

Those listening to the podcast can follow the images referred to by clicking on the links in the text below.

At War with Zola

by Nicholas White (University of Cambridge)

Plenary Lecture, annual conference of the Society of Dixneuviémistes

University of Glasgow: April 13th-15th 2015

Many thanks, Susan, for such a generous introduction. I'd just like to begin by pointing out that, contrary to common opinion, none of the roles described by Susan (not least with SDN) were designed to prepare me for a plenary lecture at a conference whose subject is 'conflict' – though this may, in one or two cases, have been an inadvertent outcome. It is a great pleasure to have the opportunity to put on record my thanks to my co-editors at Dix-Neuf (Nigel Harkness and Sonya Stephens) and best wishes to the new editors (Cheryl Krueger and Helen Abbot who have joined Nigel), and my gratitude to SDN executive committees past and present, and to the Society's presidents, past and present (Anne Green, Tim Unwin, Robert Lethbridge and Susan Harrow). Indeed, as grateful as I am for the Executive Committee's invitation to talk today after my prolonged stint as one of the editors of the journal of the Society, as I prepared I couldn't quite get out of my mind - in thinking of this

generosity - the image of the proverbial gold watch, offered on retirement to colleagues (to old soldiers, one might say) with whom one no longer has to work. The last two former presidents I mentioned, Robert and Susan, are of course two of our most eminent *zolistes*. And looking at the programme of the conference which Larry Duffy has so ably organized, I am struck by how many papers on Zola we will have the chance to hear before close of play on Wednesday... perhaps even awe-struck, not least because unlike so many plenaries which are the fruit of completed research, my work on the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-71 and in particular Émile Zola's 1892 novel on the subject, *La Débâcle*, are very much in progress, and though I'd be happy to take comments at the end, you may find that I'll have nothing more enlightening to say than: 'what an interesting question; I'll think about that next week.' Though many colleagues, North American as well as European, will recognize in my discussion of Zola's response to this war the unattributed profit I have gained from comments and conversations at conferences and seminars over the last few years as I have begun to divorce myself from the literature of the family. We are all aware, of course, of the largesse implicit in the choice of any conference topic, and conflict is no different. Indeed, one of the pleasures in a discipline such as ours is the degree of latitude and metaphoricity with which we often choose to address conference themes. But in this strange academic geometry of square pegs and round holes, I'm

afraid that I shall be something of a literalist, discussing conflict, defined by the 1873 Littré as a ‘choc de gens qui en viennent aux mains’, in perhaps its most evident and manifest form: that of war, defined in the same place as ‘la voie des armes employé de peuple à peuple, de prince à prince, pour vider un différend’.

I nevertheless hope to make some connection between my previous work on the cultural history of private life and the life of nations which now intrigues me. And I would argue that one of the particular gifts to nineteenth-century French studies from the rise, more generally, of social and cultural history in recent decades has been their methodological imbrication of the very terms of private and public life on which so many of the key arguments in our field have turned in these same decades. To think of nineteenth-century wars is amongst other things to reflect on the century’s language of masculinity, though the recurrent image of the *cantinière* reminds us – before we consider the wider contexts of societies at war – that it would be wrong, for more than one reason, to think of war merely in terms of male homosociability. By talking of homosociability, I refer to a definition which I have quoted so often in my work on the literature of marriage and the family that I have lost count, namely Eve Kosofsky Sedwick’s argument that:

‘ “Homosocial” is a word occasionally used in history and the social sciences, where it describes social bonds between persons of the same sex; it is a neologism, obviously formed by analogy with the “homosexual”, and just as obviously meant to be distinguished from “homosexual”. To draw the “homosocial” back into the orbit of “desire” is to hypothesize the potential unbrokenness of a continuum between homosocial and homosexual – a continuum whose visibility, for men, in our society, is radically disrupted. [...] My hypothesis of the unbrokenness of this continuum is not a genetic one – I do not mean to discuss genital homosexual desire as “at the root of” other forms of male homosociality – but rather a strategy for making generalizations about, and marking historical differences in, the structure of men’s relations with other men.’

Zola’s tripartite novel is structured around the relationship between two men, Jean and Maurice, and one of the strangest aspects of the novel, for many readers, has been the physical closeness which Zola repeatedly ascribes to these brothers-in-arms. As Zola writes on page 10 of his *ébauche*: “Ne voulant pas mettre de femme dans *La Débâcle*, ou plutôt ne voulant pas donner à une femme de rôle important, l’intérêt romanesque s’y trouvera réduit. Je m’étais arrêté à l’idée d’y peindre une grande amitié, toute l’amitié qui peut exister entre deux hommes.”

[\http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b9079746f/f11.image.r=Zola%2

[ODEbacle.langFR](#)] As Robert Lethbridge writes in what is, I think, the most insightful introduction, “As they each represent one part of France, and as their friendship underlines national unity faced with the Prussian invasion, so the fact that they subsequently find themselves on opposite sides, images a country divided within itself.” This will be key in my discussion later in the hour of one particular episode from, precisely, the halfway point of the novel, namely the much celebrated defence to the last man, against Bavarian troops, by the *Infanterie de la Marine*, of a village to the south of Sedan named Bazeilles. For I shall argue that Zola’s use of the heterosexual love plot, *malgré tout*, at the heart of this episode, in which Maurice’s twin sister, Henriette Weiss, is widowed, is best explained by the novel’s own version of *fraternité* and its analogy between the sexual and the political, an analogy which speaks back to Lynn Hunt’s ground-breaking study of what she calls *The Family Romance of the French Revolution*. In this, then, I take inspiration from Susan Harrow’s wonderful book on *Zola: The Body Modern* where she argues that we should, and I quote, “move the study of corporeality beyond the exclusivity of erotic desire and set it in an expanded experiential arena: the body at work, at play, at war.” But more of this episode anon.

