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'Du pain!' to 'À Berlin!'

Food in Zola's Rougon-Macquart

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‘Du pain!’ to ‘À Berlin!’: Food in Zola’s *Rougon-Macquart*

Rachel Eliza Rees – Middleton

A dissertation submitted to the University of Bristol in accordance with the requirements for award of the degree of MPhil in the Faculty of Arts, School of Modern Languages, September 2021.

Word Count: 25,534

Abstract

Émile Zola's *Les Rougon-Macquart: histoire naturelle et sociale d'une famille sous le Second Empire* (1871-1893), a broad exposé of life in Second Empire France, was avidly consumed by a nineteenth-century readership and is rich in everyday detail. Through focusing on descriptions of the sourcing, preparing, and sharing of food, as well as its rhetorical potential, this thesis contends that food is a crucial, if understudied, aspect of the *Rougon-Macquart* cycle. As a novelist, Zola was preoccupied with labour and the effects of work on the body, as well as with narratives of physical and social illness, and the language of production, consumption, appetite, and hunger pervades his novels. Throughout this thesis, close readings of narrative engagement with food reveals its productive intersection with themes of gender, work, community, and the rhythms of everyday life.

This thesis will trace a three-part study of food as narrative function in the *Rougon-Macquart*. Chapter I situates the topic of food within the context of the *Rougon-Macquart* and explores the connection between the language of food and the language of adultery, as well as themes of scarcity, plenty, and edibility which recur in various novels in the cycle. Chapter II focuses on food in Zola's seminal novel of work: *Germinal* (1885). In *Germinal*, the economy of exchange - capitalist, ideological, corporeal - is set against a backdrop of family life and domesticity. Zola's female characters, who navigate their families through extreme hunger and suffering, weave together these strands of narrative, bridging the gap between work in the mine and the domestic work which happens at home. In Chapter III, I trace the relationship between food, waste, and mess in *Nana* (1880), showing how Nana's 'appetites' lead to social and bodily mess. Throughout the thesis, I draw attention to the complexity of food in a selection of *Rougon-Macquart* novels, an argument which opens up fresh perspectives in Zola studies, and connects more generally with sensory, material, cultural, and literary studies of food.

Acknowledgements

Heartfelt thanks goes to my supervisors Professor Susan Harrow and Dr Paul Earlie for their excellent guidance and feedback. Reading Susan's work first inspired me as an undergraduate, and she has been a source of great creativity, inspiration and encouragement. Paul's stylistic eye for detail and expertise on critical thought and theory has been invaluable throughout. My thanks also go to the staff at the Arts and Social Sciences Library, whose hard work during the Covid-19 pandemic meant that my research could go unhindered. Finally, thanks to friends and family in Bristol and further afield, for constant support.

Author's Declaration

I declare that the work in this dissertation was carried out in accordance with the requirements of the University's *Regulations and Code of Practice for Research Degree Programmes* and that it has not been submitted for any other academic award. Except where indicated by specific reference in the text, the work is the candidate's own work. Work done in collaboration with, or with the assistance of, others, is indicated as such. Any views expressed in the dissertation are those of the author.


SIGNED:  DATE: ..23/09/21.....

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Abbreviations

All references to Zola's novels use Henri Mitterand's five-volume *Émile Zola, Les Rougon-Macquart: histoire naturelle et sociale d'une famille sous le Second Empire* (Paris: Gallimard, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1960-67). Page references will be abbreviated using the following abbreviations, followed by the volume number (I-V) and page numbers:

<i>FR</i>	<i>La Fortune des Rougon</i> (1871)
<i>C</i>	<i>La Curée</i> (1872)
<i>VP</i>	<i>Le Ventre de Paris</i> (1873)
<i>CP</i>	<i>La Conquête de Plassans</i> (1874)
<i>SE</i>	<i>Son Excellence Eugène Rougon</i> (1876)
<i>A</i>	<i>L'Assommoir</i> (1877)
<i>N</i>	<i>Nana</i> (1880)
<i>PB</i>	<i>Pot-Bouille</i> (1882)
<i>ABD</i>	<i>Au Bonheur des Dames</i> (1883)
<i>G</i>	<i>Germinal</i> (1885)
<i>Œ</i>	<i>L'Œuvre</i> (1886)
<i>T</i>	<i>La Terre</i> (1887)
<i>BH</i>	<i>La Bête humaine</i> (1890)
<i>D</i>	<i>La Débâcle</i> (1892)
<i>DP</i>	<i>Le Docteur Pascal</i> (1893)

References to the ten-volume edition of *Émile Zola: Correspondance*, ed. by Bard H. Bakker and Henri Mitterand (Montreal/Paris: Presses de l'Université de Montréal and CNRS, 1978-95) are given as *Corr*, followed by the volume (I-X) and page numbers.

Introduction

‘Ce diable de roman m’a donné beaucoup de mal. Mais je suis très content, [...]. Je n’ai soif que de travail’ (*Corr*, V, 222). Émile Zola was nearing the end of writing *Germinal* (1885), his great novel of the working classes of the industrial north of France, when he wrote these words in a letter to Henri Céard in January 1885. Zola writes here of his ‘thirst’ for work, reflecting on the paradoxical nature of his craft as a source of solace and of frustration, as well as the demands of work on the body, and its influence on the rhythm of everyday life. In *Zola: Le Saut dans les étoiles*, the title of which is taken from another letter to Céard, in March 1885 (*Corr*, V, 249), Colette Becker reflects on Zola’s concern with everyday practices:

Zola, en effet, s’est tout particulièrement attaché à l’étude des habitudes, des manières de vivre, aux problèmes posés à l’individu confronté à de nouvelles conditions de vie, à la grande ville, à la foule, aux rapports du moi avec le monde et avec l’autre.¹

Meditating on Zola’s own practice as a writer, Becker captures the way Zola’s extensive preparatory notes reveal a desire to depict the specificities of the milieu chosen for his twenty-volume *Les Rougon-Macquart: histoire naturelle et sociale d’une famille sous le Second Empire*. Stemming from an interest in Zola’s ‘étude des habitudes’, as well as the metaphorical and rhetorical ‘saut’ from the observational to the figurative to which Zola (and Becker) refers, this thesis explores the complex role of food in the *Rougon-Macquart*. In several novels in the *Rougon-Macquart*, food works in dialogue with the wider issues to which Becker refers; in essence, the everyday work of existing in modern life.

My thesis addresses the following questions in relation to Zola’s use of food in the *Rougon-Macquart*. How does Zola, a writer intensely preoccupied by the impact of work on individual lives and wider society, present his characters sourcing, preparing, serving, and

¹ Colette Becker, *Le Saut dans les étoiles* (Paris: Presses de la Sorbonne Nouvelle, 2002), p. 60.

sharing food? How do representations of food and its production and consumption relate to Zola's portrayal of Second Empire decline and collapse? How do themes of waste and mess intersect with food in Zola's novels and how do these connect to the wider narrative project of the *Rougon-Macquart*? In Chapter I, I look at several *Rougon-Macquart* novels in dialogue with each other, highlighting points of complementarity and of difference in the role food plays in these texts. In Chapter II and Chapter III, I offer close readings of *Germinal* and *Nana* (1880) respectively, unpacking Zola's language, rhetoric, and narrative structure.

Reading a selection of Zola's correspondence in relation to the *Rougon-Macquart* provides important context for this study of food. Susan Harrow argues that Zola's epistolary reflections on his craft of writing 'have far-reaching ethical and practical lessons for his readers [...]. Zola's thoughts on work, and related variables of time and space, rhythm and habitat, offer lessons in ways of working, and ways of living'.² Harrow has shown how Zola's early correspondence in particular creates 'a porous space where questions of ethics, ethnography, and the everyday intersect with sites of habitat, habits, exile, food, privacy, domesticity, creativity, and sociability'.³ Indeed, Zola frequently oscillates from weighty discussions of literary craft to more quotidian thoughts on food, health, and diet. In a short letter to Numa Coste in June 1889, Zola enquires about Coste's plans for the Paris Exposition and updates him on his progress on *La Bête humaine* (1890). He also asks Coste to send him some saffron in the post, if he decides not to come to Paris (*Corr*, VI, 397), and assures Coste: 'quant à l'huile, nous en aurons assez cette année' (*Corr*, VI, 398). In these examples, as in others (*Corr*, VI, 72, 235), Zola is revealed to be a frequent receiver of food from his

² Susan Harrow, 'Worlds of Work and the Work of Words: Zola', in *The Labour of Literature in Britain and France, 1830-1910: Authorial Work Ethics*, ed. by Marcus Waithe and Claire White (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 203-19 (p. 205). As Harrow notes, Zola's correspondence is imbued with the same values of work that are represented extensively in his fiction, itself informed by Zola's meticulous documentary study (p. 206).

³ Susan Harrow, 'Living Alone Together: Barthes, Zola, and the Work of Letters', *L'Esprit Créateur*, 55 (2015), 21-38 (p. 21).

friends, often linked to a specific locality. In a letter to Paul Alexis in December 1890, Zola draws on the sensory power of these foodstuffs to evoke memories of place, atmosphere, and climate as he thanks Alexis for a gift of olives, ‘qui m’ont apporté un peu de ce Midi’ (*Corr*, VII, 107). Concerns regarding Zola’s own health abound: he describes himself as a ‘gros homme rouillé’ on holiday in Mont-Dore (*Corr*, V, 141), and extols the benefits of giving up coffee and wine to his ‘santé physique et littéraire’ (*Corr*, VI, 401). Despite this concern for health and diet, Zola also associates leisure time with gastronomic pleasure: a letter sent after a holiday to Aix-en-Provence has been cancelled sees Zola lamenting the loss of a fortnight set aside ‘à manger des oursins et de la bouillabaisse’ (*Corr*, V, 301).

While the materiality of food in these letters gives a sense of Zola as a gourmand, and the intriguing reference to literary health hints at his preoccupation with food as a source of nourishment and of wellbeing, Zola as a writer enjoys the rhetorical freight of food, as my opening quotation suggests. Harrow draws on an example from 1877, where Zola takes a working holiday in Provence to begin *Une page d’amour* (1878). For Harrow, Zola ‘extols an invigorating mixture of hard work and hospitality, creativity, and sensuous pleasure’ when he writes ‘je me nourris de coquillages, ce qui rend les idées légères’ (*Corr*, III, 68).⁴ In this example, the distinctively Mediterranean rhythm of sun, sea, and fresh food fuels Zola’s fiction. However, in other correspondence, Zola uses the language of food metonymically to describe the all-consuming, ‘devouring’ nature of his craft. In a letter written from Médan in June 1889, Zola is immersed in his writing, with work driving the rhythm of the days and months ahead: ‘J’ai commencé mon nouveau roman, *La Bête humaine*, le 5 mai, et en voilà pour sept à huit mois à me dévorer’ (*Corr*, VI, 395). Later that summer, Zola reflects to

⁴ Harrow, ‘Living Alone Together’, p. 35. Henri Mitterand references a letter to Edmond de Goncourt written in the same summer, where Zola writes once more about the exquisite food of the Midi: ‘ce qui me perdra, ce sont les bouillabaisse, la cuisine au piment, les coquillages et un tas de saletés exquis dont je mange sans mesure’, *Zola: L’Homme de Germinal. 1871-1893* (Paris: Fayard, 2001), p. 376. Here, food is a sensory delight, consumed with abandon, and, its epistolary inscription points to the creative potential of new environments.

Georges Charpentier on this time as ‘une période très saine de travail’, which leaves him feeling rejuvenated, ‘comme à vingt ans, lorsque je voulais manger les montagnes’ (*Corr*, VI, 414).⁵ Zola’s use of metaphor here relates to the various modulations of ‘appetite’ – alimentary, sexual, and aesthetic – which become a major focus of the *Rougon-Macquart* narrative, and are also part of his energised and capacious engagement with many aspects of life, including technology, politics, and nature.⁶

Henri Mitterand’s biography of Zola makes several references to Zola’s passion for food. In *Zola: L’Homme de Germinal*, Mitterand links eating, the body, and Zola’s work as a novelist: ‘la gourmandise du corps s’associe chez lui à celle de l’imagination et de l’écriture’.⁷ In the eyes of contemporary critics, Zola’s work quickly became associated with food, or even described metaphorically as food, such as in a review of *Le Ventre de Paris* (1873) published in *Le Constitutionnel* on 14 July 1873 which reads: ‘Il croit dire le dernier mot de l’art en faisant du boudin, M. Zola’.⁸ Here, Barbey d’Aurevilly denounces the vulgarity of Zola’s Naturalism by invoking the culinary, in particular, the fatty, bloody *boudin*. The metaphorical implications of *boudin* are fully understood by Zola: in *Le Ventre de Paris*, Lisa’s slow consumption of *boudin* in front of Florent merges the erotic and the

⁵ The metaphor ‘manger les montagnes’ does not appear to be frequently used, and may be Zola’s own conception. In a review of this volume of Zola’s correspondence, Robert Lethbridge makes reference to this quotation, pointing out that Zola’s happiness in this letter coincides with the late stages of Jeanne Rozerot’s first pregnancy. See Lethbridge, Review of *Émile Zola: Correspondance* (1987), *French Studies*, 44 (1990), 233-34 (p. 234). With this historical context in mind, it is perhaps not only work which leaves Zola feeling rejuvenated, but also the prospect of becoming a father.

⁶ It is not only Zola’s correspondence which is steeped in culinary language. Colette Becker shows how Zola uses vocabulary such as ‘recette’, ‘ragoût’, and variations of the verbs ‘épicer’ and ‘cuisiner’ throughout his literary and art criticism. See Becker, ‘Zola, un critique gourmet’, in *La Cuisine de l’œuvre au XIXe siècle - regards d’artistes et d’écrivains*, ed. by Éléonore Reverzy and Bertrand Marquer (Strasbourg: Presses universitaires de Strasbourg, 2013) <<https://books.openedition.org/pus/2876>> [accessed 19 September 2021].

⁷ Mitterand, *L’Homme de Germinal*, p. 30.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 117.

gastronomic (VP, I, 695).⁹ In a letter published in September 1892 in *Le Figaro*, German militarist Karl Tanera gives his opinion of Zola's novel of the Franco-Prussian war, *La Débâcle* (1892): 'les personnages de M. Zola ne pensent qu'à boire et à manger'.¹⁰ For Tanera, Zola's attention to everyday detail in the novel reveals a lack of understanding of the mechanics of war, and of how soldiers behave in combat, a viewpoint which perhaps can be said to align with conventional interpretations of Naturalist aesthetics.¹¹ As I argue in Chapter I, however, food is also part of a wider sensory landscape which Zola uses to push the limits of readability in *La Débâcle*.¹²

In the preface to *La Fortune des Rougon* (1871), Zola asserts that the Rougon-Macquart family 'a pour caractéristique le débordement des appétits' (FR, I, 3). In this example, Zola's use of the word 'appétit' points to the sexual, economic, social, cultural, and political desires of the Rougon-Macquart family, while 'débordement' suggests both the intensity and excess of the drives, passions, aggressions, and conflicts characteristic of the cycle, and a much slower and more sustained degeneration of a family and society.¹³ As we

⁹ Manon Mathias surveys the wider symbolic implications of *boudin* in Huysmans, Zola and Flaubert in her chapter 'Digestion and Brain Work in Zola and Huysmans', in *Gut Feeling and Digestive Health in Nineteenth-Century Literature, History and Culture*, ed. by Manon Mathias and Alison M. Moore (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), pp. 155-76 (p. 171).

¹⁰ Karl Tanera, 'Lettre du capitaine bavarois Tanera sur *La Débâcle*', *Le Figaro*, 19 September 1892, accessed from *Gallica* at: <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k54952228/f9.image.r=zola,%20manger> [accessed 3 December 2020].

¹¹ Zola's relationship with the term 'Naturalism', as many critics have discussed, is problematic. Jessica Tanner outlines Zola's fluctuating attitude to his own reception as a novelist of dirt, vice, and contamination from *Thérèse Raquin* (1867) to *La Terre* (1887) in 'Branding Naturalism: Dirt, Territory, and Zola's Aesthetics', *Dix-Neuf*, 23 (2019), 71-89.

¹² Similarly in *Germinal*, food is an essential part of Zola's depiction of the everyday, but also pushes the boundaries of readability: there are instances where coffee is watered down to such an extent that it resembles rusty water (*G*, III, 1205-6), or towards the end of the novel, bread is rendered almost inedible through being soaked with water (*G*, III, 1566).

¹³ Nicholas White reminds readers of the historical specificity of the *Rougon-Macquart*, noting how Zola 'defines his fictional family precisely in terms of such procreative and excessive desire, and he identifies in this novelistic pattern an emblem of the historical moment', 'Family Histories and Family Plots' in *The Cambridge Companion to Zola*, ed. by Brian Nelson (Cambridge: Cambridge University

will see, the lexical link between ‘appétit’ and food in this example is just one of several where the vocabulary of food and eating merges with Zola’s descriptions of work, sex and family life, fundamental themes of the *Rougon-Macquart*.

Claude Grignon argues that in Zola’s *L’Assommoir* (1877), ‘we find the most complete realisation of the joint introduction into the novel of food (in its “dirtiest” aspects) and the material life of the popular classes (in its most “sordid” aspects)’.¹⁴ Grignon draws on a range of examples from several of Zola’s novels to demonstrate the pervasiveness of food, and argues that images around food – notably the inexhaustible salad bowl of *L’Assommoir* (A, II, 574) and the stomachs of the hungry workers – become associated within the course of the text.¹⁵ However, Grignon’s insistence that Zola’s use of food is evidence of ‘class-based ethnocentrism’¹⁶ means that his analysis does not consider the full and rich metaphorical and metonymic potential of Zola’s food narratives, which I explore across this thesis. In a similar vein, Albert Sonnenfeld’s work focuses on Zola’s use of food to convey the designation of – or aspiration to – a certain social class.¹⁷ For instance, Sonnenfeld sees the food served at Nana’s housewarming party in Chapter 4 as evidence of her ‘social ascendancy made possible by money alone’.¹⁸ Although Sonnenfeld does acknowledge the wider rhetorical significance of Zola’s use of food in relation to *Le Ventre de Paris*,¹⁹ he does not explore the possibility that food in Zola can operate as more than just a symbolic representation of moral

Press, 2007), pp. 19-38 (p. 20). For White, ‘the family is not only the thematic focus of [Zola’s] writing, but also its grand structuring principle’, allowing Zola to explore a variety of cultural norms and connotations, ‘Family Histories and Family Plots’, p. 22.

¹⁴ Claude Grignon, ‘Sociology of Taste and the Realist Novel: Representations of Popular Eating in É. Zola’, *Food and Foodways*, 1 (1985), 117-60 (p. 121).

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 145. A similar association occurs in *Germinal*, where the mine (Le Voreux) devours the hungry miners.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 146.

¹⁷ Albert Sonnenfeld, ‘Émile Zola: Food and Ideology’, *Nineteenth-Century French Studies*, 19 (1991), 600-11 (p. 602).

