètement réalisé les aspirations réalistes." (3) The novel published in 1865 by the brothers, Germinie Lacerteux, was an example of their scrupulous attention to the gathering of accurate facts from real life. The novel was based on a minutely-detailed study of the Goncourts' maid; in the Preface the brothers gave a sample of the diary of events from which the novel was composed.(4) Subsequent novels by the Goncourts showed that they still adhered to the same scrupulous method: Manette Salomon, Madame Gervaisais, La Fille Elisa, La Faustin - all are examples of precise documentations from different areas of society used as the basis for a novel.(5)

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(1) Flaubert: O.C., 7, p.509, letter to Louis Bonenfant, 12.12.1856

(2) v. infra section 2 of this Chapter.

(3) Martino: Le Naturalisme français, p.20.

(4) Goncourt: Préfaces et Manifestes littéraires, pp.23 et seq.

(5) Published in 1867, 1869, 1877, 1882 respectively.



The Goncourts' novel Germinie Lacerteux is significant in a consideration of Zola's development since it was the first of what might properly be termed the "Naturalist" novels. Zola read the novel and was prompted to write an article in praise of it.(1) Zola's own novel Thérèse Raquin, published in 1867, gained the support of the Goncourt brothers. (2) Thus the Goncourts might indeed claim to be the originators of the Naturalist movement, if not of Naturalism itself (which was essentially an exaggerated realism).

It is necessary, however, to define what is understood here by Naturalism. The Naturalism of the Goncourts differed in certain respects from that of Zola. To the two brothers the main quality of their novels was their fidelity to reality. Although Edmond de Goncourt claimed, in 1891, that he was the rightful founder of Naturalism (the term, by that date, had found general acceptance) earlier he and Jules had disassociated themselves from the expression. The novel, as they envisaged it, was essentially documentary:

Le roman, depuis Balzac, n'a plus rien de commun avec ce que nos pères entendaient par roman. Le roman actuel se fait avec des documents, racontés ou relevés d'après nature, comme l'histoire se fait avec des documents écrits.(3)

The term used by Edmond, in his Preface to La Faustin, was not "roman naturaliste", but "école du document humain":

..... je veux faire un roman qui sera simplement une étude psychologique et physiologique de jeune fille, grandie et élevée dans la serre chaude d'une capitale, un roman bâti sur des documents humains.

His footnote expanded the phrase "documents humains":

Cette expression, très blaguée dans le moment, j'en réclame la paternité, la regardant, cette expression, comme la formule définissant le mieux et le plus significativement le mode nouveau de travail de l'école qui a succédé au romantisme: l'école du document humain.(4)

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(1) Printed in Le Salut public, 24.2.1865, reprinted in Mes Haines.

(2) Hemmings: Emile Zola, p.162.

(3) Goncourt: Journal, 24.10.1864 littéraires.

(4) Goncourt: Préfaces et Manifestes, p.60 (Preface to La Faustin).

The assessment of the French novel in the 1870s made by Pellissier, a contemporary of the Goncourts and Zola, sums up the Goncourt attitude:

Le roman contemporain est une œuvre essentiellement documentaire. Il réduit le plus possible la part de l'invention; il veut être une copie de la réalité. La première loi des réalistes est d'étouffer en leur "moi" toute prédilection qui pourrait nuire à l'autorité de leur œuvre. Ils ne nous montrent rien d'eux-mêmes, que la précision sévère de leur analyse. Le roman est pour eux un instrument d'enquête: ils font l'histoire de leur génération. ....Leur but est de donner sur les hommes et les choses de leur temps des renseignements impartiaux. (1)

In practice, Edmond de Goncourt prided himself on keeping closer to reality than Zola did. The Journal contains an entry of 1884 in which he criticised Zola's characters for not being naturalistic. Only Zola's "milieux", Goncourt commented, were drawn from nature, the people in his novels were inventions, unlike the true-to-life Goncourt heroines Renée Mauperin and Germinie Lacerteux. (2)

Huysmans, also, criticised Zola for not adhering to Naturalist principles and found fault with certain unauthentic passages in L'Assommoir. (3)

Zola, however much he publicised and campaigned for Naturalism, was in practice less careful about keeping strictly to what he had observed in real life than were the Goncourts.

Whatever Zola's attitude to "art" in his literary theory (and we shall see that he neglected the consideration), in his novels realism was frequently sacrificed to artistic truth. Psichari gives the example of Estelle in Germinal. The fact that the girl, unrealistically, is always seen to be crying is not unreal within the novel; it serves to impress upon the reader the essential misery of the situation. (4)

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(1) Pellissier: Le Mouvement littéraire au XIXe. siècle, p. 268.

(2) Goncourt: Journal, 11.2.1884.

(3) v. infra Chapter 3, section "Emile Zola et l'Assommoir"

(4) Psichari: Anatomie d'un Chef-d'œuvre "Germinal", p 12.

Zola is not faithful to the "document" at the expense of expressiveness in his novels. He was not hide-bound by realist tenets. He is quoted as saying to Céard and Huysmans, for example, when they criticised him for not showing enough respect for the "document vrai" : "De la vie vécue, croyez-vous cela si nécessaire?" (1)

Naturalism then, in the hands of the Goncourts and of Zola's literary admirers of the seventies and eighties (the groupe de Médan) was realism exaggerated, elevated to prime importance and applied to every section of society including the working classes and underworld of Paris. They based their novels on a close examination of reality, on "documentation".

Martino observes:

Cette expression de "roman documentaire" est donc celle qui convient mieux à définir ce qu'a été, en moyenne, le roman réaliste et naturaliste de 1860 à 1890. (2)

It is this definition which is understood, in this dissertation, by the term Naturalist novel.

The definition is confused, however, by the association of the Naturalist movement with Zola. Zola used the word when it suited his purpose and was aware of its usefulness as a journalistic catchword. He was, furthermore, content to be thought of as the leader of the Naturalist group, but he was not a typical member. The documentary novels of Alexis, Céard, Henrique and even Huysmans lacked the imaginative power and artistry of Zola's great novels - L'Assommoir or Germinal, for example. Since Zola was the most influential of the Naturalist authors, the word Naturalism inevitably took on implications which were peculiar to Zola rather than to the basic definition we have given of Naturalism. The characteristics Zola introduced into the theory of Naturalism are revealed in his theoretical work Le Roman expérimental.

(1) Martino: Le Naturalisme français, p. 115.

(2) Ibid., p. 70.

LE ROMAN EXPERIMENTAL

Le Roman expérimental was first published in 1879 to explain, as Zola states in the introductory passage, what he meant by a "littérature déterminée par la science." (1) Zola's actual motivation in writing the articles constituting Le Roman expérimental may be questioned. Edmond de Goncourt made the shrewd observation in 1877 that Zola's articles earned him money, but that it was by his novels he would wish to be judged. This is always a factor to be taken into account when Zola's journalistic work is being discussed - Zola had no private means; his earnings all came from his work and his writings. Furthermore, his talent for expressing a concept in vivid, readily-digestible form and his natural enthusiasm may have led him into being less discriminating than he might otherwise have been. Was, therefore, Le Roman expérimental a money-making, or publicity-seeking venture, or was it an expression of views sincerely held by Zola? There are justifications for both opinions. On the one hand, there is Zola's natural journalistic flair, the pressures of journalism, the earnings involved, on the other, Zola's natural sincerity, the fact that he republished Le Roman expérimental in book form (i.e. he did not seek to renounce the ideas it contained) and the fact that the views he expressed in the work were not entirely unlike what he had written previously.

The principle idea of Le Roman expérimental - that the rôle of a Naturalist novelist is similar to that of scientist - is one which Zola had expressed in earlier critical articles in his column "Livres d'aujourd'hui et de demain". (2)

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(1) Zola: O.C., 10, p. 1175.

(2) In L'Événement.

In an article praising a book by Mme. Champseix - Un Divorce - Zola makes the interesting comment:

Je ne suis pas un disciple de l'art pour l'art. Seulement, j'aime bien qu'un roman soit un roman. Je veux que le romancier se dise avant tout qu'il est un physiologiste et un psychologue. (1)

The concept of the novelist as "physiologist" and "psychologist" is expanded in Le Roman expérimental. But this work takes the idea further, equating the task of novelist with the task of an experimental scientist. Zola's preoccupation with this idea may be attributed to the profound impression made upon him by a work published in 1865 : Introduction à l'étude de la médecine expérimentale by Claude Bernard. (2) Zola's enthusiasm is apparent in Le Roman expérimental. It is debatable, as has already been suggested, whether this enthusiasm stemmed from a sincere belief in the parallel he was making between the man of medicine and the novelist, or whether, with his journalist's instinct he saw the opportunity for a vivid analogy and, as Hemmings observes, "plunged into print without giving himself time to consider where his audacious theorizing was taking him." (3) No doubt Zola was aware that publicity at this time would be all to the good, since his Rougon-Macquart series was approximately half-way through publication.

Whatever its raison d'être, however, Le Roman expérimental contains the basic elements of Zola's attitudes towards literature and art, as an examination of the text proves.

Le Roman expérimental, Zola observes in the introductory paragraph, is a "travail d'adaptation" from Bernard's Introduction à l'étude de la médecine expérimentale. The intention is stated naively:

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(1) Zola: article in L'Événement, 9.4.1866.

(2) Hemmings: Emile Zola, p.156 evinces the view that Zola did not read this work until after 1876, and that Le Roman expérimental was "an unreflecting reaction to a first reading of the book."

(3) Ibid.

to use Claude Bernard's theory literally to explain the novelist's role:

Le plus souvent, il me suffira de remplacer le mot "médecin" par le mot "romancier", pour rendre ma pensée claire et lui apporter la rigueur d'une vérité scientifique. (1)

The starting-point is obviously suspect. The confusion between the role of scientist and the role of artist continues:

Je vais tâcher de prouver à mon tour que, si la méthode expérimentale conduit à la connaissance de la vie passionnelle et intellectuelle, ce n'est là qu'une question de degrés dans la même voie, de la chimie à la physiologie, puis de la physiologie à l'anthropologie et à la sociologie. Le roman expérimental est au bout. (2)

His argument might be followed through from chemistry to sociology, but the leap in logic is evident when Zola adds the experimental novel as the culminating point of the development. While the scientist observes and experiments on a world of people exterior to himself, the novelist creates a world of fictional characters who can develop only according to the wishes of the author himself. Martino observes that Zola developed his analogy ".... sans s'aviser que le romancier ne trouvera jamais dans son "expérimentation" que ce qu'il y aura préalablement introduit lui-même". (3)

Zola's analogy betrays a "parallelisme vraiment naïf" in the critic's opinion. (4) Deffoux and Zavie express the contradiction in thought thus:

... le romancier ne se trouve pas dans la position du chimiste opérant sur des substances inanimées. Il ne peut rien provoquer en fait d'expérience....

Le chimiste transforme, le romancier reconstitue; et vous voyez la différence capitale entre les deux opérations. (5)

(1) Zola: O.C., 10, p. 1175.

(2) Ibid.

(3) Martino: Le Naturalisme français, p.37.

(4) Ibid., p.36.

(5) Deffoux and Zavie: Le Groupe de Médan, p.239.

They furthermore cite a letter written by Henry Céard in which he explained his reason for lending Zola Bernard's work:

Quand j'ai prêté à Emile Zola, l'Introduction à la médecine expérimentale de Claude Bernard, j'espérais lui montrer de quelle façon procédaient les savants et, par là, le mettre en garde contre l'inconvénient, sinon l'erreur, que commettrait un romancier si, en littérature, il prétendait employer le même système.(1)

Céard's comment, made forty years after Zola wrote Le Roman expérimental, pin-points Zola's mistake. Zola had fallen into the trap Langer describes in her Chapter: "Idols of the Laboratory", where she warns against the danger of using scientific terms metaphorically. (2) The only time when the novelist and scientist are on an equal is when the science concerned has not been proved but is still at the hypothetical or imagined stage, as Lionnet observes. (3)

Zola, in his ambition to play sociologist, ignores the artistic side of the novelist's work. He does, however, bring the word "art" into his argument when he claims, sophisticatedly, that his reason for basing Le Roman expérimental on Bernard's text is that medicine, to a great many people, is an art, just as the novel is an art. (4)

This thought is reiterated in "Chapter Four" of Le Roman expérimental:

Ce qui m'a fait choisir l'Introduction, je l'ai dit, c'est que la médecine est encore regardée par beaucoup de personnes comme un art. ....Puisque la médecine, qui était un art, devient une science, pourquoi la littérature elle-même ne deviendrait-elle pas une science, grâce à la méthode expérimentale? (5)

It is only fair to Zola to bear in mind that the division which exists in our thinking between "the arts" and "the sciences" was not so well-established in the Nineteenth century. Claude Bernard's purpose

(1) Ibid., pp. 238-9 (letter from Céard to Maurice-Verne dated 22.7.1918.)

(2) Langer: Mind: An Essay on Human Feeling, vol. 1, p.46.

(3) Lionnet: L'Evolution des Idées chez quelques-uns de nos contemporains, p. 237.

(4) Zola: O.C., 10, p.1175.

(5) Ibid., p. 1191.

in 1865, was to clear away any such confusion in the sphere of medicine. The Theories of Darwin, Taine and Charles Letourneau were further contemporary examples of scientific attempts to reduce problems to clear facts. (1) The determinist climate of the 1870s and eighties might be put forward as a reason for Zola's analogy between medicine and literature, but not as an excuse. Bernard himself had made the distinction between the physical reality of the doctor's world and the author's imaginary world. It is ironic to read Bernard's definition of a literary work: "Une création spontanée de l'esprit, qui n' a rien de commun avec la constatation des phénomènes naturels.(2) Zola criticises this attitude, apparently oblivious of the falsity of his assertion:

Sans doute, il (Bernard) songe à la poésie lyrique, car il n'aurait pas écrit la phrase en pensant au roman expérimental, aux œuvres de Balzac et de Stendhal. (3)

Zola then, unlike the scientist, is determined to treat novel-writing as an experimental science. He persists in his use of phrases lifted straight from Claude Bernard's text:

... l'expérimentateur doit n'avoir aucune idée préconçue devant la nature et garder toujours sa liberté d'esprit. (4)

This statement cannot possibly be applied to the novelist, except at the stage where he is collecting information on which to base his novel - the documentation stage dear to the Goncourts. Zola was not aware that the determinism he assumed ran through the whole of human behaviour was essentially an a priori idea. The aim of the experimental method, as Zola cites Bernard, is to establish relationships between phenomena, not to arrive at the final cause, to find out the

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(1) Darwin: Origin of Species translated into French 1862.  
 Taine: Histoire de la Littérature anglaise, 1863; Nouveaux Essais de critique et d'histoire, 1865.  
 Letourneau: Physiologie des passions, 1868, reviewed by Zola in Le Globe, 23.1.1868.  
 (2) Zola: O.C., 10, p.1201 cites Bernard.  
 (3) Ibid.  
 (4) Ibid., p. 1176.



"comment" but not the "pourquoi". (1) It is not apparent to Zola that as novelist he is more concerned with the "why"; he is not an impersonal scientist trying to establish natural laws, but is himself doing the determining. Zola abuses the positivist tenets he cites. He is carried away by the idea of novelist as seeker after discernible truths about men; he goes on to envisage the role of intelligent man in a future society:

pénétrer le comment des choses, pour devenir supérieur aux choses et les réduire à l'état de rouages obéissants...(2)

However scientific or positivistic Zola would like to be, such flights of the imagination prevent him.

The "scientism" (i.e. his belief in the power of science) in Zola's literary theory is thus apparent. There is an unhappy fusion between his desire to be objective and his Romantic vision of the novel and the society of the future. These two elements are illustrated in Zola's analysis of Balzac's La Cousine Bette:

Le romancier part à la recherche d'une vérité. Je prendrai comme exemple la figure du baron Hulot, dans la Cousine Bette, de Balzac. Le fait général observé par Balzac est le ravage que le tempérament amoureux d'un homme amène chez lui, dans sa famille et dans la société. Dès qu'il a eu choisi son sujet, il est parti des faits observés, puis il a institué son expérience en soumettant Hulot à une série d'épreuves, en le faisant passer par certains milieux, pour montrer le fonctionnement du mécanisme de sa passion. Il est donc évident qu'il n'y a pas seulement là observation, mais qu'il y a aussi expérimentation, puisque Balzac ne s'en tient pas strictement en photographe aux faits recueillis par lui, puisqu'il intervient d'une façon directe pour placer son personnage dans des conditions dont il reste le maître. Le problème est de savoir ce que telle passion, agissant dans tel milieu et dans telles circonstances, produira au point de vue de l'individu et de la société; et un roman expérimental, La Cousine Bette par exemple, est simplement le procès-verbal de l'expérience, que le romancier répète sous les yeux du public. En somme, toute l'opération consiste à prendre les faits dans la nature, puis à étudier le mécanisme des faits, en agissant sur eux par les modifications des circonstances et des milieux, sans jamais s'écarter des lois de la nature. Au bout, il y a la connaissance de l'homme, la connaissance scientifique, dans son action individuelle et sociale. (3)

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(1) Ibid.

(2) Ibid., p. 1188. Martino: Le Naturalisme français, p.37 comments on Zola's ambition to eventually improve society.

(3) Zola: O.C., 10, pp. 1178-79.

The above passage demonstrates that the "truth" sought by the novelist, in Zola's opinion, is not an artistic, but a scientific (specifically psychological and sociological) truth. Balzac, in his Preface to the Comédie humaine had written of his ambition to establish the laws of social behaviour.(1) Zola's vision takes the idea further: Zola envisages the novelist as discovering scientific truths through his experimentation.

Balzac and Zola had in common not only their immense creative capability but a set of fixed principles on which each based his literary theory. Balzac, considering himself as an "instituteur des hommes", stated:

L'homme n'est ni bon ni méchant, il naît avec des instincts et des aptitudes; la Société, loin de la dépraver, comme l'a prétendu Rousseau, le perfectionne, le rend meilleur; mais l'intérêt développe aussi ses penchants mauvais. (2).

Zola, on the other hand, based his ideas of universal determinism on the "race, moment, milieu" theory of Taine and Dr. Prosper Lucas'

Traité philosophique de l'hérédité naturelle. (3) The Rougon-Macquart series was intended to show the development of two branches of a family through successive generations. The hereditary weakness present in the blood of certain members of the family was the cause of their destruction or insanity - Jacques Lantier, for example, in La Bête humaine, or Claude Lantier in L'Œuvre. The principles upon which such an undertaking as the Rougon-Macquart series or Balzac's Comédie humaine is based are very necessary since they give a coherent backing to the finished collection as well as an original plan from which the author may work.

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(1) v. supra p. 14.

(2) Balzac: O.C., 1, p.8 ("Avant-propos" de la Comédie humaine).

(3) Martino: Le Naturalisme français, pp. 39 et seq., Levin: The Gates of Horn, p. 308 and Hemmings: Emile Zola, pp. 55 et seq. examine the sources of Zola's ideas.

This does not mean, however, that the principles may not be broken. It is on this point that Zola differs from his fellow-Naturalists. His sympathies are for certain characters - the striking miners in Germinal, for example, and against others - the middle-class mine-owners in the same novel. Zola did not intend to be unscientific in this way - Hemmings cites an aide-mémoire in which Zola stated:

Je ne veux pas comme Balzac avoir une décision sur les affaires des hommes, être politique, philosophe, moraliste. Je me contenterai d'être savant, de dire ce qui est en cherchant les raisons intimes.(1)

Such a professed aim is incompatible with the resulting novels of the Rougon-Macquart series - the partisanship of Germinal, the lyricism of La Faute de l'abbé Mouret (which Huysmans' hero of A Rebours compared to a Hindu poem.(2) Zola's imagination usually rescued his novels from being simple documentary accounts or scientific studies. Indeed, he used the heredity factor artistically, as Hemmings observes, as a "substitute for old-fashioned fate". (3) This "novelist's licence", however, was not Zola's professed intention, if we are to judge from the scientific claims of Le Roman expérimental. The great effort he put into collecting information in preparation for his novels was the effect of a genuine desire to be scientific. (4) As we have seen, he prevailed upon his friends to help him in this task. (5) Here, then, is the basic dichotomy present in Zola - on the one hand, he has scientific, positivist intentions, on the other, he has an intensely imaginative creative ability. This accounts for the contradiction present throughout most of Le Roman expérimental. The metaphor of the novelist as scientist is so strong in Zola's mind that he begins to believe in the literal truth of the idea.

(1) Hemmings: Emile Zola, p.55.

(2) Huysmans: O.C., 7, p. 272.

(3) Hemmings: op.cit., p. 57.

(4) Ibid., p. 108 describes Zola's care in gathering details for La Faute de l'abbé Mouret.

(5) v. supra p. 7.

An attempt is made by Butor, in his "Introduction" to Le Roman expérimental in the Mitterand edition, to justify Zola's claim that the novel is an actual experiment. The test of the experiment is, according to Butor whether the reader has been convinced by the story:

Le lecteur n'a pas besoin de recommencer après sa lecture l'expérience qui lui a été décrite, ce qui serait nécessaire, au moins idéalement, s'il s'agissait d'un ouvrage de physique ou de chimie; l'expérience a déjà été répétée. A la fin du livre, le lecteur a-t-il cru ou non? S'il est arrivé jusqu' à la fin, en général, c'est qu'il a cru. Et si le romancier a bien mené cette expérience qu' il n' a pas seulement décrite mais répétée sous nos yeux, alors, dans un certain domaine, le lecteur ne peut plus penser de certaines façons. (1)

Butor has rendered Zola's theory more plausible, profiting to some extent on the ambiguity of the word "expérience" ("experiment" or "experience"). However, in so doing, Butor has altered the emphasis from the pseudo-scientific experiment, considered by Zola independently from the reader, to the question: "Has the novel influenced the reader's thoughts?" The point of application is shifted by Butor from the novel to the reader. The "experimental novel" was, to Zola, a demonstration in itself of a truth about man in society, as the passage cited above shows ("Le romancier part à la recherche d'une vérité..."). It was not, as Butor interprets, merely a demonstration of a hypothesis which the reader might or might not verify. This is an interesting twentieth-century version of Zola's theory, but it omits Zola's conviction of the scientific power of the novel. (2) Zola sees the novel as an instrument for discovering truths about the human situation; the novelist is an "experimental moralist":

Nous sommes, en un mot, des moralistes expérimentateurs, montrant par l'expérience de quelle façon se comporte une passion dans un milieu social. Le jour ou nous tiendrons le mécanisme de cette passion, on pourra la traiter et la réduire, ou tout au moins la rendre la plus inoffensive possible. Et voilà ou se trouvent l'utilité pratique et la haute morale de nos œuvres naturalistes, qui expérimentent sur

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(1) Zola: O.C., 10, p. 1147, The "Introduction" by Butor.

(2) It is interesting to note that Céard had made a similar suggestion to Zola - that the reader might act as verifier v. Céard: Lettres inédites à Emile Zola, pp. 107 et seq.

l'homme, qui démontent et remontent pièce à pièce la machine humaine, pour la faire fonctionner sous l'influence des milieux. Quand les temps auront marché, quand on possédera les lois, il n'y aura plus qu'à agir sur les individus et sur les milieux, si l'on veut arriver au meilleur état social. (1)

Zola thus equates, naively, the practice of the novelist with that of the scientist.

A further point, however, emerges from the above passage. Perhaps Zola is not as naive as he would have the reader believe. By setting up a defence of the novel as a very useful tool for social and moral improvement, he is anticipating, or rather replying to, all the criticisms of immorality which the naturalist novel had provoked. The scandal caused by L'Assommoir is an example of this. (2) Huysmans defended the morality of the novel and of its author in a set of articles Emile Zola et l'Assommoir. (3) The trials of Flaubert and Baudelaire on the charge of immorality were possibly fresh in Zola's mind, causing him to disassociate himself from any "l'art pour l'art" kind of argument. A safer defence was to speak of "l'utilité pratique et la haute morale de nos œuvres naturalistes". The assumption of a "scientific" attitude was, in itself, a defence against the criticism of immorality; by professing to look from a scientist's point of view, Zola could evade the criticism that he himself was debauched, for the scientist merely observes reality, does not judge, and, moreover, is obliged to report faithfully what he observes - it would be unscientific to omit some of the facts because they are too immoral or unsavoury.

The scientific objectivity claimed by Zola for the Naturalist novelist inherits, as has been seen in the first section of this chapter, from the ideas of Balzac and Flaubert. To Zola, though, as to

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(1) Zola: O.C., 10, p. 1188

(2) v. supra p. 4.

(3) v. infra Chapter 3.

the Goncourts, the idea became of prime importance. They were certain that the correct way of writing novels was the realist way. Romanticism was derided, just as the Realist painters had rejected the style of Delacroix and Gericault. In Le Roman expérimental, Zola scorns the work of Romantic and idealist, i.e. non-realist, writers:

Il faut vraiment notre âge de lyrisme, notre maladie romantique, pour qu'on ait mesuré le génie d'un homme à la quantité de sottises et de folies qu'il a mises en circulation. (1)

Objectivity plays a large part in Zola's aesthetic ideas in both the literary and the artistic spheres. The "écran réaliste" was the one which least deformed the original vision, and was the "screen" through which Zola preferred to look. (2) His approval of such painters as Manet, Pissarro and Monet reflects this preference, since these were the artists who pursued the realist aim in painting.

Beside this desire for objectivity, however, there is another element present in Le Roman expérimental which has been neglected by critics. It is easy to dismiss the work as an impossible statement of the novelist's task, without taking into account the second element Zola introduces: that of the "personnalité" of the novelist. Zola continues his scientific analogy, comparing the novelist's "personality" or "originality" to the scientist's

... la méthode n'est qu'un outil; c'est l'ouvrier, c'est l'idée qu'il apporte qui fait le chef-d'œuvre. J'ai déjà cité ces lignes: "C'est un sentiment particulier, un 'quid proprium' qui constitue l'originalité, l'invention ou le génie de chacun." Voilà donc la part faite au génie, dans le roman expérimental. (3)

The novelist/scientist analogy has become, by this stage, a travesty of literary theory, but the importance of the element Zola calls "l'originalité" must be stressed. The author's "personnalité", Zola insists, is a vital contribution to the work of art. (4)

(1) Zola: O.C., 10, p. 1193.

(2) Zola: letter to Valabrègue, August 1864.

(3) Zola: O.C., 10, p. 1193

(4) Ibid., p. 1180 and p. 1193.

In an earlier critical article, Zola had shown a similar attitude when he wrote, of Voltaire:

Quant à moi, qui ne suis pas un lettré, je ne considère point Voltaire comme un poète, un philosophe, un historien ou un romancier; je le considère comme une force dont s'est servie la vérité, ou plutôt encore comme l'individualité la plus complète et la plus en lumière du glorieux dix-huitième siècle. (1)

Zola's view-point in this article is that of Ste-Beuve. The description of Ste-Beuve, as critic, given by Pellissier might very well be applied to Zola:

... ce qui l'intéresse le plus, c'est le caractère de l'auteur lui-même, sa personne dans ce qu'elle a de plus individuel et de plus intime. (2)

Such terms as "tempérament", "originalité", "personnalité", "individualité" appear to derive not only from Ste-Beuve, but from Taine's "faculté maîtresse"; they are used by Zola to refer to the qualities of a work of art which escape determinist explanation. The dual idea of objectivity plus "individualité" is central to Zola's critical thinking. The undefined concept of "tempérament", we shall see, played a large part in Zola's art criticism.

When, therefore, Zola's own novels are criticised as not keeping to the "scientific" rules he set down in Le Roman expérimental, it is not strictly true, since any unrealistic element may be attributed to his "originalité". Even the Romanticism so derided by Zola, which is apparent in the description of the pit-head in Germinal, for example, may be included under this vague title of originality. The very impreciseness of the term might allow it to cover the major omissions of Le Roman expérimental: the part played by art; the relationship of art to reality, or to science. The theory is thus at the same time comprehensive and unsatisfactory in its vagueness. Le Roman expérimental lacks the completeness and logic of Flaubert's critical observations.

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(1) Zola: review of Pierron's Voltaire et ses maîtres in L'Événement, 3.4.1866.  
 (2) Pellissier: Le Mouvement littéraire au XIXe. siècle, p.306.

In summary, Zola brought to Naturalism scientific considerations which differentiated the movement from realism, although his ambition and practice in composing the Rougon-Macquart series had much in common with Balzac's undertaking: La Comédie humaine. Zola's fellow-Naturalists such as Céard, however, did not share the same attitudes; the groupe de Médan owed more to the documentary novel of the Goncourts.(1) Zola, however, was not always limited in practice by his "scientific" theory; he made use of it only when it suited his purpose.

As a piece of writing, Le Roman expérimental is, like Zola's other work, vigorous and imaginative, but the gaps in the thought are unconcealed by his introduction of the "originality" idea. As an exposé of literary theory it is unsatisfactory. Firstly, it confuses art with science, secondly, it disregards completely the question of artistic form and style, thirdly, it contains no original insight into the practice of novel-writing - Balzac, Flaubert and Taine had already described the scientific aspect of the novelist's task.

However, the two main aspects of Zola's critical thinking are conveyed: the importance of realism and the equal importance of "individuality". Disregarding the impossible metaphor of the novelist/scientist idea, these two elements will be seen to form the basis of Zola's views on painting. His attitude is essentially simple and generalised, neglecting discussion of the nature of art, beauty, literary technique.

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(1) v. *infra* Chapter 3 on this subject.



### CHAPTER THREE

#### HUYSMANS' LITERARY THEORY

Huysmans' theoretical writing on literature is, for the most part, included in his novels. Emile Zola et l'Assommoir stands apart as a work of astute literary criticism and as a testimony to Huysmans' involvement with Naturalism in 1877 when the work was published. Huysmans' development from fervent Naturalist to unconvinced Naturalist and then to mystic is reflected in his novels from Marthe to Là-bas to La Cathédrale. The development is not so clear-cut, since in many ways Huysmans remained a Naturalist until the end of his career, while the implications of Christian mysticism were present, even if the author himself was not aware of it, as early as Le Drageoir aux Epices of 1874.

Huysmans, at the beginning of his career as author, came under the influence of the Naturalist novels of the Goncourts and Zola. His earliest works were written in the spirit of Naturalism. Le Drageoir aux Epices of 1874, a collection of sketches and prose-poems, owed more to the elaborate style of the Goncourt brothers than to Zola. (1) An element peculiar to Huysmans was apparent from the start: his artist's eye for colour and form, and his ability to recreate a picture of a scene or object he had observed:

Ta robe, ô hareng, c'est la palette des soleils couchants, la patine du vieux cuivre, le ton d'or bruni des cuirs de Cordoue, les teintes de santal et de safran des feuillages d'automne! (2)

The descriptive power demonstrated by Huysmans in this prose-poem is an important quality in his future criticism, both literary and artistic, where analysis often gives way to creative evocation of a work by another author or painter. Trudgian goes so far as to call Le Drageoir aux Epices

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(1) The 1st. edition was called Le Drageoir à Epices, Paris, Dentu, 1874.

(2) Huysmans: O.C., 1, p.49 "Le Hareng saur".

"l'oeuvre d'un transplanté", suggesting that Huysmans was a born painter who had instead taken up literature. (1) Frequent reference is made, in Le Drageoir aux Epices, to the works of painters, Italian, Dutch and Flemish - an indication of Huysmans' tastes and education. (2)

Marthe, Huysmans' first novel, written before he met Zola, was described by the author, in the preface to the 1879 re-edition, as a 'roman naturaliste'. In choosing his subject, the life of a working-class girl who becomes and remains a prostitute, Huysmans showed that he was thinking along the same lines, and at the same time, as Edmond de Goncourt, whose novel La Fille Elisa was beaten to publication by Huysmans' Marthe. (3) Similarly, Zola was to write the story of a 'fille' - Nana, published in 1880, while Paul Alexis was preparing La Fin de Lucie Pellegrin (telling of Lucie's death caused by the hardships resulting from poverty, marriage and absinth.) (4).

In Marthe, Huysmans reveals the characteristic Naturalist element of 'documentation'. (5) The description of the process of artificial-pearl production in the factory where Marthe works is authentically detailed:

L'imitation de la perle se fabrique avec les écailles de l'ablette, pilées et réduites en une sorte de bouillie qu'un ouvrier tourne et retourne sans trêve. L'eau, l'alcali, les squames du poisson, le tout se gâte et devient un foyer d'infection à la moindre chaleur, aussi prépare-t-on cette pâte dans une cave...(6)

A typically Naturalist (implying here 'realistic to the point of being unsavoury') description is the one given by Huysmans of the actor Ginginet, who, after coming across Marthe contemplating suicide, pursues her home and collapses drunk in the street:

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- (1) Trudgian: L'Esthétique de J.K. Huysmans, p. 46.  
 (2) Huysmans: op.cit. p. 14 (Cimabué; Angelico), p.20 (Titien), p.50 (Van Dyck; Scheele; Rembrandt), pp. 81 et seq. (Brauer), p.87 (Van Dyck; Rubens), pp. 91 et seq. (Béga), p. 92 (Rembrandt).  
 (3) E. de Goncourt: La Fille Elisa, published 1877.  
 (4) P. Alexis: La Fin de Lucie Pellegrin, published 1880.  
 (5) v. supra pp. 15-16.  
 (6) Huysmans: O.C., 2, p. 22.

Et il tomba tout d'une pièce sur un tas de trognons de choux et d'épluchures de scaroles qui bossuaient de vert le pavé de la rue. (1)

More squalid is a description from Les Sœurs Vatard of 1879, in which Huysmans evokes the atmosphere of the workshop of "Débonnaire et C<sup>ie</sup>., maison de satinage et de brochure":

Une buée lourde planait au-dessus de la salle; une insupportable odeur de houille et de gaz, de sueur de femmes dont les dessous sont sales, une senteur forte de chèvres qui auraient gigoté au soleil, se mêlaient aux émanations putrides de la charcuterie et du vin, à l'âcre pissat du chat, à la puanteur rude des latrines, à la fadeur des papiers mouillés et des baquets de colle. (2)

Such a passage derives more from the gamey ("faisandé") kind of description of the Goncourts than from the more robust naturalism of Zola. "Sac au dos" was the title of the short story Huysmans contributed to the volume Les Soirées de Medan. (3) The story ends on a Naturalist note, down to the banality of everyday life:

... pour apprécier la valeur d'une cuvette d'eau, pour savourer la solitude des endroits où l'on met culotte bas, à l'aise. (4)

Such an ending may be considered as truly Naturalist; it is in agreement with the definition of Naturalism given by Huysmans himself, following Zola:

... le naturalisme, c'est, suivant l'expression même de M. Zola, l'étude patiente de la réalité, l'ensemble obtenu par l'observation des détails. (5)

This quotation is taken from the work in which Huysmans defended Naturalism as a literary theory, Emile Zola et l'Assommoir. Before considering this text, however, there is a further point to be made concerning Huysmans' Naturalist novels and sketches of the 1870s. If he is judged by his own definition of Naturalism: "l'étude patiente de la réalité", it will be seen that in many passages Huysmans, by

(1) Huysmans: O.C., 2, p.77.

(2) Huysmans: O.C., 3, p.14.

(3) Les Soirées de Medan, published 1880.

The original version of "Sac au dos" was published in L'Artiste, Brussels, 1878.

(4) Huysmans: O.C., 1, p. 249

(5) Huysmans: O.C., 2, p. 166.

insisting upon the sordid and the unsavoury, by not keeping to a neutral position of depicting every aspect of reality with equal value, is not keeping to Naturalism; indeed he is being anti-naturalistic.

Huysmans does not present an unbiased view, but arouses in the reader a sense of revulsion at the state of humanity - for example in the passage quoted above from Les Soeurs Vatard ("Une buée lourde...").

Huysmans had already, in Le Drageoir aux épices of 1874, shown a taste for describing the revolting and the ugly - the woman, for example, in the sketch: "Ritournelle"

... un nez dont les larges ailes, des sontes à tabac, pullulent de petits bulbes violacés (1)

Her suffering is summed up in the twice-repeated:

Défunt son homme la roua de coups, lui fit trois enfants, et mourut tout impregné d'absinthe. (2)

The line between what is true to life and what is unnaturally sordid is difficult to draw, since this is a matter of personal taste and opinion.

Contemporary critics, nevertheless, detected an unhealthy imagination behind the sketch Huysmans included in Croquis parisiens, published in 1880, called "Le Gousset", a prose-poem discussing feminine armpits and their various odours. Huysmans himself wrote to Zola commenting that he was earning a reputation among critics of being an "erotomaniac".(3)

The author of "Le Gousset" appears to take a delight in expressing his disgust with the natural. His female characters suffer the beatings of their husbands and lovers: the unfortunate woman of "Ritournelle", for example. Marthe, at the point in the narrative where she is living with Ginginet, accepts the brutality and insults he doles out to her like an animal (4); Celine's first lover, in Les Soeurs Vatard, leaves her, "après lui avoir préalablement meurtri les reins de coups de canne" and

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(1) Huysmans: O.C., 1, p. 11.

(2) Ibid.