Zola’s novel recounts the troubled tale of Republican *fraternité* through Jean and Maurice, Jean the proverbial salt of the earth, who

has come from the illiterate rural peasantry of his *La Terre* to defend the land he has farmed, leading a small unit of men, including his antithesis, the puny urban bourgeois culture-vulture Maurice, over whom he watches. This tripartite colossus of a novel begins with the unit's wild goose chase between Paris, Reims and eastern France, culminating in its central section in a bravura depiction of the French defeat at Sedan which triggered the demise of the Second Empire itself. Separated by circumstance, and their conflicting versions of Republican politics, Jean returns to Paris as a Versaillais soldier, in the third and final part of the novel, on behalf of the compromise Third Republic and kills a Communard rebel on the barricades, realizing only too late that this was his beloved Maurice. In the unmistakable symbolism of this intra-republican death, and its return to the repressed, lies – I would argue – a prime motive for a collective amnesia with regard to this novel, making of it a *lieu d'oubli*.

It goes without saying that the announcement last year of the 2015 theme of 'conflict' for SDN coincided with the start of centennial reflections in many parts of the world, not least in Western Europe, on the First World War. This reflection on 1914 is, for us, a reflection on the end of the long nineteenth century. And it will be evident to all present that the shape and extent of the French nineteenth century can be defined by war itself: first, in the internal

sense of civil war and that form of civil conflict that becomes revolution; and second, in the international sense for which, as we shall see, Napoleon Bonaparte remains the icon until the end of the century. And the zigzagging shape in the internal conflict between that trio of rival regimes (restored monarchies, Napoleonic empires and new republics) was defined in no small part by the international conflicts into which France was drawn. How can one imagine the protracted birth of the Restoration without Waterloo? And how can one imagine the sudden birth of the Third Republic in September 1870 without the Franco-Prussian War and, more precisely, Napoleon III's calamitous defeat at Sedan? Both of these instances of regime change (as recent international politics has taught us to say) naturally mark the fall of the two Napoleonic empires, each either side of that *moment-charnière* in our conceptualization of the European nineteenth century, 1848. 1848 still understood, over sixty years since the publication of *Le Degré zero de l'écriture*, as a cultural rather than simply political watershed, which has encouraged us to read nineteenth-century French literary texts ever since by locating them in the interstice between modernity and modernism (in the *fêlure*, one might say). But thus also to question the pivotal force of 1848, between Balzac and Flaubert, and chart ever earlier the modernism of the nineteenth century. That debate, moreover, is couched in the very language of the *contra*, of the cultural conflicts which our conference theme connotes: be it Ross Chambers's notion

of oppositional discourse, or Richard Terdiman's concept of counterdiscourse. And that very notion of culture war (implicit in Zola's own art historical retrospection of 1896 on 'le bon combat' fought three decades earlier in defence of Impressionism as 'le drapeau qu'il s'agissait de planter sur les terres ennemies') continues to be enshrined in our own understanding of the period, in for instance Christopher Prendergast's 2007 book on *The Classic: Sainte-Beuve and the Nineteenth-Century Culture Wars*. Less often recalled by modern critics is that the English term itself, 'culture war', is the product of the world created by the Franco-Prussian War. For it is a loan translation, a *calque*, of the German term *Kulturkampf* used to describe Bismarck's secularizing policy in Prussia against the Catholic Church from 1871 to 1878:

[\[http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Kladderadatsch_1875_-_Zwischen_Berlin_und_Rom.png\]](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Kladderadatsch_1875_-_Zwischen_Berlin_und_Rom.png)

The war itself, as classically described, saw Napoleon III's Second Empire drawn into a conflict with the Germanic states, dominated by Prussia, who were thereby able to galvanize the forces of unification. The infamous Ems telegram of the summer of 1870, the diplomatic mechanism by which Bismarck played on French Imperial hubris, was itself a matter of trans-linguistic play, a matter of wilful mistranslation, whereby Bismarck manipulated French fears of encirclement (by the threat of a German prince ascending to the

Spanish throne) in what Emily Apter has called the Translation Zone. This late nineteenth-century continental war began – as we know - in the summer of 1870 with Gallic hubris at the thought of perpetuating the myth of the Second Empire of the 1850s and 1860s: namely, that, under the hand of Bonaparte's nephew, Napoleon III, it was continuing the imperial work of military self-assertion of his illustrious uncle and that original Empire of the post-revolutionary period. The war itself was swift, and after initial success, the French army was defeated, as I say, most notably at Sedan in September 1870. And as this audience knows only too well, this triggered the collapse of the Second Empire and the installation of the Third Republic under Thiers. With the French pushed back, the Prussians laid siege to Paris, and only too aware of the abortive first and second attempts at forming a French republic that might last, the new republic negotiated an unfavourable peace which saw France yield Alsace and much of Lorraine, and the Germanic states unify under the leadership of Kaiser Wilhelm to form a new country which had not existed before: Germany. As Anton Werner's painting celebrates [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anton_von_Werner#/media/File:Wernerprokla.jpg] this official unification took place in the Hall of Mirrors in the Palace of Versailles. In the words of the fourteen volume *Cambridge Modern History*, planned at the end of the 19th century by Lord Acton, and completed in 1912 as the Great War

approached, “The new Empire was proclaimed amid the painted victories of the *Roi Soleil*.”

