

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-83594-7 - The Cambridge Companion to Zola

Edited by Brian Nelson

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

THE CAMBRIDGE COMPANION TO
ZOLA

Emile Zola is a towering literary figure of the nineteenth century. His main literary achievement was his twenty-volume novel cycle, *Les Rougon-Macquart* (1870–93). In this series he combines a novelist's skills with those of the investigative journalist to examine the social, sexual and moral landscape of the late nineteenth century in a way that scandalised bourgeois society. In 1898 Zola crowned his literary career with a political act, his famous open letter ('J'accuse. . . !') to the President of the French Republic in defence of Alfred Dreyfus. These newly commissioned essays offer readings of individual novels as well as analyses of Zola's originality, his representation of society, sexuality and gender, his relations with the painters of his time, his narrative art, and his role in the Dreyfus Affair. The Companion also includes a chronology, detailed summaries of all of Zola's novels, suggestions for further reading, and information about specialist resources.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-83594-7 - The Cambridge Companion to Zola

Edited by Brian Nelson

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

THE CAMBRIDGE
COMPANION TO
ZOLA

EDITED BY
BRIAN NELSON



CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-83594-7 - The Cambridge Companion to Zola
Edited by Brian Nelson
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore, São Paulo

Cambridge University Press
The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 2RU, UK

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

www.cambridge.org
Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9780521543767

© Cambridge University Press 2007

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception
and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements,
no reproduction of any part may take place without
the written permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 2007

Printed in the United Kingdom at the University Press, Cambridge

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

ISBN-13 978-0-521-83594-7 hardback

ISBN-10 0-521-83594-1 hardback

ISBN-13 978-0-521-54376-7 paperback

ISBN-10 0-521-54376-2 paperback

Cambridge University Press has no responsibility for the persistence or accuracy of URLs for
external or third-party internet websites referred to in this publication, and does not
guarantee that any content on such websites is, or will remain, accurate or appropriate.

CONTENTS

	<i>Notes on contributors</i>	page vii
	<i>Acknowledgments</i>	x
	<i>Zola's novels: a summary</i>	xi
	<i>Family tree of the Rougon-Macquart</i>	xix
	<i>Chronology</i>	xxi
	<i>Abbreviations, references and translations</i>	xxvii
1	Zola and the nineteenth century BRIAN NELSON	I
2	Family histories and family plots NICHOLAS WHITE	19
3	Zola and the representation of society SANDY PETREY	39
4	Questions of sexuality and gender HANNAH THOMPSON	53
5	Zola and contemporary painting ROBERT LETHBRIDGE	67
6	Zola and the art of fiction CHANTAL PIERRE-GNASSOUNOU	86
7	<i>Thérèse Raquin</i> : animal passion and the brutality of reading SUSAN HARROW	105
8	<i>Nana</i> : the world, the flesh and the devil VALERIE MINOGUE	121

CONTENTS

9	<i>Germinal</i> : the gathering storm DAVID BAGULEY	137
10	<i>La Bête humaine</i> : Zola and the poetics of the unconscious RAE BETH GORDON	152
11	Zola's utopias JULIA PRZYBOS	169
12	'J'accuse . . . !': Zola and the Dreyfus Affair OWEN MORGAN	188
	<i>Further reading and specialist resources</i>	206
	<i>Index</i>	211

Cambridge University Press
 978-0-521-83594-7 - The Cambridge Companion to Zola
 Edited by Brian Nelson
 Frontmatter
[More information](#)

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

DAVID BAGULEY is Emeritus Professor of French at the University of Western Ontario and Durham University. He is the author of several studies on Zola and literary naturalism, notably *Naturalist Fiction: The Entropic Vision* (Cambridge, 1990 and 2005) and *Le Naturalisme et ses genres* (1995), as well as a recent study of Napoleon III (*Napoleon III and His Regime: An Extravaganza*) (2000). He edited the volumes of the Cabene bibliography for the nineteenth century (1994) and has published bibliographies of criticism on Zola and his works.

RAE BETH GORDON is Professor of French and Comparative Literatures and Cultures at the University of Connecticut and at the University of Paris-8. She is the author of *Ornament, Fantasy and Desire in Nineteenth-Century French Literature* (1992) and *Why the French Love Jerry Lewis: From Cabaret to Early Cinema* (2001); the latter was named 'Outstanding Academic Book' in the Performing Arts category by *Choice*. She has published numerous essays on correlations between medical science, art history, aesthetics, and literature. A book-length study of Darwinism in the Parisian music-hall, entitled *Dances with Darwin*, is forthcoming.

SUSAN HARROW is Professor in French at the University of Sheffield. She researches in the field of modern French poetry and narrative. Her study of poetry from Rimbaud to Réda, *The Material, the Real and the Fractured Self*, appeared in 2004. She is the author of a short study of Zola's *La Curée* (1998), and is currently completing a monograph, *Zola, The Body Modern: Pressures and Prospects of Representation*. She is joint editor of *Romance Studies*.