(3) v. supra p. 6.

(4) Huysmans: O.C., 2, p. 101.

her second, Gabriel Michon, "lui gaula le fessier à coups de bottes, dès le premier soir". (1) The misogynistic element in Les Sœurs Vatard appears to spring from a Baudelairian disgust with women as representing all natural, animal instincts. This element in Huysmans' novel-writing is pointed out since it will be seen that he shows a similar attitude when discussing the female nudes of Degas. The quality of anti-naturalism (i.e. his revulsion at contemplating the natural) present in Huysmans' early works becomes all-important in his novel A Rebours, whose hero, des Esseintes, reacts against every form of natural action. However, before following Huysmans' later development from 1884, the date of publication of A Rebours, let us consider his defence of Naturalism (and his understanding of the term) as a literary doctrine.

#### EMILE ZOLA ET L'ASSOMMOIR

Emile Zola et l'Assommoir started as a set of four articles commissioned from Huysmans by the Belgian review L'Actualité. (2) These articles were accepted in Paris by critics and public as an important manifesto of Naturalism. (3)

Huysmans' first concern in Emile Zola et l'Assommoir is to defend Zola's character and morals:

Le buveur de sang, le pornographe, est tout simplement le plus exquis des hommes et le plus bienveillant des maîtres. (4)

Huysmans is here taking up the ironic phrase Zola used in his Preface to L'Assommoir when it was published in book form:

Si l'on savait combien le buveur de sang, le romancier féroce, est un aigne bourgeois, un homme d'étude et d'art, vivant sagement dans son coin,..(5)

(1) Huysmans: O.C., 3, p. 48.

(2) 11, 18, 25 March and 1 April, 1877.

Huysmans: Emile Zola et l'Assommoir was published in book form by Charpentier, Paris, March, 1877.

(3) v. Baldick: The Life of J. K. Huysmans, p. 38.

(4) Huysmans: O.C., 2, p. 158.

(5) Emile Zola: O.C., 3, pp. 599-600

Abuse had been heaped upon Zola when L'Assommoir was published in serial form, maligning not only his novels but his private life also. (1) This may have been a contributory factor in the shaping of Zola's 'scientific' stand-point. (2) For the problem of morality was a serious one; the gap between an author's work and his private morals was not as clearly felt as it is perhaps nowadays. Thus Huysmans, in his second chapter (originally the second article), declares that:

l'art n'a rien à faire, je le dis haut et ferme, avec la pudeur et l'impudeur. Un roman qui est ordurier est un roman mal fait, et voilà tout. (3)

Huysmans is making the same point as Baudelaire and Flaubert had attempted to make. Both of them suffered the same criticism of immorality as Zola. It is the truth, and only the truth, which is moral, Huysmans insists: "- faire vrai, c'est faire moral". (4)

The desire for truth was a significant element in Naturalism and Zola was its prime advocate in his journalistic articles, using "la vérité" as a battle-cry. (5) Huysmans praises the veracity of Zola's character-portrayal: the characters are given the speech and thoughts of their own milieu; Zola does not allow his characters ideas incongruous with their situation:

... pour me servir d'un exemple, il ne prête à une femme du peuple ni la façon de penser, ni la façon de s'exprimer d'une femme d'un autre monde; il ne l'affine ni ne l'enjolive, et, grâce à cette méthode, il atteint ce but suprême de l'artiste: la vérité, la vie! (6)

With this last phrase - 'ce but suprême de l'artiste: la vérité, la vie!' - Huysmans is clearly following the lead of the Goncourts and Zola - Zola, who wrote of Courbet, in Mes Haines, that his canvases were 'réelles jusqu'à la vie et belles jusqu'à la vérité,' (7)

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(1) v. Baláick: The Life of J. K. Huysmans, p. 37.

(2) v. supra p. 28.

(3) Huysmans: O.C., 2, p. 165.

(4) Ibid, p. 166.

(5) v. e.g. Zola: O.C., 10, p. 1194.

(6) Huysmans: O.C., 2, p. 191.

(7) Zola: O.C., 10, p. 43.

and in Le Roman expérimental of 1880 proclaimed that the novelist should not only create 'des œuvres vivantes' but aim to reach 'la connaissance complète d'une vérité'. (1) A further manifestation of the desire for authenticity is in the Naturalist ambition to depict the whole of life, not life artificially filtered of its ugly or banal side. Huysmans insists upon this point:

Pustules vertes ou chairs roses, peu nous importe; nous touchons aux unes et aux autres, parce que les unes et les autres existent, parce que le goujat mérite d'être étudié aussi bien que le plus parfait des hommes, parce que les filles perdues foisonnent dans nos villes et y ont droit de cité aussi bien que les filles honnêtes. (2)

The Goncourt brothers had professed a similar ambition in 1864 when they had written, of Germinie Lacerteux:

Le public aime les romans faux: ce roman est un roman vrai.  
Il aime les livres qui font semblant d'aller dans le monde: ce livre vient de la rue. (3)

The element of truth was important, similarly, to Flaubert, although subordinated by him to art. It is futile to attempt to consider such concepts as Beauty, Truth and Art as though they were independent from each other - for what Flaubert understood by 'Beauty' might have included some, or all, of what Zola understood by the word 'Truth'. However, it is significant that merely by choosing the word Truth, instead of Beauty, Zola was shifting the emphasis from Art to Life.

This emphasis on Life and the campaigning tone of Zola's journalistic writings is reflected in the following passage from Huysmans' second chapter of Emile Zola et l'Assommoir:

.... nous allons à la rue, à la rue vivante et grouillante, aux chambres d'hôtel aussi bien qu'aux palais, aux terrains vagues aussi bien qu'aux forêts vantées, nous voulons essayer de ne pas faire comme les romantiques des fantoches plus beaux que la nature, remontés, toutes les quatre pages, brouillés et grandis par une illusion d'optique, nous voulons essayer de camper sur leurs pieds des êtres en chairs et en os, des êtres qui parlent la langue qui leur fut apprise, des êtres enfin qui palpitent et qui vivent, nous voulons tenter d'expliquer les passions qui les mènent, dès qu'elles sourdent et percent, les montrer, croissant peu à peu, s'éteignant à la longue, ou crevant quand elles bouent avec le cri qui jaillit des lèvres! Etant donné, comme sujets à étudier, un

(1) Zola: O.C., 10, p. 1180

(2) Huysmans: O.C., 2, p. 161

(3) Goncourt: Préfaces/Manifestes littéraires, p. 19.

homme et une femme, nous voulons les faire agir, dans un milieu observé et rendu avec un soin minutieux de détails, nous voulons démonter, si faire se peut, le mécanisme de leurs vertus et de leurs vices, disséquer l'amour, l'indifférence, ou la haine qui résulteront du frottement passager ou continu de ces deux êtres; nous sommes les montreurs tristes ou gais, des bêtes! (1)

Not only the tone, but whole phrases of the above passage are reminiscent of Zola: 'à la rue vivante et grouillante'; "camper sur leurs pieds des êtres en chairs et en os"; 'palpitent et vivent'.

Huysmans steps out of his own character almost and assumes that of Zola when he goes on to speak of the novelist as a kind of scientist.

('Etant donné...') This latter part of the passage is clothed in scientific terms: 'sujets à étudier', 'démonter...le mécanisme', 'disséquer...'. Huysmans ends his paragraph with a word which is almost a mot-clé of Zola - "bêtes". Thus Huysmans shows how close he was to the attitude of Zola, as expressed in Le Roman expérimental, to the point of adopting the same vocabulary as the leader of the "groupe de Médan".

However, while Huysmans might adopt a scientific pose and stress the desire for objective study of reality, he does not go so far as to accept the psychological and sociological pretensions of the author of Les Rougon-Macquart:

Il va sans dire que je ne m'occuperai ici ni de la théorie scientifique développé par l'auteur, ni des questions politiques que d'aucuns ont cru devoir soulever à propos de ses livres. Tout cela m'importe, en vérité, fort peu. Je ne traiterai, dans ces courtes pages, que l'œuvre d'art proprement dit. (2)

Huysmans dismisses, then, Zola's theories about heredity and social milieu, along with socialist ideas which were to come to the fore in Germinal. What is retained by Huysmans is a concept of Naturalism which may be called purer than Zola's Naturalism. The latter based itself on

(1) Huysmans: O.C., 2, pp. 162-3.

(2) Ibid., p. 168.



a priori thinking (determinism, the theories on heredity of Dr. Prosper Lucas, the image of novelist as experimentalist drawn from Claude Bernard); Huysmans' Naturalism was more truly scientific - the key-word was 'observation' rather than 'experiment':

Pour me résumer, en quelques lignes, le naturalisme c'est l'étude des êtres créés, l'étude des conséquences résultant du contact ou du choc de ces êtres réunis entre eux; le naturalisme, c'est, suivant l'expression même de M. Zola, l'étude patiente de la réalité, l'ensemble obtenu par l'observation des détails. (1)

Here Huysmans makes it clear that whatever impression was given in this same article (or "Chapter Two") by the Zolaesque sentence quoted above "Etant donné, comme sujets à étudier, un homme et une femme, nous voulons les faire agir...", the stress, for him, lies on the actual study of real people in society. Although Huysmans refers to Zola - 'suivant l'expression même de M. Zola'-in defining Naturalism, in fact his definition is closer to the Goncourts' idea: that the novelist is a historian of the present, accumulating a mass of accurately observed details from contemporary life and putting them together to reproduce the original. The emphasis with the Goncourt brothers, as has been seen in Chapter Two, was on the scrupulous preparation of a novel by making a set of 'documents humains'.(2) Huysmans, in defining Naturalism as 'l'étude patiente de la réalité, l'ensemble obtenu par l'observation des détails', is not far from the tradition established by Balzac and Flaubert, and continued by the Goncourts. Naturalism, to Huysmans in 1876, is merely an extension and exaggeration of realism.

Tel qui a sangloté pour une femme et s'est marié avec une autre, n'éprouve aucun regret et prend du ventre. Cet homme, je le déclare, me semble tout aussi grand, tout aussi intéressant à mettre en scène que Werther, cet imbécile qui machonne des vers d'Ossian quand il est gai et se tue pour Lolette quand il est triste. (3)

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- (1) Ibid., p. 166.  
 (2) v. supra pp. 15-18.  
 (3) Huysmans: O.C., 2. p. 164.

Huysmans, like Zola, is rebelling against melodramatic plots, against the 'fantômes plus beaux que nature' of Romantic authors. (1) He wishes to be as close as possible to actual life:

Et, croyez-moi, le public vient à ces romans ou l'imagination cède le pas à l'analyse, à ces romans dont la trame est si peu compliquée que le lecteur effaré s'écrie: Mais il ne se passe rien! (2)

It is necessary to pause here and remark that this is a basic fallacy in Naturalism. If the reader is shocked by the fact that nothing happens, then the author has failed in his task, since even if nothing actually happens in the novel, the reader ought to have been under the author's 'spell', convinced that something was happening, that the novel he was reading had been working towards some end, or some revelation. In other words, if the aim to be naturalistic submerges artistic considerations, then the novel fails - as is illustrated by Henry Céard's novel: Une Belle Journée, and by the even lesser known works of other Naturalists. (e.g. Hennique, Alexis). It is not enough to choose as a subject the everyday events of life. There must be some interference on the writer's part which will render the material at the least interesting, at the most inspiring and enlightening. Both Zola and Huysmans hold up Balzac as an exemplary novelist - the 'chef véritable de notre école' as Huysmans says. (3) Neither, however, attempts to analyse his qualities as artist, without which Eugénie Grandet, for example, would have been another 'Belle Journée'. Balzac's novel, written in 1833, fulfils the Naturalist stipulation that the subject should be ordinary, everyday life. In it nothing much happens: Eugénie's love-affair is something of a non-event, her life is very empty of incident, as is her mother's, while M. Grandet, like the other merchant-class inhabitants of Saumur, pursues his self-seeking career

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(1) Ibid., p. 162 (v. supra p. 29 for Zola's view).

(2) Ibid., p. 164.

(3) Ibid., p. 159.

without any dramatic reversals. Yet Balzac's artistry produces a tale which is compelling and full of suspense. The difference between Céard's novel and Balzac's is one not of choice of subject matter, but of treatment. Balzac has the instinct to select the significant points of the reality he observes in order to use them to express, say, the mood of one of his characters, or to make a comment on the human situation. For example, the description of the lotto-playing in M. Grandet's parlour - not interesting in itself - is invested with significance as the reader is made to feel, underneath this surface, the real motives of the players: marrying Eugénie into their families to gain 'le père Grandet's' money - and behind this a comment on human society in general: that money is the motivating factor. Flaubert's short story: "Un Coeur simple", published in 1877, is a second example of a Naturalist type of subject matter treated in such a way as to make a moving work of art. The boring life of a servant, Félicité, who loses first her nephew, then the young girl she looks after, and finally her parrot, is transformed into a poignant narrative which reaches a climax at Félicité's death-bed when the stuffed parrot is imagined by her to be the Holy Ghost. Without Flaubert's selection of the evocative detail, his sense of tragic irony, his careful choice of words, the same basic story would have been tedious or ridiculous. Zola himself, in the creation of his novels, did not limit himself to giving a comprehensive and objective view of reality, - he let his sympathies stray and his Romantic imagination transform the original picture. He realised instinctively the importance of that part supplied by the author ("personnalité", "tempérament") to the original material, even if he did not investigate the artistic side of this. Balzac, Flaubert and Zola, then, succeeded in achieving what is more important in a work

of art than a mere reproduction of reality: viz. the illusion of reality combined with significance for the reader. None of the three kept to a simple recording of reality in their novels, as Naturalist theory might seem to advocate. Levin quotes Guy de Maupassant's suggestion that the realists should be known as the 'illusionists', and adds José Ortega y Gasset's comment that realism should be called 'apparentism'. (1) This is an interesting line of thought to be pursued when considering the work of Impressionist artists. (2).

To return to the novel, however, while Zola, in his literary theory, avoided the question of art, Huysmans did not make the same omission. His Emile Zola et l'Assommoir pamphlet asserts, in Chapter two, that form and style are an integral part of the novel. Huysmans makes the following succinct comment:

- si un livre qui n'a pour lui que le style, est un livre mort-né, un roman mal écrit n'existe pas! (3)

The two aspects necessary, to Huysmans' mind, in the novel are 'form' and 'observation and analysis':

Non, la forme n'est pas une qualité secondaire en art, elle est aussi nécessaire, aussi précieuse que l'observation et que l'analyse. (4)

In a very general way, these would correspond to Zola's two aspects: 'personnalité' and 'réalité', but Huysmans is more precise than Zola in using the word 'form'; he does not wrap the novelist's technique in vague terminology as Zola tends to do. Huysmans declares himself to be interested in Zola's work primarily as 'œuvre d'art', dismissing scientific and political considerations. (5) His method departs from Zola's - who discusses novelists as 'individualités', or as

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(1) Levin: The Gates of Horn, p. 18.

(2) v. infra Chapters 3 and 4.

(3) Huysmans: O.C., 2, p. 160.

(4) Ibid.

(5) Ibid., p. 168.

'physiologistes et psychologues', rather than as artists. (1)

In his third Chapter, Huysmans examines Zola's novels written before L'Assommoir. His manner of examining them is not to analyse Zola's style, but to describe, in evocative passages, the scenes Zola has created: the picture of "les Halles", for example, in Le Ventre de Paris:

Le lever de soleil sur les Halles, avec les légumes qui s'éveillent, les mastroquets qui flamboient derrière la buée des vitres, tout le fourmillement, tout le hourvari des foules, est enlevé avec une furie de couleurs vraiment incroyable! (2)

He is a creative critic, not limited to analytical terms, but preferring to give his own response to a work. Thanks to this subjective quality, Huysmans is both a better and a worse critic than the pure analyst would have been - worse in that he loses his objectivity at times (this was to become a prominent weakness in his later art criticism), better since it is more interesting to read an imaginative piece of prose and to experience someone else's response to the original work, even though this may not be the response the original author would have wished to arouse.

There is inevitably, in Huysmans' literary criticism, less freedom than in his art criticism to build up his own word-picture, since the medium of the original was words. He thus finds it convenient to quote certain parts which he considers particularly successful. (3) Huysmans has the imagination, however, to evoke a scene effectively without using the same vocabulary as the original, but at the same time making a real effort to capture the atmosphere of Zola's initial description. For example, it is interesting to compare Huysmans' re-creation of the laundry in L'Assommoir with Zola's original picture.

(1) v. supra Chapter 2, p. 20.

(2) Huysmans: O.C., 2, p. 175.

(3) Ibid., v. eg. pp. 175, 181, 184.

Zola evokes the scene in the laundry at eleven a.m. when half the women there are having a break, drinking wine and eating sausages and bread:

Quelques coups de battoir partaient encore, espacés, au milieu des rires adoucis, des conversations qui s'empâtaient dans un bruit glouton de mâchoires; tandis que la machine à vapeur, allant son train, sans repos ni trêve, semblait hausser la voix, vibrante, ronflante, emplissant l'immense salle. Mais pas une des femmes ne l'entendait; c'était comme la respiration même du lavoir, une haleine ardente amassant sous les poutres du plafond l'éternelle buée qui flottait. (1)

Huysmans recreates the scene:

... cet intérieur de blanchisserie si parfaitement rendu avec la torpeur avachie des femmes qui somnolent, le nez dans leurs verres, tandis que le monceau du linge sale chante les ordures et les vices du quartier, ... (2)

A comparison of these two passages is interesting and revealing.

They evoke a similar atmosphere: drowsy, steamy, while each laying emphasis on different aspects: the first, Zola's, characteristically transforms the 'machine à vapeur' into a pervasive being, the spirit of the place almost, against which the characters become small by comparison. The second description ends with a note characteristic of Huysmans: "chante les ordures et les vices du quartier". There is not enough evidence in the small passage quoted, but we might imagine that Huysmans' laundry, had he composed the original, would have been more squalid and degrading than Zola's. Huysmans' naturalistic descriptions, such as the one quoted above from Les Soeurs Vatar (published two years after L'Assommoir) lack a certain moral objectivity apparent in Zola's. In Zola's laundry scene there is no judgement of the character - a dirty heap of washing is not particularly a symbol of vice. Zola wrote in his Preface to L'Assommoir:

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(1) Zola: O.C., 3, p. 614.

(2) Huysmans: O.C., 2, p. 184.

... C'est une œuvre de vérité, le premier roman sur le peuple, qui ne mente pas et qui ait l'odeur du peuple. Et il ne faut point conclure que le peuple tout entier est mauvais, car mes personnages ne sont pas mauvais, ils ne sont qu'ignorants et gâtés par le milieu de rude besogne et de misère où ils vivent. (1)

Huysmans, in stressing the sordid aspect of a scene, seems to imply a moral criticism of the character involved, a disgust with their situation, (The disgust with human life as he saw it which was to lead Huysmans to writing A Rebours. Des Esseintes, the hero of this novel, reacts deliberately against what seems to be natural and normal to everybody else). A further difference between Zola's attitude to life and Huysmans' may be mentioned here - namely Zola's healthy, robust quality, accepting the seamy side of life and championing the cause of the socially underprivileged (eg. in Germinal) rather than being discouraged and disgusted at it like Huysmans, more similar in this to the Goncourts than to Zola. Huysmans, then, in the example cited above, gives a personal slant to Zola's description of the laundry in L'Assommoir.

He shows himself to be the objective critic, however, when he finds fault with certain details of characterisation and plot structure in L'Assommoir. Huysmans' criticism is basically that in certain places Zola's novel lacks authenticity - e.g. at the point where the apparently violent 'sergent de ville' behaves unnaturally, unviolently when he catches his wife in the act of adultery. (2) The criticisms Huysmans makes are not major ones; it is simply interesting to remark that his grounds of criticism are Naturalist, i.e. Huysmans, Zola's professed disciple, criticises the master for not keeping to his own tenets, the tenets Huysmans himself was to find most constricting.

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(1) Zola, O.C., 3, pp. 599,600, (Preface to L'Assommoir)

(2) Huysmans: O.C., 2, p. 187.

Huysmans is perceptive in observing a particular quality of Zola's: 'le maniement prodigieux des foules'. (1) Zola's 'sense of collectivity' has been adequately commented on by subsequent critics. (2) Huysmans, moreover, appreciates exactly what Zola's ambition is in writing his novels, and sensitively uses Zola's own kind of vocabulary to compliment him on achieving this:

... les premières pages où la vie fourmille et grouille avec une pareille intensité! (3)

Huysmans also appreciates the fact that Zola works largely by intuition rather than precise observation, as practised by Flaubert and the Goncourts:

Il se rapproche davantage de Balzac en ce sens qu'il a l'intuition plutôt que l'observation prise sur nature des caractères. (4)

The brief assessments Huysmans makes of the particular qualities of Flaubert, the Goncourts and Zola are similarly perceptive and accurate:

Flaubert possède une énergique concision... les Goncourt s'attaquent avec leur style orfèvre aux sensations les plus fugitives et les plus tenues, Zola est moins soigné qu'eux, il a des répétitions inutiles, des adjectifs qui reviennent trop vite, il est moins ciseleur, moins joaillier, mais il possède une envergure, une ampleur de style, une magnificence d'images qui demeurent sans égales! (5)

Thus, Emile Zola et l'Assommoir is the work not only of a convinced Naturalist, who owes much to the theory of the Goncourts, and is at the same time a great admirer of Zola, but of an imaginative and perceptive critic. Perhaps the most important quality Huysmans is attempting to demonstrate to his readers is 'sincérité' - not only his own sincerity in writing the articles but the sincerity of the Naturalist movement as a whole, then under attack from critics and public for

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(1) Ibid., p. 188.

(2) e.g. Levin: The Gates of Horn, pp. 340-341.

(3) Huysmans: O.C., 2, p. 189.

(4) Ibid., p. 190.

(5) Ibid., p. 191.



being immoral. Zola viewed the work as a banner in the cause of Naturalism - "c'est un drapeau que vous levez". (1)

DEVELOPMENT IN HUYSMANS' THEORY FROM A REBOURS ONWARDS

Having established Huysmans as Naturalist and admirer of Zola, it is interesting to trace the development of his ideas away from this doctrine, starting with his novel A Rebours written between the years 1882-4, and progressing towards the preoccupation with religious symbolism of his last years.

A Rebours was described by Zola, in a conversation with Huysmans in 1883, as a 'terrible blow for Naturalism'; Huysmans acknowledged in his 1903 Preface to the novel that A Rebours was a break from his previous novels. (2) Huysmans' dissatisfaction with Naturalism is rationalised in this Preface, written after Zola's death:

On était alors en plein naturalisme, mais cette école, qui devait rendre l'inoubliable service de situer des personnages réels dans des milieux exacts, était condamnée à se rebâcher, en piétinant sur place.

Elle n'admettait guère, en théorie du moins, l'exception; elle se confinait donc dans la peinture de l'existence commune, s'efforçait, sous prétexte de faire vivant, de créer des êtres qui fussent aussi semblables que possible à la bonne moyenne des gens. (3)

Huysmans wished to break out from a doctrine which had become stagnant. It was his opinion that a vital element lacking in Zola's Naturalism was the "soul" element - Zola's characters were merely puppets:

... il suggérait très bien l'illusion du mouvement et de la vie ses héros étaient dénués d'âme, régis tout bonnement par des impulsions et des instincts, ce qui simplifiait le travail de l'analyse. (4)

The creations which Huysmans had found 'vivantes et grouillantes' in Emile Zola et l'Assommoir, he was now to find lacking the most authentic part of their being - their own soul.

Il faut bien le confesser, personne ne comprenait moins l'âme que les naturalistes qui se proposaient de l'observer. Ils voyaient l'existence d'une seule pièce; ils ne l'acceptaient que conditionnée d'éléments

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(1) Zola: letter to Huysmans, 4.4.1877.  
(2) Huysmans: O.C., 7, p. xxii.  
(3) Ibid., pp. vii-viii.  
(4) Ibid., p. x.

vraisemblables, et j'ai depuis appris, par expérience, que l'invraisemblable n'est pas toujours, dans le monde, à l'état d'exception. (1)

Thus Huysmans reacted against the materialist, determinist view of humanity, in which every human action could be explained by physiology and psychology. The expression of Huysmans' dissatisfaction with such a theory was through *des Esseintes*, a character who was interested not in the normal, the predictable, but in the abnormal, the ambiguous. The hero of A Rebours is an exaggerated self-dramatisation (with certain characteristics based on other live people, notably Robert de Montesquiou (2) ).

The Goncourtian side of Huysmans' nature - the distaste for life in society and desire to be the exception - is revealed in *des Esseintes*.

Baldick sums up *des Esseintes* as follows:-

... it is clear that *des Esseintes* became the repository of Huysmans' secret tastes and untold dreams, and that in their sickly sensibility, their yearning for solitude, their abhorrence of human mediocrity, and their thirst for new and complex sensations, author and character were one. (3)

A similar assessment is made by James Laver in his book: The First Decadent. As for *des Esseintes*' literary tastes, he rejects the Naturalist works of Flaubert, de Goncourt and Zola, preferring their more imaginative works:

Aussi, perdant la faculté d'admirer indifféremment la beauté sous quelque forme qu'elle se présente, préférait-il, chez Flaubert, la Tentation de Saint Antoine à l'Education sentimentale; chez de Goncourt, la Faustin à Germinie Lacerteux; chez Zola, la Faute de l'abbé Mouret à l'Assommoir. (4)

*Des Esseintes* is thus made to reject the 'bible' of Naturalism:

L'Education sentimentale (5). His taste, reflecting that of Huysmans himself, tends towards the subtleties of authors of the Latin decadence and to Baudelaire, Poe, Mallarmé, Verlaine and Corbière. (6) It may be remarked that the quality *des Esseintes* admires in the late Latin

(1) Ibid., pp. xxiii et seq.

(2) v. Baldick: The Life of J. K. Huysmans, p. 80 for the various models for *des Esseintes*.

(3) Ibid., pp. 81-82.

(4) Huysmans: O.C., 7, p. 272.

(5) Ibid., Préface, p. viii.

(6) Baudelairian influence on the novel is discussed by Trudgian: L'esthétique de J. K. Huysmans pp. 176 et seq.

Petronius is his naturalism:

il décrivait la vie journalière de Rome...

Notant à mesure les faits, les constatant dans une forme définitive, il déroulait la menue existence du peuple, ses épisodes, ses bestialités, ses ruts. (1)

But it is the 'faisandage' of the late Latin authors which most appeals to des Esseintes:

L'intérêt que portait des Esseintes à la langue latine ne faiblissait pas, maintenant que complètement pourrie, elle pendait, perdant ses membres, coulant son pus, gardant à peine, dans toute la corruption de son corps, quelques parties fermes que les chrétiens détachaient afin de les mariner dans la saumure de leur nouvelle langue. (2)

The ambiguities of Poe, Verlaine and Mallarmé similarly allow Huysmans to indulge in elaborate descriptions in which he does not confine himself to the material, but develops thoughts on symbolism.

Descriptions of banal reality no longer satisfy him. Des Esseintes mirrors Huysmans' desire to widen the scope of Naturalism, to find a spiritual element lacking in Zola.

In his novel Là-bas, Huysmans formulates, through the mouths of both des Hermies and Durtal, the kind of literary doctrine he would like to put in the place of Naturalism:

Il faudrait ... garder la véracité du document, la précision du détail, la langue étoffée et nerveuse du réalisme, mais il faudrait aussi se faire puisatier d'âme et ne pas vouloir expliquer le mystère par les maladies des sens...  
un naturalisme spiritualiste... (3)

The addition of a spiritual element would rescue Naturalism from being, in the hands of its disciple Rosny: 'un laborieux étalage d'érudition laïque, de la science de contre-maître! (4)

The general need Durtal detects for the supernatural is an accurate observation of the situation in the arts in France during the 1880s and

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(1) Huysmans: O.C., 7, pp. 45-6.

(2) Ibid., pp. 79-80.

(3) Huysmans: O.C., 12, pp. 10,11.

(4) Ibid., p. 8.

nineties. During these years there occurred a reaction against the dominant positivism of the previous decade. (1) Martino expresses it thus:

Dans tous les domaines, le positivisme avait voulu supprimer le mystère: partout le mystère réapparaissait, comme une objection aux résultats insuffisants de la science, ou bien comme un besoin de la sensibilité. (2)

The turning of interest to the suggestive, to the ambiguous and ephemeral gave rise, in the last two decades of the century to a new group of painters - the Symbolists - as we will see in Chapter Five. Jackson, in his book on decadence in the 1890s in France makes a comment which aptly describes Huysmans' development:

All the cynicisms and petulances and flippancies of the decadence, the febrile self-assertion, the voluptuousness, the perversity were, consciously or unconsciously, efforts towards the rehabilitation of spiritual power. (3)

Huysmans himself acknowledged, twenty years after writing A Rebours, that behind the novel's perversity was a spiritual thirst. He paid tribute to Barbey d'Aurevilly's comment on reading the novel: "Après un tel livre, il ne reste plus à l'auteur qu'à choisir entre la bouche d'un pistolet ou les pieds de la croix". (4) Huysmans chose the latter path, after spending a certain time investigating devil-worship and occult groups in France - the results of these investigations are contained in Là-bas. The general desire to escape from a solely materialistic literature to a form which would include a spiritual element is reflected in Huysmans' art criticism. (5)

The theory postulated in Là-bas, then was a "réalisme surnaturel", " - le supranaturalisme" (6)

(1) Rimbaud: Illuminations published by Verlaine in 1886, Mallarmé: Poésies, 1887, are examples of this reaction.

(2) Martino: Parnasse et symbolisme, pp. 138-9.

(3) Jackson: The Eighteen Nineties, Chapter iii: "The Decadence".

(4) Huysmans: O.C., 7, p. xxviii (Preface of 1903).

(5) v. infra Chapter 5.

(6) Huysmans: O.C., 12, pp. 20 and 26.

The embodiment of this ideal was seen in the Primitive painter Grünewald, who combined naturalism with idealism - the body with the spirit:

Grünewald était le plus forcené des réalistes; mais à regarder ce Rédempteur de vadrouille, ce Dieu de morgue, cela changeait. De cette tête exulcérée filtraient des lueurs; une expression surhumaine illuminait l'effervescence des chairs, l'éclampsie des traits. ... Grünewald était le plus forcené des idéalistes. (1)

How this ideal form might be translated into the novelist's field is not explained by Huysmans. His method in his own novels was to combine a narrative with his intimate musings.

Already, by Là-bas, the novel has changed form in Huysmans' hands from the attemptedly objective view of various characters acting out their story in Marthe and Les Soeurs Vataud to a dramatised discussion between two characters (two aspects of the author's thoughts): Durtal and des Hermies. In Huysmans' Preface to A Rebours he states his ambitions as novelist in the 1880s:

... le désir qui m'appréhendait de secouer les préjugés, de briser les limites du roman, d'y faire entrer l'art, la science, l'histoire, de ne plus se servir, en un mot, de cette forme que comme un cadre pour y insérer de plus sérieux travaux. (2)

The move in Huysmans' novels away from the traditional story to the relation of one man's thoughts is evident. In his later novels En Route and La Cathédrale the intrigue becomes less and less and the subjective musings take precedence.

The particular preoccupations to which Huysmans turned in later years were contained in embryo in A Rebours. His admiration for such authors as Baudelaire, Verlaine and Mallarmé stemmed from the spiritual quality he perceived in their work. Mallarmé was considered, in A Rebours to be the quintessential decadent in literature:

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(1) Ibid., pp. 18, 19.

(2) Huysmans: O.C., 7, p. xxiii.

En effet, la décadence d'une littérature .... s'était incarnée en Mallarmé, de la façon la plus consommée et la plus exquise.

C'étaient, poussées jusqu'à leur dernière expression, les quintessences de Baudelaire et de Poe;.... l'agonie de la vieille langue qui, après s'être persillé de siècle en siècle, finissait par se dissoudre... (1)

In referring to Mallarmé as "decadent", Huysmans was complimenting the poet on his rejection of the materialistic world view to which Naturalism had fallen prey, thanks largely to the physiological and psychological pretensions of Zola. An indication of the future direction of Huysmans' thinking was in the passage in A Rebours devoted to Barbey d'Aurevilly:

.... dans les "Diaboliques", l'auteur (d'Aurevilly) avait cédé au Diable qu'il célébrait, et alors apparaissait le sadisme, ce bâtard du catholicisme...

Cet état si curieux et si mal défini ne peut, en effet, prendre naissance dans l'âme d'un mécréant...

... il consiste avant tout dans une pratique sacrilège, dans une rébellion morale, dans une débauche spirituelle, dans une aberration toute idéale, toute chrétienne;... (2)

Huysmans was attracted to the artist Félicien Rops for the same reason: Rops' conscious blasphemy - the proof, to Huysmans' mind, of his inherent spirituality, his Christianity.

Huysmans' budding Catholicism was contained in his preoccupation with the conflict between flesh and spirit. This may be seen as early as Le Drageoir aux épices, with the insistence upon the sordid side of life and disgust with the flesh in certain passages, and in the prose-poem Le Gousset. In the novels and art criticism from A Rebours onwards, however, the preoccupation becomes more evident - for example in the passages in Là-bas devoted to a description of Grünewald's Crucifixion, of which part has been cited above. The interest shown by Huysmans in the satanic practices of the mediaeval "Bluebeard" figure Gilles de Rais

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(1) Ibid., p. 303.

(2) Ibid., p. 241.

is a further example. (1) Huysmans' fascination with the life of Sainte Lydwine de Schiedam shows his flesh/spirit preoccupation and also his interest in the history of the Catholic Church. The comment he made on this Saint at the end of her life, when her body was wracked with illness and sores was prophetic of his own death from cancer: "Son corps est une plaie, mais son âme rayonne". (2) With Catholic zeal and Naturalist eye for detail, Huysmans rejoiced in evoking such scenes in which the flesh was destroyed but the spirit shone out. (3)

In conclusion, then, Huysmans was increasingly drawn to the world of his personal experience and especially to reflections on spiritual symbolism. His involvement with Naturalism became submerged in these considerations. His novels never lost their Naturalist character, however. The "documentation" practice was continued: the detailed descriptions given in La Cathédrale of Mme. Mesurat, of the death and autopsy of Jeanne de Matel (Ste. Lydwine) and the cataloguing of architectural details in Chartres cathedral are examples of this. (4) Although Huysmans has been described as an anti-naturalist, the first decadent, a mystic rebelling against Zola's positivistic Naturalism, it must be observed that, as far as literary theory goes, Huysmans was in fact developing his own authentic kind of Naturalism - for there is little more naturalistic than the narration of a person's actions interspersed with his thoughts. However much Zola proclaimed his Naturalist ambition to write authentically, he could not really see

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- (1) Là-bas contains speculations on this legendary figure. Huysmans: La Magie en Poitou: Gilles de Rais was published in 1899.  
 (2) Huysmans: O.C., 14, 1st vol., p. 188.  
 (3) v. infra Chapter 5 for examples of this in Huysmans' art appreciation.  
 (4) Huysmans: op. cit., pp. 145-6, pp. 192 et seq. and pp. 220 et seq.

into other people's minds. Deffoux and Zavie make the comment:

... du Drageoir à épices aux Foules de Lourdes, ses (Huysmans') livres sont autant de chapitres de l'examen de conscience scrupuleux d'un seul personnage qui, devant la vie, ne cesse de considérer lui-même et toutes choses du point de vue analytique. Il fut ainsi fidèle à la discipline que s'étaient imposés tacitement les naturalistes: être les transcripteurs rigoureux de la vie du moment. (1)

Huysmans was keeping to the claim made in the Preface to Marthe, in 1876, that in his novels he wished to write "ce que je vois, ce que je sens et ce que j'ai vécu..." (2)

Most of the qualities exhibited in Huysmans' writings on literature and literary theory are reflected in his art criticism: his attention to detail, his sensitivity to the intention of the author, his capacity for appreciating the qualities of widely different authors (from Zola to Barbey d'Aurevilly and from Flaubert to Corbière) and yet his increasingly subjective view-point towards the end of his career.

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(1) Deffoux et Zavie: Le Groupe de Médan, p. 93.  
(2) Huysmans: O.C., 2, p. 9.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### ZOLA'S ART APPRECIATION AND THEORY

In this chapter it is proposed to examine Zola's writings on art from his early articles on Gustave Doré and on Courbet (published in 1865) to the article entitled "Peinture" which was published in 1896. (1) In order to see Zola's writings in context it is necessary to give a brief sketch of trends and tendencies in the world of the arts in late nineteenth century Paris. The first section of the chapter is therefore concerned with this 'scene-setting', the second section with Zola's individual acquaintanceship with various painters, and the final section with Zola's opinions on art, making especial reference to his campaigning Salon reviews of the 1860s.