Unwilling to accept defeat as the new republican regime seemed to be, a radical Parisian movement known – in the lexicon of the original Revolution – as the Commune refused to fall into line with Thiers and Co. International war, to reprise my earlier distinction, was followed by civil war, and the much disputed history of the Paris Commune, that radical urban movement which refused the republican compromise with the enemy and for a brief, idealistic, violent, incandescent moment in the spring of 1871 forced Thiers’s regime back, ironically enough, to Versailles. In the second siege of Paris, the Versaillais troops suffocated the capital’s radicalized inner core. The Commune, so important in the cultural memory of the European Left, was of course crushed in the Week of Blood of May 1871. The end of the centennial commemorations of the First World War in 2018 will be followed soon after by the 150th anniversary in 2020-21 of the events I am discussing today (the centenary having followed soon after the events of 1968), and it may well be that war memory fatigue will render even more difficult a commemoration which marks a *lieu d’oubli* as much as a *lieu de mémoire*. Difficult anyway, because of the ineluctable paradox that the moment when France decided for good that republicanism was the form of government that divided it least was not one of national consensus

(a kind of internal *pax gallica*) but instead one of bitter and violent civil war – a violence which horrified Zola, who saw more of the Commune than of the war itself. And Zola, I would suggest, is a limit-case for the new republic. Who but he could write a literary version of conscription, of an account to which all could sign up? And yet he could not. Zola had not taken part in the war in part because of his myopia, a failing he projects onto Henriette's heroic, civilian husband from Alsace, Weiss, that germanically named blank signifier ("weiss" meaning white in German, so you'll understand my personal fascination with this character), a blank signifier onto which all manner of symbolic meaning is transposed.

In his preparation two decades later for writing the novel, Zola's sources included newspaper articles alongside the many books which the war had generated subsequently, and the many letters, personal testimonies and archives to which Zola had access. Here, the press was key, for it was essentially through the written media that the general public was kept up-to-date with the future publishing plans of the most famous novelist in France, as he approached the end of the *Rougon-Macquart* cycle. Indeed, it is true to say that the public waited with baited breathe to learn what Zola would make two decades later of that terrible year. Zola's descriptions of battle are at one point attributed in the novel to the newspaper reports Maurice's widowed sister Henriette reads - in an

act of unspoken love - to the injured Jean whom she nurses back to health, unwittingly restoring him so that he can take up the Versaillais cause against the Commune, and there kill her brother, Maurice. But as the late and much mourned David Baguley shows in the footnotes of his 974 page Classiques Garnier edition which appeared in 2012, the main source here was in reality Théodore Duret's three volume *Histoire de quatre ans* published in the second half of the 1870s:

<http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b9079746f/f3.image.r=Zola%20Debacle.langFR>. Zola thereby uses a fictionalized press to conceal (and yet also to display) the depth of his vast engagement with the book-length sources of the previous two decades which constituted much of the early Third Republic's reflections on its own bloody origins. The initial serialization in *La Vie populaire*, the *hedomadaire* of *Le Petit Parisien* between 21 February and 21 July 1892, and this housing of more than one newspaper within the same financial framework allowed for an ongoing publicity campaign.

One might well argue that war should provide a Naturalist novelist such as Zola with the perfect ground on which to prove his ability to describe the excesses of *la bête humaine*. As the greatest Zola critic, Henri Mitterand, writes in his contribution to Lethbridge and Keefe's *Zola and the Craft of Fiction*, "Il y a quelque chose de Machiavel, sinon de Clausewitz [thus referencing the greatest 19th

century writer on warfare] dans cet art zolien de l'espace narratif. Je me demande parfois s'il n'a pas en tête les modèles de la guerre moderne." Peter Brooks's 2005 book *Realist Vision* opens with a yet more general analogy between the mimetic account of characters' lives and the game of playing with toy soldiers (just as Napoleon III and Wilhelm do in their military planning in *La Débâcle*). In Brooks's words, "The scale model – the *modèle réduit*, as the French call it – allows us to get both our fingers and our minds around objects otherwise alien and imposing." As if realist and naturalist writing were always a wargame. And one might well argue that this particular novel marks in Zola's career what could be termed the Idealist turn, a final text after which he is incapable of writing a trenchant Naturalist novel. After this novel of war, where Naturalism meets history most squarely, all that remains is *Le Docteur Pascal*, his trilogy *Trois Villes*, and the unfinished *Quatre Evangiles*. And one is tempted to observe that the only great thing Zola does in the remaining decade of his life is to intervene in the Dreyfus Affair... and thus to return to the problematic subject of French military honour. But would the ultimate hero of *La Débâcle*, Jean Macquart, have shared Zola's own Dreyfusard sentiments, I wonder.