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 603.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 607-09.

or social values. More recently, Larry Duffy has explored the socio-economic and political disparity between the ‘maigres’ and the ‘gras’ in *Le Ventre de Paris*, drawing on the range of digestive metaphors used by Zola.²⁰ By exploring novels where food is widely represented – *Pot-Bouille* (1882), *Nana*, and *Germinal* – as well as novels where food operates more subtly, such as *Son Excellence Eugène Rougon* (1876), *Au Bonheur des Dames* (1883), or *La Bête humaine*, this thesis expands upon symbolic interpretations to reveal the narrative, thematic, and material implications of food.

In contrast to critics such as Grignon and Sonnenfeld, Priscilla Parkhurst Ferguson develops the reading of food from the primarily social and ideological to a complex cultural signifier, rich in psychological, material, and sensory meaning. Reading Balzac, Flaubert and Zola, she describes how ‘the consumption of food offers the realist novel a precious social and psychological indicator’.²¹ This includes the goose feast in *L’Assommoir*, which signals a social and psychological ‘high point’ of Gervaise’s success and precedes a fall that will lead her to beg for scraps of food.²² Parkhurst Ferguson’s work has implications for gender and class based readings of Zola’s work, as she emphasises the distinction between French gastronomy, which ‘intellectualizes the material and rationalizes the sensual’ and the home kitchen, primarily the domain of women.²³ Using Michel de Certeau’s interpretation of the

²⁰ See Larry Duffy, ‘Textual (In)Digestions in Flaubert, Zola and Huysmans: Accumulation, Extraction, Regulation’, in *Gut Feeling and Digestive Health in Nineteenth-Century Literature, History and Culture*, ed. by Manon Mathias and Alison M. Moore (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 177-204 (p. 182). For Duffy, Zola uses incorporative, digestive metaphors in several *Rougon-Macquart* novels: these are explicit in *Le Ventre de Paris*, and implicit in novels such as *Nana*, *La Bête humaine*, *Au Bonheur des Dames*, *L’Argent*, *Le Docteur Pascal* and *Germinal*. Although Duffy is attentive to the various inflections of the digestive metaphors, connecting to discourses around consumer appetites, sexual desire, financial expansion, and family knowledge, and drawing a parallel between the literary text and the discursive context of the novel, his discussion of food as part of this digestive process is limited to his reading of Huysmans.

²¹ Priscilla Parkhurst Ferguson, *Accounting for Taste: The Triumph of French Cuisine* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), p. 102.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 113.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 132.

concept of ‘bricolage’, Parkhurst Ferguson describes the historical context of nineteenth-century French women cooks as ‘bricoleurs’, exploring how they make do with what is at hand in the space of the home.²⁴ In Chapter II, I use the same concept of ‘bricolage’ to explore how the art of ‘faire-la-cuisine’ as embodied by La Maheude and other female characters in *Germinal* contains creative and disruptive potential.²⁵ In my analysis of Zola’s novels, I will draw on this notion of sourcing and preparing food as a creative practice in order to reframe representations of women in the domestic space.

The work of Roland Barthes recognises the omnipresence of food in Zola: ‘avec Proust, Zola, Flaubert, on sait toujours ce que mangent les personnages’.²⁶ Barthes’s suggestion here that we always know what Zola’s characters consume is in part a conventional reading of the Naturalist text, the ‘texte de plaisir’, where details are spelled out for the reader.²⁷ Indeed, as I will discuss later in the Introduction, Zola’s preparatory notes for *Germinal* reveal a preoccupation with the specific eating habits of the mining community, details of which are then imported into the novel. However, Barthes’s more general writing on food and its social, economic, political, and historical implications works both with and against Zola’s own interest in everyday habits. In *Mythologies* (1957), Barthes views food as a marker of social class, and as integral for communities and national identity.²⁸ For Barthes’s Marxist-inspired perspective in *Mythologies*, food is not only a rich signifier of social and cultural mores including class, wealth, and habit; it is also situated on an affective axis,

²⁴ Ibid., pp. 144-45. In a post-war literary context, Ruth Cruickshank is also attentive to this intersection between food, gender and bricolage. Cruickshank sees Certeau’s understanding of bricolage as a specifically ‘food-related metaphor’, *Leftovers: Eating, Drinking and Re-Thinking with Case Studies from Post-War French Fiction* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2019), p. 28.

²⁵ Luce Giard in Michel de Certeau, Luce Giard and Pierre Mayol, *L’Invention du quotidien, II : Habiter, cuisiner* (Paris: Gallimard, 1994), p. 216.

²⁶ Roland Barthes, *Sade, Fourier, Loyola*, in *Œuvres complètes, II* (1966-1973), ed. by Éric Marty (Paris: Seuil, 1994), 1039-1176 (p. 1130).

²⁷ Barthes, *Le Plaisir du texte*, in *Œuvres complètes, II* (1966-1973), 1493-1532 (p. 1499-1501).

²⁸ See Barthes’s essays ‘Le Vin et le lait’, ‘Le Bifteck et les frites’ and ‘Cuisine ornementale’, in *Mythologies*, in *Œuvres complètes, I* (1942-1965), ed. by Éric Marty (Paris: Seuil, 1993), 567-722.

becoming part of wider exchanges and economies. This intersects with my reading of food in *Germinal* in Chapter II, where coffee, bread, and meat are markers of age, wealth, class, and gender, and where routines around their consumption relate specifically to the milieu of the mining community.

If Zola's use of historical detail may have been initially considered by Barthes as evidence of 'readerly' style, in his 1976 preface to *La Bête humaine*, Barthes identifies the way in which Zola's writing resists categorisation and builds complex webs of symbolism and metonymy which are both essential to – and can stand alone from – a plot-driven reading of the novel.²⁹ Barthes's re-evaluation of Zola in the preface to *La Bête humaine* relates to modern scholarship on Zola, which considers the Naturalist novelist as a proto-modernist writer. In *Zola, The Body Modern: Pressures and Prospects of Representation*, Susan Harrow departs from traditional readings of Zola and instead presents a prospective Zolian corpus, emphasising the 'writerly' qualities of his work.³⁰ Indeed, a footnote in *The Body Modern* sets out the importance of food in *Germinal*: 'Food in *Germinal* is a nexus of economic, political and erotic, as well as nutritional, pressures, dramatized by the castration of the sexually and economically exploitative grocer, Maigrat'.³¹ Harrow's argument that food operates as part of a complex system of pressures and exchanges in *Germinal* resonates with my readings of other novels in the *Rougon-Macquart*, where the literal lexis around food and eating exists alongside a metaphorical lexis, whether that is of unchecked consumer appetites, bourgeois taste and erotic appetites in *Nana* and *Pot-Bouille*, or hunger for social change in *Germinal*.³² Harrow's work, as well as that of critics such as Becker, Lawrence Schehr, and

²⁹ Barthes, 'Préface à *La Bête humaine* d'Émile Zola', in *Œuvres complètes*, IV (1972-1976), ed. by Éric Marty (Paris: Seuil, 2002), 976-79.

³⁰ Susan Harrow, *Zola, The Body Modern: Pressures and Prospects of Representation* (London: Legenda, 2010), p. 11.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

³² The word 'taste' is of course freighted with critical history. In his seminal *La Distinction: critique sociale du jugement*, Pierre Bourdieu observes how culture works as a system of hierarchical

Éléonore Reverzy, points to productive and intriguing fissures in Zola's 'Naturalist' text.³³ In his 'Deipnomachy, or Cooking with Zola', Lawrence Schehr focuses on Zola's portrayal of 'cuisine du pauvre' in *Germinal*, a novel in which food is intimately linked to wider social, economic, and political concerns. However, as Schehr demonstrates, it is also a novel where Zola creates a certain poetics around food and hunger. It is these critics' emphasis on Zola's dynamism as a writer which forms the basis of my reading of Zola's use of food as part of his inventive narrative craft, where food is both a social and cultural marker, and plays a role in the more 'writerly' qualities of Zola's novels.

Across the chapters of this study, I reveal Zola's constant oscillation between metaphor and metonymy, and between the mythological and the everyday. I suggest how food operates as part of this discursive shifting; connecting ideas around work, the body, domestic rhythms, and a deeper sense of what it means to connect as humans. Becker's overarching view that Zola's aesthetic can only be embraced in its contradictions is illuminating in the way in which she tracks his preoccupation with everyday life alongside the techniques he systematically deploys in his writing, aligning with Mitterand, Harrow, Schehr and others when she argues for the modernity of Zola.³⁴ Becker's methodological approach is as fascinating as her central argument: through extensive use of Zola's

judgements of 'tastes' noting the class distinctions inherent in the particular type of food cooked, (Paris: Minuit, 1979) pp. 207-08. Taste as a sense remains an underexplored aspect of sensory studies, which, as Aimée Boutin highlights in her introduction to a special issue of the journal *Dix-Neuf*, has focused on sight as the sense of primary importance, with many nineteenth-century thinkers associating the 'baser' senses of taste and smell with women, 'Rethinking the Flâneur: Flânerie and the Senses', *Dix-Neuf*, 16 (2012), 124-32 (pp. 125-26). Margot Szarke argues that in *Le Ventre de Paris*, Zola's inclusion of strong, nausea-inducing smells in the 'symphonie des fromages' challenges his bourgeois readership, prompting 'physiological and psychological responses as well as emotional and intellectual forms of engagement', 'Modern Sensitivity: Émile Zola's Synaesthetic Cheeses', *French Studies*, 74 (2020), 203-22 (pp. 221-22).

³³ See Lawrence Schehr, 'Deipnomachy, or Cooking with Zola', *Nineteenth-Century French Studies*, 34 (2006), 338-54; Becker, *Le Saut dans les étoiles*; Éléonore Reverzy, *La Chair de l'idée: poétique de l'allégorie dans les Rougon-Macquart* (Geneva: Droz, 2007).

³⁴ Becker, *Le Saut dans les étoiles*, p. 16.

preparatory notes and literary correspondence, as well as examples from his fiction, she makes a consistent and convincing argument for the plurality of Zola's work. This emphasis on Zolian plurality is crucial to my understanding, and allows me to consider food from a range of perspectives over the course of this thesis.

In Chapter I, I explore Zola's representation of food and consumption in several *Rougon-Macquart* novels. I demonstrate how the discourse around food in the *Rougon-Macquart* is far more complex than 'set-piece' depictions of dinner parties or market halls. Although it would not be possible to refer to all the *Rougon-Macquart* novels in this chapter, I have selected for study novels which engage with food in literal, as well as metaphoric, ways. I begin by examining the role food plays in the adultery plot before widening my scope to consider food in a more material sense, in dialogue with tropes of scarcity, plenty, and edibility.

In Chapter II, I reflect on the relationship between food and work in *Germinal*. A close reading of the novel shows how Zola's female characters can be read as builders of home and community, providers of nourishment, and as setters of domestic rhythms. From the 'Dossiers préparatoires' for *Germinal* we gain a keen sense of the novelist's fascination with the detail of life in mining communities, including diet and routines around food. 'Mes notes sur Anzin', part of these preparatory notes, offers an insight into Zola's assiduous work ethic, approach to writing, and interest in the nature of work itself, as he documents the intricate details of life in the *coron*, sketching many of the notes in pencil.³⁵ The notes include two pages dedicated to 'Plats de mineurs', from which we can glean the habitual nature of food in the mining community - 'le pot au feu, deux fois par semaine' - as well as the

³⁵ Zola, 'Mes notes sur Anzin', in *La Fabrique des Rougon-Macquart: édition des dossiers préparatoires*, V, ed. by Colette Becker and Véronique Lavielle (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2011), pp. 836-955.

difference between the food eaten by the miners themselves, and the mine owners.³⁶ Much of this detail from the preparatory notes is embedded in the final novel, including instances of watered down coffee, a lack of meat, and children sent to collect dandelions to supplement dinner. Claire White's *Work and Leisure in Late Nineteenth-Century French Literature and Visual Culture* is a path-breaking study in the intersection between work and leisure, which has strong implications for my reading of *Germinal*, where food affords moments of pleasure and conviviality but is also acutely tied to anxiety around scarcity, hunger, and starvation.³⁷

In Chapter III, I draw primarily on *Nana*, seeking to move beyond readings which connect food (or consumption more widely) and the sexualised female body.³⁸ In his character notes for *Nana*, Zola writes:

En outre, Nana est la mangeuse d'or, l'avaleuse de toute richesse; les goûts les plus dispendieux, le gaspillage le plus effroyable. Elle se rue aux jouissances, à la possession, par instinct. Tout ce qu'elle dévore; elle mange ce qu'on gagne autour d'elle dans l'industrie, dans l'agio, dans les hautes situations, dans tout ce qui rapporte. Et elle se laisse que de la cendre.³⁹

In this portrait of Nana, Zola sees consumption and waste as inherent to her character, the generating force of his text. Zola's lexicon of food in this example (*mangeuse*, *avaleuse*,

³⁶ Zola, 'Plats de mineurs', in *La Fabrique des Rougon-Macquart*, V, pp. 926-27.

³⁷ Claire White, *Work and Leisure in Late Nineteenth-Century French Literature and Visual Culture* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

³⁸ Peter Brooks's reading of Nana's nudity in Chapter 7 of the novel has ramifications for any reader of *Nana*, highlighting the frustration provoked by Nana's solitary pleasure in her nakedness, the metaphorical implications of Fauchery's 'la Mouche d'or' column, and the potential affinity between the body of the prostitute and commercial writing, *Reading for The Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), pp. 145-46. Brooks discusses *Nana* in further detail in *Body Work: Objects of Desire in Modern Narrative* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993). Here, Brooks speculates on the artistic context for Zola's representation of Nana at this crucial moment in Chapter 7, and the textual implications of the 'unrepresentability of Nana's sex', p. 148. The trace of resistance found in Brooks's reading of *Nana* is one which I take up in Chapter III.

³⁹ Published in *La Fabrique des Rougon-Macquart: édition des dossiers préparatoires*, III, ed. by Colette Becker and Véronique Lavielle (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2006), p. 417.

goûts, dévore, mange) is a key feature of the narrative. In this way, Zola's lexical engagement with food becomes emblematic of his style in the *Rougon-Macquart*, that is his highly innovative, creative, and at times destabilizing oscillation between everyday detail and the mythological and metaphoric. In this chapter, I also draw on David Trotter's work on waste and mess. Trotter's 'mess-theory', and its rejection of notions of productivity and economic growth, enhances the disruptive element of food in *Nana* and also in *Pot-Bouille*, where snacking, crunching, and the percolation of unsavoury smells establish a messy way of eating far removed from the typical bourgeois dinner party.⁴⁰ My argument in Chapter III paves the way for my Conclusion, where I draw links between certain aspects of food in the *Rougon-Macquart* and more contemporary concerns around food, and point to further avenues of research related to this thesis.

⁴⁰ David Trotter, *Cooking with Mud. The Idea of Mess in Nineteenth-Century Art and Fiction*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

Chapter I

The Landscape of Food in Zola's *Rougon-Macquart*

Food is ever-present in the *Rougon-Macquart*. It is always close to hand for Zola's characters, imbued with social, political, erotic, visual, ideological, and corporeal value, and represented in myriad ways. Vocabulary such as 'manger', 'faim', 'appétit', and 'viande' holds material and rhetorical freight across the novel cycle and is used by Zola both literally and metaphorically.¹ Financial and sexual 'appétits' feature heavily in *La Curée* (1872), *Nana* (1880), and *Au Bonheur des Dames* (1883), where the success of the department store is portrayed by Zola as a 'lutte des appétits' (*ABD*, III, 542). Nana's desire to spend money which is not hers destabilises the power dynamic between courtesan and paying customer: 'ce qui demeurait, en dehors des heures de colère, était, chez elle, un appétit de dépense toujours éveillé, un dédain naturel de l'homme qui payait, un continuel caprice de mangeuse et de gâcheuse, fière de la ruine de ses amants' (*N*, II, 1349-50). As these brief examples show, throughout the *Rougon-Macquart*, the rhetoric around food is far from homogenous, offering capacious possibilities for interpretation, critical focus, and theoretical reflection.

It is worth noting that although Zola's representation of food may be pervasive, it is fraught with tensions and contradictions. For example, mealtimes are portrayed as a part of everyday domestic routines for the Maheu family in *Germinal* (1885) and the Josserrands in *Pot-Bouille* (1882); in *Nana*, however, solitary meals in the theatre in Chapter 2 or chaotic dinner parties in Chapter 4 subvert typical conventions around consumption. In *Germinal*,

¹ A search of the invaluable *ArchivZ* (*Les Archives Zoliennes*), a website dedicated to the online publication of Émile Zola's work and associated documents and images, shows a sample of relevant vocabulary totalling the following number of uses in all 20 *Rougon-Macquart* novels: 'manger' - 896; 'pain' - 635; 'cuisine' - 560; 'dîner' - 438; 'faim' - 449; 'déjeuner' - 327; 'viande' - 200; 'appétit' - 185; 'repas' - 173, and 'nourriture' - 107 (this search includes both literal and metaphorical usage). To put this into context, food holds its own statistically against other terms which are fundamental themes of the *Rougon-Macquart*: 'travail' appears 1366 times, 'corps' 913 times, and 'famille' 763. <http://www.archives-zoliennes.fr/recherche> [accessed 4 June 2021].

women in the *coron* gain support, nourishment, and community from sharing basic food supplies, and are united in their mob violence towards the grocer Maigrat. There are also instances when bodies are described as food for consumption, for example Cécile Grégoire's skin is described as having 'une fraîcheur de lait' (*G*, III, 1196). This trope is present in other novels; from as early as Chapter 1 in *Nana*, Nana's body is described in culinary terms: 'Y a de quoi manger' (*N*, II, 1110). In *Germinal*, the Grégoire and Hennebeau families eat luxurious, expensive, and even imported food, in keeping with their wealth and status. Indeed, the sight of gastronomic plenty in the Hennebeau kitchen motivates the striking miners to continue their action: 'Les femmes avaient aperçu la cuisine, et c'était une tempête d'imprécations contre le faisan qui rôtissait, contre les sauces dont l'odeur grasse ravageait leurs estomacs vides' (*G*, III, 1439-40). In this quotation, the litany of worker complaints are echoed and amplified in the enumeration of foods and food processes. The smell and sight of fatty luxury the miners cannot afford is in stark contrast to the simplicity of their demand for bread, which they need to sustain themselves and the strike. In *L'Assommoir* (1877), instances of plenty, such as the goose feast, are tempered by Gervaise's modest desire for the daily assurance of food: 'Mon idéal, ce serait de travailler tranquille, de manger toujours du pain, d'avoir un trou un peu propre pour dormir' (*A*, II, 410). As these examples show, food has complex significations: it can illustrate ideas around health, wellbeing, modernity, worker solidarity, and progress, and its capacity to sustain is often tainted with degeneration, instability, waste, crisis, social injustice, and even death.