#### THE SCENE IN THE WORLD OF THE ARTS IN THE LATTER PART OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY.

A powerful influence in the artistic world of mid-nineteenth century France was that of the Académie des Beaux - Arts. This was the body which presided over the organisation of the annual Salon, and was responsible for the system of instruction young artists followed in the various ateliers of Paris. (2) The distinction is made by Boime, in his comprehensive study of academic influence on nineteenth century French painting, between "academic" and "official" art. (3) The latter term is used to refer to art patronised by the Emperor and wealthy bourgeois, as opposed to art conforming to strict academic standards. Artists had to decide whether to conform to the Academy's practices and eventually compete for the famous Prix de Rome which would entitle them to a stay in Rome studying the masters, or whether to tailor their works to the tastes of wealthy patrons.

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(1) In Le Figaro, 2nd May, 1896.

(2) Some "ateliers" were more academic than others. v. infra p. 66.

(3) Boime: The Academy and French Painting in the Nineteenth Century, pp. 15 et seq.

Before defining the particular qualities of academic art and the concessions to bourgeois taste made by artists such as Horace Vernet, an account of the workings of the Salon is necessary. The Salon was the exhibition of paintings held each May in the palais de l'Industrie; its annual jury (or selection committee) was drawn up by academicians. The selection system was the source of much controversy between academicians and rejected artists who complained to the Emperor, or to the press, or who simply, in the cases of Courbet and of Manet, set up independent exhibitions in defiance of the Salon. (1) The first salon des Refusés was set up in 1863, at the instigation of Napoléon III, after a particularly severe jury had thrown out anything resembling non-conformism or originality in painting. The juries of the 1860s and 70s were accused of nepotism, as were the Prix de Rome judges. Rumours and insulting anecdotes concerning them were reported in leading Parisian papers, and especially in L'Événement, which had a reputation for being controversial (2). An example of the rumours surrounding the Salon jury is a letter printed in L'Événement, 1866, telling the story of a painter who had exhibited for eighteen or twenty years at the Salon until the year 1864 when he opened some kind of half artistic, half industrial business, and his two submissions of that year were rejected by the Salon. Resubmitting the same two pictures in 1865, under a false name, he found that not only were the paintings accepted but one was given a medal! (3). Whether this story is true or not, it is an example of the criticism which was rife against the jury in 1866, the year when Manet's two submissions were rejected (l'Acteur tragique and

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- (1) Courbet exhibited his paintings independently in 1855, 1867, Manet in 1867.
- (2) L'Événement was launched in 1866 by M. de Villemessant editor of Le Figaro and discontinued in the same year when Le Figaro became a daily.
- (3) L'Événement, 27. 4. 1866: letter signed Léo d'argyle. The account was disputed in the 30th April issue of L'Événement in a letter from A. Masson.

Le fifre). A letter in the 29th April issue of L'Événement, from the marquis de Boissy, calls for:

le retour à la mesure toute libérale due à l'initiative de l'Empereur, c'est-à-dire que les jugements rendus à huis-clos par le jury soient soumis au jugement du public impartial. (1)

The unfairness of the system is illustrated by the official announcement in 1866 that two medals would be awarded for the two outstanding paintings of the Salon - these to be chosen by all the artists exhibiting who had obtained a medal in a previous Salon! The whole Salon-jury system was a self-perpetuating one; the Emperor was wary of opposing the official artistic body and, naturally, unwilling to support iconoclastic artists such as Courbet or Manet. His gesture of forming the salon des Refusés was not followed up by any radical reforms. The salon des Refusés was held only once, in the year 1863, was attacked ferociously by academic, traditionalist critics and was generally regarded as a place for fun and ridicule. Zola describes the atmosphere of the salon des Refusés of 1863 in his novel L'Œuvre:

Claude, ragailardi par ce souffle de lutte, s'animait, se fâchait, écoutait maintenant monter les rires du public, l'air provocant, comme s'il eût entendu siffler des balles. Discrets à l'entrée, les rires sonnaient plus haut, à mesure qu'il avançait. Dans la troisième salle déjà, les femmes ne les étouffaient plus sous leurs mouchoirs, les hommes tendaient le ventre, afin de se soulager mieux. C'était l'hilarité contagieuse d'une foule venue pour s'amuser, s'excitant peu à peu, éclatant à propos d'un rien, égayée autant par les belles choses que par les détestables. (2)

Lethève documents the similar reaction of the critics to that of the public.(3) He quotes, for example, Louis Enault in the Revue française of the 1st. of August:

La généralité des tableaux refusés est mauvaise. Elle est plus que mauvaise: elle est déplorable, impossible, folle et ridicule...(4)

(1) L'Événement, 29. 4. 1866, letter signed marquis de Boissy.

(2) Zola: O.C., 5, p. 534.

(3) Lethève: Impressionnistes et Symbolistes devant la presse, pp. 19-21.

(4) Ibid., pp 19-20.

Maxime du Camp, in the Revue des Deux-Mondes, described the salon des Refusés thus:

Il y a même quelque chose de cruel dans cette exhibition: on y rit comme aux farces du Palais-Royal...(1)

The jury was inconsistent and unjust in its selection for the Salons of subsequent years. In 1867, a particularly severe year, the submissions of Monet, Renoir, Sisley and Pissarro were rejected although they had all exhibited previously. Manet did not submit anything in 1867. (2)

The decisive break with conservative, academic art did not come until the Independent exhibitions, the first of which was held in 1874, became an established voice in the painting world and Impressionism, as the art of Monet, Pissarro and Manet's later works came to be called, triumphed at the very end of the century. (3)

The juries of the 1860s found their defendants, however, amongst conservative critics. Albert Wolff defended the jury's impartiality, in 1866, while ridiculing the salon des Refusés:

Jamais on ne vit une plus grotesque collection de pitoyables choses. c'est tout au plus si l'on remarquait dans ce musée de niaiseries à l'huile deux ou trois toiles que le jury aurait pu recevoir sans se compromettre; le reste ne valait pas le diable, et l'on se disait avec raison:

"Quel dommage qu'il y ait de la peinture sur ces toiles!... sans cela, on pourrait en faire d'excellents matelas pour les hôpitaux." (4)

It may be observed, in passing, that among the "niaiseries" of the salon des Refusés were included, in 1863, not only Manet's Déjeuner sur l'herbe, but works by Fantin-Latour, Jongkind, Pissarro, Whistler and Bracquemond.

Count Nieuwerkerke, the superintendent at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts had defended the jury in a previous issue of L'Événement, referring to them as: une réunion d'hommes du talent desquels la France a droit de s'enorgueillir et que les personnes compétentes de toute l'Europe savent apprécier. (5)

(1) Ibid., pp. 20-21.

(2) v. Wilenski: Modern French Painters, p. 18.

(3) Rewald: Cézanne et Zola, pp. 85-9 gives an account of the reaction to the first Independent exhibition of 1874.

(4) Wolff: "Gazette de Paris" in L'Événement, 2. 5. 1866.

(5) L'Événement, 25. 4. 1866: letter signed Comte de Nieuwerkerke.

Daniel Bernard, a traditionalist, criticised those artists who had complained about being rejected from the Salon for being arrogant:

Vous vous plaignez de la rigueur qu'on vous a temoignée. Mais elle ne saurait avoir été trop sévère. Car vous eussiez pu, grâce à votre profession expéditive, bâcler en quelques minutes ce que les autres ont tant de peine à apprendre, et ce qui constitue l'art: la légèreté du trait, la ressemblance des formes. (1)

Both Count Nieuwerkerke and Daniel Bernard were defending the Academic establishment. Count Nieuwerkerke, of course, had a vested interest in preserving the system as it was. Many others supported by the system were similarly loath to see its very foundations attacked.

How could a work of art be produced after only a few minutes' work?

If this were possible then what would become of the painstaking methods taught by the Académie, and might not the Académie's very existence be threatened? A rejection from the Salon, wrote Bernard, was beneficial in making the artist more determined to succeed - a point made also by Zola, who himself was inspired by difficult challenges. But Bernard, unlike Zola, implied in the article quoted that the way to become a painter of merit was by emulating the great artists of the day, and by bowing to the judgement of the academics:

Non. Les Meissonnier (sic), les Cabanel, les Ingres (je prends ceux-ci au hasard de la fourchette) tous ceux qui se sont hissés jusqu'à la gloire universelle, ne peuvent être considérés comme des ignorants, parce qu'ils auront refusé le paysage d'un Dubois, d'un Durand ou d'un Dumollard. (2)

Bernard's attitude exemplifies that of the academics. A belief in constant application to the "métier" of painting is in itself a sound attitude - the same idea was important to Cézanne. The academics, however, asserted that there was a set way of painting a picture; anything not conforming to their idea was not worth consideration.

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(1) Bernard: article in L'Événement, 29. 4. 1866.

(2) Ibid.

Academic style placed great emphasis on the finishing of the picture (1). An unfinished painting, according to academic standards, would not be suitable for exhibition at the Salon, or for being entered for the Prix de Rome. Painting method as taught in the studios ("ateliers") consisted of a two-part procedure: the sketch ("ébauche") and the finished painting. The "ébauche" was executed using a broader technique than in the final composition, the master of the "atelier" normally urging pupils to paint the general effect - the details could be put in at the finishing stage. Boime observes:

The "ébauche" embodied all the qualities of an immediate and direct expression, as well as fulfilling the essential goal of the general effect. (2)

The "finished" work, however, painted on top of the scraped sketch, often managed to kill the spontaneity of the "ébauche" (3). It was the sketch's spontaneity which Impressionist painters wished to preserve (4). Manet was the first to reject, in a dramatically obvious way, the laborious finish of academic painters such as Bouguereau, Meissonier and Cabanel. These are the names which frequently spring from Zola's pen as the epitome of "dead" art. (Their sketches, not usually exhibited, are much more exciting than their finished pieces.) (5)

The Independents, or Impressionists as Monet, Degas, Pissarro and others have come to be called, were not the first to rebel against the academic "finish". Delacroix and other Romantic painters had attempted to preserve the vigour of the original brush-work. Delacroix

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- (1) Boime: The Academy and French Painting in the nineteenth century, p. 20.
  - (2) Ibid., p. 39.
  - (3) v. *ibid.*, pp. 20 et seq. for a detailed treatment of academic practice.
  - (4) The term 'Impressionists' was not adopted until after 1874, but will be used as a general term to refer to the works of Monet, Pissarro et al.
  - (5) v. Boime, *op.cit.*, illustrations, for examples of sketches by Paul Delaroche, Léon Cogniet, Cabanel, Bouguereau and others.

realized the truth which Impressionists were to insist upon:

Plus je me tiendrai près du croquis original dans ces petits tableaux, plus ils gagneront en énergie. (1)

While Romantic painters had tried to find a vigour lacking in neo-classical painting, the Realist painters, led by Courbet, turned from the historical and exotic subjects of Gros and Delacroix to contemporary scenes. To a public familiar with sentimental allegories, historical and mythological subjects such as "Thétis apportant à Achille les armes forgées par Vulcain", to quote the subject of the Prix de Rome competition in 1866, the works of Courbet, and even more so of Manet, appeared scandalous. Baudelaire, in 1845, had advocated modernism in art:

... et pourtant l'héroïsme de la vie moderne nous entoure et nous presse... Celui-là sera le peintre, le vrai peintre, qui saura arracher à la vie actuelle son côté épique, et nous faire voir et comprendre, avec de la couleur ou du dessin, combien nous sommes grandes et poétiques dans nos cravates et nos bottes vernies. (2)

This observation was prophetic of the work of Manet, Renoir, Toulouse-Lautrec; the idea continued in naturalist writers and in art critics from the Goncourts to Laforgue. Baudelaire further commented on the question of "le fini" in art, so precious to the academic mind:

Braves gens! qui ignorent d'abord qu'une œuvre de génie - ou tout est bien vu, bien observé, bien compris, bien imaginé - est toujours très-bien exécutée, quand elle l'est suffisamment. - Ensuite - qu'il y a une grande différence entre un morceau fait et un morceau fini - qu'en général ce qui est fait n'est pas fini, et qu'une chose très-finie peut n'être pas faite du tout - (3).

Baudelaire is replying here to critics who said that Corot did not know how to paint. The sketch-finish controversy was of prime importance to nineteenth century French artists. Some stuck rigidly to academic

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- (1) Delacroix: Journal de Eugène Delacroix, 1, p. 245, (7.10.1847).  
 (2) Baudelaire: O.C., Curiosités Esthétiques, pp. 77-78, ("Salon de 1845").  
 (3) Ibid., p. 56, (section concerned with Corot). In the recent "Livre de Poche" edition (vol. 1, p. 105) the second "fini" is not italicised. This alters the meaning slightly, but not the general distinction Baudelaire is making between a complete picture and a "finished" one.

technique, for example Cabanel; some compromised, like Decamps; eventually Manet's uncompromising work appeared and caused an uproar. It was only at the end of the century, when the initial shock of Impressionism was over, that artists were freed from academic prejudices.

The two qualities praised by Baudelaire in Corot's work - "naïveté" and "originalité" - were to become significant in the later part of the nineteenth century. "Naïvety" may almost be equated with the "sincerity" so admired in Manet by Zola, since a naïve view-point is one untainted by prior conceptions of what constitutes beauty - it is a sincerely personal view-point. The Impressionists tried to eliminate everything but their own vision of a particular scene; Monet's later paintings of water-lilies may be said to be truly naive. "Originality" was a word much bandied about by nineteenth-century critics and artists alike.(1) For the Romantics, originality lay in the expression of their subjective passion, in the element Baudelaire called "temperament":

Qui n'a pas de tempérament n'est pas digne de faire des tableaux,(2)

The main criticism against academic teaching was that it killed originality. This quality, essential to Romantic painters, was usually destroyed when the "ébauche", which captured the spontaneity of the painter's personal reaction to the subject-matter, was subjected to the meticulous finishing-process. Behind the discussions about originality lies a fundamental problem with all artists - to what extent one should follow one's own inclinations and how much one should bow to instruction. Some artists could adapt their own "temperaments" admirably to the academic finish and the careful modelling of light and dark tones. Ingres is one such. Others, like Manet, could not. Defenders of the academic

(1) v. Boime: op.cit. p. 175 et. seq. for the development of the word from the seventeenth century to the nineteenth.

(2) Baudelaire: O.C., Curiosités Esthétiques, p. 88, ("Salon de 1846").



system were justified in pointing out that originality did not consist solely in innovation, and that novelty was not in itself originality. This was the argument of Quatremère de Quincy, who, as "Secrétaire Perpétuel" of the Académie des Beaux -Arts between 1816 and 1839, had made a stand for tradition, and opposed Romantic trends in painting.(1).

A comment upon Manet's Olympia by Théophile Gautier made, implicitly, the same distinction between the original and the merely novel.

Gautier found Olympia to be simply an attempt at sensationalism:

Ici il n'y a rien, nous sommes fâchés de le dire, que la volonté d'attirer les regards à tout prix (2).

In L'Artiste, Jules Claretie, discussing the same painting, wrote of Manet's aim of "originalité à tout prix." (3)

The inevitable problem is: "Who is to decide what is original?" This question is central to an examination of Zola's art criticism, since certain painters were proclaimed by him as being original, for example Manet, while others were condemned for their lack of originality. Some contemporary painters may be considered to have been treated unfairly by Zola on this basis, as in the case of Gustave Moreau.

When the decree of 1863 put the Ecole des Beaux-Arts under the control of the state instead of the Académie and abolished the Prix de Rome landscape competition, the emphasis, in the decree, was on originality. Viollet-le-Duc, one of the decree's main instigators, criticised the Académie for its suppression of original talents.(4) Count Nieuwerkerke, more conservative than Viollet-le-Duc, modified the decree after controversy over the question of originality had arisen, - for to many the reign of originality would mean anarchy. Whereas anarchy

(1) Boime: op.cit., p. 178.

(2) Lethève: Impressionnistes et Symbolistes devant la presse, p. 32.

(3) Ibid., pp. 32-3.

(4) Boime: op.cit., p. 181.

in the arts was anathema to academics, to Zola it was a welcome phenomenon. (1) Boime interprets the word "originality" as a democratic concept by the time of the decree, - a concept which aroused anger in conservative and traditionalist critics. (2) The conclusion of his book is that the triumph of the sketch was linked with the triumph of democratisation of the concept of originality. This view-point is interesting in relation to Zola's ideas. In proclaiming originality as the great criterion in art, was Zola unconsciously expressing a democratic principle? Zola's attitude to originality is examined in section three of this chapter.

Openings for young painters with original and radical ideas were limited. There were two ways to success (meaning public acclaim and reward) : academic or official recognition. The artistic styles acceptable to academics and state officials, however, were both very different from that of Manet, whose ambition it was, ironically, to decorate a ceiling in the Hôtel de Ville (3). Official patrons usually supported artists of the "juste-milieu" - so named because they managed to combine realism with an idealised treatment and a historical or anecdotal subject using an academic technique - the result being what looked like a sentimental photograph. Examples of this type of art are the paintings of Bastien-Lepage, discussed by both Zola and Huysmans with disparaging conclusions. Le Triomphe du martyr by Bouguereau, exhibited at the 1855 Salon, is a further example of a successful "juste-milieu" painting by an Academy member this time (4). Bouguereau was still producing works of this kind twenty years later, when he painted his allegory of Youth (Jeunesse) - a picture of a classically

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(1) v. infra, p. 106.

(2) Boime: op. cit., pp. 82-4.

(3) v. Proust: Edouard Manet, p. 94.

(4) Sloane: French painting between the past and the present...

discusses this painting, p. 122.

dressed young woman posing artificially as two cupids fly about her head, whispering to her. It is easy to understand the pleasure Zola took in criticising such works, and difficult now to realise that Bouguereau was one of the painters of the time. Bastien-Lepage's painting Jeanne d'Arc might more properly be termed a "juste-milieu" style painting since it makes even more concessions to realism than did Bouguereau's painting of Youth. Jeanne is situated in a photographically realistic garden. Unfortunately, however, the artist has seen fit to include the ghostly figures of her "Saints" hovering in the background. The impression given is of the falseness of the picture. (1) Both Zola and Huysmans strongly criticised this popular painter.

For the young painter there was little choice between the different ateliers of Paris in the fifties and sixties, for the academic system of instruction was the accepted one. But there was some choice. Prospective artists did not have to choose the thoroughly conservative studio of, for example, Drölling. There was the studio of Thomas Couture, at which both Manet and Puvis de Chavannes studied (2). Couture taught the academic techniques, and the constriction of this was felt by Manet, as Proust's anecdotes indicate. Manet criticised the models for their unnatural poses:

.... Monsieur Manet, articula Dubosc (the model) d'une voix étranglée par l'émotion, grâce à moi, il y en a plus d'un qui est allé à Rome. -Nous ne sommes pas à Rome et nous ne voulons pas y aller. Nous sommes à Paris : restons - y.(3)

Couture, however, was not an academician - his relationships with academicians were strained - and he himself had a preference for the expressive quality of the Romantics rather than academic polish. His own work was often left unfinished, as though he were frustrated by the

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(1)v. Nochlin: Realism, pp. 34-5.

(2) Manet left Couture's studio in 1856.

(3) Proust: Edouard Manet, p. 21.

accepted rules for finishing a painting (1). Artists who simply could not bear academic teaching, or who were not accepted as pupils by the various studios, could always spend their time at the Académie Suisse, known also as the atelier Suisse, where there was no formal curriculum. This was usually Cézanne's place of work while he was in Paris, and was attended by Manet in the evenings (2). It was generally a meeting place for Independent artists. It was all very well to have somewhere to work, and to meet other artists who were not content with the established system, but the avenues to success were closed to such people. Gleyre's studio was more encouraging to painters who wished to follow their own instincts rather than academic precepts. Gleyre was not a member of the Académie and adhered less to its principles than did Drölling or Gérôme. His pupils, including Bazille, Monet, Renoir and Sisley, were encouraged to work out of doors, and were not restricted to composing neo-classical landscapes (3).

Landscape was an area in which realism of treatment was more palatable to the public. The "Ecole de Barbizon" painters, including such painters as Millet, Théodore Rousseau, Corot and Daumier, had set up their own landscape school in the forest of Fontainebleau. Simply by working from nature, even if the results were not always naturalistic but Romantic (e.g., Rousseau's) or Neo-classical (as in the case of Corot), they were setting an example which Monet, Pissarro and Sisley were to follow. Changing tastes were reflected by the biennial landscape competition instituted by the Academy in 1869 - the Prix Troyon. This competition departed from the former historical landscape section of the Prix de Rome (abolished by the 1863 decree), as the title of the first subject indicated:

"Une vallée parcourue par un torrent" (4)

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- (1) v. Boime: op.cit., p. 73.  
 (2) Proust: op.cit., p. 20.  
 (3) v. Boime: op.cit., pp. 59 et seq.  
 (4) Ibid., p. 146.

The movement towards painting a landscape in a naturalistic way was thus being acknowledged by academic circles. Influence from Dutch realist painters and from the paintings of Constable and Turner in England played a part in this gradual change of attitude. Realism in landscape-painting which had been considered, though important, an inferior genre to historical subject painting, came as less of a shock to the academic mind than realism in the treatment of people. While the Barbizon landscapists of the 1830s and forties had come off comparatively lightly, therefore, Courbet's Un Enterrement à Ornans of 1849 caused an uproar when it was presented to the Salon committee of 1850. The Realist movement, compaigned for by Champfleury and Duranty, was still being fiercely attacked when Zola started writing his articles about painting (1).

There was an even greater furore after the exhibition of Manet's Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe at the 1863 salon des Refusés, and his Olympia of 1865, which was admitted into the official Salon. The reaction of middle-class visitors to the salon des Refusés towards Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe is described by Mathey:

No comparable outbreak of abuse and ridicule had ever resulted from the exhibition of a single picture.

Such were the prejudices of the newly-fledged connoisseurs, that a nude Venus (provided she had an idealized figure and assumed an artificial posture), between Mars and Vulcan, was held to be not only proper but edifying, whereas a nude woman of the ordinary sort, sitting in a natural pose beside two men wearing their office clothes, was an outrage upon propriety. (2)

The public were thus following Emperor Napoléon's lead; he had declared "Ce tableau offence la pudeur" (3).

Olympia, even more than Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe offended public taste on moral, or hypocritically moral, grounds, since this was obviously a

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- (1) Champfleury: Le Réalisme, published 1857. Duranty edited Réalisme, published monthly between Nov. 1856 and May 1857.  
 (2) Mathey: The World of the Impressionists, p. 4.  
 (3) v. Wilenski: Modern French Painters, p. 14.

picture of a "grisette" with her black velvet neckband, crumpled sheets and bouquet of flowers. This was an appealing "terrain de lutte" for Zola. The battle was for Naturalism which he was proclaiming in the field of the novel, and the adversary was the hypocrisy of a public who were prepared to accept Giorgione's idyllic pastoral scene - the Concert champêtre, hanging in the Louvre, and idealised erotic works such as Titian's Venus of Urbino or Ingres' Odalisque, in her Eastern setting but who rejected pictures of contemporary reality. Huysmans' words defending the morality of the Naturalist author may be recalled:

- faire vrai, c'est faire moral (1).

There is a greater morality (i.e. the painting is unhyprocritical) and, above all, a more warmly human quality in Manet's Olympia than in Ingres' ideally beautiful nudes. Manet's treatment of his subject matter moreover, was criticised: his opposing of light and dark tones without the extensive "transitional tones" precious to the academic method. A common insult among Manet's critics was to compare his works with playing cards; the particular qualities of this "flattening" method were appreciated by very few art-lovers of the time. The crudity of Manet's technique was satirised by Henry Fouquier at the time of Manet's individual exhibition of 1867:

son système, car

"C'est, de la tête aux pieds, un homme tout système" est simplement d'opposer le blanc au noir sans demi-teintes. C'est ainsi qu' au naïf théâtre de Guignol, un procédé irrésistible pour amener le rire chez les spectateurs consiste à faire embrasser un meunier par un charbonnier. Encore prennent-ils chacun quelques nuances grises à ce contact; M. Manet s'en garde et son charbon reste vierge à côté de son plâtre éclatant.(2)

The twentieth-century critic of Manet, Wadley, sees in the "flattened"

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(1) v. supra p. 37.

(2) Henry Fouquier: article in "L'Avenir National", 12. 6. 1867.

forms of Manet's work of the 1860s (this includes Olympia, le Fifre, L'exécution de Maximilien and the Portrait de Zola) Manet's most important contribution to painting - the search for a three-dimensional/two-dimensional compromise which Manet later abandoned under Impressionist influence. (1) In other words, a new attitude towards representation, which has been developed in twentieth-century art, was fore-shadowed by Manet when he attempted to translate a three-dimensional reality into a two-dimensional reality without the "modelling" of, say, Ingres. Academic "modelling" was one solution to the problem of conveying a three-dimensional reality in two-dimensional terms; Manet's work (we might think for example of the Fifre) was in many ways a more exciting attempt. By his simplification of planes into flat areas of colour and his juxtaposition of different shades, often dramatically different, he was in effect trying to find a dynamic compromise between reality and the painting, not simply a three-dimensional illusion. It is true to say that Manet's experiments were new to the neo-classical vision of nineteenth-century visitors to the Salon, although the technique had been suggested in Romantic paintings with their dramatic lighting effects (e.g. Delacroix's Cavalier arabe attaqué par un lion of c. 1850) or in Corot's Auto-portrait of 1835, for example, which was painted out-of-doors and has a marked distinction between light and shaded areas. A similar vision was being imported in Japanese works of art. The flat quality of the Fife-player, although inspired originally by Velasquez, was reflected in the prints of Utamaro and of Hokusai which became popular in the late 1860s and seventies (2). The interest in things Japanese is admirably illustrated by Manet's Portrait de Zola, of 1868, which incorporates a Japanese screen and an Utamaro print, placed side

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(1) Wadley: Manet, pp. 14-17.

(2) For Spanish influence on Manet v. Wadley: op.cit., p.13. For Japanese influence on Olympia, v. ibid., p. 15.

by side with Manet's own picture of Olympia, and an engraving from a Velasquez painting. The Goncourt brothers described the new fashion in a Journal entry of 1868:

Le goût de la chinoiserie et de la japonaiserie! Ce goût, nous l'avons eu des premiers. Ce goût aujourd'hui envahissant tout et tous, jusqu'aux imbéciles et aux bourgeoises...(1)

The craze for Japanese art was shared by Huysmans who discusses Japanese prints in an article about Félicien Rops (2). Zola was more concerned, in the 1860s, with defending French artists such as Manet and Pissarro who were at the time being badly treated, but he is aware of the similarity between the elegant simplicity of the Japanese artists and Manet, for example, or Degas (3).

A further very important influence from the 1860s, approximately, onwards was the development and commercialisation of photography. Not only did photographs show the difference between what was known as Realism and what an exact reproduction of reality looked like, it had a profound effect on the artist's attitude towards his "métier".

Impressionists insisted on the importance of the artists' impression, not on the realistic quality of a painting, even though their method was to get as close to the reality of the scene as possible, (v. for example Monet's studies of haystacks and of Rouen cathedral). Artists were generally indignant when accused of using photographs for their work. An illustration of this is the letter from Monet to Durand-Ruel, written in 1905 from Giverny, in which Monet protested against Durand-Ruel's accusations that his paintings were not done "d'après nature" - as long as the result was good painting, then what did it matter what method he used to paint his scenes of London and his cathedrals? asked Monet.(4)

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(1) Goncourt: Journal, 29. 10. 1868.

(2) v. infra, Chapter 5.

(3) Zola: O.C., 12, p. 832 and p. 882 respectively.

(4) Monet: Letter to Durand-Ruel, dated 12. 2. 1905., (collection Durand-Ruel).



In fact most of the Impressionist painters used photographs, and especially Degas.(1) The advantages of being able to "fix" a scene or a model's position in a matter of seconds using a camera when the fleeting moment was so difficult to catch by means of a paintbrush were undeniable. The 'competition' with photography was possibly a factor in encouraging the Impressionists to stress the importance of capturing the general effect ("l'effet") of a scene rather than preserving accuracy of detail, as Pre-Raphaëlite painters had done in England. It may also have led Monet to emphasise the individual brushwork and the physical surface of his painting - Monet's paintings, from the late 1870s, have an increasingly free and flowing rhythm of brush strokes of which his pictures of the water-garden at Giverny are the culmination. The distinction between mere reproduction (as photography was understood before the photographic-art work of, for example, Nadar was fully appreciated) and the reality seen by the artist was an important one to the Impressionists, as it was to Zola.(2)

These, then, were the important elements in the art world of the third quarter of the nineteenth century in Paris. The conflict artists experienced, from Courbet to the Impressionists, was that between new attitudes to painting and the traditions upheld by the Académie with its rigid, inconsistent Salon-selection system. New attitudes included an ambition to portray contemporary life, in a realistic manner and a desire to break away from the techniques and conventions taught by academicians. Influence was felt from former French movements: the Romantics, with their insistence on the spontaneous personal response to the subject-matter and the "école de Barbizon", as well as foreign influence - English (Constable and Turner), Dutch, Japanese. The

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(1) v. Nochlin: Realism, p. 44.

(2) v. infra, p. 93.

greatest battle was that of Realism; its leading figures were first Courbet than Manet, followed by the Impressionists. Realism itself was shaken as a concept by the growing popularity of photography. The emphasis on originality and "temperament" gained strength with the Impressionists as the sketch won supremacy over the finished work. Not a small part was played in the artistic battle by the newly-established middle-class and their conservative preference for "juste-milieu" artists (these artists did not, unlike Manet, shock their moral conventions). The scene was one of combat; each faction had its supporters. Zola entered the fight at a crucial moment, when the scandal over Manet was just breaking.

#### ZOLA'S RELATIONS WITH PAINTERS.

The painter usually connected with Zola's name is probably Manet, for Zola was his most influential defender, in his articles of 1866, 67 and 68 (1). Zola met Manet through Guillemet a frequenter, like Zola of the café Guerbois. His first visit to the painter's studio took place in the February of 1866, the year of his controversial articles about the Salon and of his first article about Manet. Zola's longer defence of Manet, entitled: "Une Nouvelle manière en peinture: Monsieur Edouard Manet", was published the next year, preceded by the following notice:

La "Revue du XIXe siècle" a ses doctrines mais elle a aussi sa tribune libre, où elle convie toutes les opinions sur l'art à s'exprimer. Voilà pourquoi elle imprime cette étude hardie.. (2)

Manet, in gratitude, painted the now famous Portrait d'Emile Zola, which was accepted by the 1868 Salon but hung very badly by the judges,

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- (1) Published in L'Événement, La Revue du XIXe siècle, l'Événement illustré respectively.
- (2) La Revue du XIXe siècle, 1. 1. 1867. Zola's article was republished in pamphlet form at the time of Manet's individual exhibition, the same year, and later incorporated in the 1879 edition of Mes Haines.

a common practice with works of which they did not approve: "Les deux tableaux de l'artiste sont malheureusement fort mal placés, dans des coins, très haut, à côté des portes." (1) (the other picture referred to is Une jeune dame.) Antonin Proust, Manet's friend, acknowledged Zola's valiant help in defending Manet, although not allowing that Zola fully understood Manet's work (2).

While Zola and Manet met only in 1866, there was a deeper bond uniting Zola and Cézanne. The two, along with Baptistin Baille, were firm friends at the Collège Bourbon in Aix-en-Provence, spending their free time roaming the Provençal countryside, discussing their ambitions and inventing ecstatic and sentimental poems (3). The influence of the Romantic poets on the two young men was strong:

Dans cette province reculée, au milieu de la bêtise somnolente des petites villes, ils avaient ainsi, des quatorze ans, vécu isolés, enthousiastes, ravagés d'une fièvre de littérature et d'art. Le décor énorme d'Hugo, les imaginations géantes qui s'y promènent parmi l'éternelle bataille des antithèses, les avaient d'abord ravis en pleine épopée, gesticulant, allant voir le soleil se coucher derrière les ruines, regardant passer la vie sous un éclairage faux et superbe de cinquième acte. Puis, Musset était venu les bouleverser de ses passions et de ses larmes, ... (4)

This passage, taken from L'Œuvre, describes the emotional life of Claude and Sandoz, who may be taken, superficially, to represent Cézanne and Zola respectively, although this is an over-simplified view. Claude incorporates characteristics of Manet and of Zola himself (is it a coincidence that Zola had used the name 'Claude' himself as a pseudonym when writing his articles on the Salon of 1866?) as well as of Cézanne, but the character is viewed by Zola through a Romantic 'screen'.(5)

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(1) Zola: O.C., 12, p. 862.

(2) Proust: Edouard Manet, p. 49. The 20th century critic Wadley is not so harsh on Zola. v. Wadley: Manet, pp. 14-15.

(3) Zola: La Confession de Claude, Nouveaux Contes à Ninon, L'Œuvre contain recollections of this period.

(4) Zola: O.C., 5, p. 460, (L'Œuvre).

(5) v. supra p. 29 for Zola's use of the word "écran".

The whole novel has an element of Romantic sentiment, as though Zola, in recalling memories of childhood and of the artistic struggles of the 1860s, were being self-indulgent and seeing these memories through rose-coloured spectacles (1). The effect of Zola and Cézanne's Romantic ideals during their youth at Aix was revealed in Zola's admiration for the sentimental painter Ary Scheffer, expressed in a letter to Cézanne from Paris:

Je ne sais si tu connais Ary Scheffer, ce peintre de génie mort l'année dernière: à Paris, ce serait un crime de répondre non, mais en province, ce n'est qu'une grosse ignorance. Scheffer était un amant passionné de l'idéal, tous ses types sont purs, aériens, presque diaphanes. Il était poète dans toute l'acception du mot, ne peignant presque pas le réel, abordant les sujets les plus sublimes, les plus délirants. (2)

After Zola had come to Paris in 1858 he wrote to Cézanne in Aix encouraging him to pursue his artistic ambitions. At this time, Zola, Cézanne's friend and confidant, was convinced that Cézanne had potential:

... tu ajoutes que si je t'ai compris, tu ne te comprends pas (i.e. Cézanne) Je ne sais ce que tu entends par ce mot "compris". Pour moi, voici ce qu'il en est: j'ai reconnu chez toi une grande bonté de coeur, une grande imagination, les deux premières qualités devant lesquelles je m'incline. Et cela suffit, dès ce moment je t'ai compris, je t'ai jugé. Quelles que soient tes défaillances, quels que soient tes errements, tu seras toujours le même pour moi... ...Je t'ai jugé bon et poète, et je le répéterai toujours: "Je t'ai compris". (3)

When Cézanne prevailed upon his father to allow him to come to Paris, in 1861, one of the first things he and Zola did was to go and see some Ary Scheffers. (4) This is ironic when Zola's attitude of 1868 towards Ary Scheffer is considered. (5) As Cézanne became acquainted with other painters mainly at the Académie Suisse, Zola was introduced to them too: Béliard, Pissarro, Monet, Degas, Fantin-Latour. A common meeting place was the Café Guerbois, where Duranty, Guillemet, the art-critic Burty and Renoir were also to be found. (6). By 1870, Zola was recognised as

(1) v. Pierre Daix's Introduction to L'Œuvre in Zola: O.C., 5. p. 427.

(2) Zola: O.C., 14, p. 1206 (letter to Cézanne, 25. 3. 1860).

(3) Ibid., p. 1207.

(4) Rewald: Cézanne et Zola, p. 26.

(5) v. infra p. 104.

(6) Hemmings: Emile Zola, p. 29.

a defender of avant-garde artists thanks to his Salon reviews of the sixties, and, as Rewald points out, he had had his portrait done three times - once by the sculptor Philippe Solari, (buste d'Emile Zola) who was an old Aixois friend, by Manet (Portrait d'Emile Zola, 1868) and by Fantin-Latour, who included Zola in his group study: L'atelier des Batignolles. The "Batignolles" group comprised those painters and friends who formed a band of supporters round Manet, most of whom met at the café Guerbois which was situated, like Fantin-Latour's studio, in the Batignolles district of Paris. Cézanne, however who had introduced Zola to many of these people, and who had contributed much towards the formation of Zola's ideas on art, was a rare visitor to the café Guerbois; his anti-social tendencies and sensitivity kept him away from this general meeting-place.(1) The influence of Cézanne's opinions on Zola's, regarding art, has been a much-debated question. Rewald concluded, in 1935, that Zola's formula, "Une œuvre d'art est un coin de la création vu à travers un tempérament" was, doubtless, the fruit of the long discussions about art between Zola and Cézanne (2). Hélène et Jean Adhémar asserted that Zola "fut renseigné par ses amis, dont il est l'écho".(3) Zola's biographer, Hemmings, puts forward the point that "The vehemence with which (Zola) expressed his views is some guarantee of the sincerity with which he held them". (4) The formula itself: "Une œuvre d'art ..." was indeed the result of discussions between Zola and Cézanne, as Zola himself says in the dedicatory letter to Cézanne which prefaced Mon Salon in 1866.(5) He

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(1) Rewald: op cit., p. 58.

(2) Ibid., p. 52.

(3) Hélène et Jean Adhémar: article entitled "Zola et la peinture" in Arts, 12-18 Dec., 1952 quoted by Hemmings; op.cit., p. 31.

(4) Hemmings: Emile Zola, p. 31.