As Benjamin Gilles explains in his 2013 book *Lectures de poilus* on the reading experiences of French troops in the First World War, Zola's novel continued to enjoy vast significance for readers as

France entered the Great War in 1914 - a war that speaks back to 1870 in ineluctably compelling fashion, as much as it seems to suppress the collective memory of earlier wars. Precisely because of the twentieth century's traumatic experience of war, I would argue, Zola's epic account of modern war has been culturally displaced in the privileging of other popular novels by this most popular of authors. Indeed, what strikes me most about the reception of Zola's novel is the way in which its literary effacement in the twentieth century mirrors the historical effacement of its subject. It is usually the case that the success of Zola's novels in his own lifetime (which often meant notoriety) maps very well onto the popular, pedagogical and canonical success of his novels in the twentieth century: think *Thérese Raquin*, *L'Assommoir*, *Nana*, *Germinal* and *La Bête humaine*. There is, however, one exception, and that is *La Débâcle*. In the decades that followed the First World War, it acquired an obscurity from which it has not recovered. Now I should make it clear that I am not so interested in fighting the good fight of recanonization on behalf of Zola (although I do think that it is a truly remarkable novel). The best-selling Zola novel in his lifetime, by 1927-28 *La Débâcle* still ranked, in its print-runs, second only to *Germinal* of his twenty *Rougon-Macquart* novels; by 1993 it had dropped into the bottom half in the Livre de poche edition. I am keen to explore what has been lost, by virtue of this displacement, or repression, in our understanding of the cultural "equipment" brought to the front by

French soldiers in 1914 and imagined by the community left at home. And in particular, keen to compare the interplay of past and future in Zola's narrative refashioning of the Third Republic's bloody origins with the art of the period, and consider the extent to which the conflict of 1870-71 does and does not emerge as a model of modern warfare in its most conspicuous novel published precisely halfway between 1870 and 1914.

As such I wish to focus on the Janus-like role of the literature borne of the Franco-Prussian War in the backwards and forwards play of historical memory on which so much ink has been spilt (not least in the Anglophone and Francophone worlds) in the course of the centennially resonant year we have just lived through. How, then, was this war remembered? For as Montaigne had long ago written in another context, in a quotation referenced in the entry for "conflit" in the 1873 Littré, "C'est un conflit qui se décide plus par les armes de la mémoire que par celles de la raison." And is it still worth remembering, even if re-member-ing war inevitably means in some regard reconstructing the dismembered bodies of the fallen? In the language of Pierre Nora, what place does this memory have? Place to be understood here not simply in the current fascination for the cultural history of material objects (whether village war memorials or breech-loading canons) but also in the places of rhetoric, common and otherwise. If one turns to the subject of history within Zola's

novel itself, one is reminded how any fresh account of cultural responses to a war inaugurated under the aegis of Bonaparte's nephew must necessarily be a memory of a memory of a memory. In the novel, two visions of historical time come into conflict, the third Communard section fixating on a matter of days as if to perform, however critically, that sense of an absolute present, whose daily self-rejuvenation sat at odds with the long view of history and the long arm of the past. This long view encapsulated in Chapter 3 of the novel's opening section which recalls the "récits homériques" of Maurice's grandfather who fought in the Grande Armée of the original Napoleon, by contrast with Napoleon III, "ce pauvre homme qui – and Zola uses a telling phrase here – n'avait plus de place dans son empire". Significantly, this chapter unfolds in Reims, that Urtext in the narrative of French nationhood, a *lieu d'origine* turned *lieu de mémoire*.

When I mentioned in passing to a neighbour of mine who works in publishing that I was now moving on in my next project, having worked on domestic unhappiness for so long, to study another form of human unhappiness in the shape of war, he proffered the withering observation: "Double-barrelled C19 wars never sell." His point was probably well made. Indeed, to focus on this war right now might be said to be both timely and untimely. And my neighbour is not the first to comment on this effacement of the

Franco-Prussian War and the Commune, though such comments are often to be found at the start of volumes about to add to the historiography of these events. And the bibliography is, of course, large. The art historian Hollis Clayson asks: “Why have I written a book about art produced in Paris during the Franco-Prussian War, an obscure conflict without celebrity in the annals of modern art?” Historian Stéphane Audouin-Rouzeau confirms the obscurity of this event when he declares, “The war of 1870 is a forgotten war.”

Of the artistic responses to 1870-71, prose fiction and painting loom particularly large. Whether it be in the sometimes momentarily new forms which Hollis Clayson identifies in *Paris in Despair*, or in Albert Boime’s *Art and the French Commune*. Whereas Clayson highlights the technical influence, and often the literal presence of the war on the art of the time, Boime stresses Impressionist art’s repression of the impossibly painful subject of the civil war which followed the war against the Prussians. “At the heart of the modern, Boime argues, is a ‘guilty secret’—the need of the dominant, mainly bourgeois, classes in Paris to expunge from historical memory the haunting nightmare of the Commune and its socialist ideology.” This tension between the depiction and repression of war lies at the centre of my reflections today on the historiographical place of 1870-71 in the subsequent cultural history of war. My question therefore is less the generalizable complaint “Why War?” and more the specific

interrogation “Why, or rather why not, this war?” The pivot in this tension between the presence and absence of the bellicose reference is Degas’s cryptic 1875 painting, *Vicomte Lepic et ses filles traversant la Place de la Concorde*, the square renamed as an antidote to internal conflict.