In this chapter, I connect examples of food and eating from a range of *Rougon-Macquart* novels, exploring food as nourishment for the individual and wider communities, but also as essential to Zola's portrayal of Second Empire decline and collapse. Drawing on a selection of novels, including *La Conquête de Plassans* (1874), *Pot-Bouille*, *La Terre* (1887), *La Bête humaine* (1890), and *La Débâcle* (1892), this chapter will show how Zola's use of

food is embedded in the fabric of the *Rougon-Macquart* cycle. Work by Marie Scarpa attends to the notion of ‘appétit’ in the *Rougon-Macquart*, suggesting that *Le Ventre de Paris* (1873) is the novel in which this is invoked in the clearest culinary terms.² Scarpa’s observation that food in *Le Ventre de Paris* frequently appears as a ‘nature morte’ reminds us how food operates as part of a wider discourse around growing consumer appetites and desires: it is not just something to be consumed, but rather an intrinsic part of Zola’s wider textual project.³

Tony Tanner, in his introduction to *Adultery in the Novel: Contract and Transgression*, encourages his reader ‘to note what, if any, significance the novelist locates in the meal’,⁴ which he identifies as ‘one of the central events and activities in the bourgeois home and thus in the novel related to it’.⁵ Tanner’s chapter on *Madame Bovary* (1856) explores certain aspects of the relationship between consumption, adultery, and Realist fiction, most notably the famously outlandish confection of Emma’s wedding cake, which,

² Marie Scarpa, ‘Retour ethnocritique sur les modalités du ventre dans *Le Ventre de Paris*’, in *La Cuisine de l’œuvre au XIXe siècle - regards d’artistes et d’écrivains*, ed. by Éléonore Reverzy and Bertrand Marquer (Strasbourg: Presses universitaires de Strasbourg, 2013) <<https://books.openedition.org/pus/2888>> [accessed 19 September 2021]. Scarpa concludes by stating that the novel was not on Zola’s initial list of ten novels, and sees the foregrounding of food as a result of historical context. Zola began to work on the novel in Winter 1871, a few months after the hunger of the Paris Commune in Spring 1871. For Scarpa, ‘*Le Ventre de Paris* ne serait décidément pas le roman de l’abondance alimentaire mais plutôt le rappel (et peut-être l’antidote) de son envers : l’angoisse incontrôlable de la faim’, para. 26 of 26.

³ These consumer appetites are not limited to the gastronomic: in *Au Bonheur des Dames*, Zola draws on the changing consumer desires in fashion and retail, as well as the architectural changes in Paris which enable this. Peter Brooks deems *Au Bonheur des Dames* ‘the novel of commodity fetishism’, which reveals the way in which women are alienated from their own bodies through the market economy, *Body Work*, p. 149. Steven Wilson sees the sexual appetites in *Nana* replicated in the consumer desires in *Au Bonheur des Dames*, Steven Wilson, ‘Nana, Prostitution and the Textual Foundations of Zola’s *Au Bonheur des Dames*’, *Nineteenth-Century French Studies*, 41 (2012), 91-104 (p. 98). Susan Harrow reads *La Curée* through Barthes’s *Mythologies*, revealing Zola’s ‘critical, ironic, and, at times, satirical representations of cultural practices’, including food, architecture, and upholstery, ‘Exposing the Imperial Cultural Fabric: Critical Description in Zola’s *La Curée*’, *French Studies*, 54 (2000), 439-52 (p. 440).

⁴ Tony Tanner, *Adultery in the Novel: Contract and Transgression* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979), p. 57.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 53.

much like Charles Bovary's cap, becomes an iteration of meaningless references.⁶ Tanner points out that as a way 'to find something to consume to fill up the gaps', Emma resorts to self-consumption, nibbling her own lips.⁷ In Part 1, Chapter 9 of *Madame Bovary*, the reader's attention is drawn to the intense disillusionment with petit-bourgeois habit which Emma feels when seated at the dinner table with Charles: 'mais c'était surtout aux heures des repas qu'elle n'en pouvait plus, [...]. Toute l'amertume de l'existence lui semblait servie sur son assiette' (*MB*, 351).⁸ Here, feelings of tedium and bitterness replace the food Emma should be sharing with Charles, driving her to create her own 'plot' of theatre, adultery, and chaotic ingestion. For Lilian Furst, instances of food in *Madame Bovary* have wide-ranging implications, including as an illustration of banal reality, evidence of Charles's provincial simplicity, and Emma's desire for attention. There are also moments of reversal, in which Emma's swallowing of arsenic, which causes her to vomit profusely and a black liquid to ooze from her mouth, turns the naturally nourishing process of consumption into self-destruction and bodily degradation.⁹ For Anna Igou, food in the novel is stripped of its ability to nourish, with Emma consuming, but not eating.¹⁰

Traces of this boredom at mealtimes are found at the beginning of *La Conquête de Plassans*, where regular mealtimes are part of the provincial routine of married life, serving as a way to pass time:

Rose acheva de servir le dîner. Les Mouret, ce soir-là, firent traîner le repas. Ils causèrent longuement des nouveaux locataires. Dans leur vie d'une régularité d'horloge, l'arrivée de ces deux personnes étrangères était un gros événement. Ils en parlaient comme d'une

⁶ Ibid., p. 285.

⁷ Ibid., p. 354.

⁸ All references to *Madame Bovary* use the following edition: *Œuvres*, vol. I, ed. by René Dumesnil and Albert Thibaudet (Paris: Gallimard, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1951).

⁹ Lilian R. Furst, 'The Role of Food in *Madame Bovary*', *Orbis Litterarum*, 34 (1979), 53–65 (p. 61).

¹⁰ Anna Igou, 'Nothing Consumed. The Dangerous Space of Food in *Madame Bovary*', *French Forum*, 39 (2013), 35–49 (p. 37).

catastrophe, avec ces minuties de détails qui aident à tuer les longues soirées de province.

(*CP*, I, 913)¹¹

In this example, the narrator illustrates the diversion which the arrival of Abbé Faujas and his mother causes for François and Marthe Mouret. Although their arrival is described in this instance as a ‘catastrophe’, pre-empting the disastrous consequences which arise later in the novel, there is also a pleasurable sense of release from routine, with conversations about the new arrivals prolonging the meal.¹² Sophie Ménard argues that in *La Conquête de Plassans*, ‘l’usurpation est édifiée sur une manipulation, plus précisément, des lieux et symboliques du manger’.¹³ One aspect of this is that as the novel progresses, the fracturing of the mealtime ritual follows the novel’s descent into manipulation and violence. Mealtimes begin to constitute a sense of isolation, much as they do in *Madame Bovary*: ‘la salle à manger restait mélancolique, avec les deux couverts isolés, séparés par toute la largeur de la grande table’ (*CP*, I, 1083). Here, the intimacy between François and Marthe has been replaced by melancholy silence and an increase in physical distance, with mealtimes no longer offering comfort and conviviality.¹⁴

¹¹ Susan Harrow draws on this example, arguing that ‘such first-person voices, whether singular or plural, interject irony or mockery and, at any rate, a degree of critical distance that aligns the speaker more with the real-life reader than with the fictional characters’, *The Body Modern*, p. 114.

¹² The ‘régularité d’horloge’ by which François and Marthe live their life is just one example of Zola’s fascination with clocks and the regulation of time. As Harrow writes, ‘in creating his fictional worlds, Zola is alert to the mechanical regulation and everyday punctuation of abstract time: pocket-watches, mantel clocks, and tolling bells are the material “supports” of timekeeping’, ‘Worlds of Work and the Work of Words: Zola’, p. 210. Harrow analyses Zola’s depiction of Maheu’s body clock in *Germinal*, which works as a very precise marker of time, as well as Gervaise Macquart’s ornamental clock in *L’Assommoir* as ‘a site of desire and fantasy’, p. 211.

¹³ Sophie Ménard, ‘L’Empire de la cuisine chez Zola: ethnocritique de *La Conquête de Plassans*’, in *La Cuisine de l’œuvre au XIXe siècle - regards d’artistes et d’écrivains*, ed. by Éléonore Reverzy and Bertrand Marquer (Strasbourg: Presses universitaires de Strasbourg, 2013) <<https://books.openedition.org/pus/2861>> [accessed 19 September 2021] (para. 2 of 13).

¹⁴ In both *L’Œuvre* and *L’Assommoir*, Zola shows how easily household routines are lost in times of crisis, with ‘mauvaise nourriture’ (*O*, IV, 249) signalling a descent into poverty. In *L’Assommoir*, a lack of nourishing food and extreme poverty go hand in hand: ‘s’ils mangeaient du pain au beau temps, les fringales arrivaient avec la pluie et le froid’ (*A*, II, 683). Here, weather echoes the poverty

In these examples from *La Conquête de Plassans* and *Madame Bovary*, mealtime boredom seems to constitute a necessary part of the marriage plot. Although Emma Bovary rarely eats with Léon or Rodolphe, her adultery is filled with ‘toutes les platitudes du mariage’ (*MB*, 556). In several *Rougon-Macquart* novels, alimentary and erotic discourses collide in instances of adultery. For example, in *L’Œuvre* (1886), Claude’s mealtimes at home with his wife are characterised by poverty and bad food; however when he is with Irma ‘[il] mangeait aussi avec l’appétit glouton des grandes crises’ (*O*, IV, 251). In *Pot-Bouille*, which Nicholas White argues ‘is at the heart of the rewriting of the Flaubertian novel which we observe after May 1880’,¹⁵ sexual and gastronomic ‘appétits’ are heightened by the interiority of the *immeuble*, a space which both reveals and conceals the plot of adultery. Sharon Marcus, in her influential chapter on *Pot-Bouille*, writes of Octave’s topographical strategy for conquering Paris, in which ‘[his] many sexual liaisons with the women in his building simultaneously interiorize the plots of urban conquest (sexual and economic) and the adultery plot’.¹⁶ One aspect of this interiorization is Octave’s persistence in sharing meals with the various families in the apartment block, thus allowing him into the intimate space of the home, as we shall see now.

of the family. Jessica Tanner writes on weather in the *Rougon-Macquart*, arguing that descriptions of weather are not just a background narrative, but rather ‘burst into meaning as matter or metaphor’, ‘The Climate of Naturalism: Zola’s Atmospheres’, *L’Esprit Créateur*, 57 (2017), 20-33 (p. 25). I suggest that the language of food works in a similar way to Tanner’s ‘weather words’: everyday ‘background’ discourse is mobilised by Zola to evoke rich metaphor and meaning. Marion Glaumaud-Carbonnier explores how Zola’s frequent references to weather in his letters to Alexandrine reflect the complex dynamics of their marriage, and connect the couple across distances and through difficult times, ‘La pluie et le beau temps: l’inclinaison du ciel dans les *Lettres à Alexandrine*’, *Mélanges pour Alain Pagès*, ed. by Olivier Lumbroso, Jean-Sébastien Macke, and Jean-Michel Pottier (Paris: Presses de la Sorbonne Nouvelle, 2019), pp. 97-106.

¹⁵ Nicholas White, *The Family in Crisis in Late Nineteenth-Century French Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 25.

¹⁶ Sharon Marcus, *Apartment Stories: City and Home in Nineteenth-Century Paris and London* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), p. 171.

Octave's first dinner with the Campardons establishes the significance of adultery within the plot of *Pot-Bouille*: Octave, having witnessed a furtive conversation between Campardon and his mistress (and wife's cousin) Gasparine prior to the dinner, is left speculating over the women in the apartment block (*PB*, III, 21). Ironically, it is Octave who becomes a way for Rose Campardon to 'tuer ses soirées' (*PB*, III, 179), while her husband spends time elsewhere. When Gasparine moves in with the family, Rose too feels the marital boredom lift, and her enjoyment of food increase, as she plays witness to her husband's adultery. Gasparine's capable management of the household's provisions leads to a domestic and bodily impasse: 'depuis que la cousine s'occupait de tout, la maison vivait dans une indigestion continue, tant elle savait bien acheter, payant moins cher et rapportant deux fois plus de viande que les autres' (*PB*, III, 274). While Gasparine resists food, her ability to shop pragmatically and strategically allows the family to partake in the luxury of eating well, as well as fulfilling Campardon's sexual appetite.¹⁷

In a similar way to Tony Tanner, White is attuned to, but not explicit on, the importance of the culinary in the novel of adultery. White remarks how Marie Pichon's rape takes place between a discarded plate and a copy of George Sand's *André*, stating that 'these icons of two forms of consumption (culinary and literary) frame the tragically brief moment of sexual consummation'.¹⁸ For White, the 'shift from the ideal to the material' which occurs as Octave and Marie show concern for the damaged novel reveals the 'emotional vacuity of the seduction scene'.¹⁹ While Marie's status as a reader of Romantic

¹⁷ Marcus writes how the Campardons 'expose the self-sufficiency of the domestic interior as inherently contradictory because they complete their couple by incorporating someone external to it', *Apartment Stories*, p. 181.

¹⁸ White, *The Family in Crisis*, p.33. Another example of the overlap between the literary and the culinary is in Chapter 2, where Adèle uses Éléonore's Lamartine text as a book rest for her shopping list, debunking Romantic legacy. This example of social parody is clearly intentional on the part of Zola: he is flagging the interrelation between literature and food, as literature in this example is literally 'propping up' the shopping list (*PB*, III, 28).

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

fiction has been well established,²⁰ I would add that Zola's invocation of the culinary in this example underscores her attachment to other modes of consumption; later in the novel, we learn that 'dîner au restaurant était sa joie' (*PB*, III, 170). After Octave discovers Marie is pregnant, most probably with his child, he decides to take the Pichon family to dinner. Over the course of several pages, Octave moves from the role of lover to that of paternal protector, with the discovery that he may be the father of the child driving the paternalistic act of hosting a luxurious meal.²¹ At the end of *Pot-Bouille*, the narrator observes the unchanged nature of the food served at bourgeois gatherings: 'le thé, ensuite, déroula le même défilé, promena les mêmes tasses et les mêmes sandwichs' (*PB*, III, 382).²² The stasis implied by this repetition contrasts with the rapid commercial development Octave pursues in *Au Bonheur des Dames*. Ultimately, Octave's self-interest, and material and erotic appetites engender his success in finding 'tout à la fois, le pain et le lit' (*PB*, III, 174), moving from the more static, sealed space of the *immeuble* in *Pot-Bouille* to the expansive, consuming space of the department store in *Au Bonheur des Dames*.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

²¹ Nicholas White comments on the kiss on the forehead Octave gives Marie as they step out of the carriage: 'Octave can only respond to the possibility of paternity by borrowing a gesture from the repertoire of family life', 'Carnal Knowledge in French Naturalist Fiction' in *Scarlet Letters: Fictions of Adultery from Antiquity to the 1990s*, ed. by Naomi Segal and Nicholas White (Houndsmills: Macmillan, 1997), pp. 123-33 (p. 128). Although there is a sense of Octave in the role of paternal protector here, the meal in the restaurant takes place in *cabinet particulier*, a space typically associated with illicit sexuality and sexual transgression. The narrator overemphasises Octave's resistance to this trope in the episode – they go as a three, Lilette sleeps on the *divan*, and on the way home, Octave avoids touching Marie's legs with his. Of course, the irony is that adultery is the pretext for this entire episode. Masha Belenky discusses the significance of another Zolian scene in a *cabinet particulier*, where Maxime and Renée consummate their love affair in *La Curée*. While Belenky is primarily concerned with the voyeuristic implications of the omnibus and its passengers, who lurch into and out of this scene, she is also attuned to Zola's use of food, particularly Renée's consumption of aphrodisiac oysters. See Belenky, *Engine of Modernity: The Omnibus and Urban Culture in Nineteenth-Century Paris* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020), pp. 137-39.

²² White observes Octave's 'singulière sensation de recommencement' (*PB*, III, 381) in this episode as one where 'the differences between extra-marital and conjugal encounters [are] cynically elided', *The Family in Crisis*, p. 65.

Zola also invokes culinary metaphors in *Pot-Bouille* in the adulterous relationship between Berthe and Octave. Throughout the novel, literal food waste at the centre of the *immeuble* – and the text itself – reveals the gap between a perceived bourgeois desire for order and respectability, and the corruption and transgression at its core. In another transition from the ideal to the material, Berthe and Octave’s adultery is tainted by the comments of the maids: ‘une blague ordurière salissait leurs baisers’ (*PB*, III, 269). The omnipresence of the maids in the apartment building means that they have knowledge of everything and, for Berthe, the revelation that her own ‘plot’ is nothing but banal gossip to others is coded in the language of bitterness and decaying food: ‘c’était ça leurs amours, cette fornication sous une pluie battante de viande gâtée et de légumes aigres!’ (*PB*, III, 269).²³ Not only does this quotation serve to highlight the textual motive to reveal the ‘pourriture’ of the bourgeoisie, but it also links the female body to moral degeneration, physical decay, and corporeal rotting.

The uneasiness with which Berthe views her own adultery towards the end of *Pot-Bouille* is an extreme example of Zola’s metonymic use of food. In contrast, in the first chapter of *La Bête humaine*, Zola creates a much subtler sense of unease through a range of narrative strategies, including a disturbance of the ‘meal’ trope. While one function of the meal in *Pot-Bouille* is to facilitate Octave’s adultery, in this example from *La Bête humaine*, Roubaud’s and Séverine’s impromptu meal in the Gare Saint-Lazare leads to the discovery of Séverine’s relationship with Grandmorin. Zola builds a sense of foreboding through repeated references to the passing of time, with the mechanical striking of the cuckoo clock in Roubaud’s room marking Séverine’s delayed return to the station (*BH*, IV, 999-1000). The clock not only serves as a reminder of Séverine’s lateness, but also functions as a countdown

²³ Véronique Cnockaert argues that in *Pot-Bouille*, Zola ‘présente bien avant Lévi-Strauss la proximité entre le bouilli et le pourri’, ‘Lecture lévi-straussienne de *Pot-Bouille* d’Émile Zola. Vers un imaginaire culturel (et culinaire) de l’adultère’, *Lettres romanes*, 67 (2013), 45-59 (p. 45). Cnockaert explores how Zola’s deployment of culinary metaphor in the title of *Pot-Bouille* is reflected in the *marmite* of the Parisian *immeuble*, where bourgeois habits mix with those of the servants, and relationships between the two classes constitute another form of mixing.

of the leisure time available to Roubaud, who must take the express train back to Le Havre. A sense of irregularity presides over their lunch: Roubaud's hunger leads him to set the table 'comme s'il eût joué à la dînette' (*BH*, IV, 1000), and he is consumed by worry over Séverine and the dangers she may encounter in Paris. When Séverine arrives back, she is flushed from her frenzied spending in Paris, devouring the 'dînette improvisée' (*BH*, IV, 1003) of bread, pâté, cheese, and sardines. There is more to this example than just a proliferation of the intricacies of preparing and sharing a meal. From the beginning of the chapter, their day is marked by difference: it is Roubaud who sets the table, a hunk of bread is found in the back of a dresser, and the usually teetotal Séverine gulps two glasses of white wine. The feeling of 'playing' at dinner is marred by Roubaud's interrogation into Séverine's childhood, and Séverine's frenzied spending in Paris contrasts with the sense of enclosure in the room and the noise of the trains passing through. As the dinner ends, Séverine's excitement seems to fuel Roubaud's introspection, setting the plot of jealousy and murder into motion.