(5) Zola: O.C., 12, pp. 785 et seq., ("Mon Salon"). This was a collection of the articles Zola had published in L'Événement of April and May, 1866.

refers to the ten years of discussions with Cézanne about literature and the arts, and the idea they believed in above all other theories:

Nous cherchions des hommes en toutes choses, nous voulions dans chaque œuvre, tableau ou poème, trouver un accent personnel. (1)

As for the influence of Cézanne and other painter friends on Zola's actual tastes in art and preference for certain painters rather than others, it is inevitable that he should be influenced by his friends. Since Zola was obviously not a painter himself, his insight into art matters must have come from the views expressed by painters he knew. This view is supported by the fact that Zola's inability to appreciate the paintings of the Impressionists in later years was coincidental with his estrangement from painting circles, preoccupied as he was with his novel-writing (2). The value of Zola's writings on art lie in the very fact that at the time of composing them he was in regular contact with the artists he was discussing and had an insight denied to many other contemporary critics. On the other hand, though, his friendship with the Independent painters in the 1860s and seventies would necessarily have caused him to tone down any adverse criticism he might privately have felt.

After Zola had turned to other interests than painting, there was a greater distance between him and painters; he gave no further support to Independent exhibitions after his complimentary article of 1877.(3) Zola was, by the mid-seventies, an important figure in his own right, thanks to the success of his novels, not merely as a campaigner for badly-treated artists, and this was probably a factor in the guardedness shown towards him by the Impressionists. Zola, for his part, may have experienced a certain pique when painters he had fought for no longer needed his support - this will be discussed in reference to his 1896

(1) Zola: O.C., 12, p. 785.

(2) The 20 volumes of Zola's Rougon-Macquart series were published between the years 1870-1893.

(3) Zola: O.C., 12. pp. 973 et seq., (Une Exposition: Les peintres Impressionnistes", article published in Le Sémaphore de Marseille, 19.4.1877)

article "Peinture". Alternatively, Zola may have genuinely disapproved of the methods used by Impressionists - their independent exhibitions in defiance of the Salon for example. Zola shared Manet's view, as quoted by Proust:

"Il n'y a pas à dire, s'écriait-il (Manet), le Salon est le vrai terrain de lutte. C'est là qu'il faut se mesurer. Les petites chapelles m'embêtent." (1)

Zola refused to contribute towards the public subscription for Manet's Olympia for similar reasons. Monet had suggested, in 1889, that this painting should be bought by the public and given to the Nation.

Subscribers included many of Manet's friends (e.g., Pissarro, Degas, Monet, Renoir) dealers (e.g. Durand-Ruel, Georges Petit), non-Impressionists (e.g. Puvis de Chavannes, Carolus-Duran, Rops, Gervex), writers (e.g. Huysmans, Mallarmé) and many others, but Zola adamantly refused to contribute (2). His reply to Claude Monet betrays a certain bitterness, but gives a legitimate reason for refusing to subscribe:

...Que des amateurs se syndiquent pour faire monter les prix d'un peintre, dont ils ont les toiles, je le comprends; mais je me suis promis, moi écrivain, de ne jamais me mêler à ces sortes d'affaires.

J'ai assez défendu Manet par la plume, pour craindre aujourd'hui le reproche de lui marchander la gloire. Manet ira au Louvre, mais il faut que ce soit de lui-même, en pleine reconnaissance nationale de son talent, et non sous cette forme détournée de cadeau, qui sentira quand même la coterie et la réclame. (3)

If Zola is given the benefit of the doubt, then it may be taken that he acted on principle, not out of spite, and that his bitterness was caused by what he considered the unethical methods which the Impressionists were using. He himself had spoken out frankly and in defiance of public anger in defence of Manet; the idea of a subscription was possibly seen by Zola as compromising his own previous hard work. On the other hand, the fact that the subscription was Monet's idea, and not his own, may have been a contributory factor (i.e. there may have been an element of

(1) Proust: Edouard Manet, p. 43.

(2) Bazin: Impressionist Paintings in the Louvre, pp. 42-3.

(3) Zola: O.C., 14, p. 1472, (letter to Monet, 23. 7. 1889).

of pique in Zola's refusal to subscribe). It is worthy of mention that Manet's old friend, Proust, did not welcome Monet's scheme either. (1)

Further instances of antagonism between Zola and Impressionist painters are cited by Furst, who writes about the "cooling-off" of relations between them (2). Zola's relationships with painters, as regarded art matters, were gradually less close although there is no reason to suppose that social relations were as hostile as some critics have implied (3). There obviously must have been a certain gap between artists who were not in the least accepted by the public and a novelist who by 1876, the year of the second Independent exhibition, was being favourably reviewed by most critics and was certainly a very popular writer with the public. This gap is illustrated by the two pieces of criticism included in the Figaro, in 1876, of Zola's novel Son Excellence Eugène Rougon and of the Independents' exhibition at Durand-Ruel's gallery. The first review (by Wolff) was favourable, the second went as follows:

..cinq ou six aliénés, dont une femme, un groupe de malheureux atteints de la folie de l'ambition .... l'absence complète de toute éducation artistique leur défend à jamais de franchir le fossé profond qui sépare une tentative d'une œuvre d'art. (4)

It is Rewald's view, echoed by Hamilton, that Zola's acceptance by the same intellectual milieu which rejected the Impressionists influenced his attitude towards the latter, and caused him to rethink his youthful ardent praise of these painters. (5) This element may have been present in Zola's later disassociation from the views of Impressionist circles, but it must be stated that he did not shun social relations with these painters. Zola's letters to Guillemet remained very affectionate until

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(1) Bazin: op. cit., p. 42.

(2) Furst: "Zola's art criticism" (article), p. 172.

(3) e.g., Furst: ibid.

(4) quoted by Rewald: Cézanne et Zola, p. 91.

(5) Rewald: op. cit., p. 91. Hamilton: Manet and his Critics, p. 220.



the publication of L'Œuvre. (1) Pissarro, after receiving and reading a copy of Germinal, wrote to Zola describing the novel as "certinement l'œuvre d'un grand cœur". (2) Moreover, however much relations had been strained by Zola's Russian articles of 1875 (which are discussed in Section three), by his article "Peinture" of 1896 and by his novel L'Œuvre (in which echoes of Manet and the Impressionists as well as of Cézanne were seen in the paintings of Claude, the central character), Monet and Pissarro, among many others, wrote letters of tribute to Zola after his courageous defence of Dreyfus in 1896 (3). Pissarro wrote as follows:

Recevez l'expression de mon admiration pour votre grand courage  
et la noblesse de votre grand caractère.  
votre vieux camarade  
C. Pissarro. (4)

As for Cézanne, he was a guest at Zola's house at Médan, as were Zola's other friends such as Alexis, Numa Coste and Théodore Duret the critic between the years 1878-82 approximately (5). Cézanne acted as "porte-voix" between Zola and Impressionist painters and it was by this term that he described himself in a letter to Zola of 1880. (6) Zola continued to encourage Cézanne, who, he knew, was often subject to moods of depression about his work:

Aie de la philosophie, rien ne marche comme l'on veut, moi-même je suis bien ennuyé en ce moment. (7)

Zola's decisive break with Cézanne came when Zola published his novel L'Œuvre, in 1886. Zola, in his haste to publish, was tactless. He could not have seen the novel from Cézanne's point of view, who evidently

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- (1) v. Zola: O.C., 14, p. 1432 and pp. 1469-70.  
 (2) Pissarro: letter to Zola, undated. (B.N.Nouv. acq. 24523, no. 52).  
 (3) Rewald: Cézanne et Zola, p. 155.  
 (4) Pissarro: letter to Zola, dated 14. 1. 1898, (B.N.Nouv. acq. 24523, no. 50).  
 (5) Rewald: op.cit., p. 105.  
 (6) Ibid., p. 109.  
 (7) Zola: O.C., 14, p. 1442, (letter to Cézanne, 4. 7. 1885).

took it as a comment by Zola on his own painting - a failure - written insensitively by his old friend who was at this time on the pinnacle of success. Cézanne, in 1886, was by no means sure of his work; it was not until 1904 that he could write:

Je crois y parvenir chaque jour davantage bien qu'un peu péniblement, car si la sensation forte de la nature - et certes, je l'ai vive - est la base nécessaire de toute conception d'art, et sur laquelle repose la grandeur et la beauté de l'œuvre future, la connaissance des moyens d'exprimer notre émotion n'est pas moins essentielle, et ne s'acquiert que par une très longue expérience. (1)

Did Cézanne's friend and supporter of old now condemn him as an abortive genius? Whereas Claude, the hero of L'Œuvre, was generally taken as being based on Manet, because the description of the painting Claude submitted to the 1863 Salon resembled Manet's le Déjeuner sur l'herbe, Cézanne recognised the use Zola made of early reminiscences, and the similarity of Claude's attitudes to his own: the desire to "realise" something on his canvas, his obsessive manner of working. (2) The Romantic ending of Zola's novel was probably seen by the sensitive Cézanne as Zola's opinion of his, Cézanne's, career:

Claude s'était pendu à la grande échelle, en face de son œuvre manquée. Il avait simplement pris une des cordes qui tenaient le châssis au mur, et il était monté sur la plate-forme en attachant le bout à la traverse de chêne, clouée par lui un jour, afin de consolider les montants. Puis, de là-haut, il avait sauté dans le vide. En chemise, les pieds nus, atroce avec sa langue noire et ses yeux sanglants sortis des orbites, il pendait là, grandi affreusement dans sa raideur immobile, la face tournée vers le tableau, tout près de la Femme au sexe fleuri d'une rose mystique, comme s'il lui eût soufflé son âme à son dernier râle, et qu'il l'eût regardé encore, de ses prunelles fixes. (3)

It is ironic that Zola's powers of imagination and dramatisation caused him to hurt Cézanne deeply and to arouse the feelings of other painters - both Monet and Pissarro protested in letters to Zola, concerned with the effect on the public of the novel's implications (4). Cézanne's letter

(1) Cézanne: letter to Aurenche (Aix, 25. 1. 1904).

(2) v. Lindsay: Cézanne, Life and Art, pp. 293 et. seq.

(3) Zola: O.C., 5, p. 726.

(4) Ibid., p. 740 (Mitterand's "Notice").

to Zola, which appears to have been his last, was cold and brief. (1) The apparent betrayal by Zola remained in Cézanne's mind; this barrier prevented the two men from sharing their former confidences, however much each of them separately felt an attachment to the other.

It must be pointed out that Zola's separation from Cézanne in later years did not necessarily imply his separation from Impressionist painters. Cézanne, it is true, had acted as a link between him and say, Monet or Renoir, but Cézanne himself was not an integrated member of the group of Impressionists. He exhibited with them more through the friendship of Pissarro than out of common aims with Impressionism.

Thus, while there was a strained silence between Zola and Cézanne in the last years of the century, Zola kept (very loosely) in touch with Pissarro, Monet and others, but, as Zola himself acknowledged in 1896, the old days of the sixties were over; his life had turned to other preoccupations: "Oui, trente années se sont passées, et je me suis un peu désintéressé de la peinture." (2)

#### ZOLA'S ART CRITICISM AND THEORY.

In this section the progress is traced of Zola's attitudes to painting in general and to specific contemporary painters over the thirty years 1865 to 1896, and an assessment is made of the value of Zola's writings on art.

The article by Zola which appeared in Le Salut public in 1865 under the title: "Proudhon et Courbet" was a criticism of Proudhon's utilitarian attitudes towards the artist in society and an appraisal of Courbet's painting (3). Zola defended the artist's right to the freedom of expressing his own individuality:

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- (1) Rewald: op.cit., p. 139.  
 (2) Zola: O.C., 12, p. 1048.  
 (3) Zola: O.C., 10, pp. 35 -46.

Moi, je pose en principe que l'œuvre ne vit que par l'originalité. Il faut que je retrouve un homme dans chaque œuvre, ou l'œuvre me laisse froid. Je sacrifie carrément l'humanité à l'artiste. Ma définition d'une œuvre d'art serait, si je la formulais: "Une œuvre d'art est un coin de la création vu à travers un tempérament". Que m'importe le reste. Je suis artiste, et je vous donne ma chair et mon sang, mon cœur et ma pensée .... Il serait risible que vous veniez me faire changer et me faire mentir, vous l'apôtre de la vérité! (addressed to Proudhon) Vous n'avez donc pas compris que l'art est la libre expression d'un cœur et d'une intelligence, et qu'il est d'autant plus grand qu'il est plus personnel. (1)

The characteristics of Zola's future artistic and literary opinions were established in this passage: the importance placed on originality, individuality, sincerity and truth. In his article "L'Expression personnelle" of thirteen years later, the same words were still recurring. Zola speaks of Daudet as creator:

Tout le mécanisme de l'originalité est là, dans cette expression personnelle du monde réel qui nous entoure ... etc. (2)

In the "Proudhon and Courbet" article Zola eulogizes originality. The sublimity Zola found in Ary Scheffer's painting in 1860 was supplanted by originality as the great criterion. The ideal is still a Romantic one, as is the vision of the artist struggling for freedom to express the truth about his own personality. The article in question may be seen as a compromise between Romantic and Realist attitudes. Zola's view-point, when he speaks on behalf of artists against Proudhon's utilitarian ideas, is basically idealistic and Romantic, to the point of sentimentality:

Notre idéal, à nous, (i.e. "Artistes" and "littérateurs") ce sont nos amours et nos émotions, nos pleurs et nos sourires. ... Nous faisons du style et de l'art avec notre chair et notre âme; nous sommes amants de la vie, nous vous donnons chaque jour un peu de notre existence. Nous ne relevons que de nous, nous n'obéissons qu'à notre nature; (3)

Zola here expresses the ideal behind such paintings as those of Delacroix, whom he defends against Proudhon's opinions in the same article (4).

Zola makes his position clear:

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- (1) Ibid., p. 38.  
 (2) Zola: O.C., 10, p. 1291, ("L'Expression personnelle" was published in Le Voltaire, 27. 8. 1878).  
 (3) Zola: O.C., 10, p. 39.  
 (4) Ibid., p. 38 and p. 40.

Je n'aime ni les Egyptiens, ni les Grecs, ni les artistes ascétiques, moi qui n'admets dans l'art que la vie et la personnalité. J'aime au contraire la libre manifestation des pensées individuelles - ce que Proudhon appelle l'anarchie -, j'aime la Renaissance et notre époque, ces luttes entre artistes, ces hommes qui tous viennent dire un mot encore inconnu hier. Si l'œuvre n'est pas du sang et des nerfs, si elle n'est pas l'expression entière et poignante d'une créature, je refuse l'œuvre, fût-elle la Vénus de Milo. (1)

Zola's views accommodate the Realist painter as much as the Romantic, for in Courbet just as in Delacroix Zola sees the expression of an individuality. Thus, the criterion used is apparently applicable to different kinds of painting. (Difficulties were to occur later when Zola attempted an assessment of Puvis de Chavannes and the symbolist Gustave Moreau). Zola is praising, at the same time, truth to reality (Realism) and truth to one's own temperament (Romanticism). This is the dynamic which is to remain fundamental to Zola's art theory. The formula by which he chooses to express the synthesis (between reality and personality) is "un coin de la création vu à travers un tempérament". This phrase, which was subsequently repeated, like a refrain, throughout Zola's critical writings on art, was wide enough to be applied to painting or to literature. The formula may have been "le fruit des longues discussions d'art entre Zola et Cézanne" as Rewald asserts (2). It was certainly not a new idea, however. Baudelaire had expressed the same thought in his art criticism when he had written of the dual importance of the artist's temperament and of the study of nature or contemporary reality. (3).

Zola's formula accurately describes a "work of art", yet without defining the term on which the whole thing hinges - "temperament". What if a painter's temperament were banal? - the resulting piece of

(1) Ibid., p. 40.

(2) Rewald: Cézanne et Zola, p. 52.

(3) v. supra pp. 62-3.

work might fulfil Zola's formula, but it would not necessarily be a great work of art or, in Zola's terms, a work of originality. In other words, the formula serves to describe the genesis of a work of art, but not to help us judge the result. The neatness with which Zola expressed himself in the formula concealed the fact that those works which found approval in his criticism were dependent on Zola's own tastes (or those of people who influenced him, e.g. Manet).

Zola's tastes, then, as seen in "Proudhon et Courbet", were for what he called the vigour and solidity of Courbet's painting rather than the moral quality which Proudhon had found in Courbet's work. Zola praised "la façon énergique dont il (Courbet) a saisi et rendu la nature" (1). Mitterand makes the shrewd observation that Zola sees in Courbet the energy which he detects in himself (2).

Trapu et vigoureux, il avait l'âpre désir de serrer entre ses bras la nature vraie; il voulait peindre en pleine viande et en plein terreau.(3)

These words, in which Zola characterises Courbet, might indeed be applied to the author of the Rougon-Macquart series. This thought leads on to a rather discouraging point: Proudhon saw his own ideas - socialistic - in Courbet, while Zola saw in Courbet his own vigour. Is the true Courbet overlooked in these assessments, or does he have both elements? The art critic is always limited by his own vision. If Zola's formula might be extended for a moment, it could be said that "la critique est une œuvre d'art vue à travers un tempérament". In studying art criticism we are essentially studying the critic. The limits imposed by the art critic's own temperament may be illustrated by Zola's inability to appreciate Gustave Moreau - although he confessed a certain fascination for the artist's work - and by Huysmans' lack of appreciation of

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(1) Zola: O.C., 10, p.40

(2) Ibid., p. 172, (notes by Mitterand).

(3) Ibid., p. 42.

Courbet (when he actually examined Courbet's work and stopped repeating the accepted view that Courbet was a master). (1)

The realist aims of Courbet and Zola, however, coincided. No-one would deny that Courbet's figures were solidly painted, and this appealed to Zola; as for Courbet's "énergie", there is possibly more solemnity and heaviness than vigour in, for example, Un Enterrement à Ornans, and more monumental breadth in les Casseurs de pierres than energy or than socialism, as Proudhon detected. However, such comments can only be matters of opinion. Even the artist's opinion is not the ultimate statement, since a work of art has a life of its own as far as subsequent observers are concerned. The fact that Courbet had no particular socialist aim in painting the stone-breakers does not prevent it from being a socialist painting if that is the generally accepted opinion. (2)

Zola anticipated the views of Impressionist painters when he emphasized not the subject matter but the treatment of it. At a time when great importance was given to the content of a painting, Zola's view was avant-garde: "L'objet ou la personne à peindre sont les prétextes" (3) Such an attitude was acceptable neither to academics, with their historical and allegorical subjects, or to the public who were accustomed to seeing "noble" paintings. Proudhon is criticised for, as Zola sees it, (the fault of placing too much importance on subject-matter. (4)

The characteristic of Courbet's painting, then, most admired by Zola was the vigorous, solid treatment of subject matter which produces life-like works:

... toiles énergiques, d'une seule masse, bâties à chaux et à sable, réelles jusqu'à la vie et belles jusqu'à la vérité. (5)

(1) v. infra Chapter 5.

(2) v. Leymarie: French Painting. The Nineteenth Century, p. 137 on Courbet's intentions.

(3) Zola: O.C., 10, p. 45.

(4) Ibid., p. 43.

(5) Ibid., p. 43.

The criticism Zola made of Gustave Doré, in an article published in Mes Haines, was that the solid quality of Courbet was lacking in Doré's work. (1) Zola had by this time (1865) taken up his position in the realist camp:

L'œuvre n'est pas solide; il n'y a point, sous elle, la forte charpente de la réalité pour la tenir ferme et debout. (2)

His praise of Doré was less lavish than in the article he had written two years earlier, when reviewing Doré's illustrations of Cervantes' Don Quichotte. (3)

The "forte originalité" previously detected by Zola in Doré's Don Quichotte illustrations is found in 1865, after Doré's illustrations of the Bible had been published, to be lacking the solidity and variety which would come from a careful study of nature, or reality. Zola had perceptively anticipated this later judgement when he had stated in his 1863 study of Doré:

Je ne crois pas qu'il puisse s'accommoder d'un sujet d'une ampleur grave et sévère, aux lignes pures et sans mouvement; (4)

Whereas the "grandeur", "finesse", "ironie" and "comique" of Doré's particular talent was admirably suited to Cervantes' novel, it did not do justice to the Bible. Zola echoed the feeling of Cézanne in recommending to Doré a long and patient study of nature - this would refresh his failing resources. Although Zola accepted that Doré had a distinct originality, he found the illustrator's work lacking in the other element necessary to a work of art - the study of reality:

On ne se renferme pas impunément dans le songe; un jour vient où la force manque pour jouer ainsi au créateur. Puis, lorsque les œuvres sont trop personnelles, elles se reproduisent fatalement; l'oeil du visionnaire s'emplit toujours de la même vision, et le dessinateur adopte certaines formes dont il ne peut plus se débarrasser. La réalité,

(1) Ibid., pp. 73-79, (this article was originally published in Le Salut public, Lyon, 14. 12. 1865)

(2) Ibid., p. 73.

(3) Zola: "Cervantès et Gustave Doré" published in Le Journal populaire de Lille, 20th, 21st, 22nd, 23rd December 1863.

(4) Zola: O.C., 10, p. 306.



au contraire, est une bonne mère qui nourrit ses enfants d'aliments toujours nouveaux... (1)

Zola's attitude is sound. The same thought is expressed by Aldous Huxley when he states the advantage of working from nature as opposed to working purely in the abstract - for nature has a far richer variety and intricacy of forms. (2) Huxley's description of the creation of a work of art, moreover, echoes that of Zola's:

In the plastic arts the proposing is done by the subject matter; that which disposes is ultimately the artist's temperament..(3)

We can see the similarity with Zola's opinion as expressed in the phrase: "un coin de la création vu à travers un tempérament". The importance of studying nature, as Zola recommended to Doré, was expressed by a contemporary who had in common with Doré a powerful imagination - Odilon Redon:

Il faut que le peintre ait chez lui, sous la main, des éléments fixes. Je ne croiz pas que l'on puisse s'en distraire. Aucune mémoire visuelle n'y suppléera.(4)

Redon, who criticised the Impressionists for being too much confined to reality, to a materialistic view-point, and who was, himself, more concerned with trying to express the mystery of life, yet acknowledged that:

Voir et bien voir sera toujours le précepte premier de l'art de peindre, cela est une vérité de tous les temps. (5)

He described his work as artist in his "Confidences d'artiste":

J'ai fait un art selon moi. Je l'ai fait avec les yeux ouverts sur les merveilles du monde visible, et, quoi qu'on en ait pu dire, avec le souci constant d'obéir aux lois du naturel et de la vie. (6)

Thus, even the imaginative and mystical painter Redon would agree with Zola that an imagination is not enough.

Without denying Doré's originality, then, Zola concluded that a study of reality would add richness and force to his work:

(1) Ibid., p. 74.

(2) Huxley: Collected Essays, p. 152.

(3) Huxley: The Doors of Perception, p. 24.

(4) Redon: A Soi-même, p. 112.

(5) Redon: A Soi-même, p. 54

(6) Redon: "Confidences d'artiste", included in A Soi-même, p. 9.

Mais s'il pense lui-même que l'étude du vrai doit le grandir, qu'il se hâte de rendre son talent plus solide et plus profond, et il gagnera en génie ce qu'il aura gagné en réalité. (1)

The solidity Zola admired in Courbet was thus recommended to Doré. While the advice to work hard at studying nature was basically sound, it may be remarked that Zola was suggesting something outside Doré's capacity and foreign to his particular temperament - a temperament that led him to paint unsolid fairy-like visions.

### Zola's articles of 1866.

In April, 1866, Zola was commissioned by the editor of L'Événement, M. de Villemessant, to write a series of articles reviewing the Salon of that year. Zola's approach was deliberately provocative. He began with an article describing the suicide of an artist who was rejected by the Salon jury of 1866, followed this with two insulting articles about the jury, and included an appraisal of Edouard Manet, whose two paintings Le Fifre and L'Acteur tragique were rejected that year. In the 14th. May issue of L'Événement, M. de Villemessant quoted Zola's request to cover the Salon exhibition:

Je ferai, m'a-t-il dit (i.e. Zola), une campagne de guérillas: MON SALON (de là son titre, auquel on a reproché d'être prétentieux, mais que justifient des allures vraiment personnelles), mon salon ne ressemblera en rien à celui des autres; on en parlera, je vous en réponds, car je serai d'une sincérité absolue; je me tromperai peut-être, mais je ne commettrai jamais que les erreurs d'homme de bonne foi. (2)

This piece expresses the campaigning spirit present in the articles Zola published, although the number of projected articles was dramatically cut, and three articles by the more moderate Pelloquet were published alongside Zola's to pacify those readers offended by Zola's articles. (3)

Pelloquet's articles, while not pandering to the academics, were more of a reflection of public taste: he disputed the praise lavished upon

(1) Zola: O.C., 10, p. 78.

(2) M. de Villemessant: L'Événement, 14. 5. 1866.

(3) Pelloquet's articles were published in L'Événement on the 16th and 25th May and 15th June, 1866.

Manet by "quelques littérateurs fantaisistes" (presumably referring to Zola), and called Courbet "le lion du Salon de 1866". Courbet was, by this time, popular:

Tous les journaux retentissent de ses louanges; tous ses confrères, et parmi ceux-ci, ceux qui autre fois le dénigraient le plus, le placent au rang des maîtres. (1)

If Pelloquet's articles echoed public taste, Zola's deliberately opposed it. While he praised Manet, Courbet was found to have lost his former power. Since elsewhere Zola's opinion of Courbet is one of admiration, his views as expressed in the article entitled "Les Chutes" of 1866 may be considered as a reaction against common opinion and a deliberate attempt at being controversial (2).

The first article Zola published was called Un Suicide and dramatised the suicide of Jules Holtzapfel, an affair which apparently made a deep impression on Zola. A phrase which Zola used in this article evoked the scene he was to describe twenty years later in the novel L'Œuvre:

"Le peintre s'est tué devant ce tableau inachevé". (3)

Zola obviously saw this incident as an emotive prelude to his attack on the jury: "Je grossis comme je puis le dossier de mes griefs contre le jury qui a fonctionné cette année." (4)

The two articles which followed tore the jury to pieces. The most slanderous part, referring to specific members of the jury by name, was retracted and suppressed when Zola republished his 1866 articles for the second time in 1879. A sample of Zola's satire is as follows:

M. MEISSONIER. Rien n'est long à faire, paraît-il, comme de petits bonshommes, car le peintre en titre de Lilliput, l'artiste homœopathe à doses infinitésimales, a manqué presque toutes les séances. On m'a dit pourtant que M. Meissonier avait assisté au jugement des artistes dont le nom commence par un M. (5)

(1) Pelloquet: article in L'Événement, 16. 5. 1866.

(2) Zola: "Les Chutes", article in L'Événement, 15. 5. 1866.

(3) Zola: "Un Suicide", article in L'Événement, 19. 4. 1866.

(4) Ibid.

(5) Zola: O.C., 12, p. 1066.

Zola did not merely attack the selection committee, member by member, but put forward positive reasons for advocating a change in the Salon selection system. His motives were a desire for freedom and for truth - the public, ideally, should have the freedom to chose for themselves what they liked; the Salon ought not to be a "temple" with the jury acting as its "corps de garde": (1)

Moi, public, je me plains d'être lésé dans ma liberté d'opinion... moi, public, j'exige qu'on ne me cache rien... (2)

... il s'agit ici de vérité et de justice ... (3)

Zola's preference, as expressed in his articles on the jury, is for the truthfulness of realist painting:

Eh oui! je me constitue le défenseur de la réalité. J'avoue tranquillement que je vais admirer M. Manet, je déclare que je fais peu de cas de toute la poudre de riz de M. Cabanel et que je préfère les senteurs âpres et saines de la nature vraie. (4)

The same tastes are thus expressed as in his "Proudhon et Courbet" article of the previous year. The artist in whom he sees the "senteurs âpres et saines de la nature vraie" is, in 1866, M. Manet. The same comment might be made as before: that Zola is distinguishing his own characteristics in the artist he is viewing. The phrase cited above would aptly describe, say, Nana or L'Assommoir by Zola. The Salon of 1866 lacks the quality of solid reality which appeals to Zola; it is described by him as "un brave bourgeois en pantoufles et en chemise blanche" - not a very flattering image.

Zola's attitude to Courbet is more critical, in 1866, for Courbet has adopted the views of Proudhon about the socialistic possibilities of art. Zola utters a plea for moral and political objectivity in painting; Par grâce, restez le premier peintre de l'époque, ne devenez ni moraliste ni socialiste." (addressed to Courbet). (5) Zola was not to observe this objectivity in his own novels, it may be remarked: Germinal with its

- (1) Ibid., p. 789.
- (2) Ibid., p. 794.
- (3) Ibid., p. 792.
- (4) Ibid., p. 793.
- (5) Ibid., p. 794.

socialist leanings (though these are a matter of dispute among critics) may be given as an example of political engagement. However, if we might return briefly to the article on "Proudhon et Courbet", it must be observed that here Zola drew a distinction between the function of the painter and that of the writer - whereas the painter possessed "le droit de nous donner des émotions", the writer, or the speaker, by means of his words might hope to instruct. (1)

In the fourth article published in L'Événement in 1866, Zola declares his criterion in judging art: what he looks for above all is an "individuality", the authentic expression of a person's originality (2). The resemblances to Baudelaire's aesthetic are obvious: insistence on temperament and originality; the idea that artistic beauty changes with the times:

Comme toute chose, l'art est un produit humain, une sécrétion humaine; c'est notre corps qui sue la beauté de nos œuvres. Notre corps change selon les climats et selon les mœurs, et la sécrétion change donc également. (3)

The image is Zola's, but the thought is very similar to Baudelaire's, as expressed in Le Peintre de la Vie moderne (4). Zola experiences the same reaction as Baudelaire against neo-classical fixed ideals in art and the resulting falseness of the academic technique. The very word "art" has bad overtones for Zola, since it implies some kind of fixed ideal ("idéal absolu"). The ideal art to his mind would be a living art: "Je veux qu'on fasse de la vie ..." (5) The parallel with his literary theory and his novel-writing is obvious; the importance of real life was essential to the Naturalist way of thinking. In the Paris art-world of the 1860s, though, the desire for a more living kind of art was strengthened by the opposition of the whole academic tradition, with its set practices

(1) Zola: O.C., 10, p. 42.

(2) Zola: O.C., 12, pp. 796-800, ("Le Moment artistique" published in L'Événement, 4. 5. 1866).

(3) Zola: O.C., 12, p. 797.

(4) Baudelaire: Le Peintre de la Vie moderne was published in November, 1863 and later included in L'Art romantique.

(5) Zola: O.C., 12, p. 797.

and fixed definition of what constituted a finished work of art.

The two-fold formula Zola put forward in his previous essay:

"Une œuvre d'art est un coin de la création vu à travers un tempérament" is explained in "Le Moment Artistique":

Il y a, selon moi, deux éléments dans une œuvre: l'élément réel, qui est la nature, et l'élément individuel, qui est l'homme. (1)

Zola is aware, in 1866, of the importance of photography, which he considers to be the ultimate objectivity:

si le tempérament n'existait pas, tous les tableaux devraient être forcément de simples photographies.(2)

i.e. a photograph is a reproduction of "l'élément réel, fixe",

(this is of course an elementary view of photography, which, as an art, was in its elementary stages). Zola goes on to emphasise the quality which transforms a mere reproduction into a work of art -

"l'élément individuel": "Le mot "réaliste" ne signifie rien pour moi, qui déclare subordonner le réel au tempérament". (3) This is

an important point in Zola's aesthetic writings which is often played down while the accent on realism is over-emphasised. It is a vital element in Zola's literary theory, as has been seen in Chapter two, although overshadowed by the "roman expérimental" idea. Sloane rightly stresses the importance of temperament in Zola's aesthetic.(4)

When Doucet described Zola's Mon Salon as a great cry for "vérité", he gave an accurate description. (5) It is necessary to add, however, that Zola's theory implies a two-fold truth: truth to the subject-matter observed and truth to the artist's personal vision of that subject-matter - a "sincere" rendering.

(1) Ibid.

(2) Ibid.

(3) Ibid.

(4) Sloane: French painting between the past and present..., pp. 96-7.

(5) cited by Sloane: op.cit., p. 200.

It is precisely this quality that Zola praised in Manet in the article published in L'Événement on the 7th May 1866. Manet, as Zola saw it and as subsequent critics have agreed, was attempting to go back to an original view of the subject unimpeded by considerations of what other artists thought to be the correct, or ideal, way of painting:

... un homme s'attaquant directement à la nature, ayant remis en question l'art entier, cherchant à créer de lui-même et à ne rien cacher de sa personnalité. (1)

The view that an artist should be free to express himself in any way he might choose, an accepted opinion nowadays, was distinctly alien to the main body of French artists and critics in the 1860s. The objection Zola anticipated to such an iconoclastic view was: "Vous prenez l'étrangeté pour l'originalité". (2) The problem of distinguishing between true originality and mere novelty, expressed by Quatremere de Quincy of the Académie (v. supra p. 64), and a major difficulty for critics of twentieth-century art, was to be raised again by Zola in his last article on painting, written in a mood of self-doubt (the article of 1896 entitled "Peinture").

As for Manet's original manner of seeing in 1866, Zola characterises it in the following words: "simplicité", "justesse", "larges taches", "oppositions vigoureuses". These comments are seen to be very accurate when applied to, for example, Olympia or Le Fifre. Simplified areas of colour, juxtaposition of light and dark areas are exemplified by both these paintings. The frank realism of Le Dîner sur l'herbe and Olympia appeals to Zola, just as Courbet's earlier work had done. (3)

In the article entitled "Les Réalistes du Salon", Zola singles out Monet's Camille as the only painting, among the works of Ribot,

(1) Zola: O.C., 12, p. 803.

(2) Ibid., p. 806.

(3) Manet's painting "Le Dîner sur l'herbe", originally called Le Bain, is usually known as Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe.

Villon, Bonvin and Roybet exhibited at the Salon along with Monet's, possessing life: "C'est là une peinture énergique et vivante." (1) He denies the other painters truth or originality, or both, in depicting their subject-matter. Zola appears to feel the need, given the title of his review, to restate his aesthetic: realism (i.e. truth to nature) is a sine qua non with all artists, but an equally important consideration is the artist's temperament. (2) Zola's definition, although broad, does not admit paintings not based on reality that is, dream-painting: "Peindre des rêves est un jeu d'enfant et de femme; les hommes ont charge de peindre des réalités." (3) He would, presumably, reject Symbolist painting. However, he does not have the problem here, the mood of the time being, as Zola observes, realist - "ou plutôt positiviste." (4) Since the painter must reflect his own age, then the important paintings of the time will be realist. Zola's observation is proved accurate by the work of the Impressionists of subsequent years, with their concentration on the material aspect of their subject and their attempt at rendering it faithfully on their canvases, conscious that even a few minutes would alter the scene before their eyes.

In "Les Chutes", Zola's next article of 1866, he laments the "going soft" of Courbet: "Courbet, cette année, a arrondi les angles trop rudes de son génie; il a fait patte de velours..." (5) Théodore Rousseau and Millet, similarly, are found by Zola to have lost their usual authentic vigour and solidity.

It is noticeable that Zola, while not using the technical terms

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(1) Zola: O.C., 12, p. 808.

(2) Ibid., p. 807.

(3) Ibid.

(4) Ibid., Symbolist painting is discussed *infra* Chapter 5.

(5) Zola: *op. cit.*, p. 811 ("Les Chutes" was published on the 15. 5. 1866.)



used by artists, at least makes an attempt not to use strictly literary terms in his art criticism. He employs such phrases as "grasse et solide". (1) These may be readily understood by the public he is writing for; they are essentially simple adjectives, not precise enough to be technical. Furst makes the observation that Zola uses predominantly literary terms. (2) It must be pointed out, however, that Zola has his readership to consider. He himself, moreover, is aware that painters object to being criticised in literary terms (his friends are painters): "... je parle en poète, et les peintres, je le sais, n'aiment pas cela." (3)

The final article published in L'Événement by Zola was entitled "Adieux d'un critique d'art." (4) In this last article, Zola takes the opportunity to deride the painters Fromentin, Nazon, Dubufe and Gérôme, who were extremely popular in academic circles and accepted as examples of top painters by the public. The quality disliked by Zola in these painters is their artificiality. (5) He compares Nazon's "décors en carton" with the qualities of "vérité et justesse" and "vigueur" of Corot, Daubigny and Pissarro (who was an unknown artist in 1866), although Corot's nymphs, to Zola's eyes, are a sign of softness, and his possibly too fragile landscapes have a tendency towards artificiality. Zola's attitude remains consistent; the same qualities are still admired as in his 1865 article on Courbet. The dedicatory letter to Cézanne, included when Zola's articles were published in book form, with its polemical, confident tone, again emphasises the importance to Zola, as to Cézanne, of originality and the "accent personnel" in a work of art. (6)

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(1) Ibid., p. 813.

(2) Furst: Zola's Art Criticism, p. 175.

(3) Zola: op. cit., *ibid.*

(4) published 20th May, 1866.

(5) Zola: O.C., 12, p. 815.