[\[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Place_de_la_Concorde_\(painting\)#/media/File:Edgar_Degas_Place_de_la_Concorde.jpg\]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Place_de_la_Concorde_(painting)#/media/File:Edgar_Degas_Place_de_la_Concorde.jpg)

We may note the play of presence and absence occasioned by the irresistible question: what lies behind the vicomte’s top hat? What does it conceal, and reveal? The answer is one of the sculptures representing a French city still to be found at this location so replete with a revolutionary symbolism that stretches back to the guillotine of the 1790s... and not just any city but in fact Strasbourg,

[\[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_works_by_James_Pradier#/media/File:Statue_of_Strasbourg_on_place_de_la_Concorde,_Paris,_France_2012.jpg\]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_works_by_James_Pradier#/media/File:Statue_of_Strasbourg_on_place_de_la_Concorde,_Paris,_France_2012.jpg) the long lamented capital of Alsace

[\[http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b6908423q.r=statue+de+Strasbourg.langFR\]](http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b6908423q.r=statue+de+Strasbourg.langFR), returned to France in 1918

[\[http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b53005445b.r=statue+de+Strasbourg+1918.langFR\]](http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b53005445b.r=statue+de+Strasbourg+1918.langFR) – that notion of public art in mourning itself revisited on another Parisian square

[\http://static3.nydailynews.com/polopoly_fs/1.2069816.1420689999!/img/httpImage/image.jpg_gen/derivatives/article_635/article-

[charlie-hebdo-rally-france-0107.jpg](#)] in January of this year
 [<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-30763697> - *2nd image*].

Degas's method rather different, as we shall see, to the popular official military painting of Edouard Detaille, whose patriotic pigment allowed the French to remember the war against the Prussians rather than the civil war of the Commune, and thus 1870 more than 1871. More ambivalent in its depiction (though not as ambivalent as we might hope) is Zola's novel on the subject.

As Benjamin Gilles's *Lectures de poilus* shows, probably never before World War One had reading been such an important experience of the ordinary soldier, stuck for long periods of time in the trenches with time to kill before emerging onto the killing fields, with the newfound tools of mass state education at hand. In a provocative comparison, Gilles argues that the rate of illiteracy was lower then than now in France, and the consumption of newspapers higher. And perhaps not just of newspapers, but also of novels. One might then suggest that one of the fruits of Third Republic education policy was greater access to the cultural legacy of the four and a half decades of the republic. As one soldier, Étienne Tanty, writes in 1915 to his family: "C'est bien dommage que Zola soit mort et n'ait pas pris la tranchée. C'eût été le seul naturaliste capable de donner une idée de cet animal, le Poilu, ce monstre d'une civilisation à rebours."

But so particular and novel did the experiences of the First World War prove to be that in several ways it killed off the long nineteenth century. Only in this sense perhaps was it, as promised, a war to end all wars. Although the causes of the war seemed to anticipate the last properly nineteenth-century European war of dynastic, often monarchical, claim and counter-claim, a new type of conflict without proper historical precedent was discovered in the grinding experience of the 1914 war of attrition, trenches and tanks, rather than one of cavalry charges (in other words, a war not made for warhorses). This is why in hindsight the causes of 1870 have seemed so inveterately petty, in some sense *petites* by contrast with the Grande Guerre.

Still, it is true, that the territorial loss of Alsace and Lorraine to the Germans was corrected by the peace at the end of the First World War, and though it might have mattered less to the British and to North Americans, to the French it mattered considerably that the First World War should be closed in the Hall of Mirrors at Versailles where the new German nation had been borne nearly half a century earlier.

For all of its brevity, and its stress on offensive power, the war of 1870 was in many ways conspicuously modern: not least technically, in its use of the machine-gun -- though that too might be said to be more misuse than use, when one considers how much

more effectively it was to be employed in the First World War. And in terms of the history of Europe, the relative effacement of the war of 1870 after the First World War seems at once comprehensible and yet bizarre. For if one takes the reasonable position that the Franco-German relationship is at the centre of Europe, even after the fall of the Berlin Wall, then the significance of 1870-71 becomes crystal clear. As this is the moment when the German nation was created, and the moment when France finally embraced Republicanism in a manner that would endure (Vichy aside, of course) until the present day. In the words of probably the most influential of the avalanche of books recently published on the First World War, *Sleepwalkers* by Christopher Clark, "After 1871, France was bound to seek every possible opportunity to contain the new and formidable power on its eastern border. A lasting enmity between France and Germany was thus to some extent programmed into the European international system. It is hard to overstate the world-historical impact of this transformation."

This Franco-German memory of war might also serve to decentre Anglophone perceptions of the mind-set of soldiers walking into battle in the First World War. For the French and the Germans, the historical reference point was clear. And one way to theorize this might be to return to that theorist of the novel, René Girard, whose analysis of mimesis in fictional love plots finds a new home in

Chapter 8, “La France et l’Allemagne”, of his series of interviews, *Achever Clausewitz*, updated in 2011. Here it is the Franco-German relationship which is seen to exhibit the mimetic problem of rivalry, in an account anchored in Mme de Staël’s Germanophile Romantic reaction against Napoleon, which concludes “Les Français doivent croire en l’Europe, et pour cela régler enfin leurs comptes avec Napoléon.”