At various points in the *Rougon-Macquart*, in contexts where food is both scarce and plentiful, Zola explores the limits of edibility, pushing his readership into the realms of disgust. In *La Terre*, Zola appears to draw on Pierre Leroux's 'circulus' theory, in which human excrement is used as an agricultural fertiliser, in order to boost the production required to feed a growing population and include humans within the cyclical processes of the natural world.²⁴ Manon Mathias suggests that this 'circulus' model is put into practice by

²⁴ Ceri Crossley's work provides an informative insight into the social, political, and religious resonances of Leroux's theory, 'Pierre Leroux and the *Circulus*: Soil, Socialism and Salvation in Nineteenth-Century France', in *Histoires de la Terre: Earth Sciences and French Culture 1740-1940*, ed. by Louise Lyle and David McCallam (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2008), pp.105-18. Although Crossley does not mention Zola in this article, there are resonances between Leroux's socialist vision of 'circulus' as a solution to hunger and Zola's own vision of a more equal society, where everyone has access to food (implicit in his critique of excesses of food in novels such as *Pot-Bouille* and *Germinal*).

La Frimat in *La Terre*, who uses human excrement to fertilise her produce.²⁵ While Leroux's 'circulus' model proposes a rational solution to the problem of hunger, La Frimat's 'overpowering, barely manageable growth' is imbued with a sense of ominous excess.²⁶ Although the vegetables she sells are admired for their size and earn her a small wage each week, her practice of using human waste induces disgust, 'même dans les campagnes' (*T*, IV, 471) and deters the bourgeois shoppers from buying from her. This humorous aside nevertheless shows the rejection of these unconventional farming practices, which seem to overstep typical boundaries between humans and animals. These practices also result in La Frimat's partial alienation from the community and form part of a wider tension in *La Terre*, where scepticism around the involvement of science in agriculture results in hunger and even starvation (*T*, IV, 488-89). Narrative instances of alcoholism, destitution, violence, murder, and rape go a long way to negate the utopian vision of a life nourished by a harmonious relationship with the land.

Zola's fascination with the boundary between the edible and inedible, between pleasure and disgust, is not limited to *La Terre*. As Susan Harrow has argued, this appears frequently in *La Débâcle*, where in the context of the trauma of war, the novelist experiments with the boundaries between what can and cannot be consumed: non-edible items such as soap and wood become food for the soldiers, whose own bodies are cannon-fodder.²⁷ Zola's focus on the material in *La Débâcle* encourages readers to imagine, in close-up, the horror of war. As Harrow writes, 'tropes of feeding and nourishment are metaphorically reworked (and in the process distorted, negatively freighted, aversively inflected) in the demotic language which tends to collapse distinctions between human subject and food object, between eater

²⁵ Manon Mathias, 'Recycling Excrement in Flaubert and Zola', *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, 54 (2017), 224-39 (p. 232).

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 233.

²⁷ Susan Harrow, 'Food, Mud, Blood: The Material Narrative of Zola's *La Débâcle*', *Dalhousie French Studies*, 76 (2006), 51-61 (p. 53).

and thing eaten'.²⁸ As the Franco-Prussian war intensifies, everything that can be found becomes food, and the Prussian army invade the spaces of the community:

En moins d'une heure, les épiceries, les boulangeries, les boucheries, les maisons bourgeoises elles-mêmes, ont eu leurs vitrines fracassées, leurs armoires pillées, leurs caves envahies et vidées... Chez le docteur, on ne s' imagine pas une chose pareille, j'en ai surpris un gros qui a mangé tout le savon. (*D*, V, 536)

In this example, the dizzying list of nouns and verbs rhetorically performs the systematic pillaging of shops and homes by the soldiers, who eat everything they can lay their hands on. Although the narrator tells readers, 'on ne s' imagine pas une chose pareille' (*D*, V, 536), the sheer detail of the text forces the reader to confront that specific, supposedly unimaginable reality.

Readers of *La Débâcle* must first digest the muddying of the lines between war and everyday human experience before coming to terms with the terrible loss of human life, and its transformation into waste matter: 'c' étaient les miettes de la boucherie, l' affreux déchet d' un lendemain de massacre, dans le morne lever de l' aube' (*D*, V, 720). Tropes of decline and regeneration – the sunrise after the massacre – are articulated through metaphors of leftover meat and waste. The coagulating food, flesh, and blood in *La Débâcle* is in part so troubling because it calls into question our notions of edibility, and shows soldiers pushing this to the extremes in order to survive. In one example, the bodily consequences of a revolting *marmite* of half-cooked horsemeat and beetroot are felt almost immediately by the soldiers (*D*, V, 765-66). The usually comforting 'pot-au-feu' is inedible and almost unreadable: the threat of dysentery and death from consuming rotting flesh and contaminated water destabilises the humanity of the soldiers, who struggle through the practicalities of preparing the soup only for their bodies to reject it from the first mouthful.

²⁸ Harrow, 'Food, Mud, Blood', p. 54.

Concerns with food adulteration are found in the strikingly different context of *Pot-Bouille*, where the Josserand family is described as scrimping on food in order to save for their weekly parties. Éléonore Josserand buys expensive flowers to hide ‘la médiocrité du beurre et la poussière ancienne des biscuits’ (*PB*, III, 54), and redcurrant syrup is made from watered-down jam (*PB*, III, 27), later declared ‘exquis’ by guests (*PB*, III, 54).²⁹ In a perversion of hospitality, although Éléonore may criticise her invitees ‘qui venaient chez elle uniquement pour s’emplir’ (*PB*, III, 56), she encourages her daughters to do the same when they are invited to parties. In a culture marked by appropriation and acquisition, Éléonore’s self-interest strips the food she serves her guests of any sense of generosity, or shared pleasure. Eating at parties is an important part of the Josserand’s alimentary economy, allowing them to save money on food, and Berthe and Hortense’s inability to eat at the allotted time, or within the expected rhythm, is presented as just one aspect of their social ineptitude: ‘elles avaient faim, elles en étaient malades’ (*PB*, III, 26). The metonymic coding of their physical hunger as an illness pre-empts the other forms of ‘malady’ which ail the Josserand women, including social awkwardness, vanity, adultery, and financial incompetence.

The literal and metaphorical ‘hunger’ of the Josserand women is emphasised from the beginning of the novel, where Berthe and Hortense break into the text with an exclamation of their hunger: “‘Alors, on va se coucher?’” demanda Hortense. “‘Moi, j’ai faim.’” (*PB*, III, 25). Berthe’s response, “‘Oh! Et moi donc! [...] Je crève.’” (*PB*, III, 26) echoes the exclamatory

²⁹ These examples of adulteration also link to wider contemporaneous discourses around food adulteration. See Marni Reva Kessler, *Discomfort Food: The Culinary Imagination in Late Nineteenth-Century French Art* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2021), pp. xxii, and Chapter 2, ‘Clarifying and Compounding Antoine Vollon’s *Mound of Butter*’, pp. 47-94. Kessler explores various ways in which butter and other milk products were deliberately degraded in order to extend their shelf life. This attitude towards food seems to reflect bourgeois attitudes towards marriage, sex, and the family, with concerns around adulteration feeding into the theme of adultery. While Kessler’s work explores how food is freighted with memory and nostalgia, food also holds prospective potential in nineteenth-century art and literature, speaking to questions and anxieties around food sourcing and waste which remain pertinent today.

nature of her sister's question, with the verb 'crever' holding particular significance in a novel concerned with the implications of various social, erotic, and moral 'burstings'.³⁰ The food Berthe and Hortense find in the kitchen is a mixture of leftovers: Hortense picks meat from a rabbit bone and Berthe dips crusts into redcurrant syrup mixed with water. This evening snack is distinguished not only by its insubstantial nature, but also by the way it is eaten: the girls are half-dressed, warming up in front of a lukewarm stove, listening to their dysfunctional parents argue over money and marriage:

Elles mangeaient toujours, leur camisole tombée des épaules, frottant doucement leur peau nue contre la faïence tiède du poêle; et elles étaient charmantes de jeunesse, dans ce débraillé, avec leur faim goulue et leurs yeux gros de sommeil. (*PB*, III, 33)

This practice of eating, far removed from the typical meal eaten around a table, codes the girls as unmarriageable in two distinguishable traits. Firstly, for all their unripe 'peau nue' is 'charmante', it is too youthful, too naïve to be desirable. Secondly, there is a threatening undertone to their insatiable appetites: the fact they are always eating and that their 'faim goulue', recalls the mine in *Germinal*, figured cynically with 'un air mauvais de bête goulue' (*G*, III, 1135) hints at their disturbance of bourgeois social norms.

The literal hunger of Berthe and Hortense at the beginning of *Pot-Bouille* morphs into social, erotic, and financial hunger as the text progresses. The relative scarcity of their childhood, combined with their mother's insistence of the value of material goods, fuels Berthe's hunger for luxury. In Chapter 12, Berthe's desire for expensive possessions is depicted as 'un arriéré de faim amassée', compensating for 'sa jeunesse nécessiteuse chez ses parents, des basses viandes mangées sans beurre pour acheter des bottines' (*PB*, III, 239). The sight of gastronomic plenty – 'un lapin, un gigot, des choux-fleurs' (*PB*, III, 240) – bought to

³⁰ The significance of the verb 'crever' can be traced throughout the text. M. Jossérand suffers from 'le cœur crevé' (*PB*, III, 138) when Saturnin cannot attend Berthe's wedding, pre-empting the blood clot which kills him shortly after the discovery of Berthe's adultery.

show off to her parents, becomes the focus of conflict between Auguste and Berthe, who find a repetition of the Josserand's arguments around money and status in their own marriage, leading to Berthe seeking refuge in adultery. The push and pull between exterior and interior motives has been explored extensively by Marcus who notes that, in the adultery scene, Berthe's bad behaviour is epitomised by her violent attempt to eject herself from the apartment block.³¹ While removing herself from the *immeuble* would be a dangerous act of exteriorisation for Berthe, and indeed for any woman removing herself from the marital home, it is ironically the act of adultery, with the bedroom door locked, which keeps Berthe behind closed doors.

Although *Pot-Bouille* is set in the urban context of Paris and *La Terre* in the rural Beauce, there are similarities to be found in the tracking of anxieties around food sourcing and preparation, and the balance between scarcity and plenty. In *La Terre*, Zola is attuned to the way in which in the Beauce, 'cette terre du blé' (*T*, IV, 368), food supply changes with the seasons.³² In his preparatory notes for the novel, he is motivated (as in *Germinal*) to include 'ce qu'ils boivent, ce qu'ils mangent, les vêtements, les meubles, l'intérieur des maisons. Les propres et les sales'.³³ Although Zola's research on food in the Beauce does not reach the same level of detail as the 'Plats de mineurs' for *Germinal*, food details are present throughout the text. Early in the novel we learn how food is rationed, with every morsel accounted for: 'on pèse le pain, les légumes, la viande' (*T*, IV, 388). However, during the summer working in the wheat fields, the workers eat five meals a day. At this point in the novel, there is a glorification of the abundance of food, where bodies must be fed in order to keep up the pace of the harvest:

³¹ Marcus, *Apartment Stories*, p. 175.

³² In his notes for *La Terre*, Zola writes, 'La Beauce n'est belle qu'en mai et juin, toute verte; [...]. Mais, après la moisson, abominable', *La Fabrique des Rougon-Macquart: édition des dossiers préparatoires*, VI:2, ed. by Colette Becker and Véronique Lavielle (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2013), p. 1173.

³³ Zola, in *La Fabrique des Rougon-Macquart*, VI:2, p. 1505.

Entre ces deux repas, il y en avait trois autres, le pain et le fromage du déjeuner, la seconde soupe de midi, l'émiettée au lait du goûter: en tout, cinq, des repas copieux, arrosés de cidre et de vin, car les moissonneurs, qui travaillent dur, sont exigeants. (*T*, IV, 564)

In this example, where the use of the present tense implies a certain documentary ambition, Zola emphasises the steady, hearty fare eaten during the working season, appealing to an idealistic narrative of agricultural labour as healthily simple, where days spent in the fields are rewarded with an abundance of food and drink. There is also a sense of political tension, suggested by the adjective 'exigeant', as we learn that the harvesters demand their fill. In this way, Zola's narrative of abundance is troubled by a sense of excess; in the end of season meal, an indulgence in rich alcohol and meat results in sexual fantasy and lust (*T*, IV, 577).³⁴

I will briefly reflect on one more example which shows Zola's pervasive interest in 'appétit', and its multiple implications for his novels of the Second Empire. In *La Curée*, a novel in which financial and commercial appetites drive the motor of the plot, Hausmannisation is described as 'bon pour mettre le public en appétit' (*C*, I, 389), with workers profiting from this construction: 'Paris haché à coups de sabre, les veines ouvertes, nourrissant cent mille terrassiers et maçons' (*C*, I, 389). The metaphors of food in this example shows how easily the lexicon of food processes such as chopping and feeding can slip into domains other than the culinary, and also how food, work, and waste merge together as the workers feed on the remains of ancient Paris. This chapter has drawn on a sample of food instances from several *Rougon-Macquart* novels, pointing to the rich metaphorical

³⁴ I explore the Ducasse festival in *Germinal* (Part 3, Chapter 2) in Chapter II of this thesis. This example offers a similar sense of troubling excess: the rabbit meat is too rich for the miners to digest and drunken revelry is the order of the day. Claire White discusses the contradictions inherent in these festivities, where 'the prospect of political organisation [is] [...] drowned out by this débordement of popular pleasure', *Work and Leisure in Late Nineteenth-Century French Literature and Visual Culture*, p. 70. In *La Terre*, although there is a similar sense of carnivalesque pleasure, the workers have already made their demands for food.

implications of food for Zola's plot. Building on critics such as Tony Tanner and Nicholas White who have signalled the relationship between culinary and literary modes of consumption in the novel of adultery, my focus on the link between food and adultery in *Pot-Bouille* reveals the movement between these two themes. Sexual and gastronomic appetites are dulled and intensified along gendered lines: while Campardon in *Pot-Bouille* finds himself 'heureux et satisfait dans tous ses appétits' (*PB*, III, 179) when his mistress moves in, for Gasparine, her movement into the domestic space of the *immeuble* leaves her with an 'estomac rétréci' (*PB*, III, 274). Although Octave's seemingly straightforward desire for economic and sexual fulfilment drives the plot of the novel, the complex desires of women such as Berthe Josserrand form much of its intrigue. Her hunger for social status, material goods, and financial security is coupled with a desire for love, tenderness, and care. While for Octave, their adultery is merely a 'bêtise' (*PB*, III, 270), Berthe's revelation that adultery does not hold the potential for escapism she once imagined is articulated alongside the image of rotting food. As I have argued in this chapter, food is invoked both materially and metaphorically across the *Rougon-Macquart*, and produces in characters (and readers) feelings ranging from mild unease to sheer revulsion. In my next chapter, I will explore Zola's narrative investment in the materiality of food, and the social and corporeal implications for his characters in *Germinal*, a novel freighted with discourse around food.

Chapter II

Food and Work in *Germinal*

Close readers of *Germinal* (1885) find themselves steeped in references to food. From the beetroot fields which border Montsou, to the smell of fried onion which seeps out of the miners' kitchens, to numerous lexical references to mouths, hunger, digestion, swallowing, and gluttony, food connects mine to home, home to family, and family to community in a complex web of exchange. Food is sustenance for the hard manual labour in the mine, but it is also social and recreational, affording the mining communities brief moments of leisure from their highly regulated working day.¹ Indeed, two options for alternative titles for *Germinal* considered by Zola, *L'Assiette au beurre* and *Les Affamés*, directly invoke the culinary and suggest how food is of principal importance for the author in the crafting of this novel.² In this chapter, I will explore how throughout *Germinal*, the lexicon of food and eating spills into descriptions of work, sex and family life. The lexical traffic between food and hunger and bodily and economic exchange works in both directions, connecting the extended metaphor of the mine, Le Voreux, with the everyday lives of the people in Montsou. Early in the novel, the description of the mine merges myth, metonymy, and metaphor:

Pendant une demi-heure, le puits en dévora de la sorte, d'une gueule plus ou moins gloutonne, selon la profondeur de l'accrochage où ils descendaient, mais sans un arrêt, toujours affamé, de boyaux géants capables de digérer un peuple. (*G*, III, 1154)

¹ Claire White draws attention to the question of 'workers at play' in the *Rougon-Macquart*, suggesting that 'from a trip to the Louvre to a Sunday jaunt into the Parisian suburbs, those brief excursions outside of the high capitalist workplace lend the plot of modern labour certain anecdotal or episodic possibilities', *Work and Leisure in Late Nineteenth-Century French Literature and Visual Culture*, p. 47. White's argument has implications for my reading of food in Zola's novel of work, *Germinal*, where food is integral to both leisure (consumption) and work (production).

² Henri Mitterand, 'Ideology and Myth: *Germinal* and the Fantasies of Revolt', in *Critical Essays on Emile Zola*, ed. by David Baguely (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1986), pp. 124-30 (p. 128).

Here, the discourses of food, work and consumption frequently collapse into one another. The mine and, as an extension, the mine owners are imagined as a system which devours, greedily and with an insatiable hunger, its never-ending food supply, the miners themselves, who are described on multiple occasions as ‘la viande’.³ The tensions created by the capitalist system of mineral extraction, insatiably consuming and regurgitating the workers, are brought into the domain of the domestic through language which recalls the everyday lives of the miners, where there are always too many mouths to feed and hunger is oppressive and constant. It also hints at hunger in a metaphorical sense, suggesting anger towards injustice (*G*, III, 1476), a desire for improved working conditions (*G*, III, 1338), and a collective corporeal and social aspiration to take action (*G*, III, 1383).⁴

Throughout *Germinal*, the metonymic and metaphorical force of Zola’s language consistently chimes with vocabulary of hunger, food, and consumption. In this chapter I offer a reading of food in *Germinal* which intersects with both class and gender, considering food not only as fuel for work, but as an important and at times creative form of work itself, particularly for Zola’s female characters. I explore how what I call La Maheude and Catherine Maheude’s ‘food work’ establishes them as builders of home and community, providers of nourishment, and as setters of domestic rhythms. Informed by the work of Michel de Certeau and Luce Giard, I argue that La Maheude’s sourcing and preparation of

³ For example, ‘un ordre partait du porte-voix, un beuglement sourd et indistinct, pendant qu’on tirait quatre fois la corde du signal d’en bas, “sonnant à la viande”’ (*G*, III, 1153); ‘on tira cinq fois le signal, sonnant à la grosse viande’ (*G*, III, 1184); ‘enfin, les chargeurs sonnèrent à la viande’ (*G*, III, 1500) and, at the very end of the novel as La Maheude goes down the mine, ‘on tira la corde du signal pour taper à la viande’ (*G*, III, 1588). In each of these examples, Zola’s use of metonym links the miners to the food they can barely afford to eat. The repetition of this metonym at several moments in the novel underscores the repetitive nature of the miners’ work, as well as the circularity of the novel.