ROBERT LETHBRIDGE is Emeritus Professor of French Language and Literature in the University of London. He is currently Master of Fitzwilliam College, Cambridge. He has published widely on a number of nineteenth-century French authors, notably on Zola and Maupassant. His recent work has been devoted to the relationship between literature and the visual arts in the *fin de siècle*, developing some of the interdisciplinary perspectives opened up by essays in his (edited with Peter Collier) *Artistic Relations: Literature and the Visual Arts in Nineteenth-Century France* (1994).

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-83594-7 - The Cambridge Companion to Zola

Edited by Brian Nelson

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

VALERIE MINOGUE is Emeritus Professor of French at the University of Wales, Swansea. She is the co-founder (with Brian Nelson) of the journal *Romance Studies*, of which she was General Editor from 1995 to 2004. She is the author of *Proust: 'Du côté de chez Swann'* (1973); *Nathalie Sarraute: The War of the Words* (1981); *Zola: 'L'Assommoir'* (1991); and co-editor of *Nathalie Sarraute, Œuvres complètes* (with Notes and commentaries), under the general editorship of Jean-Yves Tadié (1996, 2001). She is currently President of the London Emile Zola Society.

OWEN MORGAN is Emeritus Professor of French at McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario. He was associate general editor of vols. VI to X of the Franco-Canadian edition of Zola's letters (1987–95) and is the co-author, with Alain Pagès, of *Guide Emile Zola* (2002). He is currently completing, in collaboration with Dorothy Speirs, a second supplement to the *Correspondance*.

BRIAN NELSON is Professor of French Studies at Monash University, Melbourne, and editor of the *Australian Journal of French Studies*. His publications include *Zola and the Bourgeoisie* and *Emile Zola: A Selective Analytical Bibliography*. His recent editorial work includes *Practising Theory: Pierre Bourdieu and the Field of Cultural Production* (with Jeff Browitt) and *After Blanchot: Literature, Criticism, Philosophy* (with Leslie Hill and Dimitris Vardoulakis). He has translated and edited Zola's *Au Bonheur des Dames*, *Pot-Bouille*, *La Curée* and *Le Ventre de Paris*.

SANDY PETREY is Professor of French and Comparative Literature at SUNY-Stony Brook. His principal research interest is the intersection of the realist novel and contemporary critical theory, which he has addressed in *History in the Text* (1980), *Realism and Revolution* (1988), *Speech Acts and Literary Theory* (1990), and *In the Court of the Pear King* (2005).

CHANTAL PIERRE-GNASSOUNOU is *maître de conférences* at the University of Paris III – Sorbonne Nouvelle. She has a particular interest in genetic criticism and is a member of the Centre d'Etudes sur Zola et le Naturalisme at the Institut des Textes et Manuscrits Modernes in Paris. She is the author of *Zola. Les fortunes de la fiction* (1999).

JULIA PRZYBOS is Professor of French and Comparative Literature at Hunter College and the Graduate Center, City University of New York. Her *L'Entreprise mélodramatique* was published by José Corti and won the Gilbert Chinard Literary Prize in 1987. Her book *Zoom sur les Décadents* (2002) is a study of decadent fiction in the cultural context of *fin de siècle* France. She is currently writing a book on the role of physiology in realist and naturalist fiction.

HANNAH THOMPSON is Lecturer in French at Royal Holloway, University of London. Her research interests include nineteenth-century fictions of desire, sexuality

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-83594-7 - The Cambridge Companion to Zola
Edited by Brian Nelson
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

and the body, gender theory and depictions of Paris. She has published several articles on Zola and is the author of *Naturalism Redressed: Identity and Clothing in the Novels of Emile Zola* (2004) and editor of *New Approaches to Zola* (2003).

NICHOLAS WHITE is a Fellow of Emmanuel College, Cambridge, where he is Director of Studies in Modern and Medieval Languages. He is the author of *The Family in Crisis in Late Nineteenth-Century French Fiction* (Cambridge, 1999). His editorial work includes Emile Zola, *L'Assommoir* (1996), *Scarlet Letters: Fictions of Adultery from Antiquity to the 1990s* (1997), J.-K. Huysmans, *A rebours* (1999), whose translator, Margaret Mauldon, won the Scott Moncrieff Prize, and *Currencies: Fiscal Fortunes and Cultural Capital in the French Nineteenth Century* (2005). He was co-founder of *Dix-Neuf*, the journal of the UK Society of Dix-Neuviémistes, and he reviews for the *TLS*. His current research concerns the debates about, and depictions of, divorce in nineteenth-century France.

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-83594-7 - The Cambridge Companion to Zola
Edited by Brian Nelson
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank all my contributors for their patience and for their collaboration in bringing this project to fruition. My warm thanks are due to the following friends and colleagues for their help and advice: Philip Anderson, Marie-Rose Auguste, David Baguley, Valerie Minogue and Robert Savage. Finally, I am grateful to my editors at Cambridge University Press, Linda Bree, Maartje Scheltens, Jayne Aldhouse and Linda Woodward, for making the project such a pleasant and rewarding experience.