The centenary of the Franco-Prussian War and the Commune in 1970-71 followed, of course, soon after the events of May 1968 which, in its very slogans and graffiti, cited the most conspicuous absent-presence of the war, Arthur Rimbaud. 2020-21 will therefore mark, as I say, the 150th anniversary of this “année terrible”, as Hugo famously dubbed those twelve months from one summer to the next, from hubris to humiliation. And quite what fate awaits this anniversary which will open the next decade in France remains to be seen. Rather than build on the collective cultural intelligence on the subject of war (if I might half-cite Wilfred Owen) borne of the 2014-18 centenary through which we now live, perhaps the First World War will once again kill off the Franco-Prussian War, so war-fatigued will the general and intellectual publics in both the Anglophone and Francophone worlds be, after five years of what might necessarily be termed overkill. This might well play into the hands of a certain Republican ideology, for the real problem in the memory of 1870-71

is less death at the hands of the Prussians than at the hands of fellow Frenchmen in the civil war of the Commune. And what Zola's ultimately rather pro-Versaillais account does in its encryption in the Jean/Maurice relationship of the opposed Republican traditions of the conservative Republic and the radical Commune is to remind its French readers of the difficulty in washing away bloodstains and of marrying divergent traditions – literally in the case of Jean and Maurice's twin sister, Henriette, whose closeness represents the reconciliation which Zola proposes, and yet which can never be consummated before the shared spectre of Maurice (as if in some unwitting, idealized return to the haunting triangle of *Thérese Raquin*).

It is, I suppose, quite understandable that the First World War commemorations in this country have reflected the Anglophone experience. Indeed, we all, I am sure, have personal reasons for recalling the horror and pity of war, not least because of the collateral damage it inflicts on individual families at home. And I take an ironic pleasure in speaking on this subject in Glasgow as my mother's great uncle, Jimmy McMenemy, [<http://www.amazon.co.uk/Jimmy-McMenemy-Napoleon-David-Potter/dp/1780911556>] was one of the most notable early players in Scottish football, playing for Celtic and Scotland from 1902 to 1920, and later managing the Glaswegian club prior to the Second World

War. Nicknamed “Napoleon”, apparently in the top ten all-time list of games played and goals scored for Celtic (168, one more than a certain Kenny Dalglish). His playing career was nonetheless interrupted in its prime, like so many others, by the First World War. It has become a cliché to observe that modern international sport has become something of a surrogate for war, though I only fully comprehended the analogical power of football as the proverbial wargame, and thus strangely close to that eminently literary notion of the *agon*, when trying to explain to my 6-year-old son, Jonathan, that finally I had a research project in which he could take an interest. He replied to my description of this research on the war of 1870 with the telling question: “Which teams were playing, Dad?”

In the context of Anglophone reflections on war, I take it as my role as a French scholar to recall the specificity of the non-Anglophone experience of the First World War, and in particular the way in which the cultural memory of 1870-71 provided French and German soldiers walking into battle in 1914 with, as I say, a very specific and rather different template of war in their minds. And if one takes this view that the relationship between France and Germany has been and continues to be at the heart of the post-1945 European project, then 1870-71, the foundation of the German nation and of a lasting French republic become yet more significant in our ongoing attempt to understand the present. In this image

[http://www.cicero.de/sites/default/files/field/image/merkel_hollande.jpg], one might well imagine that Angela Merkel and François Hollande are watching a football match. And it is true that in the metaphorical war of football, each country has its own traumatic World Cup memory, not just of defeat but of injustice: for the Germans, the Russian linesman allowing a controversial English goal in 1966; for the English, the Argentinian Diego Maradona post-Falklands War punching the ball into the net with, as he was later to say, “the hand of God”; and for French people, certainly of my generation, the following act of Teutonic violence in the 1982 World Cup semi-final in which Germany defeated France, in a penalty shoot-out, of course!

[<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wyVqz2tU43w>] Taken from the official website of the French football association, it is hard not to hear in the commentary a recognizable rhetoric which one might easily transpose back from metaphor to source. A rhetoric reinforced in the accompanying official French football association description of the game as “une bataille homérique”, thus speaking back, as we have already seen Zola do, to the association between literature and war in the earliest of literatures in *The Illiad* and *The Odyssey*.

Zola was to find more recent models and counter-models of war literature in the accounts of Waterloo in Stendhal’s *La Chartreuse de Parme*, Hugo’s *Les Misérables* and Tolstoy’s *War and*

Peace, translated in 1874. But it is the glory of the French army before Waterloo which is invoked in the most famous visual representation inspired by the French defeat in 1870. The kind of historiographical musings, or meta-history, in which I am engaged today is not without its precedents, in 2012 Jean-François Lecaillon penning the worthy *Le souvenir de 1870*, which acts as a useful source for references on this subject.

[<http://mapage.noos.fr/jflecaillon/Pages/couv%20-%20souvenirs%2070.jpg>]

Lecaillon's book is not the first, nor will it be the last to reproduce on its front cover *the* most celebrated military painting of the post-war period, Edouard Detaille's *Le Rêve* of 1888. And I would agree with Richard Thompson's claim in his book on the art of this period, *The Troubled Republic*, that to ignore such significant genres in our quest for the modern (via Impressionism alone, for instance) is to misunderstand the diversity of fin de siècle culture. As an idealistic account of the motives of young French soldiers of the new Republic, asleep on the field, as in the foreground a sleeping dog lies, Detaille's image looks rather different to the blood and guts we might expect of Naturalist fiction. Though this *carte de visite* to be found in the *dossier préparatoire* of *La Débâcle* suggests that such "isms" are a place to begin rather than to end our analysis of the cultural battlefield:

[<http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b9079763z/f598.image.r=Zola%20Debacle.langFR>].