⁴ The various interpretations of this quotation resonate with Larry Duffy’s argument which views *Germinal* as ‘the novel of accumulation in which Zola deploys digestive metaphor most powerfully’. Duffy also reflects on the link between digestive and literary metaphors, linking Étienne’s metaphorical poor digestion of the political magazines and pamphlets he has read, and his subsequent failure to bring the strike to fruition, ‘Textual (In)Digestions in Flaubert, Zola and Huysmans’, p. 186.

food in *Germinal* works as ‘bricolage’, as she makes do with what is at hand, which is both practical, and affords a certain amount of pleasure and creativity.⁵ I then look closely at rituals around eating in the mine, and consider how these contribute to Zola’s wider vision for *Germinal*. Through a short comparison with Zola’s Parisian novel of retail work, *Au Bonheur des Dames* (1883), I will explore how discourse around food in the context of work relates to questions of community, leisure, and commercial expansion.

As a writer, Zola was preoccupied by work. Susan Harrow argues that the *Rougon-Macquart* portrays ‘bodies at work’ in diverse spaces – the land, the theatre, the mine, the railway track, the battlefield – all informed by the novelist’s meticulous on-the-ground research.⁶ Harrow connects Zola’s epistolary reflections on the rhythms of his own writing to his portrayal of work in *L’Assommoir* (1877) and *Germinal*, where we see Zola engaged with ‘a related culture of rotas, shifts, work periods, timetables, and seasons, that conjures up the institutionalization of time in military, religious, commercial, agrarian, community, and personal contexts’.⁷ In *Germinal*, the narrator is alert to the effect which shift work has on family rhythms. La Maheude states the rarity of the family eating together: ‘jamais on ne parvenait à faire ensemble l’unique repas où l’on aurait pu être tous autour de la table’ (*G*, III, 1234), with the regulated shift pattern of the mine determining the ‘food work’ of La Maheude and other women in the *coron*, whose role it is to prepare food according to these timings and the expectations and constraints they entail. In the Maheu household, the table is always set: ‘la table restait mise du matin au soir, toujours il y en avait un là, avalant sa portion, au hasard des exigences du travail’ (*G*, III, 1226-27), emphasising a dynamic of movement and flux, and of solitary, hurried eating as opposed to convivial sharing.⁸ In this

⁵ Luce Giard in *L’Invention du quotidien*, p. 216.

⁶ Harrow, *The Body Modern*, pp. 208-09.

⁷ Harrow, ‘Worlds of Work and the Work of Words: Zola’, p. 210.

⁸ Henri Mitterrand notes that in *Germinal*, the bourgeois home has no such indicators of time, as the mine owners are not tied to the same economic constraints as the miners. See Mitterrand, ‘Le Roman

way, eating at home is not a moment of pure leisure, since its timings are directed by the pressures of work.

Claire White's exploration of the acute relationship between work and leisure in *Germinal*, the regulation of time, and 'l'inquiétude du lendemain' (*G*, III, 1269) exposes what she terms 'the contradictory nature of the worker's free time' in supposed moments of leisure such as the Montsou fair or the 'routinised sexual enjoyment' between the Maheu couple.⁹ To my mind, it is telling that these two examples are charged with culinary metaphor, which heightens the tensions between work and leisure invoked by White. White's analysis of *Germinal* highlights the omnipresence of work for Zola's miners, and the casual slippage between work and leisure which occurs throughout the novel. The pleasures of the Montsou fair are marred by intoxication and indigestion: rabbit is enjoyed, but poorly digested,¹⁰ and references to liquids – 'tout y passa, il ne resta qu'un morceau de bouilli pour le soir' (*G*, III, 1261) and the 'mer montante de bière' (*G*, III, 1271) – pre-empt the rising tide of water which kills Chaval and Catherine. For Lawrence Schehr, the 'cuisine de pauvre' presented in *Germinal* 'borders on chaos, with disorder and liquidity replacing sustenance [and] solidity':¹¹ watered-down coffee, vermicelli, soup, and ratatouille never quite provide the sustenance needed. In a household where food is scarce, Maheu's after-dinner sexual pleasure is described as 'un dessert qui ne coûtait rien' (*G*, III, 1232), a phrase which metonymically describes La Maheude's body as the food she strives to provide. As White points out,

et ses "territoires": l'espace privé dans *Germinal*, *Revue d'histoire littéraire de la France*, 85 (1985), 412-26, (p. 419). The exclusion of the working classes from familial ritual is keenly felt in *Germinal*, where Maheu's body clock aligns with the rhythm of his labour, rather than family meals. In a similar vein, Sharon Marcus has written on the way the bourgeois characters in *Pot-Bouille* deny the working-class tenants access to a familial interior, *Apartment Stories*, p. 176.

⁹ White, *Work and Leisure in Late Nineteenth-Century French Literature and Visual Culture*, p. 70.

¹⁰ The full quotation is: 'C'était bon, la viande; mais ils la digéraient mal, ils en voyaient trop rarement' (*G*, III, 1261). The irony in this quotation is made clear later in the novel, when Alzire dies of hunger, and the doctor states a lack of meat as the cause of illness and death, 'c'est de la viande qu'il faut pour vous guérir', (*G*, III, 1478).

¹¹ Schehr, 'Deipnomachy, or Cooking with Zola', p. 341.

however, this free pleasure is not without its potential constraints, and is marred by the possibility of unwanted children.¹²

Henri Mitterand describes the Maheu family home as ‘la cellule nourricière’, a space which generates the energy to work, and also to revolt.¹³ The kitchen is at the centre of this space and it is here that La Maheude makes nutritional sacrifices, forgoing her portion to keep her children and husband well-fed. Throughout *Germinal*, La Maheude embodies the everyday anxieties felt by the mother-provider.¹⁴ Alongside this, the novel gives a keen sense of La Maheude’s pragmatism, and the specific knowledge around food provision and domesticity which she holds. For La Maheude and her eldest daughter Catherine, their food economies are sustained and supported through innovative and carefully thought out ritualized practices. Luce Giard, acknowledging the unpaid nature of women’s domestic work in France, both historically and in her twentieth-century context, articulates the creative and even meditative aspect of food preparation. Giard sees these repeated acts of domesticity as testimony to the patience and stoicism of women, ‘femmes très patientes qui répètent indéfiniment les mêmes gestes’,¹⁵ a sentiment which recalls the narrative characterisation of La Maheude and the description of her everyday activities.

Food becomes a way for La Maheude to evade and thus challenge notions of sacrificial motherhood and display resourcefulness and resilience in the face of a complex domestic situation. In the first two chapters of Part 2 of the novel, Zola builds the structural fabric of his text in a way which invites the reader to ‘feel with’ La Maheude in her quotidian struggle to source a meal. These two chapters work to present contrasting visions of food at

¹² White, *Work and Leisure in Late Nineteenth-Century French Literature and Visual Culture*, p. 71.

¹³ Mitterand, ‘Le Roman et ses “territoires”’: l’espace privé dans *Germinal*’, p. 424.

¹⁴ David Bagueley notes that La Maheude’s first name, Constance, denotes stoicism and presence: she is the character who remains present throughout the novel. See Bagueley, ‘*Germinal*: the Gathering Storm’ in *The Cambridge Companion to Zola*, ed. by Brian Nelson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 137-51 (p. 144).

¹⁵ Giard, *L’Invention du quotidien*, p. 225.

home, and the work required to ‘faire-la-cuisine’ in extreme poverty and adversity. In Part 2, Chapter 1, Zola depicts the abundant plenty of the Grégoire kitchen, where ‘des provisions débordaient des râteliers et des armoires’ (*G*, III, 1195). In contrast to the empty shelves of the Maheu household, Mme Grégoire’s privilege allows her to dream of the brioche she will order her daughter Cécile for breakfast from the warmth of her bed. The surprise brioche remains present in the narrative for approximately five pages before Cécile actually begins to eat it. The narrative function of the brioche is multiple: its appearances punctuate the rhythm of the chapter, suggesting a flow of time and marking interactions between characters. To read in detail here is to uncover a complex economy of associations: the language of food and hunger connects the evocation of economic success, abject poverty, gender and bodily functions and senses. Beginning as a smell early in the chapter, the brioche morphs from an idea generated by Mme Grégoire into a material object formed by the hands of her maids, Mélanie and Honorine.¹⁶ Although the narrator informs the reader that ‘on ne parla longtemp que de la brioche’ (*G*, III, 1200), its presence, like the appearance of its primary consumer, Cécile, is delayed. Instead, the chapter is punctuated by a detailed description of the economic history of the Grégoire family, making explicit the link between luxurious food, domestic comfort, and the capitalist workplace.

While the image of the family breakfast table is disrupted by the story of the Grégoire’s economic exploitation of the working classes, the lexicon in the interruption (‘nourrir’, ‘engraisser’, ‘gourmande’, ‘affamés’, ‘manger’, ‘goûter’) serves to connect the two subjects. The inanimate brioche and the reverie it induces in readers immersed in Zola’s

¹⁶ Schehr references the brioche in his article on *Germinal*: ‘For the rich, food, easily acquired and consumed, has a surface value of sustenance, but its interest does not lie there. Rather, it is in the surplus value of taste, rareness, and exquisite flavour; a brioche instead of ordinary, daily bread brings about no revolutionary thoughts; even the servants share the pleasure of those sated with food and power’, ‘Deipnomachy, or Cooking with Zola’, p. 343. I read Mélanie and Honorine’s joy at producing the brioche as contributing to the sense of awe the brioche provides for the Grégoire family. This relationship between servant and employer contrasts with *Pot-Bouille*, where the maids are scornful towards their bourgeois employers.

sensory writing is freighted with narrative meaning, which is only reinforced by the portrayal of bourgeois prosperity the Grégoire family represent. The narrative stress is on order and calm, emphasising the strategically planned acquisition of material comforts: ‘c’était une existence réglée, les quarante mille francs mangés sans bruit’ (*G*, III, 1199). ‘Mangés’ here is not the voracious spending seen in *Nana* (1880) but a steadier, more controlled spending. Monsieur Grégoire affirms that the future of the mines will lead to guaranteed food security in the future, ‘les enfants des enfants de Cécile en tireront encore leur pain blanc’ (*G*, III, 1202).¹⁷ The narrative break here reminds readers that everything in *Germinal* is determined by systems of labour and work, including the food on the table.¹⁸ The interruption of La Maheude at the end of the chapter reinforces the connection between economic security and food provision; unlike Cécile, the Maheu children do not benefit from this individualist system and are forced to scrape together a meagre existence from what is leftover. In this instance, the brioche serves to connect Mme Grégoire to her servants and the Maheu family, by the action of giving away the rest of the brioche to Lénore and Henri. While the brioche brings a moment of familial *repos* to the Grégoire household, La Maheude scolds Lénore and Henri for eating it on the way home. A seemingly straightforward action of purported generosity by Mme Grégoire results in conflict for the Maheu family, for whom food is primarily for sustenance, rather than enjoyment, and for whom everything is carefully counted and shared.

At the beginning of Part 2, Chapter 2, the narrator tracks backwards in time and space to that morning, into La Maheude’s own domestic space, characterized by empty cupboards and a lack of provisions, in stark contrast to the Grégoire home already described in rich

¹⁷ Here, ‘pain blanc’ works metaphorically to describe a better life, filled with economic security, and also metonymically to invoke the clean, white, soft skins of those who are sheltered from physical work and adverse material conditions.

¹⁸ Henri Mitterand writes, ‘En effet, tout, dans *Germinal*, est déterminé par des fatalités économiques, par des choix et des engagements sociaux et en fin de compte politiques’, *Zola, L’Histoire et la fiction* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1990), p. 194.

detail. Schehr writes about the functions of a flashback such as this in the Realist narrative, suggesting its dual function as both a logical backstop to the current situation and as an expectational informer of the present.¹⁹ In this way, Zola's use of analepsis works to immerse the reader in the comfortable world of the Grégoire family, before returning to the harsh reality of life for the miners in Montsou. In an example of the monetary shrewdness required to provide for a large family in times of hardship, La Maheude plans in meticulous detail how she will spend the loan she has not yet secured:

Elle, tout en marchant, dépensait déjà les cent sous: d'abord du pain, puis du café; ensuite, un quart de beurre, un boisseau de pommes de terre, pour la soupe du matin et la ratatouille du soir; enfin, peut-être un peu de fromage de cochon, car le père avait besoin de viande. (*G*, III, 1209)

In this quotation, the narrative performs the permanent process of evaluation and adaptation which La Maheude adopts, where necessities such as bread and coffee come before luxuries such as meat or offal.²⁰ The adumbration of food items appears as a stream of consciousness episode, where we gain an insight into La Maheude's train of thought. Although La Maheude does not work in the mine, in this example, the all-encompassing nature of La Maheude's 'food work' is emphasised: it is not only the preparation of food which she is responsible for here, but also the planning and sourcing. For readers of *L'Invention du quotidien*, to focus on these everyday food economies is to bring value to the often forgotten work carried out by generations of French women.²¹ The high degree of ritualization and affective investment involved in cooking, as emphasised by Giard, can be found in the repeated mention of the daily ritual of soup preparation in Part 2, Chapters 2 and 3 of *Germinal*, where its cooking is

¹⁹ Lawrence Schehr, *Subversions of Verisimilitude: Reading Narrative from Balzac to Sartre* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2009), p. 70.

²⁰ This list is entirely based on Zola's observations of the diets of the mining community in Anzin. See 'Plats de mineurs', in *La Fabrique des Rougon-Macquart*, V, pp. 926-27.

²¹ Giard, *L'Invention du quotidien*, pp. 224-25.

delayed, forgotten then remembered in a process of enumeration. The soup's presence in the text connects not only the Maheu family, but also the wider mining community, for whom this ritual of production and consumption is a sustaining force of everyday existence.

The relief felt by La Maheude when she does secure another loan from Maigrat is shared by an empathetic reader; although there is an awareness that this loan is merely a momentary stopgap, the illusion of plenty suggested by the lists of food and the laden table is alluring for both characters and readers. The assurance of food for the next couple of days gives La Maheude a brief release from the stresses of food provision, affording her space to engage with her children and her neighbours, sharing coffee and stories. In a moment of lightness in the novel, Zola describes Maheu arriving back from the mine, seeing the table laden with parcels: 'Comment la femme aurait-elle fait? [...] Il riait d'aise' (*G*, III, 1227). In this example of *style indirect libre* we gain a sense of both the narrator's and the fictional character's wonderment at his wife's achievement as well as a broader attitude towards women and domestic provision found in the novel.²² Despite knowledge of its temporary nature, La Maheude delights in recounting to her husband the details of her shopping: 'sept sous de fromage de cochon, dix-huit sous de pommes de terre, il me reste trois francs soixante-quinze pour un ragout et un pot-au-feu... Hein? je crois que je n'ai pas perdu ma matinée' (*G*, III, 1231). Here, the list of primary ingredients and meals keeps La Maheude firmly attached to her status as working-class mother: her food is practical and filling, with every morsel accounted for. La Maheude's meticulous planning and attention to detail stem from a desire to provide her family with the relative luxury of sharing a well-made meal. The

²² In *Nana*, *style indirect libre* shows Nana mounting a fierce defence of her parents and expressing nostalgia towards her childhood: 'on aurait beau lui apporter des fortunes, lui bâtir des palais, elle regretterait toujours l'époque où elle croquait des pommes' (*N*, II, 1366). This moment articulates a desire to relive a simpler moment, and to reconnect with the family and community of *L'Assommoir*; the use of the plural nouns 'palais' and 'fortunes' is a clear critique of excess. Nana's childhood poverty, metonymically described in terms of the food she used to eat, remains an important part of her character, evident in her interactions with the people around her.

delight in this provisional triumph is intense and shared, with La Maheude once more deploying strategy and intelligence, and experiencing a sense of satisfaction in her ability to provide.²³

Alongside La Maheude, Catherine is also an important builder of home and community, sharing the same qualities of practicality and resourcefulness as her mother. Catherine works as the bridge between home and work, and her ‘food work’ operates as an example of Zola’s preoccupation with food in the workplace. Early in the novel, Catherine is described preparing lunch before she and her family leave for work in the mines. The rhythm of this preparation is well-practised and adapts, as Giard describes in *L’Invention du quotidien*, to the food available at the time, in this case a small amount of *fromage blanc* and butter. Thanks to Catherine’s habitual action in the mornings, ‘bientôt, les quatre briquets furent en rang sur la table, répartis avec une sévère justice, depuis le gros du père jusqu’au petit de Jeanlin’ (*G*, III, 1149). Catherine’s considered rationale here ensures that everyone is fed according to their needs, with nothing going to waste. The militaristic sense of rationing – ‘répartis’ – and judicial language – ‘une sévère justice’ – demonstrates Catherine’s regulatory attitude towards food, which is clearly necessary in the difficult economic circumstances. Although the notion of severity implies an excess of restraint or perhaps a rule too strictly applied, like her mother, Catherine understands the complex economy of food provision and

²³ Another way in which La Maheude attempts to save her family from hunger is through taking in Étienne as a lodger: ‘elle semblait sauvée de la faim une fois encore’ (*G*, III, 1270). Aware of the imminent strike, La Maheude understands that her family will need supplementary income, even to obtain the scarce amount of food they were accessing before. Étienne may be the revolutionary hero of the novel, but he does not see the arrangement through the same lens of practical economy as La Maheude: his disappointment at the lack of meat, ‘il souffrait seulement de la rareté de la viande’ (*G*, III, 1274), suggests that he does not fully understand the economy of scarcity which La Maheude and her family face. Despite this, the benefits of living at the Maheu household are multiple for Étienne: he is closer to Catherine and he feels well looked after by La Maheude ‘il sentait autour de lui la propreté et les bons soins d’une femme’ (*G*, III, 1274). He also takes the opportunity of being closer to his comrades to rally support for the strike and deepen his understanding of the mining community. Indeed, the narrator suggests that sitting around the dinner table in the Maheu household, feeling well looked after, is the ideal moment for Étienne’s revolutionary ideas to be developed (*G*, III, 1274-80).

the daily challenges that this poses to the female domestic provider, and the logic and reason required to fulfil this role.