(6) Ibid., p. 785, (v. supra, p. 25.)

Zola's articles of 1867.

In 1867, Zola published his lengthiest study on Manet, entitled: "Une Nouvelle manière en peinture: Monsieur Edouard Manet". (1) In much the same way as Huysmans defended Zola in Emile Zola et l'Assommoir, Manet's character and life-style are described by Zola as respectable, refined even; the artist is not, as some rumours have implied bohemian (2). The rest of the article is devoted to assessing the general characteristics of Manet's work, and discussing Manet's paintings up to 1867 in detail. Zola was not the first to find good qualities in Manet: the critics Zacharie Astruc, a friend of Manet's, and Privat had praised his work. (3). Resemblances may be pointed out between Astruc's comments on Manet, in his 1863 article, and Zola's subsequent observations. The vigour and authenticity praised by Zola in Manet was the quality Astruc had admired in Manet's work: "... des œuvres toutes spontanées, si harmonieuses, exécutées avec tant de verve et de force qu'elles semblent jaillies de la nature par un seul élan..." (4) Baudelaire had commented on Manet's taste for modern reality and described him as having "un talent mûr et profond" in an article published in Le Boulevard in 1862. (5) These favourable notices were, however, the exception. Thanks to Zola's highly controversial articles of the preceding year, though, more attention was paid to his study of Manet in 1866.

Zola sees in Manet's paintings an example of his definition of a work of art: "une traduction forte et originale de la réalité". (6) His observation of Manet's particular qualities is accurate: the precise rendering of tonal variation, with all the colours translated into a lighter scale than in nature (what has been called "peinture claire"),

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- (1) published in La Revue du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle, 1st January 1867, v. supra, p. 21.  
 (2) Zola: O.C., 12, pp. 825-827. The original version contained more personal details - v. ibid., p. 1069.  
 (3) v. Sloane: French painting between the past and the present etc., p. 192.  
 (4) Ibid.  
 (5) Baudelaire: O.C., L'Art Romantique, p. 112 and p. 114.  
 (6) Zola: O.C., 12, p. 830.

the simplicity of vision:

(Manet) se laisse guider par ses yeux qui aperçoivent ce sujet en larges teintes se commandant les unes les autres...

Manet's sense of refinement and his similarities with Japanese artists. (1)

This assessment of Manet's characteristics remains the basis of twentieth-century criticism of Manet, although new angles have been developed thanks to more recent attitudes in art. For example, Wadley's idea that Manet's best work (i.e. the earlier non-Impressionist paintings, some of which Zola reviewed in his 1867 article) was an attempt at combining the truth to the impression of the subject-matter with the truth to the harmony of the canvas (which twentieth-century non-representational art is most concerned with) (2) this idea bases itself on the qualities Zola pinpoints in Manet: his simplification and precise observation of tonal values.

Jeannot, who visited Manet in 1882 at the time when Manet was painting Le Bar aux Folies-Bergère, recorded Manet's own advice to be concise, to look for the main area of light and the main area of shade and the rest would follow. (3) Perhaps the most difficult thing for the public to accept in Manet's pictures was his attitude towards his subject-matter. He did not let sentiment or emotion alter his vision of the object he was representing, but concentrated on the various patches of colour (an avant-garde method at the time). Zola, perhaps through his friendship with Manet, but also no doubt because of his own realist views, found no difficulty in accepting this. Zola interprets Manet's work in the context of the age - a positivist age - where the emphasis is being put on scientific observation:

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(1) Ibid., p. 831.

(2) Wadley: Manet. pp.14-17.

(3) Jeannot in La Grande Revue, 10. 8. 1907.

Je vois en lui un peintre analyste. Tous les problèmes ont été remis en question, la science a voulu avoir des bases solides, et elle en est revenue à l'observation exacte des faits....

tandis que d'autres se creusent la tête pour inventer une nouvelle Mort de César ou un nouveau Socrate buvant la ciguë, il place tranquillement dans un coin de son atelier quelques objets et quelques personnes, et se met à peindre, en analysant le tout avec soin (1).

Manet, although not wishing to be known as the leader of the Impressionists, showed them the way by largely ignoring the content of the subject he was painting and concentrating on its appearance. This was a decisive break with the anecdotal or "noble" art which was popular at the time, in which the subject carried great importance. Manet was a true realist in method, even purer than Zola, since he simply painted the area of colour which he saw, without emotion, whereas Zola's "naturalism" usually conveyed a sense of human struggle, grandeur or pathos. The critic Venturi comments on the purity of Manet's images and on their existence as forms in their own right, separate from the original subject-matter:

(Manet's images) exist by means of their artistic life, which parallels the life of natural things but is not to be confused with it. (2)

Manet's amoral Exécution de Maximilien (1867-8) is an example of this.

Whatever emotions led Manet to undertake the subject of Maximilien's execution, the resulting painting is more an investigation of the shapes involved than an expression of the tragedy of the event, (compare Manet's painting with Goya's very emotive 3rd of May).

Manet was shocked at the public response his paintings provoked; Zola was fully aware of the kind of subject which would arouse public emotion. Proust quotes Manet's conversation when having lunch chez Tortoni:

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(1) Zola: O.C., 12, p. 833.

(2) Venturi: Impressionists and Symbolists, p. 8.

Faut-il qu'on soit niais, s'écria-t-il pendant le repas, pour dire que je cherche à tirer des coups de pistolet. Est-ce que j'ai jamais eu l'idée, moi, d'assassiner le duc de Guise?... Je rends aussi simplement que possible les choses que je vois. Ainsi l'Olympia, quoi de plus naïf? Il y a des duretés, me dit-on, elles y étaient, je les ai vues. J'ai fait ce que j'ai vu. (1)

A further citation given by Proust may serve to demonstrate the positivist in Manet (in 1878):

...Gustave Moreau, qui est un convaincu, aura une influence déplorable sur notre temps. Il nous ramène à l'incompréhensible, nous qui voulons que tout se comprenne. (2)

Manet, in his paintings, is more of a realist than either of the two "faiseurs de chair" Courbet and Zola. Whereas Zola, as he admitted, could never quite escape from his Romanticism, Manet succeeded.

Proust, in his speech of 1885, described Manet:

Il a laissé les choses agir sur lui, il n'a pas eu la prétention d'agir sur les choses. Jamais il ne s'est dit: "Je serai impressionniste, naturaliste, moderniste." Et il a été plus impressionniste, plus naturaliste, plus moderniste qu'aucun de ses contemporains, parce que son esprit n'était pas troublé par les préjugés de systèmes et par les théories préconçues.

L'observation était chez lui toute désintéressée: il était impartial. (3)

Zola's description of Manet as a fine analyst may appear unremarkable, now that Manet is accepted as a master of painting. If his study of Manet is viewed in its context of 1867, however, even the idea that the painter should be considered seriously was avant-garde. While Manet's sketch-like, flattening technique was unacceptable to academics, his amorality offended everyone except a small number of friends and critics. The moderate critic Thore could not accept Manet's method of treating a person in the same way as an inanimate object. (4)

It is remarkable that the qualities proclaimed by Zola to be the criteria in judging a painting - "originality", "sincerity" (or

(1) Proust: Edouard Manet, p. 80.

(2) Ibid., pp. 87-8.

(3) Ibid., p. 146.

(4) Thore, Salons de W. Bürger, Vol. 2, p. 531.

authenticity) "naïveté" - were words used by critics from Thoré to Fouquier. But no other newspaper critic has the conviction or courage to attach these words to Manet, Monet or Pissarro.

In his examination of Manet's separate works, Zola continues to make accurate and careful judgements. Le Buveur d'absinthe he describes as almost melodramatic, but this is Manet's earliest painting. (1) The melodramatic, or Romantic element in Manet's earliest works (further examples are Le Chanteur espagnol, L'enfant à l'épée) had prompted Baudelaire to describe Manet as "malheureusement marqué de romantisme depuis sa naissance".(2) The technique of Lola de Valence is correctly analysed by Zola, who points to its simplified tonality, and the treatment by "taches" and "oppositions vives". (3) (It may be remarked, here, that in the espagnolisme of Lola de Valence there is a continuation of a Romantic attitude.) When discussing Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe, Zola explains the cause of the scandal, although this was not the painter's intention: "le sujet pour (les peintres) est un prétexte à peindre, tandis que pour la foule le sujet seul existe." (4) The reaction of the public, however, is seen by Zola as a perfect opportunity to attack hypocritical values, for, as Zola claims in this article, there were more than fifty paintings in the Louvre which contained clothed persons along with nudes, so why object to Manet's painting? It is obviously a pleasure for Zola to attack what he sees as an example of public hypocrisy, as it is for him to seize on the illogical rejection by the Salon jury of Le Fifre and L'Acteur tragique when it had accepted Olympia, in 1865, the previous year. (The jury of course was avoiding further scandal.)

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(1) Zola: O.C., 12, p. 835.

(2) Baudelaire: O.C., Correspondance générale, vol. iv, p. 276 (letter to Thoré, dated env. 20 juin, 1864).

(3) Zola: O.C., 12, p. 836.

(4) Ibid., p. 837.

Zola's defence of Manet's "violence des transitions" is interesting.

He claims that Manet paints objects as we in fact see them naturally, in large patches of light:

le peintre a procédé comme la nature procède elle-même, par masses claires, par larges pans de lumière. (1).

This observation is interesting since it anticipates the work of the Impressionists, who placed great emphasis on the effect of light. As for Manet's supposed pastiching of Spanish painters, a popular criticism of the time, Zola denies this, as Baudelaire had done in 1864 in a letter to Thore. (2) Manet's main qualities are his "sincérité", his "originalité".

On the question of originality, Zola acknowledges the problem that the public will inevitably react against an original painter, as the case of Manet proves. (3) Zola has no illusions about the taste of the public, with whom he includes himself when he makes the observation:

L'originalité, voilà la grande épouvante... Il nous faut toujours le même horizon; nous rions ou nous nous irritons des choses que nous ne connaissons pas. C'est pour cela que nous acceptons parfaitement les audaces adoucies, et que nous rejetons violemment ce qui nous dérange dans nos habitudes. (4)

This thought has been proved so many times that it is not necessary to comment further on it - the cases of Delacroix, Courbet, Manet, the Impressionists are examples. The interesting point is Zola's reaction to the problem. Where other poets and artists have chosen to ignore the public and to form an elite, Zola sees the answer in combat. His role as art critic is to educate public taste as he himself has been educated by his painter friends. The "natural socialism" and "paternalism" to be detected in Zola's art criticism has been commented on by Brookner. (5) Rather than retreating into a world of his own, as Huysmans was to do,

(1) Ibid., p. 838.

(2) Baudelaire: O.C., Correspondance générale, Vol. iv, p. 276.

(3) Zola: O.C., 12, p. 841.

(4) Ibid., pp. 842-3.

(5) Brookner: The Genius of the Future, p. 92.

Zola feels the obligation to use his powers as journalist in a just cause, and no doubt anticipates the pride of success when public opinion will have changed.

Zola further published, in 1867, a letter in Le Figaro, defending Cézanne who had been mockingly and inaccurately mentioned in the paper. Zola was obviously angered at the slight on his friend:

Il s'agit d'un de mes amis d'enfance, d'un jeune peintre dont j'estime singulièrement le talent vigoureux et personnel. (1)

His article entitled "Nos peintres au champ-de-mars" was published in July. (2) In it, Zola satirised the works of Meissonier, Cabanel and Gérôme. The artificiality of such painters was the antithesis of the vigour Zola admired in Manet. Ironic and comical phrases such as "pantins élégants", "poudre de riz", "pâte d'amande blanche et rose" (describing Cabanel's Naissance de Vénus) almost arouse sympathy for these now largely unknown painters, but these were the famous, respected, powerful names of the time, bent on preserving their positions as Academicians. (3) Théodore Rousseau is rather harshly judged as belonging to this group of unoriginal, insincere painters. Rousseau's landscapes, in their painting of leaves and blades of grass, have something in common with the preciseness of the English pre-Raphaélites, as Zola observed, but his paintings are hardly mere coloured photographs. (4) Perhaps Zola was reacting to the knowledge that Rousseau had just been awarded a medal by the 1867 jury.

(1) Zola: letter published in Le Figaro, 12. 4. 1867.

(2) Zola: O.C., 12, pp. 847-856 (article published in La Situation, 1. 7. 1867).

(3) A reproduction of Cabanel's Vénus is given in Zola: O.C., 12, p. 852.

(4) Ibid., p. 855.



Zola's articles of 1868.

In his Salon of 1868, Zola pursued his line of attack on those accepted by the jury. Even before he had visited the Salon, Zola gave a satirical evocation of what it would, he supposed, contain:

des torsés nus conservés dans du vinaigre, d'après la recette sacrée de l'Ecole...  
poupées en cire qui tournent dans les vitrines des coiffeurs...(1)

The position must have appeared clear-cut to Zola at this time:

Academicians, the Salon jury and those painters accepted by the Salon and bought by the bourgeois public were to be attacked, while the painters refused by the jury were to be defended. The former represented banality, sentimentality; the latter authenticity. If the line was not actually so simple to draw, it was useful to keep to the clear division to preserve the vigour and simplicity favourable to journalism. Ary Scheffer, the painter whose "sublimity" Zola had admired in 1860, at the age of twenty, was by now definitely classed with the anti-realists only worthy of scorn. A quality lacking in contemporary painters in general, according to Zola, was "le coup de pinceau gras et magistral du véritable ouvrier". This was one of the reasons Zola gave for the poor standard of French Salon. Along with the superficiality characteristic of French painting, Zola detected a general "crise nerveuse" which was having an unhealthy influence in the art world. The only contemporary painters Zola had found who broke out of the general stagnation were Courbet, Manet, Pissarro and Monet.

Thus, Pissarro and his fellow painters were reviewed very favourably in Zola's 1868 Salon; in them Zola saw the continuation of the solid and healthy tradition of the masters: "...ils suivent la grande voie de la vérité et de la puissance." (2) In Pissarro, Zola

(1) Ibid., p. 857 and p. 858 respectively.

(2) Ibid., p. 868.

saw a realist after his own heart: "ni poète, ni philosophe, mais simplement naturaliste, faiseur de cieux et de terrains..."(1) Zola's enthusiasm of 1868 was to dwindle, and his criticism that most contemporary painters were superficial and lacked the solid touch of the masters was to be applied, in 1896, to the Impressionists themselves.

As for Manet, Zola detected that the tide against Manet was beginning to change, while the battle for modern subjects was won.(2) The emphasis was still placed, by Zola, on the personal element of a painting, but the trend he envisaged in painting was to be naturalist:

Selon toute probabilité, les maîtres de demain, ceux qui apporteront avec eux une originalité, profonde et saisissante, seront nos frères, accompliront en peinture le mouvement qui a amené dans les lettres l'analyse exacte et l'étude curieuse du présent. (3)

With the exception of the Divisionists, Zola's forecast for future schools of painting was proved wrong, (it did not envisage such schools as Expressionism, Cubism or Symbolism.) Thus, despite his insistence on temperament, Zola was limited to a naturalist view-point; anything which was not essentially an attempt at being realistic was not conceivably good art to his mind.

Because of their combination of realism and temperament, the painters Jongkind, Morisot, Cerot and Courbet were praised by Zola, although the reservations already made regarding the last two were repeated. (4) Zola's views on sculpture echoed his attitude to painting - in this field too he envisaged an extension of naturalism. The life and authenticity of Philippe Solari's Nègre Endormi were praised, while, in an article published in La Tribune, the sterile imitation of most contemporary sculpture was satirised. (5).

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(1) Ibid., p. 867.

(2) Ibid., p. 861 and p. 870 respectively.

(3) Ibid., p. 870

(4) Ibid., pp. 877-881.

(5) Ibid., p. 894.

Zola's democratic ideas become more apparent in his writings of 1868. Following an idea of Courbet's, he envisaged, in an article entitled: "Le Camp des bourgeois illustré par Gustave Courbet", an integration of life and art where the walls of les Halles would be decorated with paintings of fruit and fishes. (1) In the Tribune article "Causerie" of August, Zola wrote: "L'âge démocratique où nous entrons exigera un art viril." (2) Zola pictured a democratic system for artists. The Salon selection would be, as he imagined it, radically different from the existing one. With the aim of liberating art and artists, it would consist of a committee elected by the universal suffrage of the painters submitting work; the reward system in which the jury gave out medals would be abolished. (3) This then would have been Zola's ideal system. He objected to the injustices and discrimination of the existing one and imagined replacing it by a democratic, even anarchic, alternative.

The war of 1870 interrupted Zola's writings on art. He was never to take up art criticism again with the same verve.

#### Zola's art criticism from 1872 onwards.

Over the years when Zola was becoming increasingly preoccupied with literature, he became less involved with the struggles of the Independent painters. His art criticism became sketchier, less immediately in touch with the contemporary art scene and more repetitive. The articles published between the years 1875 to 1879 in the Russian newspaper Vestnik Evropy, known in France as Le Messager de l'Europe, repeated much of what Zola had written in earlier articles. (4)

After an article, published in La Cloche, 1872, complimenting

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(1) Ibid., p. 891

(2) Ibid., p. 893.

(3) Ibid., pp. 898 - 900.

(4) Articles sent by Zola were published in 1875, 1876, 1878, 1879.

the naturalism of Jongkind, Zola wrote a second article reviewing the Salon of that year which concluded with the bitter observation that after so much political upheaval nothing in the art world was renewed - the same "bonshommes de pain d'épice" were exhibited. (1) Parisian newspapers were subsequently hesitant to employ Zola's services, afraid of possible closure by the new regime of Thiers and then of Mac-Mahon. Zola was a potential subversive influence. Thus his reviews of the 1874, 1875 and 1876 Salons, and of the Impressionist exhibition of 1877, were published in Le Sémaphore de Marseille, not in a Parisian newspaper.

The situation in the Salon of 1874 was found to be unchanged by Zola. The most original painters were the landscapists, and the most popular, he observed, were the conservative, unoriginal painters such as Carolus-Duran, Duez, Bonnat, Cabanel. (2) Zola's attitude to Puvis de Chavannes in 1874, as in the following year, was that Puvis had talent as a decorator. In his Russian articles of 1875, Zola paid tribute to Puvis' "talent vraiment original" while seeing him as only a precursor since he did not take his subjects from contemporary life. Even Manet, whom Zola had praised so warmly in 1867, was found to be merely a precursor of the imaginary great artist to come: the analyst of modern life. This ideal now preoccupied Zola. He envisaged the "triomphe de la nature sur le vaste champ de la connaissance" in the field of painting just as, four years later, he proclaimed the possibilities of the Naturalist novel for discovering truths about human society when he published Le Roman expérimental. (3) He did not, however, acknowledge that any contemporary painter had achieved the status of a master. (4)

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(1) Zola: O.C., 12, p. 909 (both articles published in La Cloche 24th Jan. and 12th May, 1872 respectively).

(2) Ibid., pp. 914-5.

(3) v. supra pp. 19 et seq.

(4) Zola: op.cit., p.942.

It must be remarked that the original text of Zola's Russian articles is no longer available; the veracity of the Russian translations has been disputed. (1) The general view, however, present equally in Zola's Sémaphore de Marseille articles, was that the Salon represented artificiality in painting and although naturalism in landscape had won through, there was no obvious successor to Delacroix and Ingres: "...à peine un ou deux s'efforcent de se hausser au rang des créateurs. (2) These few referred to were, presumably, such painters as Manet, Monet and Pissarro. In the same article Zola commented on Manet's adoption of an Impressionist style, which Zola found "curious and original". (3) In the revolutionary work of the Impressionists, Zola saw the future transformation of the French school, (although he did not acknowledge that any of the Impressionists had achieved the status of a "master"). (4) With the help of the art criticism of Fromentin and of Duranty, who was at the time the defender of Independent painters in Paris, Zola accurately characterised the Impressionist style. He noted its concentration on the whole effect of a scene, and the importance of light and colour:

Les artistes dont je parle ont été appelés des "impressionnistes" parce que la plupart d'entre eux s'efforcent visiblement de communiquer avant tout l'impression véridique donnée par les choses et les êtres; ils veulent la saisir et la reproduire directement, sans se perdre dans les détails insignifiants qui ôtent toute fraîcheur à l'observation personnelle et vivante. Mais chacun, par bonheur, a son trait original, sa façon particulière de voir et de transmettre la réalité. (5)

Zola's comments on the Impressionists after their second exhibition were very complimentary. In the same Russian article as the definition of Impressionism given above, he spoke of Monet's "éclat extraordinaire". Monet, the "leader" of the group, was found to be "plein de simplicité et de charme". (6) Degas' work had already been compared by Zola to

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- (1) Christie: "The Enigma of Zola's 'Madame Sourdiss'", article in Nottingham French Studies, vol. no. 1. 1966, p. 7.  
 (2) Zola: O.C., 12, p. 953 (article published in Vestnik Evropy, June 1876).  
 (3) Ibid., p. 967.  
 (4) Ibid., p. 971.  
 (5) Ibid., p. 970. (6) Ibid., p. 971.

Japanese prints in its simplicity and elegance, in an article of 1868.(1) Degas' originality was acknowledged by Zola in 1876, as was his power of expressing the "truth" of his subject matter. Zola's terms are not precisely defined:

Ses (i.e. Degas') Blanchisseuses sont surtout frappantes par leur vérité artistique: je parle non de la vérité banale, mais de cette grande et merveilleuse vérité de l'art qui simplifie et élargit tout.(2)

The simplification of Degas was appreciated by Zola, just as Manet's simplification had been - his translation of reality through his own "temperament". "Banal reality" may be said to correspond to a photographic reality, as Zola understood it, that is a replica of life lacking the temperament (or the artist's own vision) which imbued a work of art with life. Unfortunately the life of Degas' sketches tended to be lost when the artist embellished his paintings; his best works, in Zola's opinion, were his sketches. (3) This is a justifiable point; the translucent, vivid quality of Degas' pastels of ballet dancers gives them more effect than certain of his over-finished paintings - his pictures of race-horses for example. An interesting point with reference to Zola's phrase "cette grande et merveilleuse vérité" is this almost mystical way of expressing the artistic truth attained by a good artist. A more obvious example is the phrase Zola used to describe Jongkind, in his article of 1872:

un maître intime qui pénètre avec une rare souplesse dans la vie multiple des choses. (4)

Degas and Jongkind were thus observed by Zola to have achieved through their art what might be called "vision" - the perception of a reality superior to the common everyday reality. Neither the terms Zola uses ("grande et merveilleuse réalité"; "vie multiple des choses") nor the artistic means by which the vision is achieved are discussed in

(1) Ibid., p. 882.

(2) Ibid., p. 970.

(3) Ibid., p. 971.

(4) Ibid., p. 903.

Zola's articles. A definition may not be possible. (1) A newspaper article is not a suitable place to go into such problems. However, it is observable that the method used by these two painters was the realist method: they concentrated on the aspect presented to their eyes rather than bringing thoughts, ideals or symbolism into play. For Zola this was the only method acceptable in painting. It is interesting to speculate on the effect Monet's last paintings, done in his water-garden at Giverny, would have had on Zola if he had been alive to see them, for these paintings succeeded in penetrating the life of things, attaining, through a concentration on the real water-lilies before Monet, a visionary quality.

Although Zola approached a mystical attitude on occasions when he was writing about the simplified, or essential, reality of an object, when he was confronted with works that were in intention visionary, but were based on objects other than contemporary reality, he was unimpressed. He confessed himself fascinated by the work of Gustave Moreau, but could not fully enter into the spirit of it, as Huysmans did. In his Russian articles of 1878, Zola described Moreau's style as: ...un talent symboliste et archaïsant qui, non content de dédaigner la vie contemporaine, propose les plus bizarres énigmes. (2)

This is a fair observation on Moreau, but it indicates that Zola could never accept such a painter as being a worthy artist. The term "symboliste" was usually applied by him to the false poets such as Ary Scheffer. Anyone who scorned contemporary reality went against all Zola's principles.

Cézanne was mentioned in an article of 1877 (after the third Impressionist exhibition) which Zola published in Le Sémaphore de Marseille. Zola described him as "le plus grand coloriste du groupe",

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(1) Huxley attempts to analyse "vision" in his Doors of Perception.

(2) Zola: op.cit., p. 997.

a painter of "toiles si fortes et si vécues". (1) Cézanne was only beginning to find his "voie" at this time. His most successful works were not produced until the 1890s onwards, when Zola had virtually given up art criticism.

Zola's admiration of the Impressionists was unfortunately soured by the year 1879. An article in Vestnik Evropy surprisingly criticised Monet's hastiness of execution, remarked on the general imperfection of the Impressionist technique and even pronounced Bastien-Lepage, a juste-milieu painter combining sentiment with a photographic realism, to be superior to the Impressionists. (2) Fortunately, Zola was, however, wary of praising whole-heartedly a painter issuing from Cabanel's atelier. (3) The cause of Zola's disappointment with Impressionist painters was apparently their lack of a solid technique, when Zola compared them with the masterly solidity of Courbet, (in whom he appeared to have found new faith, after Courbet's disgrace and exile because of his participation in the Commune.) There is present, in an article of 1880, irritation at the methods used by the Impressionists to display their paintings to the public; Zola accuses them of "opportunism". (4)

There is a tendency in Zola's articles to find more faults with the Impressionists in proportion to their mounting popularity. His criticism against the Impressionists is that they should have fought the battle for acceptance at the Salon rather than go by a round-about way and, in so doing, raise much bad publicity.

Donc, M. Claude Monet, que l'on regarde avec raison comme le chef des impressionnistes, n'est plus aujourd'hui qu'un renégat comme M. Renoir. (5)

Zola's attitudes to the actual painting of the Impressionists seem to be

(1) Ibid., p. 974.

(2) Ibid., p. 1004.

(3) Ibid.

(4) Ibid., p. 1013 (article: "Le Naturalisme au Salon" published in Le Voltaire, 18th to 22nd June, 1880).

(5) Ibid., p. 1013.



influenced, unfortunately, by his disapproval of their methods in winning notoriety. However, he has an artistic reason for not fully approving of their painting which goes back to his first artistic writings, reminiscent as it is of the qualities he admired in Courbet - vigour and solidity:

Selon moi, on doit bien saisir la nature dans l'impression d'une minute; seulement il faut fixer à jamais cette minute sur la toile, par une facture largement étudiée. (1)

Although Zola was not on close terms with Cézanne at this time, it is noticeable that both men made the same criticism of the Impressionist technique. Cézanne, by dint of persevering hard work, managed to achieve the solid monumentality which Zola found lacking in Monet and others. Whether Zola would have recognised this in Cézanne's work (which was after all not fully appreciated until well into the twentieth century) is debatable.

"Peinture", Zola's article of 1896.

The last article Zola wrote on painting, entitled "Peinture" is penetrated with nostalgia and bitterness (2). The article has been described as a "Romantic lament", made by the "last of the Romantic idealist critics. (3) After a walk through the Salon exhibition of 1896, Zola is shocked at the abuse of the "note claire" for which he had fought thirty years previously when the predominant note was that set by the dark, academic, neo-classical paintings. He further observes the abuse of the "tache"; the outrageous "femmes multicolores", "paysages violets" and "chevaux oranges" (the characteristics found in Gauguin and the Pont-Aven group). Zola's reaction is almost comic, but expressed as it is in a very emotional way, strikes the reader as pathetic.

(1) Ibid., p. 1015.

(2) Ibid., pp. 1047-1052.

(3) Brookner: The Genius of the Future, p. 114 and p. 116.

It is the reaction to new movements in painting of a critic who has been disassociated with the field for a number of years. The successful break with academic tradition made by the Impressionists has in Zola's opinion opened the flood-gates to ridiculous imitators and extremists:

Monet et Pissarro, les premiers, je crois, ont délicieusement étudié ces reflets et cette décomposition de la lumière. Mais que de finesse et que d'art ils y mettaient! L'engouement est venu, et je frissonne d'épouvante! (1)

The developments which have resulted from the innovations of the Impressionists turn Zola's mind nostalgically to the painters he had begun to judge harshly in the late 1870s. Puvis de Chavannes, whom Zola did not over-praise in former years, is described as a "très grand et très pur artiste" when compared with the "débordement lamentable de mysticisme" which his work has inspired. (2) All the new trends: Expressionism, the first signs of Fauvism, the symbolism of the Nabis are the antithesis of the realism Zola championed in the 1860s. The Impressionists had pushed realism to its ultimate point; Zola had not realised that the great painter he envisaged who would complete the analysis of contemporary life had been superseded by the time of Courbet, Manet and Pissarro. Zola's heroic concept of the modern artist was fulfilled more in his own work and life than in the painters on whom he tried to impose it. He could not appreciate the new preoccupations with expression, and with the properties of the paint and canvas, as opposed to the properties of a real scene. Thus the avant-garde critic who had defended the work of Manet and the Impressionists, his friends, when he ceased to frequent painters' circles and was no longer interested in the development from year to year of the Salon, became backward-looking and disheartened.

The 1896 article, however, ends on a typically heroic note: Zola does not regret, he says, the combat of former years; the great painters

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(1) Zola: O.C., II, p. 1050.

(2) Ibid.

he fought for would remain, while all that was not truly the work of genius would be forgotten:

...tous ceux qui ont déterminé l'évolution d'une époque demeurent, sur les ruines de leurs écoles. Et il n'y a décidément que les créateurs qui triomphent, les faiseurs d'hommes, le génie qui enfante, qui fait de la vie et de la vérité! (1)

#### Summary.

Zola's writings on art must be viewed in the context of his association with the painters of his day: Courbet, Manet, Pissarro and the others. He was defending a minority against the opinions held by the majority; the Académie and the public. If the Impressionists never quite lived up to Zola's ideal, but were referred to as merely precursors of some great painter of the future, Zola's articles did much to publicise their work. He singled out Manet, Monet, Pissarro, Renoir, Degas and other Independents from the very successful painters of the day such as Cabanel, Meissonier and Bouguereau. This was no mean achievement. Zola's association with the group of Independents (and possibly even more so with Cézanne) contributed greatly to this critical perception, giving Zola a conviction in the revolutionary manner of painting which lesser critics such as Leroy or Daniel Bernard did not share. Two aspects of the Independents' struggle for acceptance appear to have attracted Zola. Firstly there was the fact that they were a minority fighting against a biased system (the academic system with its rigid, unfair Salon selection). Secondly there was the sincerity of the Independents' work; they refused to bow to accepted practice and instead looked through honest eyes at their subject-matter; their's was a realist attitude, not an artificial academic approach.

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(1) Ibid., p. 1052.

Zola's primary interest was in people and life. Hence the stress on the human element in his critical writings:

Je suis de mon parti, du parti de la vie et de la vérité, voilà tout. J'ai quelque ressemblance avec Diogène, qui cherchait un homme; moi, en art, je cherche aussi des hommes, des tempéraments nouveaux et puissants. (1)

Thus, Zola's "Salon" of 1865 began with an article concerned with the suicide of a disappointed painter and his 1896 article entitled "Peinture" ends with an evocation of the companionship of the fight for freedom in which he participated along with his painter friends of the 1860s. His career turned from the art world to politics when he saw a further human cause to defend in Dreyfus.

It has been suggested (by Brookner) that Zola's eventual impatience with the Impressionists stemmed from an awareness that the painters were more concerned with their art than with human conditions and society, unlike Zola himself. (2) The Impressionists' lack of "engagement" may certainly have been a contributory cause to Zola's disillusionment, later in life, with the revolutionary painting he had formerly defended. His disapproval was also apparent of what he referred to as the Impressionists' "opportunism": the methods used to promote their paintings (e.g. holding Independent exhibitions in defiance of the Salon) were not regarded as honourable by Zola. (3)

There is, however, a further reason for Zola's eventual disapproval of Impressionist painters. In none of them, as we have seen, did Zola distinguish a fully complete master. Was Zola finally bowing to the common opinion of the day in making this assertion? Zola's view was honestly stated: no painter, according to him, possessed the "solid" qualities which he expected from a master who would continue the great realistic tradition from Courbet. (4) It may be suggested that Zola's

(1) Ibid., p. 807.

(2) Brookner: The Genius of the Future, p. 105.

(3) v. supra p. 78 and p. 111.

(4) v. supra p. 112.

idea of "solidity" was an anachronistic ideal - the only painter who could satisfy this description was Courbet himself. Was Zola in fact looking for a second Courbet?

Zola and Cézanne held a similar dissatisfaction with Impressionism.(1) To neither of these two men was Impressionism sufficient as a style. Cézanne went on to develop what might indeed be called a "solid" technique, if we are to retain Zola's word. The later paintings of Cézanne (e.g. his latest views of the Mont ste. Victoire) were a statement about the scene he was studying in depth, rather than a concentration on the ephemeral surface qualities which was characteristic of Impressionism. It is unfortunate that Zola and his former companion Cézanne were estranged in later life, for it is possible that, had their companionship continued, Zola might have come round to an appreciation of Cézanne's art. Zola might have seen in Cézanne the master he could not find in Impressionist painters. This, however, is speculation.

As we have seen, Zola's opinions on art were not particularly original; many of the terms he used - "tempérament", "modernité", "originalité" - were those previously used by Baudelaire. The formula by which Zola expressed his aesthetic was basically sound: "Une oeuvre d'art est un coin de la création vu à travers un tempérament." It was, however, unspecific enough to allow Zola to praise, or condemn, artists as he wished. The criterion for judging a painting was "originalité". Zola did not attempt to define the concept, but explained that, in his opinion, whenever a painting was the sincere rendering of a realistically viewed scene, then the painting had succeeded. Art criticism rests on personal taste. Zola's taste led him to search for "les senteurs âpres et saines de la nature vraie." (2)

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(1) v. supra p. 112.

(2) Zola: O.C., 12, p. 793 and v. supra p. 91.

CHAPTER FIVE

HUYSMANS' ART APPRECIATION AND THEORY

In this Chapter, a similar pattern is followed to that of the previous Chapter. The first section attempts to give a general picture of the artistic trends in the 1880s and 90s, in order to situate Huysmans' critical writings on art in their context. Section two is concerned with individual painters and their relationships with Huysmans. The final section deals with Huysmans' art appreciation.

ARTISTIC TRENDS OF THE EIGHTEEN EIGHTIES AND NINETIES.

Zola had begun writing about the Impressionists when they were still unknown to the majority of people. Huysmans, however, published his first articles on contemporary French painters in 1879, when the names of Renoir, Pissarro, Monet and the others were notorious. The progress of the critical reaction to Impressionism is well documented by Lethève. (1) In 1875, there was the fiasco of the sale of Impressionist paintings, at which only very low prices were obtained for works which are nowadays considered as precious. (2) The Impressionist exhibition of this year (the second such) aroused much ridicule in the Press. (3) The third Impressionist exhibition, held in 1877, was less harshly received by critics but the reviews were by no means favourable on the whole. Cézanne, of course, was not accepted yet by critics or public. An example of the general attitude towards him may be seen in Pothey's article in Le Petit Parisien, 1877: "M. Paul Cézanne est un véritable intransigeant, emporté, fantastique".(4)

Lethève points out the fact that it was Zola who had introduced

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(1) Lethève: Impressionnistes et Symbolistes devant la presse.

(2) Bazin: Impressionist Paintings in the Louvre, p. 33.

(3) Lethève: op.cit., pp. 75-81.

(4) Ibid., p. 87.

Huysmans as art critic to Le Voltaire in 1879. This might well be an indication of Zola's attitude at the time towards the painters he had reviewed favourably in his article "Une Exposition: Les peintres Impressionnistes" of 1877. In this article, Zola had stated that the Impressionists were original painters and that he wished them luck in the future.(1) It is possible that Zola's controversial reputation in Paris prevented French newspapers in subsequent years from opening their doors to further such articles from Zola. It would appear that the campaign Zola had first undertaken was continued by Huysmans in the columns of Le Voltaire. This point of view, however, conflicts with the attitudes expressed by Zola in his Russian articles of 1879, in which he criticised the technique of Monet and the Impressionists. (2) It may be concluded that while Zola felt he could afford to be more honest, and more critical, in his Russian articles, in France he would continue to support the Impressionist cause by enabling Huysmans to write in praise of the Independents. The articles written by Huysmans, republished in his L'Art moderne, raised protest among traditionalist critics. Bourget, Mallarmé and, later, Monet paid tribute, however, to Huysmans' acumen as art critic. (3)

While Manet and Renoir obtained favourable reviews from the critics for their works exhibited at the 1879 Salon (critics were by this time more accustomed to Manet), the Impressionists as a group did not begin to be accepted until approximately 1886. (4) Manet was, by 1881, "hors concours". (5) Degas, it must be observed, was one of the earliest,

(1) Zola: O.C., 12, p. 975.

(2) v. supra, Chapter 4, p. 111.

(3) Baldick: The Life of J. K. Huysmans, p. 77.

(4) Lethève: Impressionnistes et Symbolistes devant la presse, p.105 and p.130.