Like Detaille, though, Zola's account of Maurice's attraction to his grandfather's stories recalls the Bonapartist recollections (and fantasies) of the generation of 1870, captured at the top of the painting "en gloire", as art historians might say, in the tattered and faded, yet still recognizable flags of the Napoleonic armies who have died and gone to heaven.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/%C3%89douard_Detaille#/media/File:Detaille_Le_R%C3%A4ve.jpg] We might note, in this painting of the

military manoeuvres of a new generation preparing to correct the humiliation of 1870, the neatness of the line of rifles arranged in tent formation so as to preserve them from mud and water, the nearest to the far right of the image, bearing a folded standard, lying parallel to the line of the horizon, beyond which presumably lies not the vertically indexed past but a horizontally indexed future (the battle of *revanche* and of 1914, the stuff no doubt of nightmares rather than dreams). This temporal scheme of past and future is, in a mathematical sense of the term, then, carefully coordinated. And it is telling that this scheme is bisected in the stress on diagonal lines, where past and future meet, from upper left to lower right, and from upper right to lower left, described by the pattern of soldiers and rifles receding towards the left of the horizon and by the criss-crossing of the rifles which prop up each other in the tent formation. Surely Detaille – the most successful military artist of his age - is aware in this painting of the excessive neatness of these training

manoeuvres which imitate war, indeed provide fictions of war, we might say, but are in the end not a preparation for the messy realities of war, least of all the First World War which still clung, as we see in this postcard reproduction, to the patriotic fantasy in Detaille's image, that horizontal standard pointing precisely to 1914 and "victoire":

[http://images.delcampe.com/img_large/auction/000/225/307/530001.jpg?v=2]

But to see the interplay of high culture and the mass production and reworking of its classic images, we do not need to wait until 1914.

Witness Paul Legrand's 1897 painting *Devant "Le Rêve" de Detaille*, an ode to print culture which puts back onto the painted canvas a

print miniature of Detaille's great landscape work, set alongside

other images and newspapers in collage and tessellation, forming in a double sense an exorbitant frame which dwarfs the backgrounded

centre of the painting, the melancholia, anguish even, of the

vendeuse, portrait-framed in green. [[http://www.pedagogie.ac-](http://www.pedagogie.ac-nantes.fr/servlet/com.univ.collaboratif.utils.LectureFichiergw?ID_FIC)

[nantes.fr/servlet/com.univ.collaboratif.utils.LectureFichiergw?ID_FICHIER=1418508280944&ID_FICHE=1418508466934](http://www.pedagogie.ac-nantes.fr/servlet/com.univ.collaboratif.utils.LectureFichiergw?ID_FICHIER=1418508280944&ID_FICHE=1418508466934)] It is the print

from Detaille's painting which draws the gaze of the schoolboys,

unaware of the cost of war, inscribed in the lost leg of the old soldier

who turns away to read his newspaper. And it is virtually impossible

for us not to impose on our reading of this image the pathos of the

telos which calculates in hindsight that in due course (seventeen years later in 1914) these young French boys will themselves be marching off to war.

And the work of Emile Zola - sitting uncomfortably between Flaubert and Proust, and to this day embroiled in conflicting accounts of the modernity, even modernism of his writing, and of its literary worth in the face of its manifest cultural and ideological symptomatology - this work points both inwards at the logic of its own compositional imperatives and strategies, and outwards to the stream of texts and images alongside which it was read. Emblematic in this regard is Zola's account of French courage at Bazeilles near Sedan to which I referred earlier, to be found in Chapter 4 of the eight-chapter central section of *La Débâcle*, and thus at the centre of this entire fictional enterprise.

The publicity around the publication of Zola's novel (and its subsequent reinvention in multiple forms) would often evoke details of Part 2 of the novel and the trauma of Sedan, as we now come full circle, the book version having appeared with Zola's habitual publisher Charpentier on 24 June 1892. A second serialization followed in *Le Radical*, from 19 October 1892 to 26 March 1893 [<http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b90162390/f1.item.r=Le%20Radical%20publie%20La%20D%C3%A9b%C3%A2cle%20par%20Emile.la%20Zola>], and the sheer speed with which Zola wrote and the multiple

dissemination of his phenomenally popular fiction in various forms makes for a complex overlapping of his texts in the public sphere at any given moment. In Adeline Wrona's words, "les romans [...] vivent-ils souvent plusieurs vies." The serialization of the final novel of the Rougon-Macquart series, *Le Docteur Pascal*, had already begun a week earlier in *La Revue hebdomadaire* on 18 March. *Le Radical's* version of *La Débâcle* was advertised using this image from the Imprimerie Emile Lévy which foregrounds Part 2 Chapter 4 where Zola fictionalizes the defence of Bazeilles, made famous two decades earlier by Neuville's 1873 salon painting, *Les dernières cartouches*:

[http://musees-de-france-champagne-ardenne.culture.fr/musee_france/c1.jpg]. Given the indulgence of referential illusions (in every sense of that term) in Naturalist rhetoric, perhaps the only truly historical novel of Zola's *Histoire naturelle et sociale d'une famille sous le second Empire* bears a particular epistemological burden, for the fantasy of Zola and his reading public is that the novel should be both real and true – a fantasy much contested in contemporary press responses to the novel and its veracity, or otherwise. The episode of Bazeilles, still recalled today [<http://www.troupesdemarine-ancredor.org/Bazeilles-2014/Ardennes/Affiche-2014.jpg>], is such an interesting one for the cultural historian of literature because Zola was himself clearly aware of the saturation of texts and images post-

Neuville which would continue beyond 1892, and in which his own description would swim, or sink. Whether it be in music:

[<http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k8582401.r=Les+derni%C3%A8res+cartouches.langFR> &
<http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k858242s.r=Les+derni%C3%A8res+cartouches.langFR>]

in conflicting historical narrative and counter-narrative,

[<http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k9307526.r=Les+derni%C3%A8res+cartouches+Genevois.langFR> &
<http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k6539151p.r=Bazeilles%2C+ou+Les+derni%C3%A8res+cartouches.langFR>]

in theatre:

[http://data.bnf.fr/39499524/les_dernieres_cartouches_spectacle_1903/]

in prints, on postcards

[<http://epublications.unilim.fr/jeanjean/526> &
https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bataille_de_Bazeilles#/media/File:Bazeilles-FR-08-ruines_post-1870.jpg]

or even in the following short film from 1897 by one of the fathers of early cinema, George Méliès, particularly surprising to those of us used to his pantomimic cinema, framed here by the context of still

visual culture in the following presentation by the museum into which the Maison de la Dernière Cartouche in Bazeilles was subsequently turned:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uTWddzluhwU>.