It is perhaps unsurprising that Catherine has learnt how to perform day-to-day miracles in the shadow of La Maheude. Her abilities nonetheless impress even her mother: ‘elle fut surprise de voir que Catherine, en préparant les briquets, avait fait le miracle d’en laisser gros comme une noix’ (*G*, III, 1205). The unspoken language of scarcity between mother and daughter means that Catherine has learnt to be careful in her preparation and can now perform food-related ‘miracles’, which even La Maheude finds remarkable. Catherine’s task of preparing the *briquet* is a routine, perhaps even banal, act of food preparation which does not provide the kind of creative outlet described by Giard. Yet, like the smell of fried onions or the watery coffee, this meagre sandwich is essential sustenance for the miners. It acts as a potent motif in the novel, becoming part of the miners’ collective corporeality and psychology.²⁴ At three points in the novel, the narrator describes how, lodged between the miners’ vest and shirt, the sandwich renders them hunchback: ‘le briquet faisait à chacun une bosse’ (*G*, III, 1151); ‘quelques-uns n’avaient pas fini leur briquet; et ce reste de pain, rapporté entre la chemise et la veste, les rendait bossus’ (*G*, III, 1188); ‘le briquet, logé entre la chemise et la veste, rendait bossu’ (*G*, III, 1582). The apparent transparency of Zola’s writing here is ambiguous: on the one hand, he gives the reader a Naturalist description of bodies at work, bodies which we can imagine in silhouette on the horizon. On the other hand, we know that it is not the *briquet* which really alters the bodies of the miners, but rather the

²⁴ The *briquet* takes on another meaning when we consider Marx’s foundational account of food and sustenance. Ruth Cruickshank writes that ‘food can be argued to be the very basis of Marxist theories of capital, since Marx argues that it is only when the subsistence needs for nourishment are fulfilled that capital can be generated’. See Cruickshank, *Leftovers: Eating, Drinking and Re-Thinking*, p. 14. In this way, the *briquet* is the fuel that allows the miners to be at work but also affords a brief moment of communal *repos*.

gruelling physicality of work in the mine.²⁵ Zola's pathos here looks prospectively to Elaine Scarry's observation that the body is extended and magnified through its contact with material objects which extend or transform it, particularly those related to work.²⁶ In this example, the *briquet* is more than just an abstract symbol, it is a material reminder of food as a precious source of nourishment, necessary for work, which they must protect and preserve. These examples also serve to reinforce the miners' status as a collective body, subject to a wider set of rigid economic and social structures: like the beetroot fields, the description of which open and close the novel, Zola's repetition of this image adds to the sense of circularity, as well as revealing some of the tensions in the text.

As well as impacting the corporeality of the miners, each mention of the *briquet* shows the importance of sharing food as a communal ritual, and the role of women such as Catherine in preparing the food. In the mines, eating the *briquet* is a material and symbolic ritual of everyday existence and we see Catherine explaining this to the uninitiated Étienne. During Étienne's first day in the mine, Catherine notices he is not eating and immediately offers to share her *briquet* in a gesture of spontaneous camaraderie, rather than packing the rest of it away to eat later: "“Tu ne manges pas?” demanda-t-elle, la bouche pleine, son briquet à la main" (G, III, 1170). Catherine makes light of Étienne's initial refusal, her familiar language and corporeal ease – ‘Déjà, elle avait rompu les tartines en deux’ (G, III, 1170) – surprising the awkward Étienne. Indeed, at the beginning of the novel Catherine operates fluidly in both the domestic sphere and the world of the mine, despite (or perhaps because of) her youth. This interaction foreshadows an important episode in the mine, where Catherine lifts Étienne's wagon back onto the tracks, rendering him speechless.²⁷ The

²⁵ See, for example, this description of Jeanlin: ‘il était si petit, les membres grêles, avec des articulations énormes, grossies par des scrofules’ (G, III, 1144-45).

²⁶ Elaine Scarry, ‘Work and the Body in Hardy and Other Nineteenth-Century Novelists’, *Representations*, 3 (1983), 90-123 (pp. 93-94).

²⁷ Harrow discusses this moment in *The Body Modern*, p. 215.

narrator is attentive to the bodies of the miners when eating their *briquet*, emphasising the routine discomfort of their habitual pose:

Puis, descendus de la taille, ils s'accroupirent, les coudes aux flancs, les fesses sur les talons, dans cette posture si habituelle aux mineurs, qu'ils la gardent même hors de la mine, sans éprouver le besoin d'un pavé ou d'une poutre pour s'asseoir. (*G*, III, 1169)

In this example, the miners' bodies create a complex representational figure in the text, residing in a shape which is both physically unstable and habitually ingrained. Although the *briquet* may provide the necessary sustenance for the miners, and a brief moment of rest while at work, Zola charges this seemingly simple act of eating with a sense of foreboding. The nourishing possibility of food is tempered with a sense of dread or danger, as we learn that the *briquets* 'chargeaient de plomb l'estomac' (*G*, III, 1174).

It is worth comparing the depiction of the miners eating at work in *Germinal* with the Parisian context of *Au Bonheur des Dames*, where this imbuing of leisure time with the shadow of work is present in descriptions of the workers' canteen, a space filled with discussion of leisure:

Beaucoup, en avalant de grosses bouchées, lisaient un journal, plié et tenu debout contre leur bouteille. D'autres, quand leur première faim était satisfaite, causaient bruyamment, revenaient aux éternels sujets de la mauvaise nourriture, de l'argent gagné, de ce qu'ils avaient fait, le dimanche précédent, et de ce qu'ils feraient, l'autre dimanche. (*ABD*, III, 545)

Here, the workers gain common ground in their discussions of Sunday leisure, and bad food at work. The snatched moments of leisure within the working day – reading a newspaper, or talking to colleagues – take place around food and are steeped in rhythmic regularity. The canteen, much like the *briquet* in *Germinal*, becomes an important material and social aspect

of the rhythm of the workday, offering a moment of *repos* important to the collective identity of the worker. However, Octave Mouret's insistence that his workers must have 'une nourriture saine et abondante' (*ABD*, III, 432) results in pressured working conditions for the chefs, which matches the larger dystopia of the department store. There are machine-like learnt processes, as well as rigour, speed, and effectiveness in the work of the canteen chef: 'sans relâche, le cuisinier piquait des morceaux et les arrosait de sauce, avec le mouvement rapide et rythmique d'une horloge bien réglée' (*ABD*, III, 544). Contrary to La Maheude's 'food work', which adapts to the food available at the time and offers brief moments of creativity, for the canteen workers in *Au Bonheur des Dames*, their work is as regulated as that of the miners.

Although Denise has been successful in improving culinary standards for the shop workers, this is combined with an almost grotesque phenomenological expansion of the kitchens. The sinks are described as 'larges comme des piscines', the potatoes are peeled by a machine which functions with 'un tic-tac de moulin' and two small carts are filled with lettuce (*ABD*, III, 663). There is something sickening in the scale of these kitchens, where objects such as grills, saucepans, and stew pots are magnified to threatening proportions, overpowering the workers: 'les colossales marmites que quatre hommes n'auraient pu soulever' (*ABD*, III, 663). In Zola's novel of commercial expansion, the process of growing, cooking, and sharing food is transformed by automatisisation and the promise and the threat of technological innovation, which becomes a way of speeding up the process of feeding the workers. This tension between individual and industrialised food preparation, and between workers' rights and their practical implications, recalls one of Étienne's rallying speeches in *Germinal*, where he addresses the role the Republic has to play in keeping its people fed: 'Étienne, alors, parla de la République, qui donnerait du pain à tout le monde' (*G*, III, 1330). Although Étienne foregrounds food distribution as the key to an egalitarian society, the nature

of food sourcing and cooking as traditionally women's work means there is a gap not only between the mine owners and the mining community, but also between Étienne's rhetorical demands for bread and his understanding of the nuances of daily life in Montsou. It is the 'food work' of Zola's female characters in *Germinal* that navigates the complexities of domestic space and space of the mine and therefore offers an invaluable insight into the possibilities and pressures of sustaining life in both contexts. In the chapter which follows, I shift focus to the Parisian context of *Nana*, where although food may be more plentiful, it remains charged with rhetorical significance.

Chapter III

Food, Waste, and Mess in *Nana*

In the opening paragraphs of *La Fortune des Rougon* (1871), the narrator describes the enormous pear trees that border the Aire Saint-Mittre, a disused cemetery and intriguing ‘terrain vague’ (*FR*, I, 5) on the edge of Plassans.¹ These pear trees take the reader from a topographical and historical depiction of the Aire into the rhetorically suggestive: the huge pears are the product of soil made fertile by decomposing bodies, and their unnatural size – they are too big to be eaten – provokes disgust in the bourgeois households of Plassans, who leave the grotesque fruit to go to waste. Hauntingly abandoned and yet teeming with vitality and life, the Aire is a space where ‘la pourriture humaine fut mangée avidement par les fleurs et les fruits’ (*FR*, I, 6), one which provides physical and metaphorical nourishment for the social outcast. There, the urchin boys gorge themselves on the monstrous pears and travellers settle temporarily ‘mangeant des choses sans nom’ (*FR*, I, 8). If the stalls of food in *Le Ventre de Paris* (1873) are a gourmand’s paradise, then Zola’s representation of the alimentary in the Aire Saint-Mittre is a forager’s delight. The Aire’s resistance to the normative bourgeois order means that in this space, waste holds a productive, generative energy. Through using the Aire Saint-Mittre to open the *Rougon-Macquart*, Zola foregrounds waste as a significant theme of his novel cycle.

My reading of the Aire Saint-Mittre shows that a concern with waste and mess is not a by-product of Zola’s interest in themes such as gender, class, and the family, but rather an inaugural and enduring narrative preoccupation. In this chapter, I use the concepts of waste

¹ Both Naomi Schor and Susan Harrow have analysed Zola’s description of the Aire Saint-Mittre. Schor’s reading of the Aire prioritises myth, and sees the Aire as a metaphor for the French Revolution, *Zola’s Crowds* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), pp. 8-21. Harrow explores the Aire as a *mise en abyme* of Zola’s writing, and a visualisation of the social body. Harrow stresses the hybrid and paradoxical nature of the Aire, reading the Aire as a space defined by porosity, freedom, possibility, and desire, and as a place where alternative lives and transgressive practices can be pursued. See Harrow, *The Body Modern*, pp. 150-53.

and mess to reveal the role food plays in *Nana* (1880), a novel which explores waste in the context of Parisian high society, foregrounding questions of gender, desire, and class. David Trotter, in *Cooking with Mud: The Idea of Mess in Nineteenth-Century Art and Fiction*, defines waste-theory as related to systems and processes: waste is concerned with matter to be thrown away, and therefore remains in constant circulation.² For Trotter, mess, unlike waste, contains a creative potential, a dependence on chance and an awareness of contingency. For Trotter, Naturalism's preoccupation with systems and metaphors of waste, and its desire to provoke horror and disgust in the reader, both of which align with key elements of his 'waste-theory', does not preclude what he calls a 'smaller, but in some ways no less significant, investment in mess-theory'.³ In this chapter, I turn to explore how the language of food and eating intersects with wider themes of waste and mess, particularly in Zola's characterisation of *Nana*.

Critics such as Michel Serres, Jacques Noiray, Henri Mitterand, and Colette Becker have explored Zola's use of foundational metaphor in the *Rougon-Macquart*, for example the railway in *La Bête humaine* (1890), the *immeuble* in *Pot-Bouille* (1882), or the mine in *Germinal* (1885).⁴ Through these central metaphors, Zola highlights the inherent wastefulness of capitalist systems of social organisation and economic production. Brian

² Trotter, *Cooking with Mud*, pp. 1-32.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 199-200.

⁴ I use the term 'foundational metaphor' here to mean the central metaphors around which Zola's novels are constructed, which have been the focus of much critical interest. Henri Mitterand discusses Zola's use of metaphor and myth in *L'Histoire et la fiction*, pp. 9-10. Colette Becker uses the word 'machine' to describe these metaphors, arguing that they are 'doués d'une vie fantastique' and thus holds a phantasmagorical and mythic quality. For Becker, the novelist's recourse to symbol and myth sets his writing apart from his contemporaries, and paradoxically evidences his modernity, *Le Saut dans les étoiles*, pp. 221-24. Both Mitterand and Becker are building on work by Michel Serres, who first emphasised the metaphorical energy in Zola's writing in *Zola, Feux et signaux de brume* (Paris: Grasset, 1975) and Jacques Noiray, whose work focuses on the image of the machine in the French novel both broadly and with specific reference to Zola. See Noiray, *Zola, Le Romancier et la machine: l'image de la machine dans le roman français (1850-1900), vol. I, L'univers de Zola* (Paris: José Corti, 1981). While these central themes or structuring principles do generate metaphor, they are protean in nature and are also the locus of metonymic and documentary modes.

Nelson argues that Zola's depiction of the bourgeoisie is determined by 'the themes of dissipation and waste',⁵ seeing the use of waste in the *Rougon-Macquart* as a manifestation of Zola's own political opposition to Second Empire bourgeois society.⁶ For Nelson, the *Rougon-Macquart* depicts 'the breakdown of a society doomed to dissolution because of its reckless individualism and its unco-ordinated use of human energy'.⁷ For example in *Au Bonheur des Dames* (1883), Zola portrays the acceleration of the luxury goods market for the benefit of the individual, and the inevitability of waste which forms part of this. At the other end of the spectrum are novels such as *La Bête humaine* and *La Débâcle* (1892), where we see the catastrophic damage done by expressions of human endeavour and war which favour individualism, a lack of self-control, and corruption within the social order.⁸

The temporal setting of *Nana*, which coincides with the last three years of the Second Empire and precedes the beginning of a period of chaos and loss for France during the Franco-Prussian war, allows Nana's body to become a metaphor of national decline for a retrospective reader. Paradoxically, Nana's 'corrupting' body is coded as the cause, consequence and symbol of a degenerating society. On the one hand, the more she consumes men, money, and material objects, the more her body threatens and challenges the world around her. Yet the narrator is resolute in their desire to bring Nana's corrupting power into check. The cries of 'A Berlin!' (*N*, II, 1474-85) which coincide with Nana's death and close

⁵ Brian Nelson, *Zola and the Bourgeoisie. A Study of Themes and Techniques in Les Rougon-Macquart* (New Jersey: Barnes and Noble, 1983), p. 18.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

⁸ Zola's representations of waste connect prospectively with Georges Bataille's theory outlined in *La Part maudite*, whereby excess energy which cannot be absorbed within a system must be spent 'volontiers ou non, glorieusement ou sinon de façon catastrophique', *La Part maudite* (Paris: Minuit, 1967), p. 60. In this way, the death of soldiers in the Franco-Prussian war, or the exploitation of the mining community can be seen as 'catastrophic' wastage, a necessary evil of Second Empire development and expansion.

the novel, remind readers of the horrific waste, in the shape of some 140,000 French casualties in the Franco-Prussian war, represented by Zola in *La Débâcle*.⁹

In *Nana*, as critics such as Peter Brooks have argued, the protagonist's body exists as the central metaphor and as a site of material excess and disruption.¹⁰ The eponymous heroine's rise to fame and fortune leaves a trail of waste (food, money, men) in its wake, with her body acting as a figure for the wider body politic of the Second Empire. Throughout the novel, Zola experiments with tension: the guarantee of food produces a sense of boredom (*N*, 1357-58); sharing cake in bed becomes threatening and violent (*N*, II, 1294-95); and the extravagant bed designed as a monument to Nana's powerful sexuality is where she eventually dies of smallpox, her purulent, dissolving body reduced to mess. Although her eventual penetration of the Imperial Court and the excesses attached to this represents a heady ascent from her childhood as depicted in *L'Assommoir* (1877), both are marked by a lack of security.

Zola's preoccupation with the wastefulness of Second Empire society in a wider sense does not preclude an interest in the wastefulness of the individual. His preparatory notes for *Nana*'s character reference 'le gaspillage le plus effroyable' he associates with her,¹¹ and throughout the novel, *Nana* is coded in the language of unrestrained appetite and gluttony. She is repeatedly described as a 'gâcheuse', (*N*, II, 1309; 1350) and 'mangeuse' (*N*, II, 1118; 1350; 1393), and her spending is referred to as 'un gaspillage général' (*N*, II, 1433).¹²

⁹ For a detailed analysis of *Nana*'s role as a symbol of Second Empire society, embodying a social and political theme, see Valerie Minogue, 'Nana: The World, the Flesh and the Devil', in *The Cambridge Companion to Zola*, ed. by Brian Nelson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 121-36.

¹⁰ In his *Reading for The Plot*, Brooks describes *Nana* as 'Zola's most extraordinary engine', p. 46.

¹¹ *La Fabrique des Rougon-Macquart*, III, p. 417.

¹² This vocabulary is also used in *Pot-Bouille*, where Berthe is described as an 'enfant égoïste et gâcheur' (*PB*, III, 225), with an 'appétit d'argent, de toilette, de luxe gâché' (*PB*, III, 258). Both *Nana* and Berthe are female characters who actively disrupt the status-quo. Their ability to turn an inherently wasteful society to their advantage by using it to acquire money, status, and beautiful objects is what codes them as 'dangerous'. The word 'gâcheuse' in particular implies both waste and mess: on the one hand, 'gâcher' can be read as a synonym for 'gaspiller', and therefore suggests

Chapter 13 of *Nana* is where the reader gains the strongest sense of Nana's wasteful lifestyle, depicted as a product of her insatiable sexual and commercial appetites, as well as her transactional relationships, for example with Count Muffat.¹³ In several examples, the lexicon of food, money, and sex collapse into one another, and metaphor and metonymy collide: there are references to Nana's stable 'eating' 50,000 francs (*N*, II, 1434), Nana's voracious 'consumption' of land (*N*, II, 1455), and the financial ruin of Fauchery and Count Muffat, whose wife is resigned to eating Nana's 'leftovers' (*N*, II, 1465). In a description which looks forward to Bataille's invocation of luxury as a necessary use of excess energy, we read: 'Nana, en quelques mois, [...] mangea [les hommes] goulûment, les uns après les autres. Les besoins croissants de son luxe enrageaient ses appétits, elle nettoyait un homme d'un coup de dent' (*N*, II, 1454). In this example, Nana's desire is exponential, recalling the rapacious appetite of the mine in *Germinal* (similarly described as 'goulu'), with her luxurious lifestyle seeming to create, rather than satiate, a desire for more. At the same time, the rapidity implied by the phrase 'coup de dent' equates Nana's devouring of men with her consumption of foods such as radishes and pralines, easily demolished in one bite.

Zola's rhetoric of sexual, material, and gustatory appetites is consistently interwoven as Nana's body, money, and material possessions are simultaneously devoured and devouring:

material or energetic waste; on the other hand, it refers to a more subtle sense of sullyng or spoiling, which I will go onto discuss later in this chapter.

¹³ Nana's voracious consumption of material goods is part of a significant trend in nineteenth-century French fiction. In *Madame Bovary* (1856), Emma purchases things on the (mis)understanding that they will allow her to fulfil her dreams: 'elle voulut apprendre l'italien: elle acheta des dictionnaires, une grammaire, une provision de papier blanc' (*MB*, 405). Although the link between desire and material possession is present in *Nana*, Zola is attentive to the waste which is inherent in material consumption: for example, through illustrating the disgust Nana's maid Zoé feels towards this wastefulness, Zola is able to move beyond a portrait of bourgeois excess, and Nana's careless relationship to the objects she buys, to an intricate critique of consumer society.