(5) Proust: Edouard Manet, p. 111.

of the Impressionists, with Renoir, to be received more favourably. A new set of critics in the 1880s contributed towards the gradual acceptance of the Impressionists, and, by the 1890s, eulogistic articles were appearing, in tribute to the work of Monet, Pissarro and the rest. Zola's rather cold article of 1896 ("Peinture") forms a sharp contrast with articles by Georges Clemenceau, Octave Mirbeau and Georges Lecomte. (1) Thus, although by the 1880s, the group of Impressionists was much less tightly knit, their popularity began to be acclaimed. Two painters highly revered nowadays as Post-Impressionists - Cézanne and Gauguin - were not accepted until the late 1890s and early twentieth century. Huysmans was one of the first critics to consider Cézanne seriously and the first to show an interest in Gauguin.(2)

The articles which were to form Huysmans' L'Art moderne thus came at a time when Manet was no longer a subject for controversy, but the Impressionists were, while Cézanne and Gauguin were still unknown figures.

The Impressionists were essentially realists. Their realist aims had much in common with Zola's naturalist ideas, as has been seen in Chapter Four. Spurning anecdotal subjects, they followed the lead of Manet and concentrated on the actual aspect of a contemporary scene. Contemporaneity was the decisive factor, as Nochlin has observed. (3) Bastien-Lepage might paint an apparently realistic (almost photographic) Jeanne d'Arc but he is distinguishable from the true realists (i.e. the Impressionists) since he chose a historical subject rather than an actual scene from contemporary life. Lethève describes the characteristics of Impressionism:

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(1) Lethève: op.cit., pp. 131-2.

(2) Ibid., p. 136.

(3) Nochlin: Realism, p. 27.



Aux sujets anecdotiques, laborieusement historiques ou mythologiquement érotiques, ils ont préféré le spectacle brut de la vie moderne, avec un goût particulier des effets de lumière, de pluie, de neige - du plein air. (1)

The Impressionists tried to interpret the patches of colour and light, viewed by the naked eye, as faithfully as possible onto the canvas.

Their aim was not to reproduce photographically the details of a scene, but to capture its effect ("l'effet"). Thus, Monet stressed the importance of precise observation of the object at a particular moment of the day when he painted his series of studies of haystacks and of Rouen cathedral. (2) There is inevitably an element of expressionism in Impressionist paintings, since the painter was depicting his own vision of a particular scene, but the basic intention in Impressionism was to record the effect of an actual scene, as opposed to expressing an emotion, a mood, or an idea. If a mood were expressed (we may think, for example, of the gaiety of Renoir's Le Moulin de la Galette of 1876) then it would be the mood inherent in the scene observed, rather than the mood of the painter.

While Zola found the Impressionists' technique lacking in "solidity" but praised their basic - realist - intention, there were other painters of the late nineteenth century who criticised them for a different reason. A new movement, in opposition to the aims of Impressionism, was gaining strength towards the end of the century:

(1) Lethève: op.cit., p. 16.

(2) painted in 1891 and 1894 respectively.

Symbolism. (1) Odilon Redon's much-quoted observation that the ceiling of Impressionism was "too low" expresses the essence of the objection made by Symbolist painters to Realists. (2) A comprehensive selection of painters, with illustrations, who might be included under the general term of "Symbolists" is given by Philippe Jullian. (3) He includes such painters as Lévy-Dhurmer, Aman-Jean, Toorop, Maurice Denis, Gauguin, Jean Delville, Sérusier. The Symbolist movement was referred to as "la tendance" idéiste" by Albert Aurier in an article in the Mercure de France of March, 1891. A term which was also applied to these painters was "idéalistes". (4) Mellerio, writing in 1896, gave a definition of the "idealist's" attitude to painting, as distinct from the realist's:

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- (1) The Symbolist movement in painting coincides in time with the Symbolist movement in poetry. However, it does not have underlying it the vast mass of theoretical writing which has formed a subject for much study in connection with the literary movement. More material may come to light in course of time, but one would not expect painters to put their theories on paper with the readiness of writers. The use of the term Symbolism in painting can therefore not be defined other than by the names of specific painters and works. It can however be understood, and most easily by reference to the works of Philippe Jullian. What emerges is that the painters were ready to use "symbols" drawn from many iconographies: pagan, Christian, Rosicrucian (and possibly other - esoteric - sources). What is more important was that they wanted their visual images (content and brushwork) to be "suggestive", or "open-ended", not to state but to set the observer dreaming or meditating on the mysteries of this world and other possible worlds. In this they were close to Mallarmé's dictum: "Suggérer, voilà le rêve..."
- (2) Redon: A soi-même, p. 116.
- (3) Jullian: The Symbolists.
- (4) A recent exhibition (at the galerie Gaubert, Paris, December 1973) was entitled "Idéalistes et Symbolistes" and included Redon, Moreau, Bresdin, Schwabe, Carrière, Delville, Lévy-Dhurmer, Ranson, Puvis, Aman-Jean, et al.

...tandis que le "réaliste" prend pour but final de reproduire la nature dans la sensation directe qu'elle fait éprouver - l'idéaliste ne veut y voir que le point de départ éloigné de son œuvre. Tout réside pour lui dans la transformation cérébrale, entièrement subjective, que lui fait subir notre esprit. Il ne s'agit plus de "sensation", c'est-à-dire de la chose perçue indépendamment de la volonté, mais de l'idée que nous en dégageons, pur concept que l'artiste cherchera à exprimer uniquement, sans se préoccuper des exactes objectivités qui en ont été la cause." (1)

Ehrard defines Symbolist painting as "la projection imagée d'émotions psychiques et de conceptions métaphysiques".(2)

Three painters who had an important influence on the Symbolist movement and are discussed in both Mellerio's and Jullian's books, are Puvis de Chavannes, Gustave Moreau and Odilon Redon, artists whose work has until recently, been overshadowed by the popularity in the twentieth century of the Impressionists. All three criticised the materialistic quality of Impressionism, and were indicators of a rising dissatisfaction with the positivistic outlook behind such painting. Gauss, in his work on French aesthetic theories, is referring to Impressionism when he observes:

Again, as with realism, positivistic description is the ideal. (i.e. in Impressionism) The painter records the perceptual surface of the world, its lighted, visual surface. To go beneath it would be to inquire into metaphysical constituents or interior physical composition. (3)

While Cézanne, not satisfied with the Impressionist view-point, painted more penetrating physical studies of natural scenes, Gauguin made the following criticism of the Impressionists:

They pursued their searches in accordance with the eye and not toward the mysterious centre of thought, and consequently fell into scientific rationalizations. (4)

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- (1) Mellerio: Le Mouvement Idéaliste en Peinture, pp. 9-10.
  - (2) Zola: Mon Salon. Manet. Ecrits sur l'art, (Garnier-Flammarion edition), Introduction by Antoinette Ehrard, p. 34.
  - (3) Gauss: The Aesthetics of French Artists, p. 21.
  - (4) Gauguin, cited by Gauss: op.cit., p. 55. I have not found the French source of this quotation.

Cézanne and Gauguin did not criticise Impressionist painters for the same reason. Cézanne is cited, by Finke, as saying:

My (method) is, you see, hatred for the fantastic picture, I have never had any other. I would like to be really stupid. My method, my book of rules is Realism. But a Realism, understand me correctly, full of greatness, unconscious. The heroism of Reality. Courbet, Flaubert. (1)

It is obvious from Cézanne's paintings that his preoccupations were plastic rather than "idealist" (Symbolist). Gauguin, however, in speaking of the "mysterious centre of thought" was expressing a Symbolist attitude. A similar aspiration to reach beyond the limits of materialism was revealed by Redon when he claimed, in A soi-même that his paintings opened a little door into the mystery. (2) He further proclaimed, in a diary entry of 1912, that "L'artiste vient à la vie pour un accomplissement qui est mystérieux." (3) Painting which confined itself to the plastic was inferior to that which expressed a literary or philosophic idea, according to Redon:

Presque tous les chefs-d'œuvre de la Renaissance expriment une idée littéraire, et souvent même chez les peintres français, une idée philosophique. L'art uniquement pittoresque est en infériorité, et ce n'est pas sans justesse que la Hollande et l'Espagne n'ont ni l'éclat ni le prestige de l'art italien. (4)

Redon wrote this in 1879, the year when Huysmans' articles appeared in Le Voltaire. It is noticeable that Redon, like Huysmans, in his later volume of art criticism entitled Certains, turned his admiration to the Italian painters of the Renaissance. The Dutch and Spanish realists, admired by Courbet and Manet, were not the favourite painters of the Symbolists of the 1880s and nineties.

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(1) Paul Cézanne: Über die Kunst. Gespräche mit Gasquet und Briefe, p. 29, cited by Finke: French 19th century painting and literature, p. 358. Again the French original has not been ascertained.

(2) Redon: A Soi-même, p. 92.

(3) Ibid., p. 121.

(4) Ibid., pp. 82-3.

Manet's comment on Gustave Moreau, according to Proust, was as follows:

... Gustave Moreau, qui est un convaincu, aura une influence déplorable sur notre temps. Il nous ramène à l'incompréhensible, nous qui voulons que tout se comprenne. (1)

Such was the reaction of a realist to a painter who described his own work as "le rêve fixé." (2) Moreau's reaction to positivist painting, on the other hand, was irritation: "Quelle singulière manie a cette génération de vouloir tout expliquer et tout ramener à la matière et au positif." (3) Unlike the Impressionists and like Redon and Gauguin, Moreau revealed, in his Cahiers, his need for spiritual expression in his work. He was less interested in conveying human passions than in rendering visible:

...les éclairs intérieurs qu'on ne sait à quoi rattacher, qui ont quelque chose de divin dans leur apparente insignifiance et qui, traduits par les merveilleux effets de la pure plastique, ouvrent des horizons magiques, je dirai même divins. (4)

Elsewhere, Moreau speaks of his ambition: "l'évocation de la pensée par la ligne, l'arabesque et les moyens plastiques." (5) The Symbolist ambition, thus expressed, is vague, as are Redon's and Gauguin's ideas about the "mystery" they were seeking to penetrate and convey. The vagueness is obviously inevitable, since the desire of the "Idealists" is to capture and express the indefinable, the spiritual. It is debatable, however, whether the end result of, say, Moreau's paintings conveys more "vision" than do the later paintings of the realist Monet. Through his very concentration on the material aspect of a scene, Monet gives to these works a sense of insight lacking in many of Moreau's pictures. (6) On the other hand, while not denying the suggestive power

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(1) Proust: Edouard Manet, p. 88.

(2) Moreau: Cahiers, vol. 1, p. 67.

(3) Ibid., p. 73.

(4) Id.: Cahiers, vol. 2, pp. 7-8.

(5) Ibid., p. 39.

(6) The paintings (by Monet) referred to are his Nénuphars and Nymphéas, his irises, Ponts japonais and houses among the trees exhibited in the Orangerie and the Musée Marmottan, Paris.

of Moreau's Salomés, for example, it is evident that much of his tremendous output remains merely a fascinating enigma to the observer (although this is perhaps a fulfilment of Moreau's intention). The comments he himself made in his Cahiers demonstrate his quiet confidence in his art. Referring to the picture called Les Chimères (which Jullian uses, in his Dreamers of Decadence as his starting-point into Symbolism), Moreau wrote:

Je tiens essentiellement à cette œuvre. C'est par son esprit si nouveau et si initiateur un ouvrage qui bat en brèche tout l'art français qui n'a jamais su s'élever jusqu'à l'épopée lyrique et qui n'a jamais pu comprendre que le malheureux et triste procès-verbal d'un fait positif même chez les plus grands: Gros-David-Prudhon, mais je noue une chaîne par là avec l'art italien et flamand des meilleurs temps, tout en donnant une note profondément personnelle, originale et imprégnée du génie français - Le voilà aussi clair que l'eau du Rocher. (1)

What seemed perfectly clear to Moreau is not so easily understood by an observer of a different period as is, nowadays, the painting of a realist of the last century - Courbet, for example, or Pissarro. The very fact that a Symbolist painting holds implications which a realist painting does not contain acts as a barrier between the observer and the painting. The presence of an "idea" necessitates some initiation. There is an esoteric quality in Moreau's work which appealed to Huysmans. Whereas Zola found Moreau intriguing but nevertheless alien to his own way of thinking, Huysmans discovered in Moreau an echo of his own tastes.

The Symbolists, according to Jullian, revolted against Academic painting and naturalism alike. (2) Moreau himself wrote, of his own style, that it was "ramené à la simplicité et, je crois, dégagé de toute emphase académique et d'école", as though he had tried to rid his painting of the "Academic" look he had been acquainted with during

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(1) Moreau: Cahiers, vol. 1, p. 67.

(2) Jullian: The Symbolists, p. 8.

his friendship with Chassériaux. (1) However, the step is not so great from the Academic style, with its historical and anecdotal subjects, to the painting of the Symbolists, with its insistence on literary and mystical values. Hence Zola's mistrust of the latter. (2) In practice, Symbolist paintings frequently degenerated into false art and "kitsch". (3) Chassé writes of the "sentimentality" of Symbolist art. (4)

Symbolism was at its height in the eighteen nineties. Mellerio describes its beginnings in the 1889 exhibition at Volponi's entitled "Exposition des Peintres du groupe Impressionniste et Synthétiste" and its continuation in the Rose + Croix exhibitions at Durand-Ruel's between the 10th March and the 10th April, 1892. (5) The Rosicrucians, as the term is here understood, were an esoteric group of artists with the aim, according to Péladan's catalogue of the 1892 exhibition, of bringing art closer to Catholic ideas, to mysticism, to legend, myth, allegory and dreams. (6) Toorop, Redon and Emile Bernard were all, in 1892, members of the society. The poster, by Schwabe, advertising the exhibition is a good example of a Symbolist work: it depicts two women, one being led by the other away from the mud of realism up a staircase towards a realm of light; the women are surrounded by lilies and other flowers, while the border of the poster is formed by a row of "roses plus crosses". Zola, in his article "Peinture" of 1896 spoke of the "débordement lamentable de mysticisme" with its "lys fétides". (7) The lilies sacred to the Rosicrucians were thus an object of scorn to the realist Zola. Mirbeau was more caustic still: "Des lys,

(1) Moreau: Cahiers, vol. 2, p. 101.

(2) v. supra, p. 110 and p. 113.

(3) This is always, of course, a matter of opinion, but we might cite as examples of false art Puvis' l'Espérance or Moreau's Retour des argonautes

(4) Chassé: Le Mouvement symboliste dans l'art du XIX<sup>e</sup>s., p.197. (cat.20).

(5) Mellerio: Le Mouvement Idéaliste en Peinture, pp.10 et seq. and Jullian's op.cit., pp. 26 et seq.

(6) The group comprised the Sarluis, Osbert, de Feure, Maxence Seon, Point et al.

(7) Zola: O.C., 12, pp. 1050-1.

des lys, de la m...." (1) But to Huysmans, the use of flowers and other objects as symbols was a matter for serious reflection.

The general preoccupation, at the end of the nineteenth century, among artists of all the genres, with things spiritual, as a reaction against an excess of positivist influence in the mid-years of the century has been described by Chassé, Martino, Jullian and others. (2) It would be incautious to oversimplify the picture by speaking of an "age of positivism" followed by an "age of Symbolism." Pure positivism, as Charlton observes, was rare; idealism was present in the ideas of Comte and Taine as it was in those of Renan. (3) The critic of positivism, Ravaisson, in his Rapport sur la philosophie au XIX<sup>e</sup>s. of 1867, made the point that materialism could not long be preserved from philosophical, spiritual and other influences, any more than it was, we may point out, in Balzac's Etudes philosophiques:

....il n'arrive pas aussi souvent qu'autrefois qu'on reste enfermé dans les sciences dont le matériel de la nature est l'objet,...sans commerce ni avec les sciences de la vie, ni avec les beaux-arts et avec la poésie qui en fait le fond, et, en général, avec les études de l'ordre intellectuel et moral. Le matérialisme, dès lors, sous ces puissantes influences, ne subsiste guère fidèle à lui-même, mais, peu à peu modifié, altéré, se change en quelque théorie différente, plus ou moins empreinte de spiritualisme. (4)

This observation, which might be considered as a truism about human nature, is exemplified by the idealism present in Zola's writings despite his scientific pretensions (in his ideas about genius breaking through all barriers, for example, in his plans for the betterment of man's social conditions or in his Romanticism. (5) Huysmans, who might

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(1) Ibid., p. 781 (Besson's "Introduction" to Zola's Salons et Etudes de critique d'art).

(2) Chassé: Le Mouvement symboliste dans l'art du XIX<sup>e</sup>s.; Martino: Parnasse et Symbolisme (Chapter 8); Jullian: Dreamers of Decadence and The Symbolists.

(3) Charlton: Positivist Thought in France 1852-1870, p. 224 and relevant chapters on Comte, Taine and Renan.

(4) cited by Charlton: op.cit., p. 18.

(5) v. supra, p. 114, p. 24 and p. 28, p. 26 and p. 42.



be described as "more imprinted with spiritualism", to use Ravaisson's phrase, than Zola, turned obviously in later life to an over-riding pre-occupation with the mystical. This is evident in his literary writings and his art criticism. (1)

Nevertheless, if pure positivism rarely existed, the widening interest in Symbolism towards the end of the century is demonstrated by the work of creative artists from Rimbaud, Mallarmé and Verlaine to Moréas, who published a manifesto of Symbolism in Le Figaro on the 18th September 1886, and to the groups of painters already mentioned, flourishing in the eighties and nineties. The most prominent critic of Symbolism in painting was Albert Aurier. Stress was placed by him, as by Moréas (and by Redon, Gauguin and Moreau as we have seen) on the presence of an idea in a work of art - to 'clothe the idea in sensuous form'. (2)

An interesting line of enquiry is opened up by Charlton when he quotes the critic Fouillée as saying:

.. nous voyons, sous nos propres yeux, le mouvement positiviste et le mouvement idéaliste tendre vers un même but, aspirer, pour ainsi dire, aux mêmes conclusions. (3)

This can be related to the realist - idealist conflict in painting.

Both Monet and Moreau, to take an example from each side, might be said to be working towards the same revelation, or "vision". Monet, using the realist method of close, precise study of the object, attempted to reach a "naïve" statement. Moreau, by compiling elements from different sources, by encrusting his paintings with rich colours and overlaying them with tracery, by his use of myth and allusion, tried to "build up" to some kind of revelation, in incantatory fashion. Whereas the realist concentrated on the physical appearance of the object, the

(1) v. infra, section 3 of this Chapter.

(2) Moréas, in Le Figaro, 18th September, 1886.

(3) Charlton: op.cit., p. 22.

Symbolist consciously tried to transcend the object, or to use the object to express a thought. Blake made an interesting comment on how vision is reached in painting: "Vision or imagination is a representation of what actually exists real and unchangeably". (1) Huxley explains this attitude in The Doors of Perception when he speaks of the "cleansed perception" achieved by great artists. He quotes Constable's reply to Blake's exclamation: "This is not drawing, this is inspiration!" "I had meant it to be drawing," Constable replied. And Huxley comments:

It was drawing, precise and veracious, and at the same time it was inspiration - inspiration of an order at least as high as Blake's. The pine trees on the Heath had actually been seen as identical with the Dharma-Body. The sketch was a rendering, necessarily imperfect but still profoundly impressive, of what a cleansed perception had revealed to the open eyes of a great painter. (2)

How then is "vision" best achieved? By the realist method of Constable and Monet, or by the mystical method of Blake and Moreau? To the uninitiated observer, the real (yet transcendent) scenes of the former are more accessible than the subjective creations of the latter. In the final analysis, it is the painter's skill with his medium which may transform a realist work into a painting of vision, or, alternately, confine a poetic vision to the appreciation of the author solely. The two opposing attitudes - i.e. the realist and the Symbolist - are found in Zola and Huysmans. Zola always emphasises the importance of faithfulness to reality, whereas Huysmans, in his later art criticism which is written from his own convictions rather than under the influence of Zola (c. 1884 onwards) prefers the ambiguous complexities of Moreau. It is not proposed here to judge the work of, say Manet, whom Zola

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(1) quoted by Wilenski in his "Introduction" to Poussin (The Faber Gallery edition), p. 6.

(2) Huxley: The Doors of Perception, pp. 37-8.

defended, against the work of Moreau, whom Huysmans publicised; this would be presumptuous, and is inevitably a matter of individual taste.

An element which was common to late nineteenth century Symbolists and to realists was "primitivism". The use of this term here may be illustrated by citing three examples: the Impressionists; Bernard, Gauguin and the "Pont-Aven" school; and Moreau. In the Impressionists, it took the form of a realist return to the sources of vision; the light rays and colour perceived by the "naïve" eye, ignoring ideas about what constituted a worthy subject for painting, and rejecting the accepted ("academic") way of treating subject-matter. In the work of Emile Bernard and Gauguin, "primitivism" might be used to describe their technique of using simplified areas of pure colour in order to achieve a "naive" expression, to convey an emotion through the primitive qualities of the colour, (as in Gauguin's Le Christ jaune of 1889). Gauguin took the "primitivism" even further by going to live among the so-called primitive tribes of Tahiti in preference to the civilised French. Moreau's "primitivism" consisted in a reversion to ancient myth, to the legends of the Bible and to the Primitive painters of the pre-Renaissance (These were also the preference, at a slightly earlier date of the English Pre-Raphaélites.) Speaking of "virginité retrouvée", Moreau cites Giotto, Masaccio, Filippo Lippi and Botticelli as examples of an art which, in keeping with the characteristics of his contemporary society, combined the earthly with the spiritual:

On revient à cet art primitif, à cet art de la fin du moyen-âge, si différent de celui de la Renaissance proprement dit, par cette raison seule, - c'est que cet art primitif est bien plus près de l'état de notre âme moderne que cet autre art décoratif et sensuel. (1)

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(1) Moreau: Cahiers, vol. 2, p. 93.

Moreau's attitude will be seen to be reflected by Huysmans in his study "Trois Primitifs".

In a sense, the realist is always a "primitive" since he rediscovers what has been clouded by an accumulation of attitudes and habits. But the Symbolist also may have the desire to return to the unclouded truth of primitive societies or of former times in order to arrive at "the mysterious centre of thought". In the latter case, the primitivism is, as it were, "second-hand"; there is a philosophical or literary contrivance about the endeavour, a conscious appropriation of the behaviour of some other culture - whether it be the Tahitians or the late middle-ages. (This was the kind of contrivance Mallarmé criticised in Wagner, as not going "back to the source". (1) There is, furthermore, a faulty logic in scorning contemporary realists but finding a mystic quality about the realists of another age. This brings us back, by an indirect route, to the consideration of whether the realist's path or the Symbolist's is the most successful way to "vision". Is Symbolism a sign of decadence, in a derogatory sense, or are the paintings of Moreau just as valid as those of Manet? It is safer to conclude, with Laforgue, that "Tous les claviers sont légitimes". (2) The basic difference, however, between Zola's attitudes in art and Huysmans' lies in this controversy. Zola's opinion of Symbolism was a contemptuous dismissal. Before discussing Huysmans' views, a brief review will be made of the three painters Jullian refers to as the main influences on the Symbolist movement of the 1890s: Puvis de Chavannes, Moreau and Redon.

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(1) Mallarmé: Divagations, Chapter: "Richard Wagner, Rêverie d'un poète français", p. 147.

(2) Laforgue: Mélanges Posthumes, p. 141.

INDIVIDUAL PAINTERS AND THEIR RELATIONSHIPS WITH HUYSMANS:

Puvis de Chavannes; Gustave Moreau; Odilon Redon; Forain, Raffaëlli and Rops.

Puvis de Chavannes.

Puvis was described by Zola as a "talent vraiment original" in 1875. (1) Edmond de Goncourt did not concur with this view in his diary entry of 28th June 1887, where Puvis is described as "banal".

Contemporary opinions on his work varied, some finding Puvis original and others, like Huysmans, dismissing him as a "pasticheur". (2)

Puvis' qualities as decorator on a large scale were acknowledged by Zola, while Redon made a sensitive assessment of him as follows:

On ne comprendra pleinement l'œuvre de ce maître qu'en se mettant à son propre point de vue qui est celui-ci, sans nul doute; modeler la figure humaine et les arbres et toutes choses comme s'ils étaient au dixième, au vingtième plan; la clef de son œuvre est là.

Regardez un objet lointain et voyez comme les lignes se simplifient, comme les plans se réduisent, comme l'écart des valeurs y est peu sensible. Les figures y ont une ombre, une lumière, et l'ombre projetée par les corps n'y est pas visible. A l'horizon les montagnes ne seront plus qu'une arête qui se découpera sèchement sur le ciel, comme en un décor.

Puvis de Chavannes est presbyte par abstraction; il a dû réfléchir longtemps avant de peindre et de trouver sa voie, cette voie discutée comme toutes celles qui découvrent une intelligence personnelle. Bien lui a valu pourtant de la trouver et de la suivre, puisqu'il a pu nous livrer son esprit sans réserve, peindre son rêve, et faire en un mot une œuvre que l'on imite et qui restera: il a trouvé un style. (3)

This passage by Redon is a splendid technical explanation of how "le rêve" is achieved in paint. The symbolic element in Puvis' paintings is undeniable: the silent tragedy of Le pauvre Pêcheur of 1881; his symbolic figures of muses, angels and personified abstracts such as l'Espérance; the generalised, idealized qualities of his landscapes.

Puvis was admired by and influenced Sérusier and the "Nabis". (4)

(1) v. supra p. 107.

(2) v. infra, p. 151.

(3) Redon: A Soi-même, p. 159.

(4) Wilenski: Modern French Painters, p. 105 and p. 137.

Along with the symbolic element, however, there is an Academic quality in Puvis' work. It might appear surprising that Zola did not seize on and condemn this artificial element, as he had with the paintings of Meissonier, except that Puvis' case was not so clear-cut. Chassé makes the general comment on Puvis' art: "Beaucoup de noblesse, mais noblesse un peu universitaire." (1) Gauguin made the criticism that Puvis' painting was too literal and explicit: for a picture entitled "Pureté", Puvis would paint a young virgin holding a lily, whereas he, Gauguin, would paint a landscape with limpid waters. (2) Mellerio, the critic, was characteristically more favourable towards Puvis when he wrote: "l'idée se dégage des œuvres de Puvis de Chavannes, plutôt qu'elle ne les dicte rigoureusement." (3) Whether Puvis is praised as a great painter or classed as not quite original enough is ultimately a matter of individual opinion. The main points to be emphasised here are his separation, like Moreau, from the main camps of painters of his time: Impressionists and Academics, and his importance as a precursor of Symbolism.

#### Gustave Moreau.

Moreau was almost an exact contemporary of Puvis. He was born in 1824, two years earlier than Puvis, and both died in 1898. The two artists had in common a solitary career, unallied with other groups of painters for the most part. Moreau, like Puvis, was an admirer of Chassériau, the painter Baudelaire, among others, described as being a half-way stage between Delacroix and Ingres. (4) The death of Chassériau, in 1856, moved Moreau to begin his Jeune homme et la Mort, which eventually figured at the 1865 Salon. (5) A letter to Fromentin

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(1) Chassé: Le Mouvement Symboliste dans l'art du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle, p. 43.

(2) Ibid., p. 42.

(3) Mellerio: Le Mouvement idéaliste en Peinture, p. 15.

(4) Baudelaire: O.C., Curiosités esthétiques, p. 27.

(5) v. Paladilhe et Pierre: Gustave Moreau, p. 13 for further detail.

of December 1856 is a testimony to Moreau's allegorical intentions when he painted the picture:

J'ajoute un enfant dans le coin vide de gauche... Je ne vous ferai pas ici l'explication de cette addition allégorique; ce sera en fait d'idée tout ce qu'on voudra, bien que j'y en attache une très nette... (1)

This was an attitude in painting alien to the Impressionists (though not perhaps to Courbet who painted L'atelier du peintre with its allegorical significance.) Chassé appears to exaggerate his case when he claims, of Moreau, that "On pourrait même soutenir que cet idéaliste forcené représente mieux le positivisme qu'aucun artiste de son temps," on the grounds that Moreau expressed himself by means of precise and concrete detail. (2) The positivist, as exemplified in an Impressionist painter, for example Monet, made careful observation of a contemporary scene, whereas Moreau's method, on the contrary, was to assemble various historical, religious and architectural details. An example of this amassing of decoration and emblems from various sources might be Les Prétendants of 1853, or Jupiter et Sémélé of 1896 (3). With regard to this fastidious element in Moreau's paintings, Degas' comment, or rather joke, is very apt: "Il voudrait nous faire croire que les dieux portaient des chaînes de montre." (4) However, whatever Moreau's methods, his intention was not positivistic. Chassé is very much nearer the point when he makes the observation that there is a lack of synthesis between Moreau's "pensée" and his "peinture":

... dans sa peinture, on trouve une sécheresse trop intellectuelle; quant à sa pensée, elle est faussée par le souci qu'il a d'être plastique.(5)

The Symbolist's problem of closing the gap between thought and painting

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(1) Gustave Moreau et Eugène Fromentin, Documents inédits, ed. by Wright and Moisy, pp. 87-8.

(2) Chassé: op.cit., p. 23.

(3) Both these paintings are in the Musée Gustave Moreau, catalogue 19 and 91 respectively.

(4) cited by Chassé: op.cit., p. 39.

(5) Ibid., p. 37.

was avoided by the realist (who simply concentrated on the material aspect of the object before his eyes.) The sense of artificiality present in Puvis' work may be accounted for in the same way; as with Moreau, there is sometimes a dichotomy between the "idea" and the "painting". Gauguin, on the other hand, succeeded in uniting both aspects, as in, for example, his Te Rerioa (Le Rêve) or his D'où venons-nous? Que sommes-nous? Où allons-nous? of 1897. Gauguin considered that he had "freed painting from many of its former academic defects and from its symbolist defects (another form of sentimentality)".(1) Sentimentality may be derided or admired, according to one's personal tastes, but it was certainly present in the Symbolist movement of the 1890s. (2) The area where religion coincides with sentimentality, in its derogatory sense, is a vaguely defined one, depending as much on the observer as the painter; it might be exemplified by Moreau's Orphée or Puvis' le pauvre Pêcheur. Huysmans saw a powerful mystical suggestion in certain of Moreau's works, while being attracted by their ambiguity.

If Huysmans was one of the first to come close to the spirit of Moreau, he was not the first to give the artist favourable reviews. Unlike Manet and the Impressionists, Moreau had no problem with the Salon jury, or with newspaper critics. His historical paintings: Darius fuyant après la bataille d'Arbèles and la Sulamite found acceptance at the Salon of 1853. OEdipe et le Sphinx, ten years later, was acclaimed by, among others, Theophile Gautier, Maxime du Camp, Paul de Saint-Victor and Ernest Chesneau, who wrote, in le Constitutionnel:

C'est une œuvre unique qui, dans quelques galeries qu'elle prenne place, occupera toujours un rang élevé. (3)

(1) Gauguin, notes by Herbert Read, p. 22.

(2) v. Chassé: op.cit., p. 197.

(3) v. Paladilhe et Pierre: Gustave Moreau, p. 25.



Moreau thus found support among the important critics of the day, but not, it may be noted, among the less conventional critics such as Castagnary and Edmond About.

Moreau's work in subsequent years aroused no such scandal as that provoked by Manet and the Independents. Towards the end of the 1860s, however, Moreau fell out of the critics' favour somewhat. Paul de Saint-Victor, the vehement critic of Impressionism, wrote, in 1869, with reference to Moreau's Prométhée:

...Que signifie le vautour qui gît à ses pieds, mort d'indigestion, tandis que son remplaçant déchire du bec et des ongles le flanc du Titan? L'idée de ces rongeurs de relais est d'une recherche puérile... L'exécution est pénible et tourmentée comme la conception. (1)

Such a criticism is an example of the incomprehension Moreau's painting aroused among critics and public; the same enigma puzzled Zola in 1878 (v. supra p. 110) but sounded a common chord in Huysmans, giving him the opportunity to indulge in the suggestive descriptions of A Rebours, in 1884. The rehabilitation of Moreau's works with the public is still taking place at present; he has been acknowledged as a precursor of twentieth-century surrealist painters, by André Breton.(2)

#### Odilon Redon.

Redon, like Moreau in his writings, stressed the role of the imagination in a work of art. Redon's ambition, which he believed he had accomplished, was similar to Moreau's idea: "l'évocation de la pensée par la ligne...":

Pour ce qui est de moi, je crois avoir fait un art expressif, suggestif, indéterminé. L'art suggestif est l'irradiation de divins éléments plastiques, rapprochés, combinés en vue de provoquer des rêveries qu'il illumine, qu'il exalte, en incitant à la pensée. (3)

The print found in Huysmans' 'chambre mortuaire' is one of many examples of Redon's art which justify this claim: it is entitled

(1) Ibid., p. 35.

(2) Ibid., v. Chapter "Moreau surréaliste", pp. 165-171; v. also Jullian: The Symbolists, Chapter 6.

(3) Redon: A Soi-même, p. 116 (written in 1910).

L'Espérance and portrays a lightly-drawn mysterious face, eyes half-closed and with two fingers at its mouth, seen through a latticed window.(1) Although Huysmans did not write extensively about Redon's work, his admiration for the artist was a well-known fact. Deffoux, for example, speaks of Huysmans' attitude to Redon's Christ:

"Huysmans admirait particulièrement, dans l'œuvre de Redon, ce 'visage supplicié strié d'épines' ".(2) Huysmans made contact with Redon when he wrote requesting a copy of a certain sketch and later visited the family regularly. Redon was grateful to Huysmans for the publicising of his work. (3) Deffoux cites Redon (according to the notes of Redon's friends Marius and Ary Leblond) as saying of Huysmans:

Quand je vis les longues études qu'il me consacra dans A Rebours et dans Certains, ce fut une surprise. Cela me répandit beaucoup dans le monde des artistes qui suivait sa littérature. (4)

Huysmans was, of course, at this time well known as a Naturalist novelist, whereas Redon was unknown to the public.

Redon's particular technique of combining the precise with the imprecise has been observed by Klingsor. (5) The synthesis between the thought and the plastic means of expression is better effected in Redon's work than in Moreau's. The sometimes excessive and "hard" detail of Moreau, which Degas described as the gods' "watch-chains", is fortunately not present in Redon. He, in his sensitivity to the natural world around him, appears to have had a talent lacking in Moreau. Redon found, in his contemplation of nature - of people's faces, of flowers - a basis from which to work; his insistence on the primary function of the painter as an eye looking at nature has

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- (1) Deffoux: J. K. Huysmans sous divers aspects contains a reproduction.  
 (2) *Ibid.*, v. illustration of Redon's Christ.  
 (3) Baldick: The Life of J. K. Huysmans, pp. 73-6.  
 (4) Deffoux: *op. cit.*, p. 39.  
 (5) v. Chassé: Le Mouvement symboliste dans l'art du XIV<sup>e</sup> s., pp. 50 et seq.  
 A parallel might be made here with Verlaine's "Art poétique" in which the poet advocates this combination.

been illustrated above. (1) It might be claimed that Redon's painting fits into the definition of a work of art given by Zola: "un coin de la création vu à travers un tempérament", since Redon succeeds in combining the real aspect of an object with his own mystical vision of it. His picture of his mother: Portrait de Mme. Redon (1882) may be cited as an example, or, even more convincingly, his paintings of flowers in later years which are recognisable flowers but surrounded by a mysterious aura. However, Redon's more "surrealistic" pictures would move him out of the scope of Zola's formula. It was the strangeness of pictures such as Dans le rêve (a series of lithographs exhibited in 1881) which caught Huysmans' imagination. (2) Redon and Moreau, it may be noted, were the only two living painters admitted into des Esseintes' sanctum in A Rebours. (3)

#### Forain, Raffaëlli and Rops.

These three painters are not major figures in the history of art, but may be discussed briefly here since Huysmans was an admirer of their work. The first two, Forain and Raffaëlli, are classed in the French school of artists, whereas Rops, who was born in Belgium, is more properly an artist of the Belgian school, although his work was published in France.

Forain worked mainly as an illustrator in a realist style. His illustrations of women and Parisian life were often caricatural and ironic to the point of being cruel. Huysmans' attitude to his pictures of prostitutes is discussed in the third section of this chapter. Degas introduced Forain to the Fourth Impressionist exhibition of 1879, to which Forain contributed, among other pictures, his Cabinet particulier

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(1) v. supra, p. 88.

(2) v. Wilenski: Modern French Painters, p. 46.