Indeed, one could imagine a cultural history of representations of the war which might turn on the Bazeilles episode alone, and it is perhaps our task to conjoin such cultural range to the specificity of close reading for which literary scholars are supremely well-trained. Let us recall the eleventh of the definitions of “la guerre” in that 1873 Littré: “faire la guerre aux mots” defined as “critiquer minutieusement le style”. Between these two disciplines, I would argue, there need be no *conflit de juridiction*. In fact, the challenge of Bazeilles seems, for Zola, to be futile: “Quant aux environs, Bazeilles tiendra sa place dans la partie stratégique de la bataille, mais rien de plus. Tout le monde a écrit des pages là-dessus; et je ne tiens pas à refaire la *Dernière Cartouche* de Neuville.” Zola structures the pathos of his account through the rhythm of two simultaneous countdowns: first, the countdown of bullets possessed by these dozen or so Frenchmen until “la dernière cartouche”; and second, the deaths of those same men. Henry James, who listed *La Débâcle* alongside *L’Assommoir* and *Germinal*, as Zola’s truly great novels, writes that “it was the fortune, it was in a manner the doom of *Les Rougon-Macquart* to be a picture of numbers”. But to the

homosocial tale of men found in Neuville's painting, Zola adds Weiss, the description of the battle prefaced by the heterosexual suspense of his wife Henriette running to be by his side in Bazeilles against the tide of retreating French troops. And so powerful was the patriotic pull of this description that even Emile Faguet, usually intent on a *guerre de plume* with Zola, as one of the founders of the *critique universitaire* which it took Zola so long to penetrate, pours forth praise. As Faguet writes:

Le plus beau [des épisodes qui se détachent en relief] qui sera classique demain et que vous trouverez partout, est la défense de Bazeilles, et particulièrement de la maison de Weiss l'Alsacien, la bataille obstinée, furieuse, enragée, dans une soif ardente de mourir et de se venger avant de mourir. Ce sont « les dernières cartouches » de M. Emile Zola. C'est une des choses les plus belles qu'il ait écrites et qu'on ait écrites.

Lévy's image does not focus on the French soldiers defending the house to the last, but instead on Zola's imbrication of literary fiction and historical myth by stressing the role of civilian characters: Weiss about to be put in front of a firing squad before the very eyes of his wife, Henriette:

[<http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b90162390/f1.item.r=Le%20Radical%20publie%20La%20D%C3%A9b%C3%A2cle%20par%20Emile.la%20ngFR>]. The novel's subsequent idealization of the widow Henriette

relates, I would suggest, to her reading aloud of newspapers in Part 3 of the novel to Jean, the barely literate hero, himself widowed in *La Terre*, who reappears in this novel to defend the soil he has farmed. Zola confronting that tension between the Naturalist desire for clarity and a Stendhalian stress on the fog of war by filtering the mass experience of the war and the Commune through the lives of our two brothers-in-arms: rural Jean who rises to the challenge of war and leads through it men such as Henriette's brother, Maurice, an urban intellectual. In fact, the novel is in a sense the tale of how war removes Jean from the context of the Macquart family, weaving instead a long chain of family and personal relations in eastern France which emanate from Maurice via his sister Henriette to her husband Weiss to her uncle Fouchard (a peasant-farmer) who stops his son Honoré from marrying their servant, Silvine Morange, who is abandoned by the farmhand (and Prussian spy) Goliath Steinberg, father of her son, Charlot... (Et ainsi de suite...). And though contemporary critics immediately commented on Zola's focus on the French rather than German experience of war, in enigmatic fashion Zola turns Weiss's first cousin, Otto Gunther, into a captain in the Prussian army.

Let me say in conclusion that in a novel whose aesthetic dilemmas turn on the tension between individual experiences and what Naomi Schor famously refers to as Zola's crowds, the personal

and the political meet in a homo prohibition on the hetero, which brings me back to Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's point about the radical disruption for men, in our society, of, and I quote, "the potential unbrokenness of a continuum between homosocial and homosexual". For it is Jean who will kill Henriette's brother, Maurice, with his bayonet, the Versaillais soldier killing the Communard rebel as the end of the novel approaches, reinstalling that repressive disruption at the heart of the masculine. In the words of Oscar Wilde's *The Ballad of Reading Gaol*: "Yet each man kills the thing he loves." This imposes an irresolvable taboo on the love shared by Jean and Henriette. How can one love the man who kills one's brother? It is this fracturing of modern France's politics of fraternity that renders impossible – romantically and politically – any form of ideal union. And this fracture at the heart of republicanism, Zola's novel seems to suggest, is the compromise (in every sense of the term) with which the Third Republic must live.

* * *