L'hôtel semblait bâti sur un gouffre, les hommes avec leurs biens, leurs corps, jusqu'à leurs noms, s'y engloutissaient, sans laisser la trace d'un peu de poussière. [...] C'était, à l'office, un gaspillage effréné, un coulage féroce, qui éventrait les barriques de vin, qui roulait des notes enflées par trois ou quatre mains successives. [...] Mais ce qu'on perdait était pis encore, la nourriture de la veille jetée à la borne, un encombrement de provisions dont les domestiques se dégoûtaient, le sucre empoissant les verres, le gaz brûlant à pleins becs, jusqu'à faire sauter les murs; [...], dans une maison dévorée par tant de bouches. (*N*, II, 1433)

In this instance, we gain a sense of how, as Nana rises through the echelons of society, sums of money and objects lose their significance and interpretability: unpaid bills become confusing documents and merge into one another, food becomes indistinguishable from waste, and Nana's men become an indeterminate queue of bodies 'swallowed' by the house. In this example, the materiality of food waste provokes physical and moral disgust in Nana's maid, Zoé, and may provoke similar feelings in the reader. Questions of legibility raised in this quotation impact on reader experience as Nana once more seems to evade definite description. Zola's parasitic metaphor of the house 'dévorée par tant de bouches' undercuts any sense of pleasure to be taken from an abundance of food and drink, and contributes to the extended metaphor of Nana as a polluting presence in Paris. In this depiction of excess there is no sense of enjoyment to be taken from a full larder or a warm house, but rather agency passes into the 'encombrement' of material possessions and places a burden on the maids, who must contend with the physicality of the waste to be disposed of and the psychological confusion it provokes.

Zola's oscillation in this quotation between the materiality of waste and the metaphorical concerns with dissolving, devouring, and devoured bodies looks forward to Modernist concerns with waste and excess in a similar way to the image of the laden pear trees in the Aire Saint-Mittre. The image of 'la nourriture de la veille jetée à la borne' (*N*, II,

1433) anticipates the aftermath of one of Gatsby's parties in F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (1925), where crates of pulped oranges and lemons are left outside Gatsby's back door on a Monday morning. Here, Zola's aesthetics of crowds and solitude, excess and scarcity, consumption and waste, connect with Fitzgerald's modernism, in that both articulate the growing alienation of an industrialising society.

From the examples cited so far, it is clear that waste, whether material food waste or economic waste described using a language of food and consumption, is fundamental to Zola's characterisation of Nana as a symbol of social decline. In what follows, I argue that Nana's messy processes of eating reveal a discomfort with Second Empire society (articulated across the *Rougon-Macquart*), ranging from ambivalence to disgust. The first dinner party Nana hosts at her house, in Chapter 4 of the novel, is characterised by its 'manque de cérémonie' (*N*, II, 1171), suggesting the courtesan's preference for chance and contingency over bourgeois systems of organisation. Nana's hosting is charmingly messy, urging her guests into a line which 'ne put s'organiser' (*N*, II, 1171). The excessively small table, the lack of furniture, the fading light, and the mismatched glasses disrupt the usual order of a bourgeois dinner party. Nana's relaxed demeanour and disdain for social protocol contrast with the cultural and sartorial rigidity of the men she has invited, described 'en habit et en cravate blanche, [ils] étaient très corrects, avec leurs visages blêmes' (*N*, II, 1173). In this example, their pasty faces seem metonymically symptomatic of the bourgeois desire for stasis and control.¹⁴ Although few characters are eating, the narrator references several specific dishes including 'poulardes à la maréchale, des filets de sole sauce ravigote et des escalopes de foie gras' (*N*, II, 1175) and 'les assiettes des cèpes à l'italienne et des croustades

¹⁴ The rigidity of this dinner party contrasts with the predominantly feminine space, Chez Laure, in which Laure Piédefer's unconventional management of the restaurant works against strict social rules: Laure kisses each of her customers on the mouth, they sit 'mêlées au hasard des tables', and men are alienated 'sous le flot envahissant des jupes' (*N*, II, 1300).

d'ananas Pompadour' (*N*, II, 1181).¹⁵ Lavish narrative detail here is analogous with the chef's investment of time, skill, and quality ingredients and marks the gastronomic class to which Nana now belongs. The rich adumbration of prestigious dishes in this chapter serves to emphasise that the food at this dinner party is not served for its nourishing value, but rather for its visual, olfactory, and gustatory materialisation of luxurious excess. The ironic contrast between the richness of these dishes and the haphazard way they are served represents how bourgeois concerns with appearance, decorum, and power are destabilised by Nana's playfulness and creativity.

Ironically, Nana seems most comfortable when eating alone, descriptions of which occur throughout the novel. In Chapter 2, Nana is described as eating in order to dull her pre-performance nerves:

Cependant, Nana, qui disait avoir l'estomac dans les talons, se jetait sur des radis, qu'elle croquait sans pain. Madame Lerat, devenue cérémonieuse, ne voulut pas de radis; ça donnait la pituite. Puis, lorsque Zoé eut apporté des côtelettes, Nana chipota la viande, se contenta de sucer l'os. (*N*, II, 1128)

Despite the fact that Nana seems to be eating to calm bodily sensations of anxiety and nervousness, Mme Lerat's aversion to radishes associates them, and as an extension Nana, with disturbing, messy, and noisy bodily fluids. The association between Nana and disgust is furthered in her consumption of meat: rather than eating the meat Zoé brings her, she is content with sucking bones. The verb 'croquer' offers a sense of resistance, suggesting indiscriminate eating, and the crunching sound it evokes anticipates her eventual trail of

¹⁵ In his notes to the novel, Henri Mitterand notes this menu is a reproduction of a dinner given on 6 November 1878 by M. and Mme de Freycinet. Mitterand also includes Zola's sketch of Nana's dinner table, showing his careful consideration of seating (*N*, II, 1708-09). Robert Courtine also references Zola's use of this menu, interpreting it as evidence of the author's lack of culinary refinement. He writes, 'Zola n'aime que les nourritures vulgaires et n'aborde les richesses de table que pour étaler sa réussite', *Zola à table* (Paris: Laffont, 1978), p. 15. Courtine's comment occludes the more complex nature of Zola's relationship to food revealed in his correspondence.

destruction, and consumption of food and men. Although the verb ‘sucer’ is suggestive of adult sexuality, it also connects Nana to infant orality and, psychoanalytically speaking, this regression shows how Nana’s character remains beholden to idealised images of childhood and family community. The auralty of both verbs contributes to Zola’s sensory depiction of Nana as an all-encompassing presence in Paris.¹⁶ When Nana eats alone, she subsists primarily by what we may describe in contemporary terms as ‘grazing’, instead of eating meals at regular intervals at similar times each day. Not only does this work against the regularity of bourgeois mealtimes and cultural ‘order’, it is reminiscent of her childhood, expressing something of the precariousness of eating and the randomness of food availability in *L’Assommoir*. It also highlights an element of continuity in Nana’s character, despite her significant change in circumstance, and points to a ‘messy’ way of eating which differs from the bourgeois norm.

In contrast to the highly elaborate foodstuffs and formal dinner settings we see in the parts of the novel where Nana interacts with high society, these moments of eating alone are a source of pleasure and simplicity, unfettered by prescriptive social values. The crunch of the radishes appears at several points throughout the novel, often without the habitual bread, salt or butter. The simplicity of this snack contrasts with the rich flavour and craftsmanship required to produce Nana’s other favourite confectionary: pralines. If the radishes remind Nana of time spent in the countryside, then the exquisite pralines are a small taste of the more luxurious life she enjoys in Paris. As if to reinforce Nana’s disruptive potential as an essential part of her character, the language used to describe her eating barely changes as the novel

¹⁶ Aimée Boutin’s work opens up fresh vistas in sensory studies with regard to sound in Zola. Boutin’s work on *La Bête humaine* (1890) explores the slippage between representational and symbolic sounds, showing how we can read Zola’s novel as ‘a reflection on the threat of sensory overload brought on by modern technology’. See Boutin, ‘The Sound Crack in Émile Zola’s *La Bête humaine*’, *Nineteenth-Century French Studies*, 49 (2020), 50-66 (p. 51). To follow Boutin’s logic of the *fêlure* invoked by sound imagery (Boutin is building on Deleuze), Nana’s crunching and sucking on food signal a physical breakdown of material foods, as well as a symbolic breakdown of norms around consumption, which Nana takes to the extreme.

progresses. Reminiscent of Nana's eating in the theatre in Chapter 2, in Chapter 8 we read, 'cette fille, aux goûts de perruche, croquant des radis et des pralines, chipotant la viande, avait chaque mois pour sa table des comptes de cinq mille francs' (*N*, II, 1433). Here, the irony of Nana barely touching the food, for which she pays vast sums, forms part of her coding as a 'gâcheuse'. The use of 'fille' here emphasises Nana's innocence, while its sexual connotations remind us of Nana's role as a courtesan.¹⁷ The metaphorical transition Nana makes from consumer of food to consumer of land and men is made explicit by the narrator later in the novel: 'ferme à ferme, prairie à prairie, elle croqua l'héritage, de son air gentil, sans même s'en apercevoir, comme elle croquait entre ses repas un sac de pralines posé sur ses genoux' (*N*, II, 1455-56). Literal and metaphorical values of speed and indiscriminate consumption are activated in this sentence through the repetition of 'croquer', which suggests both naivety and destruction.

Nana is not unique in the *Rougon-Macquart* cycle as a woman whose resistance to normative routines around food and eating can be seen as indicative of rebelliousness, flexibility, or personal expression. In *Son Excellence Eugène Rougon* (1876), food and sexual 'messes' and 'messing' interrupt other events, pressures, and desires and serve as a reminder of the precarious nature of Second Empire propriety, reflected retrospectively by Zola.

Clorinde simultaneously repels and attracts Rougon and Delestang by eating leftovers (*ER*, II, 74) and leaving dirty plates on chairs (*ER*, II, 146).¹⁸ Indeed, both men perceive her

¹⁷ Minogue argues that Zola repeatedly refers to the 'bonne fille' element in Nana, and I consider this repetitive crunching to form part of the image of Nana as a child-like character. Minogue, '*Nana: The World, the Flesh and the Devil*', pp. 130-31. Minogue also argues that emphasising the 'bonne fille' aspect to Nana's personality is problematic, an interpretation I agree with. Nana is frequently narcissistic, destructive and damaging to the people around her. This is all part of Zola's creation of complex subjectivities, within which there are competing tensions, tastes, values, and instincts.

¹⁸ This masculine aversion to mess is also seen in *La Conquête de Plassans* (1874), when François comes back home to look for Marthe, only to discover that his house has been destroyed by the lodgers, with food mess featuring as a primary site of distress: 'ce n'était pas sa cuisine propre et froide de commerçant retiré; on avait gâché là la nourriture de toute une auberge; cette malpropreté goulue suait l'indigestion' (*CP*, I, 1193). Here, the possessive adjective 'sa' is perhaps used with a

‘excentricités’ (*ER*, II, 146; 299) as a threat to Second Empire decorum. In a conflation of the vocabulary of food and sex, the narrator describes how Clorinde welcomes men into the house, but Rougon’s desire is ‘mangé par ses quatorze heures de travail par jour’ (*ER*, II, 300). The narrator repeats twice that Delestang hides the keys to part of his apartment to protect it from Clorinde’s ‘taches de graisse’ (*ER*, II, 147; 300). As in *Nana*, where repeated references to Nana as a ‘gâcheuse’ (*N*, II, 1309; 1350) and ‘mangeuse’ (*N*, II, 1118; 1350; 1393) form a refrain throughout the novel, the repetition of ‘taches de graisse’ reinforces Clorinde’s disruptive potential.¹⁹ Clorinde’s nightmarish fantasies conjure transgressive processes of consuming and being consumed. Two of these fantasies – having a dog gnawing at her foot (*ER*, II, 146) or ingesting a fly which buzzes around her stomach (*ER*, II, 304) – show disordered eating across human-animal boundaries, and implicitly highlight the ‘dangers’ associated with women consuming out of turn. The mention of the fly recalls Nana, whose simultaneous representation of squalor and opulence, death and sex, decay and beauty is summed up in her nickname, ‘la Mouche d’or’.

Throughout *Nana*, the narrative oscillates between a portrayal of Nana as creating waste, serving to advance the plot of decline, and a portrayal of Nana as mess-provoking, which impacts on both the plot and the literary ‘performance’. In Chapter 13, Zola uses a subtle language of stains and mess alongside the narrative of destruction and waste. As Nana begins to collect clutter, which Trotter describes as ‘illusion-sustaining mess’,²⁰ she also begins to turn this clutter into something messy, which evades interpretation: ‘elle faisait

hint of irony, in contrast to the collective notion of the ‘auberge’ which the presence of the mess suggests.

¹⁹ Andrew Counter argues that Zola’s use of repetition is a stylistic feature in his novels, correspondence, and journalism, exploring its relation to wider cultural and literary discourses, and Zola’s own ideological standpoint. See Counter, ‘Zola’s Repetitions: On Repetition in Zola’, *The Modern Language Review*, 116 (2021), 42-64.

²⁰ Trotter, *Cooking with Mud*, p. 8.

ainsi autour d'elle un continuel désastre de fleurs, de bibelots précieux' (*N*, II, 1433).²¹

Whether this process of collecting clutter is intentional or involuntary, the tension between clutter and mess is made explicit by Nana's 'dirtying' effect on the precious objects she buys: 'ça se salissait entre ses petits doigts blancs' (*N*, II, 1433) and 'ses mains si fines laissaient des traces abominables' (*N*, II, 1460). In the first example, the reflexive form 'se salir' suggests that this process of dirtying is somehow intrinsic to the object itself. Zola invests agency in the object, rather than in Nana's touch, which emphasises the oxymoron at work: both Nana and the objects she interacts with are 'fines' and 'abominables'. In both of these examples, the whiteness of Nana's body contrasts with the stain or mark she leaves on the material object. At the same time, the non-specificity of these stains results in a sense of confusion for the reader, highlighting the contingency present in the narrative. Unlike the fate of more specific waste which is clearly identified, left outside for collection, or tidied away by Nana's household, questions around the cause of these marks, the kind of traces they leave, and the impact this has on the future of the object are left unanswered in the narrative. In this way, the reader is left to speculate over the meaning of this mess, complicating the cliché whereby Zola's Naturalist novel spells out absolute meaning for the reader and exposing the tension between the supposed aims of the Naturalist project and their complex manifestation in narrative.

The significance of objects as markers of material wealth and status is disturbed in these examples, where Nana's 'dirtying' touch renders the object scarred, marked, and sullied, allowing the objects to articulate meaning in new and unintended ways. At a surface level analysis, the fact that Nana breaks and tarnishes the objects she comes into contact with

²¹ Claire White discusses the connection between Zola's critical reflections on new forms of commercial culture (namely art and mass consumption) and the ideals and anxieties of his aesthetic ambitions through the notion of 'kitsch', 'Easy Reading: Zola's Kitsch', in *Lucidity: Essays in Honour of Alison Finch*, ed. by Ian James and Emma Wilson (Cambridge: Legenda, 2016), pp. 72-85. Nana's collecting of objects exemplifies some of the pressures which mass reproduction exerts on personal and domestic order.

can be attributed to her ‘flawed’ character and insatiable desires. Yet paradoxically, the presence of mess (literal, narrative, metaphorical) in *Nana* runs as a counterpoint to determinist narratives of degeneration and hereditary decline. Specifically, Nana’s story does not fit neatly into the narrative of personal upward trajectory, reproduction, and death that the plot seems to anticipate. Instead, she lives a life of contingency and chance encounter, in many ways appearing comfortable with her own complex personal narrative. In this way, Nana’s relation to objects is not only one of capitalist modes of circulation and property, but also one which hints at alternative networks of people, places and things. Therefore when Nana touches objects and leaves unspecified marks on them, the reader is confronted with contingency within the narrative, where the fate of the object remains unexplored.

In *Pot-Bouille*, as in *Nana*, Zola complicates domestic rhythms through disruptions to mealtimes and the bourgeois kitchen. For Trotter, *Pot-Bouille* is Zola’s novel of mess. He writes:

The text’s obsessive return to the contaminated kitchens which overlook this central well in effect purges the bourgeoisie by identifying the filth its needs and desires generate with the women who work there, through whose minds and bodies those needs and desires are expressed.²²

The Jossier household’s concern with keeping up appearances, and the expense of their two daughters, means that they settle for the cheapest maid, Adèle. Adèle steals prunes and drinks vinegar and is described by the narrator as a ‘gâcheuse’ (*PB*, III, 39), the same noun used to describe both Nana and Berthe.²³ In this example, ‘gâcheuse’ refers to Adèle’s

²² Trotter, *Cooking with Mud*, p. 210.

²³ Adèle’s permanent search for leftover food is both amusing and troubling. To a certain extent, the narrator strips her of any human agency: ‘tout disparaissait; on ne pouvait laisser traîner une pomme de terre, sans être certain de ne plus la retrouver’ (*PB*, III, 323). Barthes uses the term ‘éponge’ to describe Adèle, describing how she is a pariah figure, accepted neither by the bourgeois family she

messiness: in a similar way to Nana, her modes of eating complicate and confound bourgeois notions of order and propriety. Early in the novel, the mess Adèle makes in the kitchen is proclaimed by Éléonore Josserand to be ‘une infection’ (*PB*, III, 26), a blurring of dirt, illness and mess, denoting not only Éléonore’s preoccupation with domestic hygiene, but also hinting at her perception of the working classes as a potential site of infection, or contamination.²⁴ The narrator reveals a tension in the bourgeois household between the appearance of propriety, shown through Éléonore’s powdered arms, golden bracelets and smart dress, and the disorder in her kitchen:

Elle bousculait la vaisselle de ses bras blanchis de poudre de riz et chargés de cercles d’or; elle traînait sa robe feu au milieu des taches, accrochant des ustensiles jetés sous les tables, compromettant parmi les épluchures son luxe laborieux. Enfin, la vue d’un couteau ébréché la fit éclater. (*PB*, III, 26)

In this example, Zola problematizes the relationship between domestic maid and mistress of the house. Éléonore is not so far removed from her working-class maid that she cannot enter the kitchen to tidy up herself. Zola’s use of the word ‘compromettant’, however, hints at the compromise inherent in this breach of domestic boundaries. The image of Éléonore who is driven to explode at the sight of a chipped knife reveals an obsession with regulating and preventing any instance of mess in the household. Éléonore’s desire to live free from mess contrasts with Nana’s relationship to messy or disordered spaces: in Chapter 8 of *Nana*, the courtesan is described as being comfortable in Satin’s home, ‘Nana se sentait très bien chez elle, assise à ne rien faire, au milieu du lit défait, des cuvettes qui traînaient par terre, des jupons crottés de la veille, tachant de boue les fauteuils’ (*N*, II, 1297). Mess is evoked not

serves, nor by the wider community of maids in the house, *Comment vivre ensemble: cours et séminaires au Collège de France (1976-1977)* (Paris: Seuil/IMEC, 2002), pp. 121-22.