(3) Huysmans: O.C., (A Rebours) pp. 96 et seq.

and his Coulisses de l'Opéra. Degas and Forain, both artists greatly admired by Toulouse-Lautrec, were given good reviews by Huysmans. (1)

Huysmans' friendship with Forain extended from their youth right up to the period of Huysmans' strong Catholic faith. A reference to the "sprees" in Paris shared by the two men is contained in a letter written by Huysmans in 1901. (2) Both Forain and Raffaëlli collaborated with Huysmans in the illustration of Croquis parisiens, which was published in 1880. Forain also produced a frontispiece for an edition of Huysmans' Marthe. (3) Like Huysmans, Forain followed the path of conversion to Catholicism and became a firm friend in later life, visiting Huysmans in Paris and in Ligugé, at the Benedictine monastery where Huysmans became an oblate in 1901. (4)

Raffaëlli was well-known by his contemporaries as a realist painter and engraver of Parisian scenes, notably of bourgeois life and of street corners with their fortifications at the time of the Franco-Prussian war. Huysmans did much to bring Raffaëlli to the public's attention by including him in his Salon review of 1879, at a time when the artist was not yet established. His collaboration with Forain to illustrate Croquis parisiens has already been referred to; he also illustrated a posthumous edition of Les Sœurs Vatard and, like Forain, he painted a portrait of Huysmans, who possessed several works by the two artists. Both Forain and Raffaëlli had attended Gérôme's studio, but both artists were converted to the depiction of contemporary scenes in a realistic, often bitter manner. Documentary evidence of Huysmans' association with Raffaëlli is limited, but Baldick cites an invitation to Huysmans to have dinner with Raffaëlli at Asnières. (5)

(1) For Lautrec's admiration of Forain v. Wilenski: Modern French Painters, p. 125.

(2) v. Baldick: The Life of J. K. Huysmans, p. 288.

(3) Ibid., p. 33.

(4) Ibid., p. 288 and p. 294.

(5) Ibid., p. 74.

The work of the Belgian artist Félicien Rops may not be classed along with that of Forain and Raffaëlli as realistic sketches of contemporary life. For although Rops did portray such scenes (e.g. the lithograph entitled Un Monsieur et Une Dame which bears similarities to the work of Forain) his art comprised a whole aspect not present in the other two artists. (1) This aspect was an excursion into perversity, satanism and blasphemy, and was the element which attracted the attention of Huysmans.

Rops' career began when Uylenspiegel was founded; this was a satirical weekly published in Brussels. (2) Rops contributed lithographs to the review (more and more infrequently) until 1862. During the sixties, Rops abandoned lithography for copper engraving, by which means he produced many frontispieces and illustrations. The seventies were his period of intense production, and by the eighties he was illustrating works by such authors as d'Aurevilly and Péladan. (3) In 1881, Théodore Hannon's Les Rimes de Joie contained a frontispiece by Rops along with a preface by Huysmans. (4) The frontispiece, by Rops, for Péladan's Le Vice Suprême depicts a female skeleton (i.e. a skeleton wearing a skirt) appearing from a coffin and beside her a male skeleton in evening dress with his skull under his arm. The two figures are surrounded by vultures in flight. (5) Rops' obsession with death and with woman is further seen in two of his illustrations for Barbey d'Aurevilly's Les Diaboliques. (6) A un dîner d'athées portrays a nude woman sprawled across the dinner table, while La Femme et la Folie dominant le monde is a picture of a young female nude, with cloven feet,

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- (1) Ramiro: L'œuvre lithographié de F. Rops contains examples of Rops' realist work, e.g. Un Monsieur et une Dame; Juif et Chrétien; Un Enterrement au Pays Wallon; Chez les Trappistes.
- (2) Founded in 1856.
- (3) Both names, it may be remarked, loosely associated with the Symbolist movement in literature.
- (4) Hannon: Les Rimes de Joie published by Gay et Doucé, 1881.
- (5) Exsteens: L'œuvre gravé et lithographié de Félicien Rops, vol.3 no501
- (6) d'Aurevilly: Les Diaboliques published by Lemerre, Paris 1883. Rops' illustrations were published in 1886.

whose veil is being pulled off by an old woman ("la Folie") behind her. (1)

Les Sataniques, a series of "vernissages" by Rops were the subject of an essay by Huysmans, included in Félicien Rops et son œuvre. (2) The first of Les Sataniques: Satan semant l'ivraie depicts a huge Satan with long thin legs, dressed in Breton garb, striding across the Seine scattering feminine larvae as he goes on his way. (3) The satanic/erotic element is present in Le Sacrifice and Le Calvaire. (4) The women in these plates show an agonised joy which Huysmans linked with the spirit of Japanese erotic engravings. L'Idole, portraying a woman coupled with a monstrous idol, a phallic "lampadaire" at either side, is more obviously sexual, while Sainte Thérèse verges on the pornographic, containing a statement about the subject's erotic attitude towards Christ. (5) The haunting image of death is present in this series of pictures, as in Rops' other works; grotesque skeletons are incorporated into many of his pictures, reminiscent of the mediaeval image of the devil and the "danse macabre". A certain mediaeval attitude to woman is similarly exemplified in Rops' numerous nudes or semi-nudes with cloven feet. (6) The pornographic element of such works as Le Joyeux Bidet and Le Vélocipède will not be dwelt on here, since such pictures do not contain the blasphemous element which was important to Huysmans. (7)

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- (1) Exsteens: op.cit., vol. 3, nos. 509 and 512 respectively.
  - (2) Félicien Rops et son œuvre, 1897 included Huysmans' essay "L'œuvre érotique de Félicien Rops."
  - (3) Exsteens: op.cit., Planches libres no. 783.
  - (4) Ibid., Planches libres, nos. 786 and 787 (v. also no. 942).
  - (5) Ibid., Planches libres, nos. 785 and 797 respectively.
  - (6) For example, v. ibid., Planches libres, no. 746: La Joueuse de Flute and no. 958: Printemps.
  - (7) Ibid., Planches libres, nos. 751 and 752 respectively.

HUYSMANS' ART CRITICISM AND THEORY

The art criticism of Huysmans spans the years 1879 to 1907, the year of his death. His first collection of reviews, entitled L'Art Moderne, was published by Charpentier in 1883 and included articles previously printed in Le Voltaire, La Réforme and La Revue littéraire et artistique. It has been noted already that Zola introduced Huysmans, in 1879, to the editor of Le Voltaire; the verve with which Huysmans defended the new school of painters at this time is second only to that of Zola himself.

L'Art Moderne.

The influence of Zola is apparent in Huysmans' Salon reviews of 1879, 1880 and 1881. The general attitudes towards art expressed in these and, furthermore, the terminology used by Huysmans reflect the campaigning articles Zola wrote in the 1860s. A sample of Huysmans' terminology in his Salon of 1879, may be given as evidence; the qualities of good art are described by such phrases as: "vivant et vrai" (1); "vigoureusement peint... sincère" (2); "individualité... original" (3); "personnalité" (4); "virilement peint" (5); "franc, énergique," "naturaliste". (6) Referring to the work of Caillebotte, the most neglected perhaps of the Impressionists, Huysmans writes, in his review of the Independents' exhibition of 1880:

Cette qualité suprême de l'art, la vie, se dégage de cette toile... C'est un coin de l'existence contemporaine, fixé tel quel. (7)

Huysmans' preoccupation with naturalism in art is seen in his comments on nudes:

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- (1) Huysmans: O.C., 6, p. 8.  
 (2) Ibid., p. 31.  
 (3) Ibid., p. 32.  
 (4) Ibid., p. 55.  
 (5) Ibid., p. 67.  
 (6) Ibid., p. 71.  
 (7) Ibid., pp. 110, 111.

Le nu, tel que les peintres le comprennent, n'existe pas... le nu est un état provisoire, et voilà tout. (1)

The "painters" who did not understand that a composed, artificial painting of a nude was neither logical nor good art were those Zola had ridiculed: Cabanel, Bouguereau, Gérôme. (2) Huysmans' attitude to Academic and official painters was exactly similar to Zola's (3).

He criticised them for being stilted, life-less, unnaturalistic:

M. Gérôme (sic) avait rénové déjà le glacial ivoire de Wilhelm Miéris, M. Bouguereau a fait pis. De concert avec M. Cabanel, il a inventé la peinture gazeuse, la pièce soufflée. Ce n'est même plus de la porcelaine, c'est du léché flasque... (4)

Huysmans' opinion, in summarising his impression of the Salon of 1879, was that the "poncif habile" predominated at the expense of living art; he thus echoed Zola's assessments of the Salons in the 1860s and seventies. The realistic painter of nudes Huysmans hoped for was to be found in Degas (in the 1880s). Degas was to surpass other painters in his sensitivity to the female body in each "état provisoire" Huysmans wrote of in 1879. Huysmans' attitude to Degas' nudes, as expressed in the volume entitled Certains (published in 1889) was to include a certain misogyny, but in 1879, Huysmans found Degas' naturalism refreshing after the affectation of the official Salon:

... prenez un homme de grand talent, comme M. Degas, prenez même son élève, Mlle. Mary Cassatt, et voyez si les œuvres de ces artistes ne sont pas plus intéressantes, plus curieuses, plus distinguées que toutes ces grelottantes machinettes qui pendent, de la cimaise aux frises, dans les interminables salles de l'Exposition. (5)

Huysmans stressed the importance of contemporaneity, without which a work lacked authenticity. An example of the "painter of modern life", the Baudelairian phrase which had appealed to Zola, was Degas, according to Huysmans. Degas, with his scorn of convention and his accuracy of

(1) Ibid., p. 24.

(2) Ibid., p. 25.

(3) v. supra, p. 103 for Zola's comments.

(4) Huysmans: op.cit., p. 25.

(5) Ibid., p. 11.



observation, was a direct link with the art of Manet, as Huysmans correctly noted. (1) The views on architecture expressed in the Salon of 1879 have the same stress on "modernité". Garnier's Opéra (constructed between 1862 and 1874) was described by Huysmans as a mixed-up pastiche of earlier styles. (2) The beginnings of a new style, an authentic style, in architecture were seen by Huysmans in the iron-constructed gare du Nord and les Halles. (3) In the chapter "Le Fer" included in Certains similar views are expressed.

The future of art in general was envisaged, in Huysmans' Salons of 1879, 80 and 81, as a Naturalist development. The feeling that the art world was evolving and progressing towards "un art tout contemporain, approprié aux besoins de notre temps", reflects the democratic viewpoint of Zola. (4) That this view was not as important to Huysmans as to Zola is seen in the later art criticism of Certains, where contemporaneity in art gives way to other considerations, notably the need in Huysmans for a spiritual, esoteric art. This parallels the development in his literary attitudes (v. supra Chapter 3). In his later Symbolist preoccupations, Huysmans was to turn to artists of the past, but at the time of writing L'Art Moderne, Huysmans' particular individuality did not invade his art criticism to such an extent; he judged objectively the artists of his day.

The painters preferred by Huysmans in the three Salons referred to and in the two reviews of the Independent exhibitions of 1880 and 1881, which together make up L'Art Moderne, were the naturalist painters of the time: Degas, Cassatt, Raffaëlli, Bartholomé and Forain. In the last of these artists, Huysmans detected a "sens très particulier et très vif de la vie contemporaine." (5) A further quality admired by

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(1) Ibid., p. 44.

(2) Ibid., p. 95.

(3) Ibid., p. 94.

(4) Ibid., p. 94. For Zola's democratic view-point v. supra, p. 102 and p. 106.

(5) Huysmans: op.cit., p. 91.

Huysmans in the above painters was their elegance. The appeal of such a quality to Huysmans reflected his own sensitivity and his distaste for anything vulgar, (a similarity may be pointed out here with the Goncourt brothers' abhorrence of the vulgar.) The repulsion felt by Huysmans in front of Courbet's paintings, as expressed in a footnote to his Salon of 1880, was due partly to Courbet's lack of refinement. The harsh criticism levelled at Courbet, in 1880, was a dramatic reversal of view-point; Huysmans, up to the time of writing the footnote, had gone along with Zola's opinion that Courbet was a powerful naturalist painter with an accomplished technique. (1) (In Certains, Huysmans went as far as calling Courbet a "gros mufle". (2) ) Huysmans, then, it might be observed, had more of a taste for refinement than Zola.

The appraisal of Impressionist painters Huysmans wrote in 1880 and 1881 was based on the ideas about naturalism and contemporaneity held by Zola. Like Zola, Huysmans lamented the excesses of the Impressionist technique. Zola's mockery of "orange horses" in his article of 1896, may be compared with Huysmans' comments, in his 1880 review of the Independents' exhibition, on Caillebotte's "Indigomanie". The seeds of post-Impressionism mistrusted by Huysmans in 1880 were thus deplored by Zola sixteen years later. Huysmans' views on contemporaneity regarding architecture were echoed in his ideas about sculpture. Degas' revolutionary piece of sculpture entitled Petite danseuse de quatorze ans (revolutionary in that Degas incorporated pieces of material and gauze in her tunic) found praise for its "modernity". (3) Huysmans observed that the little dancer was "la seule tentative vraiment moderne que je connaisse, dans la sculpture." (4).

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(1) Ibid., p. 177; footnote on pp. 177,8.

(2) Huysmans: O.C., 10, p. 165.

(3) Huysmans: O.C., 6, p. 247.

(4) Ibid., p. 250.

In his review of the Impressionists of the following year, 1881, Huysmans was more generous with his praise of Pissarro than Zola. Pissarro was the Impressionist who least wanted to break down the object into pure light. He is thought here by Huysmans to have realised the Impressionist formula, a fact which Zola did not admit, even when he nostalgically acclaimed the Impressionists in 1896 as the leading painters of the day. (1) Huysmans, in the appendix to his 1882 review of the Impressionists, commented:

MM. Pissarro et Monet sont enfin sortis victorieux de la terrible lutte. L'on peut dire que les problèmes si ardues de la lumière, dans la peinture, se sont enfin débrouillés sur leurs toiles. (2)

Huysmans' attitude to the "juste milieu" artists.

The class of painters who combined characteristics from both Academic and realist schools (and who thus found popularity in official circles) included such painters as Bastien-Lepage, Carolus-Duran, Becker, Gervex, Cazin and Duez. (3) The line distinguishing the original from the non-original was obviously difficult to draw; Zola almost committed himself, in 1879, to proclaiming Bastien-Lepage as the answer to his own demands for a fully accomplished, realist painter. (4) Huysmans, however, showed himself to be more discriminating; he condemned M. Bastien-Lepage outright as:

un matois qui essaye du faux naturalisme pour plaire à une certaine catégorie du public et qui enjolive cette apparence de vérité de toutes les fadeurs imaginables afin d'amadouer le reste des visiteurs...(5)

Bastien-Lepage, according to Huysmans, represented cleverness without originality. (6) This assessment has been proved, by time, to be generally acceptable. As for Carolus-Duran, Huysmans' opinion was like that of Zola: that he was an unoriginal, pretentious painter whose

(1) Zola: O.C., 12, pp. 1047-52 and v. supra pp. 113, 114.

(2) Huysmans: op.cit., p. 293.

(3) v. supra, p. 65.

(4) v. supra, p. 111.

(5) Huysmans: O.C., 6, p. 150.

(6) Ibid., p. 48.

popularity was soon over and whose paintings became hard, metallic-looking soon after they were finished. (1) Huysmans did not spare the feelings of "juste-milieu" or Academic painters; his criticism was candid, even violent; he was incensed by the wide public acclaim enjoyed by such artists. The painters in question, from Cabanel to Carolus-Duran, may be appreciated nowadays from a more balanced viewpoint, since they have fallen into their rightful place as secondary to the inovatory painters of the day, the Impressionists; one can even praise their good qualities without the risk of being accused of prejudice. (2) The emotion present in Huysmans' condemnation of Gervex, for example, is no longer necessary: "cet artiste ne sait même plus peindre ... Ni dessin, no couleur, rien; M. Gervex est fini-". (3) Huysmans' comments on Bonvin and Gigoux may also be quoted as good examples of sarcasm:

M. Bonvin, c'est la sécheresse incarnée... (4)

M. Jean Gigoux est de l'entreprise cette année. (1879)

Il est donc ressuscité - Oh! pourquoi? (5)

Fantin-Latour, who might be included on the fringe of the "juste-milieu" painters since he combined a powerful realist style with a more traditional attitude to subject-matter, was singled out by Huysmans as being a "naturaliste", not a "faux naturaliste", thus demonstrating his accuracy of judgement, for Fantin-Latour is still esteemed as a painter of merit today. The warm praise bestowed on this artist in 1879 - "c'est un grand peintre qui serre et rend la vie... un des meilleurs artistes que nous possédions en France\*" - was toned down, however, in 1881. (6) In this year, Huysmans admitted Fantin-Latour's great achievements as a colourist, but observed that his paintings were all too similar: "Il

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(1) Ibid., pp. 75-6 and 159

(2) Boime gives a fair appreciation in his book: The Academy and French painting in the nineteenth century.

(3) Huysmans: O.C., 6, p. 200.

(4) Ibid., p. 85.

(5) Ibid., p. 22.

(6) Ibid., p. 75 and p. 203.

y a là, de la part de ce peintre, une immobilité par trop constante." (1)

This is a comment which might be justified if the painter's group portraits are considered: Un atelier aux Batignolles (1870) is not so dissimilar from Hommage à Delacroix (1864) or Autour du piano (1885). (2)

Such paintings are excellent pieces of realism but are more of interest as documents than for their value as dynamic works of art.

#### Huysmans' opinion of Manet.

Manet's struggle for recognition was virtually over by the time Huysmans published his Salon of 1879. He was now exhibiting at the annual Salons. Huysmans described Manet as one of the most fiery promoters of Impressionist art. The Impressionist style was characterised by Huysmans as:

...observation très curieuse ... vision étonnamment juste de la couleur, mépris des conventions ... la recherche du plein air, du ton réel, de la vie en mouvement, le procédé des larges touches, des ombres faites par les couleurs complémentaires, la poursuite de l'ensemble simplement obtenu. (3)

These are accurate observations of the realist intentions common to Manet and the Impressionists, although the description would be associated, nowadays, more with the latter than the former; more emphasis is now placed on the works of Manet's "first manner" (which would include paintings such as Olympia, the Portrait de Zola, le Balcon, le Déjeuner dans l'atelier. ... "la recherche du plein air ... de la vie en mouvement," however, would aptly describe the works Manet exhibited at the 1879 Salon, when he was painting under Impressionist influence (his "second manner"): Dans la serre and En bateau. Huysmans praised the two pictures by Manet in terms previously used by Zola:

L'air circule...  
la nature telle qu'elle est et telle qu'il la voit... (4)

(1) Ibid., p. 203.

(2) These paintings are all in the Louvre.

(3) Huysmans: O.C., 6, p. 44.

(4) Ibid., pp. 45-6.

Similarly, in his Salon of 1880, he followed Zola's lead by describing Manet's work as "œuvre claire, débarbouillée des terres de momie..." (1)

But he appears to identify Manet too closely with the Impressionist group:

Il a, parmi les impressionnistes, puissamment aidé au mouvement actuel, apportant au réalisme, que Courbet implantait par le choix des sujets surtout, une révélation nouvelle, l'essai du plein air. (2)

The evidence of Manet's work up to the period of Impressionist influence does not show him to have been particularly revolutionary as far as open-air work was concerned. Olympia, le Fifre and other portraits by him are indoor scenes, while the scandal-raising Déjeuner sur l'herbe of 1863 has a posed, "studio" look. Manet's ambition was not so much to capture the effect of outside light (until, of course, his Impressionist period, but to obtain, in Venturi's words, "a plastic-chromatic coherence." (3) In his Salon of 1881, Huysmans went further than Zola ever did in adversely criticising Manet. The two paintings exhibited by Manet in that year (Portrait de Pertuiset and Portrait de Rochefort) were not well received by the critics in general. Huysmans found in them "Nul accent, nulle vie." (4)

Huysmans' attitude to Manet was not based on a close relationship in the struggle for recognition which Manet shared with Zola during the 1860s. When Huysmans first wrote about Manet, the painter was considered to have become "assagi", to be no longer controversial. (5) Huysmans did not discuss Manet's career as a whole but concentrated on the paintings of the Salons in question; he classed Manet with the group of Impressionists, not investigating the differences between the aims of the painter of Olympia and those of Pissarro or Monet.

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(1) Ibid., p. 176.

(2) Ibid.

(3) Venturi: Impressionists and Symbolists, p. 6. v. also supra Chapter 4, p. 70.

(4) Huysmans: op.cit., p. 201.

(5) Lethève: Impressionnistes et Symbolistes devant la presse, p. 105.

Certains.

In Certains, Huysmans devoted more space to certain individual artists and made more general comments on their work as a whole than was possible in his earlier reviews of exhibitions published in the volume L'Art Moderne. Certains is a collection of articles first published in La Revue Indépendante, L'Evolution Sociale and La Cravache and reprinted in the single volume by Tresse et Stock in 1889. More than in L'Art Moderne, Huysmans' personality is present in Certains, now that he is writing about the artists he prefers and finds interesting. The guidelines of naturalism, and especially of Zola's critical ideas, are left behind and Huysmans indulges in his own tastes. The objectivity apparent throughout L'Art Moderne gives way, in Certains, to Huysmans' personal humours. Yet this second volume of art criticism is in some ways more interesting than the first. It is a mixture of fair, perceptive criticism (the chapter on "Cézanne", for example) and of subjective musings (for example, the chapter on Rops). As such, the work is an insight into the mind of the author, more valuable perhaps than any "objective" art criticism. Certains was important also in again bringing to the notice of the public the work of Gustave Moreau, the painter Huysmans' hero des Esseintes had so much admired in A Rebours, five years earlier. A Rebours, as has been observed in Chapter Three, was a revolt against the artistic ideas of Zola; des Esseintes' decadence was the beginning of Huysmans' concern to include the spirit in literature. At the same time, the novel was the beginning of the author's expressed interest in "dream-painters" such as Redon and in the spiritual ambiguities seen in Moreau. In Certains, Huysmans put forward his own anti-naturalist views without the "cover" of his hero des Esseintes. In discussing Certains, the same chapter headings as Huysmans' are used, for the sake of clarity, although the artists are not discussed in the same order.

Puvis de Chavannes.

The attitude shown towards this painter has not changed radically from L'Art Moderne to Certains: Huysmans did not like Puvis' work because of its false naivete. Although the painter's individuality stood out among all the "boring pastiches" of the Salon, Huysmans had found Puvis "anguleux et dur" in L'Art Moderne. (1) In 1880, Huysmans had admitted that Puvis was a "superior" artist to Moreau.(2) In 1889, however, this view was no longer expressed. Huysmans gave his personal opinion of Puvis full rein and wrote of the artist's unoriginality, his pastiching of the Italian primitives and his "singerie de la foi". (3) Puvis was now compared to his disadvantage with Gustave Moreau.

Gustave Moreau.

Moreau's complexity of detail was obviously a vehicle more suited to Huysmans' particular type of evocative criticism than the simplicity of Puvis. Works such as Salomé dansant gave much more scope to his rich imagination. In his Salon of 1880, Huysmans had characterised Moreau as a mystical, visionary painter:

Abîmé dans l'extase, il voit resplendir les féeriques visions, les sanglantes apothéoses des autres âges. (4)

Huysmans was aware of the literary aspect of Moreau's painting which allowed such descriptions to be written. (5) Examples may be given of the extremely imaginative evocations he wrote; the first, from A Rebours, describes Salomé:

... ses bracelets, ses ceintures, ses bagues, crachent des étincelles; sur sa robe triomphale, couturée de perles, ramagée d'argent, lamée d'or, la cuirasse des orfèvreries dont chaque maille est une pierre, entre en combustion, croise des serpenteaux de feu, grouille sur la chair mate, sur la peau rose thé, ainsi que des insectes splendides... (6)

(1) Huysmans: O.C., 6, p. 18.

(2) Ibid., p. 156.

(3) Huysmans: O.C., 10, p. 16.

(4) Huysmans: O.C., 6, p. 152.

(5) Ibid., p. 153.

(6) Huysmans: O.C., 7, pp. 81-2. The paintings referred to by Huysmans are L'Apparition (cat.222) and Salomé dansant (cat.211).



The "langue persuasive et superbe, mystérieuse et neuve" of Moreau is again evoked in Certains:

Ce fut dans la salle qui les contint un autodafé de ciels immenses en ignition; des globes écrasés de soleils saignants, des hémorragies d'astres coulant en des cataractes de pourpre sur des touffes culbutées de nués.... (1)

The individualistic tendencies of Moreau's character probably endeared him further to Huysmans, whose own revolt against the society he lived in was expressed in A Rebours. The description of Moreau as a "mystique enfermé, en plein Paris" has been disputed by Paladilhe, who stresses, on the contrary, Moreau's sociability. (2) Huysmans found reflections in Moreau of his own misanthropy and of his own mystical and perverse tendencies. Just as he exaggerated the idea of Moreau's asceticism, he saw, in Salome, the inspiration for des Esseintes' nervous disorders and "érudites hystéries". (3) Moreau's symbolism thus found an eager response in Huysmans' writings, whereas Zola, mistrusting anything anti-naturalist, was fascinated but baffled. (4)

#### Degas.

Degas, we have seen, was admired in L'Art Moderne for his naturalistic pictures of Parisian life; Huysmans had found in him "le peintre de la vie moderne" whom Baudelaire had found in Guys. (5) In Certains, however, Huysmans' attitude to Degas' realism took on a further aspect. Degas had, by 1889, painted several of his studies of nudes which are now considered as among his best work. (6) In reviewing Degas' nudes, Huysmans made the point that Degas was being iconoclastic - he was destroying the false image of the nude cultivated by Régnault and others: the pink, idealised image. (7) The beauty of the sketches and paintings

(1) Huysmans: O.C., 10, p. 15 and pp. 16-17.

(2) Paladilhe et Pierre: Gustave Moreau, Chapter 9. For Huysmans' description of Moreau v. Huysmans: O.C., 6, p. 152 and O.C., 10, p. 16.

(3) Huysmans: O.C., 7, p. 80.

(4) v. supra, p. 110.

(5) Huysmans: O.C., 6, p. 131.

(6) Degas: Le Tub (c.1884-6); La Toilette (c.1885-6); Après le bain, Femme

(7) Huysmans: O.C., 10, pp. 23,4. s'essuyant les pieds (1886).

stemmed from the fact that they were based frankly on reality. This is a very true observation. However, before making this point, Huysmans indulged in misogynistic descriptions which were not necessarily present in Degas' studies:

Ici, c'est une rousse, boulotte et farcie, courbant l'échine, faisant poindre l'os du sacrum sur les rondeurs tendues des fesses; elle se rompt, à vouloir ramener le bras derrière l'épaule afin de presser l'éponge qui dégouline sur le rachis et clapote le long des reins..(1)

He wrote about the "accent particulier de mépris et de haine." (2)

Evidently, Huysmans was glad to find a slightly distasteful, sordid flavour in paintings of nudes: "Elles glorifient même le dédain de la chair." (3) This attraction for the sordid flesh-side of life takes us back to the descriptions Huysmans himself made in works such as Le Drageoir aux épices and Marthe. (4) A distinction may be made here between the robust love of the flesh present in Zola's critical writings on art (especially with reference to Courbet) and Huysmans' decadent, potentially Catholic view-point. The scorn of the flesh Huysmans detects in Degas is an imposition of his own spiritual conflict. Degas' nudes are essentially beautiful pictures, not social or religious illustrations.

Venturi interprets the paintings as follows:

(Degas' nudes are researches into form, into light and movement, into the mechanism of the body and of its action. He aims to be the portraitist of the "bête humaine", but his enthusiasm for the action and energy of the human mechanism is such that intellectual coldness disappears from the images. Indeed his whole passion, and sometimes his desperation are reflected in them. (5)

This is a more accurate and objective criticism of the actual pictures than that of Huysmans, who went on, in Certains, to compare Degas with the Primitives:

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- (1) Ibid., p. 22. Baldick: The Life of J. K. Huysmans, p. 147 attributes Huysmans' misogyny at the time of writing this to frustration in his own relationship with Anna Meunier.
- (2) Huysmans: O.C., 10, p. 23.
- (3) Ibid., p. 25.
- (4) v. supra Chapter 3.
- (5) Venturi: Impressionists and Symbolists, p. 47.

... son œuvre appartient au réalisme, tel que ne pouvait le comprendre la brute que fut Courbet, mais tel que le conçurent certains des Primitifs, c'est-à-dire à un art exprimant une surgie expansive ou abrégée d'âme, dans des corps vivants, en parfait accord avec leurs alentours. (1)

Such an interpretation is interesting, but obviously subjective.

### Cézanne.

Huysmans showed himself to be more aware of Cézanne's importance than Zola ever did. In assessing "ce peintre trop oublié", Huysmans pinpointed the most important quality of Cézanne: his extreme sensitivity to colour. Cézanne was, in Huysmans' words, a "coloriste révélateur". (2) The author of Certains was perceptive in commenting, at this early stage, that in Cézanne lay "les prodromes d'un nouvel art". (3) Fauvists and Cubists were to acknowledge their debt to the artist. Thus Huysmans, despite the subjectivity which clouded his appreciation of some artists (e.g. Rops) in Certains, demonstrated a very discerning artistic judgement in the case of Cézanne. This was the same perception he had shown in L'Art Moderne in singling out, for example, Gauguin and Redon. (4)

### Bartholomé, Raffaëlli, Stevens, Tissot, Wagner, Forain, Chéret, Whistler.

This selection of artists written about in Certains demonstrates further the wideness of Huysmans' appreciation. His tastes included the realist as well as the idealist or dream-painter. Praise was given of Bartholomé's "observation précise" (cf. the approval shown towards this artist in L'Art Moderne). (5) Similarly, Raffaëlli's "veracity" was admired, while in Stevens' portrait de fille Huysmans found authenticity and contrasted Tissot's "moderne anglais" paintings with M. de Nittis' "agaçantes frivolités". (6) As in L'Art Moderne, Forain's pungent

(1) Huysmans: O.C., 10, p. 25.

(2) Ibid., p. 40.

(3) Ibid.

(4) Huysmans: O.C., 6, p. 261 and p. 214.

(5) Huysmans: O.C., 10, p. 30.

(6) Ibid., pp. 32, 35 and 36 respectively.

realism was praised; this artist was accurately described as deriving from Manet and Degas, but possessing an individual talent, along with a desire to be the Guys of his time. (1) Chéret succeeded, according to Huysmans, in conveying the bubbling surface of Parisian life. (2) Yet, at the same time, Huysmans could show an understanding for the "maladive élégance" of Wagner's "peinture noyée de rêve". (3) The characterisation of Whistler's work was very sensitively done. Huysmans remarked on the realism present along with "un côté surnaturel émané de ce peintre mystérieux". (4) He made the apt description of Whistler: "Artiste extra-lucide, dégageant du réel le supra-sensible". Whistler, in much the same way as Redon, may be seen as forming a bridge between the realists and the idealists of the late nineteenth century; there are similarities between the two portraits of their mothers, for example - in the realistic yet mystical portrayal of the two women. (5) Huysmans did not make this comparison; he chose to compare Whistler with Verlaine:

(Whistler) évoque, ainsi que (Verlaine), à certains instants, de subtiles suggestions et berce, à d'autres, de même qu'une incantation dont l'occulte sortilège échappe. (6)

This comment, Mallarmean in feeling, sensitively describes the suggestiveness present in Whistler, in his Nocturnes, for example, with their blurred, misty quality.

### Rops.

The ideas contained in the chapter on "Rops" in Certains are the same as those Huysmans included in the article published in the volume Félicien Rops et son œuvre, eight years later to which other contributors

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(1) Ibid., pp. 40 - 43.

(2) Ibid., p. 50.

(3) Ibid., p. 38.

(4) Ibid., p. 62.

(5) Whistler: The Artist's Mother (first exhibited 1872); Redon: Portrait de sa mère. (1882).

(6) Huysmans: O.C., 10, p. 65.

were Alexandre and Bailly. (1) Deman, the publisher, gave the reasons for producing the book: firstly, to present a general view of Rops' work and, secondly, to clear him of the charge of being pornographic. (2) Huysmans, in Certains, traced a brief history of erotic art from Rowlandson's "gaieté débraillée", which treated woman as purely animal, to the Japanese prints which portrayed the suffering inherent in eroticism (he cites the picture of the woman and octopus). (3) However, only in Rops' erotic works did Huysmans find the "tige spirituelle" which imbues the erotic pictures with transcendent meaning. (4) Thus, from the start, it may be remarked that Huysmans' interest in Rops was not so much from an aesthetic point of view as from a moral, spiritual one.

Huysmans' fascination with the "femme diabolique" idea, part of the Catholicism's inheritance from mediaeval times, may or may not have been a result of his own experience, but evidence of this fascination is seen in his novel Là-bas, of 1891, as well as in his writings on Rops. Rops portrayed, according to Huysmans, "la femme essentielle" - the slave of the devil. (5) Huysmans appears to have been obsessed with this idea. His sense of gratification on contemplating the "humiliating" studies of female nudes by Degas is a different aspect of the same obsession. The "diabolical woman" idea is of course present in the figure of Salome and is the source of the fascination Huysmans found in the various paintings of this subject by Moreau. The sin provoked by woman which was an important idea in mediaeval Christianity recurs, as a concept, in many works of art, but with the resurgence of Symbolism

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(1) Félicien Rops et son oeuvre, Brussels 1897, pub.: Deman.

(2) Ibid., "Préface" by Deman.

(3) Huysmans: O.C., 10, pp. 76-80.

(4) Ibid., p. 80.

(5) Ibid., p. 106.

in the eighteen eighties in France such images as Salome, Helen and Judith became common. (1) Huysmans saw Rops as following in the steps of Baudelaire and d'Aurevilly, who had portrayed "la diabolique ampleur des passions charnelles". (2)

The Catholic element of Rops' work was stressed by Huysmans. Rops' erotic drawings were not mere perversity, according to him, but exemplified the "esprit de Luxure", defined by Huysmans as Satanism, the exact opposite of pure Christian works of art by Memling, Fra Angelico, Grünewald and Van der Weyden. Huysmans' theory is interesting: he claims that art, like humanity, fluctuated between the two poles of purity and "Luxure"; Félicien Rops was described as "une âme de Primitif à rebours... l'œuvre inverse de Memling". (3) While much of Rops' work was pure pornography, the blasphemy which transformed it into fundamentally Catholic work, in Huysmans' opinion, is certainly present in many of his sketches and illustrations. The series entitled Les Sataniques, which has been described briefly in the second section of this chapter, is an example of such conscious blasphemy. In his study L'œuvre érotique de Félicien Rops, published eight years after Certains, Huysmans described imaginatively separate drawings of the series, appending his own interpretation and the images awakened in his own mind by the original work. The long-legged figure of Satan in the first of the plates, Satan semant l'ivraie, aroused the following speculation:

Il semble qu'il soit passé par ce nouveau-monde qui a lavé dans sa cupide hypocrisie, tonifié, rajeuni, les vices de la vieille Europe.

En scrutant l'horrible face, l'on peut discerner la jubilation froide et décidée du Diable qui sait de quelles vertus infâmes sont douées les larves qu'il essaime. Il sait aussi que la récolte est

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(1) Praz: The Romantic Agony, chapter 4 "La Belle Dame sans Merci."

(2) Huysmans: O.C., 10, p. 105.

(3) Ibid., pp. 80-82.

sûre et ses hideuses lèvres susurrent des Rogations à rebours, invitent railleusement son inerte Rival à bénir ces maux de la terre, à consacrer la formidable moisson de crimes que ce grain prépare! (1)

The second of Les Sataniques gave Huysmans the opportunity of airing some of the thoughts his researches into Satanism had given him. The picture is entitled L'Enlèvement, and contains a nude witch on a broomstick led by the devil. In Huysmans it aroused "long rêveries", "monstrous memories":

On songe au départ pour le sabbat, aux pommades extraites des mandragores, des jusquiames, des sucres des solanées, dont les femmes s'enduisent le corps; on pense aux philtres dont elles s'enivraient, des philtres composés, d'après Del Rio, "de flux menstruel, de sperme, de cervelle de chat ou de petit ânon, de ventre d'hyène, de parties génitales de loups et surtout d'hippomane...(2)

Thus, Huysmans was by this time (1897) using his art criticism, as he was using his novel-writing, as a vehicle for the speculations which preoccupied him. Aesthetic considerations were submerged by his nascent Catholicism. In Rops, above all else Huysmans saw the "spiritualisme de la Luxure qu'est le Satanisme", "le surnaturel de la perversité, l'au-delà du Mal". (3)

#### Le Monstre.

Huysmans' fascination with the odd and ugly led him, in Certains, to an appreciative description of Jan Luyken's repulsive self-portrait (in which he detected a "fanatisme de folie mystique"). (4) He further investigated the ugliness of mediaeval gargoyles and their symbolic significance in his chapter "Le Monstre". A similar interest in church symbolism is evident in La Cathédrale, of 1898, the novel in which the hero, Durtal, spends his time conversing with the abbot and others on the significance contained in the architecture of Chartres cathedral. (5)

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(1) Huysmans: "L'Œuvre érotique de Félicien Rops" in Félicien Rops et son œuvre, p. 20.

(2) Ibid.

(3) Huysmans: O.C., 10, p. 106.

(4) Ibid., p. 119. Jan Luyken was one of the artists des Esseintes admired: v. Huysmans, O.C., 7, p

(5) Huysmans: O.C., 14. v., for example, the speculations on the original of gothic forms, pp. 81 et seq.

Similarly, in Trois Eglises, published with Trois Primitifs posthumously in 1908, Huysmans discussed the symbolic content of Notre Dame de Paris and of Saint-Germain l'Auxerrois. (1) Such subjects tend to cater for the specialist interest, but the chapter on "Le Monstre" of Certains has a more general import, since Huysmans went on from mediaeval gargoyles to consider the macabre creations of Goya, the decorative chimaeras of Japanese prints and, finally, the fantastic creations of Odilon Redon. (2) His comments on this last artist are especially interesting.

The works by Redon which inspired the passage in question were the lithographs illustrating Flaubert's La Tentation de Saint-Antoine. Redon's images, Huysmans observed, were the dream paintings of an age in which minds were occupied with the theories of Wagner and Darwin. If this were to be expressed in the post-Freudian language of the twentieth century it might be said that Redon illustrated the subconscious fears of modern man. Although the term "l'Inconscient" was not yet in general use in France, the interest in dreams and poetic visions was present in what has been described as the Symbolist movement of the last quarter of the century. Laforgue writes of "l'Inconscient". (3) The phenomenon of the subconscious is touched on by Huysmans when he describes des Esseintes response to the fantastic drawings of Redon, in A Rebouris:

Ces dessins étaient en dehors de tout; ils sautaient, pour la plupart, par-dessus les bornes de la peinture, innovaient un fantastique très spécial, un fantastique de maladie et de délire.

Et, en effet, tels de ces visages, mangés par des yeux immenses, par des yeux fous; tels de ces corps grandis outre mesure ou déformés comme au travers d'une carafe, évoquaient dans la mémoire de des Esseintes des souvenirs de fièvre typhoïde, des souvenirs restés quand même des nuits brûlantes, des affreuses visions de son enfance. (4)

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(1) Huysmans: O.C., 11, pp. 169-222.

(2) Huysmans: O.C., 10, pp. 132 - 135.

(3) v. for example the first poem of the "Livres de Poche" edition of Laforgue's Poésies: "Complainte propitiatoire à l'Inconscient." Hartmann's Philosophy of the Unconscious was being publicised during the 1880s in France.

(4) Huysmans: O.C., 7, p. 97.



Huysmans' response to the fantastic art of Redon, like his response to Moreau and to Rops' satanic works is perhaps the only valid kind. For what critic could say for sure exactly what a symbolic or a fantastic work of art should mean to other observers; the most he can do is to give his personal reaction and the dreams it awakens within him. Huysmans' great sensitivity to the paintings and lithographs he admired enabled him to extract much more from them than a less gifted observer and to distinguish the qualities of painting. Odilon Redon himself paid tribute to Huysmans' capacity for seizing on good painting: "C'était un oeil! Quand il y avait un coin de bon dans un tableau, il était là pour le voir." (1) Huysmans' subjective reveries caused him at times to lose the good aesthetic judgement of which he was possessed, in the case of Rops for instance, who has never been considered as a major artist. Nevertheless such reveries served to open up the work of Moreau, Redon and others who might be classed under the general title of "Symbolists" to a public who could not see anything beyond the enigma.

#### Goya and Turner.

In discussing Goya's Bullfight, Huysmans used his command of words to express the swirling, vibrant application of the paint to produce, at a distance, a tremendous impression of life. The comparison made with the style of the Impressionists - "délire d'impressionniste" - is apt. (2) Turner's painting of landscape was seen to be similar to Goya's since it too was a "brouillis absolu" at close range which became a balanced composition when viewed from a certain distance. The real quality plus the element of imagination present in Turner appealed to

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(1) cited by Deffoux: J. K. Huysmans sous divers aspects, p. 40.

(2) Huysmans: O.C., 10, pp. 179-80.

Huysmans. The word by which he described Turner's painting was "volatalisé." (1) This is a very fitting description of the characteristic peculiar to Turner, especially in his seascapes, where water and air combine in a swirling mass. The real and the sublime are found together in Turner's painting, and in Huysmans' opinion this was the mark of a great poet. (2) There is nothing to dispute in this appreciation of Turner; Huysmans gives an accurate analysis.

#### La Salle des Etats au Louvre.

Further sound judgement is present in the chapter of Certains concerning the Salle des Etats in the Louvre. Huysmans' description of Delacroix as a "Rubens dégraissé et affiné par des névroses" suitably characterises the painter of la Mort de Sardanapale (1827). (3) Ingres is found to have a dry "glacial" quality in all but his portraits. (4) This too is a defensible assessment, since much of Ingres' work suffers from the coldness of the Academic technique of "finishing" a painting to perfection. (5) His portraits have a more human quality. (Compare, for example, his Portrait de M. Bertin (1832, Louvre) with Le Bain turc (1862, Louvre) ). Huysmans' choice of expression is rather too harsh; even in his coldest works Ingres is more than a "calligraphe patient... un pète-sec laborieux." (6)

#### Bianchi

Huysmans' admiration for the Primitives has already been in evidence. In Bianchi's painting of the virgin and child with Saint Benedict and Saint Quentin it was above all the ambiguous element which appealed to him. Huysmans interpreted the painting in true "fin-de-siècle" fashion;

(1) Ibid., p. 182.

(2) Ibid.

(3) Ibid., p. 188.

(4) Ibid., pp. 190 et seq.

(5) We might cite the example of Roger et Angélica as a perfectly "finished" painting.

(6) Huysmans: O.C., 10, p. 191.

St. Quentin is seen as an androgynous decadent creature: "un éphèbe au sexe indécis, un hybride à la beauté mystérieuse..." (1) Such an attitude is very revealing not so much of Bianchi's intentions but of Huysmans' mental attitude. The symbolic significance he saw in the picture is reminiscent of the ambiguities Walter Pater perceived in la Gioconda:

The presence that rose thus so strangely beside the waters, is expressive of what in the ways of a thousand years men had come to desire. Hers is the head upon which all "the ends of the world are come", and the eyelids are a little weary. It is a beauty wrought out from within upon the flesh, the deposit, little cell by cell, of strange thoughts and fantastic reveries and exquisite passions. (2)

St. Quentin in Bianchi's painting was seen by Huysmans as a decadent, ambivalent figure. What is more, Huysmans detected in the resemblance between physiognomies an incestuous relationship between St. Quentin and Marie, brother and sister, which had produced the infant on her knee. (3) The interpretation is an example of the decadent state of mind, deliberately seeking ambiguity and hidden secrets, and perversely inventing unnatural reasons for them. Ambiguous androgynous characters are common in the paintings of Symbolist painters - for example Moreau (v. Le Sphynge), in the works of the English painters Burne-Jones and Rossetti and of Belgian Symbolists such as Knopff and Klimt. (4)

### Trois Primitifs.

The volume entitled Trois Primitifs was published in 1908, after Huysmans' death, together with Trois Eglises. (5) The Primitives dealt with are Grünewald, "le maître de Flémalle" (who has been identified in recent years as Robert Campin, or possibly Rogier van der Weyden), and Bartolomeo Veneto, the creator of la Florentine (more correctly known

(1) Ibid., p. 202.

(2) Praz: The Romantic Agony, p. 243 cites the passage from Pater's study of Leonardo.

(3) Huysmans: O.C., 10, p. 204.

(4) Jullian: Dreamers of Decadence and The Symbolists contain numerous illustrations.

(5) Huysmans: Trois Eglises, Trois Primitifs, 1908 pub. by Flon.

as Courtisane). (1) The work of these painters was viewed by Huysmans during his travels in Germany (which included stays in Colmar and Frankfurt-am-Mein) in the year 1903. (2)

Huysmans' attitudes towards the three painters was in line with thoughts he had expressed previously. In the Grünewald Crucifixion and Resurrection his two-fold need - for the utmost realism and at the same time for a spiritual quality - was fulfilled. The crucified Christ of Grünewald, studied from bodies in the morgue, is a startling work of realism, to the last details of erupting sores on the body and putrescent feet. Huysmans gives a graphic description of the painting in the novel Là-bas. He lingers on the humiliation, or rather the humility, of the Christ figure who has suffered the ultimate torments and degradation of the flesh. (3) Yet Grünewald's Christ possesses a mystic quality:

De cette tête ulcérée filtraient des lueurs; une expression surhumaine illuminait l'effervescence des chairs, l'éclampsie des traits. (4)

Grünewald is seen to be "le plus forcené des réalistes" but, at the same time "le plus forcené des idéalistes". (5) Durtal, the partly autobiographical hero of Là-bas says that he first conceived the idea of a spiritualised Naturalism when he saw Grünewald's Crucifixion in Germany. (6) The importance to Huysmans of the spiritual element he found in Grünewald must be stressed. The humiliation of the flesh he had seen in Degas' nudes was invested with greater meaning in Grünewald's Crucifixion - not only was the flesh destroyed, but the spirit was transcendent.

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- (1) Huysmans: Trois Primitifs, Flammarion, 1967, edition contains a catalogue of paintings by these artists.  
 (2) Baldick: The Life of J. K. Huysmans, p. 324.  
 (3) Huysmans: O.C., 12, pp. 17-18. (Là-bas).  
 (4) Ibid., pp. 18-19.  
 (5) Ibid.  
 (6) Ibid., pp. 13-14 and v. supra pp. 51-2.

The portrait of "la Florentine" seen in Frankfurt gave Huysmans a further subject for speculation, in Trois Primitifs, not, this time, about the painting's ugliness as in the case of Grünewald's Christ, but about the girl's androgynous, mysterious, provocative yet menacing nature, as he understood the picture. (1) He summarised the "Florentine" as 'la pureté de l'impureté "puritas impuritatis" '; the phrase recalls Huysmans' attitude to Rops' erotic works. Just as Huysmans detected in Rops "l'au-delà du Mal", he saw "la Florentine" as a "chef - d'œuvre de la Perversité tranquille". (2) The work is examined as an enigma, its separate features, for example the flowers held by the girl, provoking spiritual reflections in Huysmans, as the work of Moreau had done.

The trend in Huysmans' thinking (i.e. towards a preoccupation with Catholicism, and his eventual conversion to this faith) is thus reflected in his criticism of painting. He was attracted to those works in which he detected a spiritual element. Grünewald's Issenheim altarpiece, "la Florentine", the Virgin of the "maître de Flémalle" all led him to considerations of a religious nature. The last picture, the Virgin, (seen in Frankfurt) transported him not to the "au-delà du Mal" of Rops but to the "au-delà divin". (3) Because of this power which he experienced on looking at the painting, Huysmans put the work above that of Rubens and other Flemish painters. (4) The aesthetic of Huysmans by this time in his life revolved around his religious obsession.

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(1) Huysmans: O.C., ll, pp. 323 et seq.

(2) Ibid., p. 328.

(3) Ibid., pp. 339-40.

(4) Ibid., p. 357.

Summary.

Huysmans was capable of very perceptive criticism; he was more sure in his taste than Zola. This is demonstrated by the volume L'Art Moderne and by parts of Certains. Certains, as a work of criticism, is fascinating, but uneven in quality, whereas L'Art Moderne is an example of lucid, sensitive art appreciation. As Huysmans' personal, spiritual needs were incorporated more and more into his criticism, causing him to turn to the painters of the Quattrocento, to the erotic, satanic works of Rops, to the ambiguities of Moreau and the fantasies of Redon, Huysmans' critical powers were obscured by his own speculations. These speculations nevertheless served to arouse public interest in the individual painters Redon and Moreau, and they remain extremely powerful and suggestive pieces of writing today, giving insight into the workings of Huysmans' mind and imagination as well as into the paintings discussed.

### CONCLUSION

A brief assessment may now be attempted of the contributions made by Zola and Huysmans to art criticism. It is evident that both had an advantage, as literary men, over some of the less talented critics of the day such as Wolff or Bernard. The breaking down of convention and acceptance of the Independent painters was possibly speeded by the publicity Zola gave Manet. The Impressionists found a much-needed support in the writings of both Zola and Huysmans, while Gauguin, Cézanne, Redon and Moreau also were indebted to Huysmans.

In a consideration of Zola and Huysmans' literary criticism we detect similarities with other authors, in the ambitious imagination common to Balzac and to Zola, for example, or between Huysmans and Goncourt in their fascination with squalid detail. But this is of secondary importance. It is the particular originality or combination of characteristics in each critic which is significant. A comparison between Huysmans' Emile Zola et l'Assommoir and Zola's Le Roman expérimental demonstrates that Huysmans was more critically astute and precise. Le Roman expérimental suffers to some extent from a surfeit of imagination. Emile Zola et l'Assommoir is a work of sound, perceptive criticism.

The distinguishing characteristic of Zola's art criticism is not so much its perception as its vigour. Zola's "Salons", especially those of the 1860s are an admirable example of powerful, incisive writing. Although the ideas of "originality" and "temperament" were not new, under Zola's pen they became slogans of battle. Similarities may again be discerned between Zola's terms and those used by Baudelaire. Zola, Huysmans and Baudelaire alike

stressed the importance of "modernity", contemporaneity, in art. (1) The particular characteristic of Zola's art criticism is his insistence upon a living art; he mistrusted the word 'art', preferring to insist upon life. (2) This preference, reflected in his literary theory, coincided with the contemporary efforts of Manet, Monet, Pissarro et al. to portray reality as they saw it, breaking through tradition and convention. In Manet, Zola saw an opportunity to admire the qualities he valued above all: sincerity, individuality and authenticity. (3) These were the qualities he himself pursued in his novel-writing. Certain of Zola's observations are exemplary pieces of good sense:

La réalité...est une bonne mère qui nourrit ses enfants d'aliments toujours nouveaux...(4)

L'originalité, voilà la grande épouvante... Il nous faut toujours le même horizon; nous rions ou nous nous irritons des choses que nous ne connaissons pas. (5)

His formula for describing a work of art "...un coin de la création vu à travers un tempérament" - was undeniably apt, though it does not help us to distinguish good art from banal art. Zola's art criticism was too much confined to generalities, however. He did not examine to the same extent as Baudelaire or Huysmans the terms used nor the elements he admired or condemned in specific artists. Moreover, he was limited to a Naturalist vision of painting.

Huysmans, on the contrary, could appreciate not only the realism of the Impressionists, and especially of Degas, but could go on to admire the suggestive dream qualities of Redon, and the esoteric "horizons magiques" of Moreau. (6) A further distinction which

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- (1) v. supra pp. 92 et seq. and pp. 143-4.  
 (2) v. supra p. 92.  
 (3) v. supra p. 83.  
 (4) v. supra pp. 87-8.  
 (5) v. supra p. 102.  
 (6) v. supra pp. 124-5.



becomes apparent when the critical writings of Zola and Huysmans are compared is between Zola's increasingly broad, democratic view-point and Huysmans' increasingly narrow, introverted view-point. Contrast Zola's dream of a democratic Salon-selection system, for example, with Huysmans' subjective speculations on a Rops engraving. (1)

Inevitably, questions of objectivity are raised. Is the art critic, we might ask, confined to seeing only himself in the paintings he observes? Do creative writers in their own right make good critics? Both authors were inevitably limited to some extent by their particular tastes and each excelled when he saw reflected in a painter the qualities he himself possessed. In Zola's case it was the solidity of Courbet, the frank realism of Manet. Huysmans, with his talent for evocative and subtle description, revelled in the symbolism of Moreau, the ambiguities of Bianchi and the anti-naturalistic elements he detected in Degas - whether these elements are present or not. (2) In Zola's aesthetic, art was linked inextricably with life. Huysmans' aesthetic, on the other hand, was increasingly linked with spiritual considerations; the impartiality of L'Art Moderne was lost in Huysmans' later writings. The imaginative pieces of art appreciation Huysmans composed are works of art in themselves, however, complementing and enriching paintings they describe. Despite the limitations of their particular tastes, both Zola and Huysmans were able to appreciate the qualities of maligned and unknown artists of their day. This in itself is an answer to the questions we have posed.

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(1) v. supra p. 106 and p. 158 respectively.

(2) v. supra p. 151, pp. 161-2 and p. 153.

In art criticism attitudes are constantly shifting. Moreau is a recent example of an artist going through the process of "rehabilitation" in public taste. Carolus-Duran, the "juste-milieu" artist, and Meissonier are not now viewed so harshly as Zola might have wished. Zola's article "Peinture" serves as a warning that one's own former opinions may be doubted. Moreau experienced the same self-questioning in later years when he reflected on the innovations of young artists and concluded:

...la vérité qui est peut-être la vérité seulement pour soi, mais qui pourtant vous crève les yeux de l'âme et de l'esprit au point de vous faire crier.

Et rien ne se peut prouver.

Zola and Huysmans may claim, above all, the merit of detecting and defending artists whose names were to remain in the history of art - Pissarro, Manet, Cézanne, Redon - when the popular artists of the day had been forgotten. Perhaps the truth seen by Zola and Huysmans was not the ultimate truth, but it was the truth for themselves. If their judgements on Courbet, Rops and Moreau have not all been accepted by today's opinions, nevertheless they remain valid. The opinions of tomorrow may vindicate them, just as many of their views, controversial in the nineteenth century have been proved sound. The conflict between realism and symbolism will no doubt continue. In matters of art nothing is fixed. "...rien ne se peut prouver."

CHRONOLOGY 1860-1905

PUBLICATIONS BY ZOLA

THE ARTS

LITERATURE, PHILOSOPHY

PUBLICATIONS BY HUYSMANS

YEAR

1860

Baudelaire: Les Paradis artificiels, opium et haschisch.

Zola begins frequenting artists' studios in Paris.  
Manet: la Musique aux Tuileries (1860-1)

1861

Manet: Le Joueur de guitare accepted at Salon.  
Berthe Morisot becomes pupil of Corot.  
Pissarro, Cézanne, Guillaumin at Académie Suisse.

1862

Flaubert: Salammbô  
Hugo: Les Misérables.  
Leconte de Lisle: Poèmes Barbares.

Manet meets Jongkind, enters Gleyre's studio, where he meets Renoir, Sisley, Bazille.  
Manet meets Degas.  
Manet: Lola de Valence.

1863

Renan: Vie de Jesus.  
Taine: Histoire de la littérature anglaise.  
Fromentin: Dominique.

Salon des Refusés includes Manet's Le Dejeuner sur l'herbe and Whistler's The White Girl.  
Death of Delacroix.  
Baudelaire: Le Peintre de la Vie moderne.

Article on the Don Quichotte illustrated by Gustave Doré in the Journal populaire de Lille.

1864 Concourt: Renée Mauperin

Contes à Ninon.

Salon: Berthe Morisot and Renoir exhibit for first time. Cézanne rejected. Fantin-Latour: Hommage à Delacroix. Monet at Honfleur with Boudin, Jongkind, Bazille. Taine succeeds Viollet-le-Duc as Professor of Aesthetics and History of Art at l'Ecole des Beaux-Arts.

1865 Concourt: Germinie Lacerteux. Death of Proudhon; posth. edition of Du principe de l'art et de sa destination sociale. Bernard: Introduction à l'étude de la médecine expérimentale. Taine: Nouveaux Essais de critique et d'histoire.

In the Salut public, Lyon. "Proudhon et Courbet" "Gustave Doré." La Confession de Claude.

At Salon, Manet's Olympia. Pissarro also exhibits. Zola visits Courbet's studio. Manet exhibition at Martinet's. Chevreul's Notes on colours.

1866 Verlaine: Poèmes saturniens.

In L'Événement account of Salon. Mes Haines.

Zola visits Manet's studio (Feb.). Salon: Manet (Le Fifre), Renoir, Cézanne rejected. Morisot, Sisley, Degas, Pissarro, Monet (Camille) accepted. Courbet: La Remise des chevreaux.

YEAR

LITERATURE, PHILOSOPHY

1867 Deaths of Baudelaire, Lamartine.  
Goncourt: Manette Salomon.

THE ARTS

Salon: Only Morisot, Degas accepted.  
Manet: L'exécution de l'empereur Maximilien.  
Monet: Femmes au jardin.  
Millet: L'Angélus.  
Courbet and Manet's private exhibitions beside the Exposition universelle.  
Deaths of Ingres, Théo. Rousseau.

PUBLICATIONS BY ZOLA

"Une nouvelle manière en peinture: Edouard Manet" (in the Revue du XIXe. siècle)  
12th April letter to Le Figero defending Cézanne.  
"Nos peintres au Champ-de-Mars" (in La Situation).  
Les Mystères de Marseille.  
Thérèse Raquin.

1868

Baudelaire:  
Curiosités esthétiques;  
L'Art romantique;  
Petits poèmes en prose, (posth.)

Salon: Manet (Portrait de Zola), Renoir (Lise à l'ombre), Degas, Monet, Pissarro, Sisley, Morisot accepted. Cézanne rejected.  
Manet: Le Balcon.

"Mon Salon" (in L'Événement illustré).  
"Causeries" (in La Tribune)  
Madeleine Férat.

1869

Death of Ste.-Beuve  
Verlaine: Fêtes-galantes.  
Flaubert: L'Education sentimentale.  
Goncourt: Madame Gervaisais.

Salon: Monet, Sisley, Cézanne rejected. Degas, Pissarro (only one painting each) and Manet (two paintings) accepted.  
Manet and Monet become friends; development of Café Guerbois circle of artists.

"Causeries" (suite) in La Tribune.

1870

Taine: De l'intelligence.  
Death of Jules de Goncourt.

Salon: all Independents group accepted, except Monet, Cézanne.  
Fantin-Latour: Un atelier aux Batignolles.  
Franco-Prussian War: Bazille killed, Pissarro and Monet in England. Cézanne at l'Estaque.

PUBLICATIONS BY HUYSMANS

YEAR

1871 Zola begins publishing the Rougon-Macquart series (1871-93)  
La Fortune des Rougon.

Courbet (president of Commission artistique de la Commune) seeks refuge in Switzerland.  
Whistler: Portrait of the Artist's Mother.  
Pissarro, Monet meet Durand-Ruel in London.  
Pissarro: Une Rue à Louveciennes.

La Curée.  
In La Cloche, "Lettres parisiennes":  
"Jongkind" and "Le Salon".  
In Le Corsaire, "Causerie du dimanche".

Salon: only Manet, Morisot, Renoir submit paintings. (Renoir rejected).  
Monet at Argenteuil.  
Monet: Impression, Soleil levant.  
Degas painting ballet dancers and musicians at the Opera.  
Pissarro and Cezanne at Pontoise.

Le Ventre de Paris.

Salon: Manet's Le Bon Bock.  
Pissarro, Sisley, Monet, Renoir, Cezanne rejected.  
Cezanne: La Maison du pendu.  
Degas: La Répétition de danse. (1873-4)  
Foundation of Société anonyme coopérative des Artistes peintres, sculpteurs, graveurs.

1871 Rimbaud: Le Bateau ivre.

1872 Death of Gautier.

1873 Rimbaud: Une Saison en enfer.

YEAR

LITERATURE, PHILOSOPHY

1874 Flaubert: La Tentation de Saint Antoine.  
Verlaine: Romances sans paroles.  
Barbey d' Aurevilly;  
Les Diaboliques.

THE ARTS

First Independents' exhibition at Nadar's - 30 participants (only Manet not represented).  
Manet: Le Chemin de Fer.  
Renoir: Le Pêcheur à la Ligne.  
Degas: Deux danseuses en scène;  
La Classe de danse; Avant le départ.  
Manet works with Monet at Argenteuil.

PUBLICATIONS BY ZOLA

In Le Sémaphore de Marseille,  
"Lettre de Paris": "Le Salon"  
Nouveaux Contes à Ninon  
La Conquête de Flassans.

PUBLICATIONS BY HUYSMANS

Le Drageoir à épices.

1875

French translation of Marx:  
Le Capital, vol. I.  
Mallarmé's translation of  
The Raven by Poe, illustrated  
by Manet.

In Le Sémaphore de Marseille,  
"Le Salon de 1875"  
In Vestnik Evropy,  
"Une exposition de tableaux  
à Paris."  
La Faute de l'abbé Mouret.

1876

Mallarmé: L'Après-midi d'un  
faune (illustrated by Manet)

Salon: Manet, Cézanne rejected.  
Gauguin accepted.  
2nd Impressionist exhibition.  
(Manet, Cézanne do not  
participate).  
Manet: Portrait de Mallarmé.  
Renoir: La balançoire;  
Le Moulin de la Galette.  
Monet: Gare St. Lazare  
series (1876-7).  
Duranty: La Nouvelle Peinture  
1876-98 Puvis de Chavannes'  
frescoes for the Panthéon in  
Paris.  
Sisley: L'Inondation à Port-Marly.

Son Excellence Eugène Rougon.  
In Le Sémaphore de Marseille,  
"Lettre de Paris".  
In Vestnik Evropy  
"Deux expositions d'art au  
mois de mai".

Marthe, histoire d'une fille.

<u>YEAR</u>	<u>LITERATURE, PHILOSOPHY</u>	<u>THE ARTS</u>	<u>PUBLICATIONS BY ZOLA</u>	<u>PUBLICATIONS BY HUYSMANS</u>
1877	Flaubert: <u>Trois Contes</u> . E. de Goncourt: <u>La Fille Elisa</u> .	Salon: Manet accepted. 3rd Impressionist exhibition. Death of Courbet. Rivière edits <u>L'Impressionniste</u> . Manet: <u>Nana</u> . Whistler begins his <u>Nocturnes</u> series.	<u>L'Assommoir</u> . In <u>Le Sémaphore de Marseille</u> . <u>"Une exposition, les peintres impressionnistes"</u> .	" <u>Emile Zola et L'Assommoir</u> " (4 articles) published in <u>L'Actualité</u> , Brussels (March-April).
1878	Hennique: <u>La Dévouée</u> .	Salon: Renoir exhibits. Cézanne rejected. Exposition universelle in Paris. Duret: <u>Les Impressionnistes</u> . Monet: <u>La Rue Montorgueil</u> <u>pavoisée</u> . Manet: <u>Les Paveurs, Rue de Berne</u> , (Impressionist style). Daumier retrospective exhibition, (paintings).	<u>Une Page d'amour</u> <u>"L'Ecole française de peinture au Salon"</u> . (in <u>Vestnik Evropy</u> ).	
1879	E. de Goncourt: <u>Les Frères Zenganno</u> .	Salon: Manet, Renoir accepted. Cézanne, Sisley rejected. 4th Impressionist exhibition: Gauguin included. Manet: <u>La Serveuse de books</u> . Deaths of Daumier, Couture. Bouguereau: <u>La Naissance de Vénus</u> . Morisot: <u>Jour d'Été</u> .	In <u>Vestnik Evropy</u> (June) <u>"Nouvelles artistiques et littéraires"</u> . Letter to <u>Le Figaro</u> (30th July).	<u>Les Soeurs Vatard</u> .



YEAR

LITERATURE, PHILOSOPHY

THE ARTS

PUBLICATIONS BY ZOLA

PUBLICATIONS BY HUYSMANS

1880

Deaths of Flaubert, Littré.  
Alexis: La Fin de Lucie Pellegrin.  
French translation of Schopenhauer:  
Pensées, maximes et fragments.  
Zola, Huysmans, Alexis, Céard,  
Hennique, Maupassant: Les Soirées  
de Médan. (April).

Salon: Renoir, Manet  
(2 paintings each). Monet  
(only 1 painting) accepted.  
5th Impressionist exhibition.  
(Monet no longer exhibits).  
Monet: Le Givre.

"Sac au dos", contribution  
to Les Soirées de Médan.  
Croquis parisiens.

Nana  
"L'attaque au moulin"  
contribution to Les Soirées  
de Médan.  
"Le Naturalisme au Salon"  
(in Le Voltaire).  
Le Roman expérimental.

1881

Verlaine: Sagesse.  
Céard: Une Belle Journée.  
Flaubert: Bouvard et Pécuchet  
(posth.).  
Maupassant: La Maison Tellier.

Manet given a medal at  
Salon.  
6th Impressionist exhibition.  
Renoir: Le Déjeuner des can-  
otiers.  
Manet: Le Bar aux Folies-Bergères.  
First Odilon Redon exhibition.

"Après une promenade au Salon.  
"Les Romanciers naturalistes",  
"Nos Auteurs dramatiques",  
"Le Naturalisme au théâtre",  
"Documents littéraires".

En Ménage.

1882

E. de Goncourt: La Faustine.

Salon: Cézanne accepted  
through Guillemet's "charité".  
Manet elected "Chevalier de  
la légion d'honneur."  
7th Impressionist exhibition.  
Retrospective exhibition of  
Courbet's paintings at  
l'Ecole des Beaux - Arts.  
Small Impressionist exhibition  
by Durand-Ruel in London.  
Death in England of Dante  
Gabriel Rossetti.

"Une Campagne"  
Pot-bouille  
Le Capitaine Burle.

AN Vau-l'Eau.

L'Art moderne.

Au Bonheur des Dames.

Salon: Seurat exhibits.  
Deaths of Manet, Dore, Eva  
Gonzalès.  
Monet at Giverny.  
Private exhibitions by Monet,  
Renoir, Pissarro, Sisley at  
Durand-Ruel's.

Brunetière: Le Roman naturaliste.  
Villiers de l'Isle.  
Adam: Contes cruels.

A Rebours.

Preface to the Catalogue  
of the Exhibition of Manet's  
works.

Retrospective Manet exhibition  
at l'Ecole des Beaux-Arts (Jan.)  
Sale of Manet's paintings (Feb.)  
Degas: Les Repasseuses.  
Burne-Jones: King Cophetua and  
the Beggar Maid.  
Death of Bastien-Lepage.

1884-92 Publication of  
Flaubert's Correspondance.  
Moréas: Les Syrites.

1884

Germinal.  
In Le Figaro, campaign  
against censorship in the  
theatre (Oct-Nov.)

Pissarro adopts divisionism.  
Degas: pastels of women washing,  
inc. Femme au Tub.

Taine: La Philosophie de l'art.  
Maupassant: Bel-Ami.  
Death of Hugo.  
Mallarmé: Prose pour des  
Esseintes.

1885

L'Œuvre.

8th and final Impressionist  
exhibition (includes Seurat  
and Signac).  
Seurat: La Grande Jatte.  
Gauguin at Pont-Aven.  
Impressionist exhibition by  
Durand-Ruel in New York.  
Fénéon: Les Impressionnistes  
en 1886.  
Degas: Apres le bain, Femme  
s'essuyant les pieds; Le Tub.  
Fantin-Latour: La Toilette.

Beginnings of Le Décadent,  
La Vogue, Le Symboliste,  
La Décadence.  
Moréas: "Manifeste symboliste"  
(Sept.)  
Rimbaud: Les Illuminations  
(pub. in La Vogue).

1886

En Rade; Un Dilemme.

La Terre.

Toulouse-Lautrec, Van Gogh  
adopt pointillism.  
Van Gogh: Portrait du père  
Tanguy.  
Monet, Renoir, Pissarro,  
Morisot exhibit at Petit's.  
Monet in London with  
Whistler (summer).  
Death of Bonvin.

Bonnetain, Rosny, L. Descaves,  
Margueritte, Guiches:  
"Manifeste des Cinq centre  
La Terre" (in Le Figaro 18th  
Aug.).  
Mallarmé: Poésies complètes  
(limited edition).  
1st publication from the  
Concourt Journal.  
Death of Laforgue.

Le Rêve.

Van Gogh: Le Pont de l'Anglois,  
Le Semeur, Tournesois.  
Bonnard, Vuillard, Denis and  
Serusier at the Académie Julian.

Maupassant: Pierre et Jean.

"Préface" to the exhibition  
of the engravings of  
Marcellin Desboutin.

Exposition universelle in  
Paris (including Tour Eiffel).  
Exposition du groupe  
impressionniste at synthétiste  
(Champ de Mars).  
Constitution of Nabis group in  
Paris.  
Renoir: Les Baigneuses.  
Monet/Rodin exhibition at  
Petit's Exhibition of French  
Impressionists in London.

Bergson Les Données immédiates  
de la conscience.

Beginning of La Revue Blanche.)

Certains.

<u>YEAR</u>	<u>LITERATURE, PHILOSOPHY</u>	<u>THE ARTS</u>	<u>PUBLICATIONS BY ZOLA</u>	<u>PUBLICATIONS BY HUYSMANS</u>
1890	Beginning of the <u>Mercure de France</u> . Moréas: <u>Le Pèlerin passionné</u> . Villiers de l'Isle Adam: <u>Axël</u> .	Renoir at Salon. Van Gogh's suicide. Manet's Olympia enters <u>Musée du Luxembourg</u> (Nov.). Monet: <u>Meules</u> series. Pissarro separates himself from neo-Impressionists.	<u>La Bête humaine</u> .	<u>La Bièvre</u> .
1891	Death of Rimbaud. Huret's " <u>Enquête sur l'évolution littéraire</u> ".	Gauguin goes to Tahiti. Sale of Gauguin paintings (Feb.) Deaths of Seurat, Jongkind. Zola has Rodin's Balzac statue commissioned by <u>Société des Gens de Lettres</u> . Retrospective Van Gogh exhibition at the <u>Salon des Indépendants</u> . 1st Toulouse-Lautrec poster for the <u>Moulin Rouge</u> .	<u>L'Argent</u> .	<u>La-bas</u> .
1892		Exhibition of works by Renoir, Pissarro, Degas at Durand-Ruel's. Retrospective Seurat exhibition at the <u>Salon des Indépendants</u> . Whistler and Burne-Jones exhibitions in London. Death of Guys.	<u>La Débâcle</u> .	
1893	Wilge: <u>Salomé</u> . José-Maria de Heredia: <u>Les Trophées</u> . Deaths of Maupassant, Taine.	Gauguin exhibition at Durand-Ruel's. Matisse and Rouault at Gustave Moreau's studio. Monet begins <u>Rouen Cathedral series</u> .		<u>Le Docteur Pascal</u> .

<u>YEAR</u>	<u>LITERATURE, PHILOSOPHY</u>	<u>THE ARTS</u>	<u>PUBLICATIONS BY ZOLA</u>	<u>PUBLICATIONS BY HUYSMANS</u>
1894		Death of Caillebotte. Gustave Geffroy: <u>Histoire de l'Impressionnisme</u> .	<u> Lourdes</u> . 1st of <u>Les Trois Villes</u> (1894-98).	
1895	<u>Verlaine: Confessions</u> .	Monet: <u>Rouen Cathedral</u> series shown. Cézanne exhibition at Vollard's. Death of Berthe Morisot.		<u>En Route</u> .
1896	Deaths of Verlaine, E. de Concourt. Proust: <u>Les Plaisirs et les jours</u> . Bergson: <u>Matière et Mémoire</u> .	Lautrec exhibition at Manzi-Joyant Gallery. Gauguin: <u>Noa-Noa</u> .	<u>"Peinture"</u> (in <u>Le Figaro</u> , May). <u>Rome</u> .	
1897	Gide: <u>Les Nourritures terrestres</u> . Mallarmé: <u>Divagations</u> .	Exhibition of the legs Caillebotte at Luxembourg palace. Sisley retrospective exhibition at Petit's.	<u>"Lettre à la jeunesse"</u> <u>"Nouvelle Campagne"</u>	
1898	<u>Œuvres de Rimbaud</u> - 1st collected edition. Death of Mallarmé, posth. edition of <u>Poésies</u> .	Gauguin: <u>Où sommes-nous? D'où venons-nous? Où allons-nous?</u> Deaths of Burne-Jones, Moreau, Puvis de Chavannes, Boudin. Rodin: <u>Statue of Balzac</u> ; <u>Le Baiser</u> .	Letter <u>"J'accuse"</u> (in <u>L'Aurore</u> ). <u>Paris</u> .	<u>La Cathédrale</u> . <u>La Bièvre et Saint-Séverin</u> .

<u>YEAR</u>	<u>LITERATURE, PHILOSOPHY</u>	<u>THE ARTS</u>	<u>PUBLICATIONS BY ZOLA</u>	<u>PUBLICATIONS BY HUYSMANS</u>
1899		T-Lautrec series of circus drawings. Pissarro views of Paris. Death of Sisley.	Articles in <u>L'Aurore</u> concerning Dreyfus affair. <u>Récondité</u> (1st of <u>Les Quatre Évangiles</u> .)	<u>La Magie en Poitou</u> ; <u>Gilles de Rais</u> .
1900	Freud: <u>Interpretation of Dreams</u> .	Exposition universelle in Paris. Retrospective Seurat exhibition at the <u>Revue Blanche</u> . Cezanne: <u>Les Baigneuses</u> . M. Denis: <u>Hommage à Cézanne</u> . Monet's first <u>Water-garden</u> series exhibited.	Articles concerning Dreyfus in <u>L'Aurore</u> .	
1901		Exhibition of Impressionist works in London. Death of Toulouse-Lautrec.	" <u>La Vérité en marche</u> " <u>Travail</u> .	
1902	Gide: <u>L'Immoraliste</u> .			
1903		Deaths of Pissarro, Whistler, Gauguin.		<u>L'Oblat</u> .
1904	Freud: <u>The Psychopathology of Everyday Life</u> .	Monet painting views of London. Cézanne views of the <u>Mont Ste-Victoire</u> .	<u>Vérité</u> (posth.)	
1905	Freud: <u>Three Contributions to the Sexual Theory</u> .	Major Impressionist exhibition in London organised by Durand-Ruel. Fauves exhibit at <u>Salon d'automne</u> . Matisse: <u>Luxe, Calme et Volupté</u> .		<u>Trois Primitifs</u> .

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