²⁴ Marcus shows how the narrator in *Pot-Bouille* frequently equates the servants and their speech with sewage, *Apartment Stories*, p. 177. This disdain for the working classes also surfaces in *Germinal*, when Mme Hennebeau is repelled by ‘l’odeur fade de misère’ (*G*, III, 1223) in Maheu’s home.

only through the unmade bed, but also through the presence of mud, dragged in from the streets, recalling Nana's childhood walking through the streets of Paris. The mud in this example looks forward to a later interaction between Nana and Satin, where both women gain a sense of catharsis discussing the 'boue de leur jeunesse; [...] le fumier où elles avaient grandi' (*N*, II, 1365).

In this chapter, I have explored how the language of food is used to show waste as integral to the time, place, and milieu depicted by Zola in both *Nana* and *Pot-Bouille*. In *Nana*, Nana is both horrified by and responsible for the mountain of waste her excessive lifestyle engenders. In this way, Nana's relationship to waste is fundamental to her coding as a symbol of Second Empire society, and as the central metaphor around which Zola constructs his text. Although reading Nana in relationship to mess and contingency sees her revelling in the messiness of her cluttered home, finding satisfaction in her relationship with Satin, and existing outside of patriarchal bourgeois structures, the temporary and transient nature of these moments give way to the novel's ultimate conclusion of waste and destruction.

Conclusion

Throughout this thesis, we have seen how Zola consistently draws on the literal and rhetorical potential of food, hunger, and appetite, thus relating his narrative to the wider social, economic, and even environmental implications of food. In our contemporary world, conversations around food remain paradoxical, as they do in the fictional world of the *Rougon-Macquart*. While the expansion of global food supply chains has made for evermore varied plates and palates for the privileged few, the Covid-19 pandemic has revealed the fragility of these systems. Growing rates of food poverty in France and elsewhere mean that access to nutritious food and the social and health benefits which this brings remain out of reach to many.¹ We are becoming increasingly aware, too, of the impact our food has on the natural world, as well as how the climate crisis, causing extreme weather and the collapse of ecosystems, is bringing food shortages and failed harvests. These anxieties are never far away for a reader of Zola, whether it is following the fortunes of La Maheude in *Germinal* (1885) as she sources food for her family, following Nana's ascent from the food poverty of *L'Assommoir* (1877) to the luxury foodstuffs consumed in *Nana* (1880), or tracing the pressures of agricultural production in *La Terre* (1887).

The recently published *Cambridge Companion to Literature and Food* confirms the ongoing relevance of food research in literary studies, and its essays take a variety of historical and theoretical approaches to reading food, including gender and sexuality, critical

¹ According to the *Comité national de coordination de la lutte contre la précarité alimentaire*, the number of people receiving food aid in France has increased by 20% since 2019, <<https://solidarites-sante.gouv.fr/actualites/actualites-du-ministere/article/cocolupa-le-comite-national-de-coordination-de-la-lutte-contre-la-precarite>> [accessed 21 August 2021]. Research carried out by the network of food banks in France, *Banques Alimentaires*, estimates that 3.5 million people in France live with food insecurity, 'L'insécurité alimentaire, une conséquence de la pauvreté en France', <<https://www.banquealimentaire.org/linsecurite-alimentaire-une-consequence-de-la-pauvrete-en-france-22>> [accessed 21 August 2021].

race studies, postcolonial studies, and ecocriticism.² In Zola studies, work by Susan Harrow and Doyle Calhoun has brought to light postcolonial meanings of food in *Germinal*,³ an avenue which could be explored in reference to other novels by Zola. Calhoun, building on the work of Lawrence Schehr,⁴ discusses the status of coffee as both an *objet de luxe* and an article of mass consumption, arguing that ‘le marc de la veille’ not only shows the scarcity inherent in the lives of the miners, but also reveals ‘the degree to which one exploitative system of labour rests upon another’.⁵ As my reading of *Au Bonheur des Dames* (1883) in Chapter II explored, the retail workers’ demands for better food places pressure on the chefs, who work in a space where the smell, sight, and sound of food and cooking is amplified to the extreme. Alongside *Germinal* and *Au Bonheur des Dames*, novels such as *L’Assommoir* and *Le Ventre de Paris* (1873) also offer an opportunity to read beyond the French context of labour, into the colonial and transnational aspects of food. In *La Curée* (1872), Zola invokes the culinary and the colonial through Saccard’s proposition to ‘mettre Paris sous une immense cloche, pour le changer en serre chaude, et y cultiver les ananas et la canne à sucre’ (C, I, 419). Here, the lexicon of transformation and change coincides with the exotic foodstuffs that Saccard wishes to exploit, signifying the profitable potential of consumer appetites for novelty and difference.

Research by scholars such as Daniel Finch-Race has emphasised the important work which the arts, humanities, and social sciences can play in engaging with the challenges

² *The Cambridge Companion to Literature and Food*, ed. by J. Michelle Coghlan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020).

³ Susan Harrow, ‘Paysage industriel, paysage multi-sensoriel de *Germinal*’, in *Espaces et paysages industriels: Zola et les réalités sociales de son époque*, ed. by Valerie Minogue and Patrick Pollard (London: The Émile Zola Society, 2019), 15-32 (p.31) and Doyle Calhoun, ‘Unearthing the Subtext of Slavery in Zola’s *Germinal*’, *French Studies*, 75 (2021), 1-20.

⁴ See Schehr, ‘Deipnomachy, or Cooking with Zola’.

⁵ Calhoun, ‘Unearthing the Subtext of Slavery in Zola’s *Germinal*’, p. 17. Calhoun’s reading of food in *Germinal* shows how the metonymic potential of foodstuffs such as coffee and sugar ‘point[s] far beyond the ostensibly continental geography of Zola’s novel’, p.18.

posed by the climate crisis.⁶ Finch-Race has worked to develop ecocritical dialogues in French studies and his article on *La Joie de vivre* (1884) reads Zola as a writer alert to issues of extreme weather, flooding, and coastal erosion, as well as the impact of heavy industry on the environment.⁷ In *Germinal* and *La Terre*, we see how landscapes are altered by the production of commodities, and in *La Débâcle* (1892), peasant farmers hold onto the productive potential of their land, even as it is ravaged by war (*D*, V, 664). As my reading of selected *Rougon-Macquart* novels has shown, there is further scope to explore the juncture in Zola's novels between food production and consumption and its impact on the natural environment, and how his use of metaphor, metonym, and imagery reveals the interconnectedness of these activities and spaces. Panoramic descriptions such as the opening of *Germinal* invoke the mystery of the natural world – in landlocked Montsou, there are ‘des rafales larges comme sur une mer’ (*G*, III, 1133) – and place humans in subordination to vast land and skies. The focus then shifts from this expansive opening image, simultaneously suggestive of tumult and of change, of geographical specificity and of vague ‘terres nues’ (*G*, III, 1133), to the detail of Étienne's clothes, gait, and physicality. Here and elsewhere in the *Rougon-Macquart* and in his own correspondence, as critics such as Jessica Tanner and Marion Glaumaud-Carbonnier have pointed out, Zola is attentive to the weather and the seasons, and their effect on the human psyche.⁸

These postcolonial and ecocritical approaches to food in Zola align with Henri Mitterrand (and others) who seek to prise Zola away from the confines of ‘Naturalism’, emphasising the contemporary value of late-modern intellectual engagement with Zola, as well as the broader cultural resonances of his work. In an article questioning the usefulness of

⁶ Daniel Finch-Race, ‘Editorial: Hopes and Fears in Times of Ecological Crisis across the *francosphère*’, *Modern & Contemporary France*, 29 (2021), 99-114 (p. 100).

⁷ Daniel Finch-Race, ‘Elemental Ecocritique of Normandy's Industrial-Era Coast in Zola's *La joie de vivre*’, *Modern & Contemporary France*, 29 (2021), 145-63.

⁸ See Tanner, ‘The Climate of Naturalism: Zola's Atmospheres’ and Glaumaud-Carbonnier, ‘La pluie et le beau temps: l'inclinaison du ciel dans les *Lettres à Alexandrine*’.

the terms ‘Naturalisme’ and ‘naturaliste’ to describe Zola’s work, Mitterand emphasises that a crucial part of the attraction of the writer lies in his narrative investment in ‘les manières de vivre, d’aimer, de se vêtir, de se nourrir, de souffrir et de mourir’.⁹ My focus on Zola’s preoccupation with food and eating, and the thematic and metaphorical implications of this, contributes to a growing body of critical research on these ‘manières de vivre’.¹⁰ Reading *Germinal* alongside the work of Michel de Certeau and Luce Giard in Chapter II exposed the ‘food work’ of La Maheude and Catherine. For La Maheude in particular, although she does not work in the mine, her work is essential to the social and economic structure of Montsou. Instances of food preparation such as La Maheude’s much-delayed soup in *Germinal*, or repeated gestures of consumption such as Nana’s crunching on radishes, apples, and pralines, shape the structure of the narrative and focus readers’ attention on quotidian issues of time-keeping, domestic work, and personal autonomy.

Arguing for an improved understanding of Zola’s ‘personnalité artistique’, Mitterand notes the value in paying ‘une attention primordiale aux mots et aux formes du texte’.¹¹ As my discussion has shown, the lexicon of food, consumption, appetite, and hunger – through vocabulary such as ‘nourrir’, ‘avalier’, ‘appétit’, or ‘goût’ – is pervasive in the *Rougon-Macquart*, in dialogue with themes such as sex, the body, work, and waste. For Zola, these everyday issues are far from banal, holding narrative focus as well as engaging with larger social and economic questions. The rhetorical freight of hunger and appetite was a key theme in Chapter I, where I drew on a range of examples from across the *Rougon-Macquart*, to identify several instances of divergence and convergence in the way food is charged with rhetorical meaning. Examples of sexual, financial, and material ‘hunger’ in *Pot-Bouille*

⁹ Henri Mitterand, ‘Zola est-il un romancier naturaliste?’, *Australian Journal of French Studies*, 57 (2020), 154-62 (p.159).

¹⁰ In the realm of ‘se vêtir’, Hannah Thompson explores the power of clothing in the *Rougon-Macquart*, *Naturalism Redressed: Identity and Clothing in the novels of Émile Zola* (Oxford: Legenda, 2004).

¹¹ Mitterand, ‘Zola est-il un romancier naturaliste?’, p. 160.

(1882) formed a key part of this discussion, and resurfaced again in Chapter III, in the context of mess and waste. The visceral description of Adèle's *accouchement* at the end of the novel is steeped in references to hunger and nourishment, revealing lines of class conflict, and bodily confusion. Éléonore Josserand sees Adèle's growing body as an opportunity 'pour faire croire au quartier qu'elle la nourrissait enfin' (*PB*, III, 366), and when Adèle states she is ill, Éléonore blames overeating (*PB*, III, 372). Although Éléonore shows a brief moment of empathy for Adèle, affording her time to rest, the narrative of personal acquisition and greedy self-interest perpetuates, preoccupied as she is with saving three francs on doctor's fees and her own food provision (*PB*, III, 372).

Remaining attentive to the differences in historical context, there is considerable potential to explore the prospective nature of Zola's writing in relation to broader questions such as food insecurity, food justice, and food sovereignty, as well as the lessons we can glean from Zola's fictional representations of food, rich in suggestive metaphor and textual detail. In *Germinal*, the miners find a way to supplement their meagre food supply through foraging (*G*, III, 1222; 1230) and growing vegetables (*G*, III, 1233; 1281).¹² The pride Maheu takes in his garden is overshadowed by the sense of not quite being able to do enough, 'ce coin de jardin les fournissait de légumes, sauf de pommes de terre, dont ils n'avaient jamais assez' (*G*, III, 1233). The creative and productive possibilities of a parcel of land rented from his employers are limited by the constraints of his work, and the demands of his family, revealing the link between the social, economic, and political structures which shape life in the *coron*.

Claire White notes how in *Germinal*, Zola evokes 'a sense of the contradictions that plague working-class enjoyment'.¹³ As I argued in Chapter II, from the descriptions of milky

¹² This theme of foraging (in all of its various forms) is pertinent in a contemporary context in Agnès Varda's *Les Glaneurs et la glaneuse* (New York: Zeitgeist Video, 2002) [on DVD].

¹³ White, *Work and Leisure in Nineteenth-Century French Literature and Visual Culture*, p. 71.

white skin, soft brioche, and metaphorical ‘pain blanc’ associated with the bourgeois mine owners, to the coal-stained, starving bodies of the miners (repeatedly described as ‘la viande’), food narratives in *Germinal* problematize wider questions of work, gender, and class. While shared relief at sourcing food, or moments of collective eating, are important instances of narrative lightness and relief, these are tempered by instances of negation. As Autumn advances in Maheu’s garden, the focus is on what is lacking: ‘il ne restait que les légumes d’hiver, les choux perlés de gelée blanche, les poireaux et les salades de conserve’ (*G*, III, 1281). The tension between the presence of food and the lack of nourishment it provides is followed throughout the novel, highlighting the precariousness of life for the mining community. Fractures within the collective struggle are frequently articulated through references to food: as the strike intensifies, Étienne reminds Chaval that ‘ceux qui mangent n’ont rien à faire avec ce qui ont faim’ (*G*, III, 1384), drawing a distinction not only between the bourgeoisie and the miners, but also between those who strike and those who work. Hunger becomes a complex site of psychological and political negotiation, as well as narrative fracture: the seemingly straightforward demands for bread (*G*, III, 1437-41) punctuate the reflections of Hennebeau, whose internal torment at his wife’s adultery leads him to wish to ‘crever la faim, d’avoir le ventre vide’ (*G*, III, 1440).

As we saw in Chapter III, Adèle and Berthe in *Pot-Bouille* and Nana are coded as ‘gâcheuses’: ‘messy’ women who, at least momentarily, challenge the structures around them. Although Nana is an avid consumer of food, money, men, and material possessions, there are instances when this narrative is subverted. One such example is the moment of absolute joy Nana finds in seeing strawberries and cabbages growing in her garden in *La Mignotte* (*N*, II, 1234-35), where food offers an alternative focus for Nana’s energy, and appeals to her childlike nature. Valerie Minogue makes the point that in moments such as

this, ‘Zola offers a glimpse of a Nana that might have been’.¹⁴ Nana’s curiosity at the fresh produce, although expressed through a familiar language of accumulation and excess – ‘son besoin était de suivre toutes les allées, de prendre une possession immédiate des choses’ (*N*, II, 1235) – precedes the appearance of Georges Hugon, with whom she shares an impromptu meal.¹⁵ Supplementing soup with ‘un tas de choses, des provisions qu’elle avait fourrées là [dans son sac] par précaution’ (*N*, II, 1237), this temporary moment of wellbeing runs counter to the narrative of possession and decline which dominates the novel.¹⁶

Finally, the arguments made in Chapter II and III could be extended by putting the novels at the centre of these chapters (*Germinal* and *Nana*) into more sustained dialogue with other *Rougon-Macquart* novels. For example, Zola’s sensory depiction of food in *Germinal* – notably the smell of fried onion which pervades the *coron* and which is synonymous with the hunger felt by the miners – is seen elsewhere in the *Rougon-Macquart*, connecting with wider discourses around class and habit. In *Pot-Bouille*, the concierge, regulator of so-called bourgeois propriety, conflates the smell of frying onions with a ‘polluting’ working class: there is ‘une chambre louée à un ouvrier, à un menuisier qui empoisonne le corridor avec ses soupes à l’oignon’. (*PB*, III, 103). Octave’s reference to the centre of the apartment block as a ‘puits humide’ (*PB*, III, 104) pre-emptly the language of *Germinal*, revealing a more pervasive Zolian semantics linking food, class, and labour, which merits deeper exploration than this thesis can provide.

In bringing this thesis to a close, I turn to an episode in Chapter 10 of *Le Docteur Pascal* (1893), the final *Rougon-Macquart* novel, in which the impoverished Pascal and

¹⁴ Minogue, ‘*Nana: The World, the Flesh and the Devil*’, p. 130.

¹⁵ White comments on this moment in *Nana*, seeing it as ‘as desire to compensate for the deprivations of her humble origins’, *Work and Leisure in Nineteenth-Century French Literature and Visual Culture*, p. 66.

¹⁶ As Minogue notes, ‘the whole episode with Georges has something of the idyll about it, but it is seriously compromised by elements of narcissism, transvestism and even incest’, ‘*Nana: The World, the Flesh and the Devil*’, p. 130. While the meal shared with George is rejuvenating for Nana, it is tainted by the surrounding narrative.

Clotilde share a simple meal in their bedroom. Food in this instance allows Pascal and Clotilde to reflect nostalgically on easier times, offers comfort and joy in the present, and hints at an idealistic vision of a future that we know is out of reach for the protagonists:

Et ce fut un gala merveilleux, qui leur rappela l'exquis déjeuner qu'ils avaient fait, au lendemain des noces, [...]. Ils éprouvaient le même ravissement d'être seuls, de se servir eux-mêmes, de manger l'un contre l'autre, dans la même assiette. (*DP*, V, 1127)

Here, the narrative shifts from the banal to the exquisite; previous details of Martine's ability to stretch out Pascal's remaining money (*DP*, V, 1073) are at odds with this image of a 'gala merveilleux', evoking festivity and celebration. As in *Germinal*, the complex economics of food sourcing is a burden which can be momentarily suspended through moments of eating together. Simple foods are imbued with an almost mythic potential as Zola invokes the natural and the spiritual in his description of the food: grapes are ripe with the 'sang de la terre', gulps of water are 'divins', and the plates appear to be made of gold (*DP*, V, 1128). While Pascal 'avait retrouvé son appétit de trente ans' (*DP*, V, 1128), questions of alimentary and sexual 'appétit' converge in the depiction of Clotilde's youthful corporeality, with food working as the precursor to 'le royal cadeau' (*DP*, V, 1128) of the female body.

This scene of *Le Docteur Pascal* is emblematic of some of the most salient elements of Zola's treatment of food throughout the *Rougon-Macquart*. Verbs such as 'mordre' and 'goûter' and adjectives such as 'fraîche', 'ravi', and 'divin' are used, a lexical mixing echoed in the narrative structure of the episode, where the focus shifts from food to body. Although eating well, like in *Nana* and *L'Œuvre* (1886), provokes feelings of youthful contentment, this is a fleeting sense of comfort. As is so often the case in Zola's novels (and indeed, as we saw in the Introduction, in his correspondence), food is a contradictory and complex object. It is a source of anxiety and a site of confusion, yet it is also a provider of relief and wellbeing.

The subtlety of Zola's writing is revealed through his deep engagement with food, which both constrains and sustains the worker, the writer, and the reader.

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