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-83594-7 - The Cambridge Companion to Zola
Edited by Brian Nelson
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

ZOLA'S NOVELS: A SUMMARY

The summaries below provide, without commentary, the basic plot lines of Zola's novels

Early works

La Confession de Claude (1865)

Claude, a young and impoverished poet, lives with a prostitute, Laurence, whom he attempts to save. Jacques, their neighbour, becomes Laurence's lover, and Jacques' mistress, Marie, dies. Claude is finally able to summon the strength to break with Laurence.

Le Voeu d'une morte (1866)

Daniel Raimbault, a generous young man, loves Jeanne, whose mother has provided him with financial support. He gives her up to his best friend, Georges.

Les Mystères de Marseille (1867)

Philippe Cayol loves Blanche de Cazalis, whose rich uncle is a prominent politician living in Marseilles. Philippe's brother, Marius, tries to protect the lovers from the uncle's wrath. Blanche gives birth to an illegitimate daughter before entering a convent.

Thérèse Raquin (1867)

Thérèse and her lover, Laurent, murder Camille, Thérèse's husband. Their remorse destroys their passion for each other, and they finally commit suicide under the gaze of Camille's mother, who has become completely paralysed.

Madeleine Férat (1868)

Guillaume, a shy dreamer, is the husband of Madeleine. They live happily together until Madeleine's former lover, Jacques, who is an old schoolfriend

Cambridge University Press
 978-0-521-83594-7 - The Cambridge Companion to Zola
 Edited by Brian Nelson
 Frontmatter
[More information](#)

ZOLA'S NOVELS: A SUMMARY

of Guillaume, reappears after an absence of many years. Madeleine, still under Jacques' spell, commits suicide under the vengeful eye of an old Protestant servant who imagines herself to be an agent of divine retribution.

Les Rougon-Macquart

La Fortune des Rougon (1871)

This is a political novel which also recounts the origins of the Rougon-Macquart family in Plassans. Dide, an orphan with a streak of insanity, marries a local peasant, Rougon, from which union springs the acquisitive Rougon branch, fathered by Pierre. From Dide's adulterous liaison with the drunken poacher Macquart are born Antoine, whose descendants are the proletarian Macquart line, and Ursule, from whose marriage to a Marseilles tradesman, Mouret, spring the bourgeois adventurers and the provincial bourgeoisie. The ambitious Pierre, a liberal Republican, and his wife Félicité, use the scare resulting from Louis-Napoleon's *coup d'état* to secure for Pierre a government post. His half-brother, Antoine Macquart, duplicitously uses Republican ideas to enrich himself. Silvère Mouret, who embodies the true spirit of the Republic, dies on the battlefield.

La Curée (1871)

Aristide Rougon, Pierre's son, adopts the name Saccard and makes his fortune in the frenzied property development that accompanied the Haussmanisation of Paris during the Second Empire. His wife, Renée, conducts an 'incestuous' relationship with her stepson, Maxime (Saccard's son by his first marriage) against the exotic background of a tropical hothouse. She dies, exploited by both men.

Le Ventre de Paris (1873)

Florent, having escaped from deportation to Cayenne after Louis-Napoleon's *coup d'état* of 1851, returns to Paris and is taken in by his brother, Quenu, and Quenu's wife, Lisa Macquart, daughter of Antoine, who own a *charcuterie* near Les Halles, the great new food markets built at the beginning of the Second Empire. Florent leads an amateurish conspiracy against the regime, is denounced by Lisa, and is once again deported. The 'Fat' are restored to their complacency by their expulsion of the 'Thin'.

La Conquête de Plassans (1874)

Faujas, a priest sent to Plassans to act as a secret agent for the imperial regime, lodges with François Mouret and his wife, Marthe, daughter of Pierre and Félicité Rougon. He effects a reconciliation of Bonapartists and

ZOLA'S NOVELS: A SUMMARY

monarchists through his hold over Marthe, who is infected with a religious hysteria that drives François mad. The theme of hereditary insanity is thus seen in duplicate, and all perish when François, crazed by jealousy, sets fire to the house.

La Faute de l'abbé Mouret (1875)

Serge Mouret, son of François Mouret and Marthe Rougon, is a priest whose cult of the Virgin results in a brain-fever involving amnesia. He is nursed by a young girl, Albine, and by his uncle, Pascal, in Le Paradou, a ruined château whose garden provides an idyllic background for the love that develops between Albine and Serge. They make love under the Tree of Life. But the Church, through the fearsome figure of the Friar Archangias, reasserts its hold over Serge, and Albine dies of grief. The only happy character is Serge's half-witted sister, Désirée, who symbolises animal enjoyment unmarred by human intelligence.

Son Excellence Eugène Rougon (1876)

Eugène Rougon, the elder son of Pierre and Félicité Rougon, Minister of State under Napoleon III, is the chief executant of the policies of the Emperor's regime. He loves power for its own sake. He is temporarily deposed by the scheming temptress, Clorinde Balbi, but returns to power by deliberately withholding information about an attempted assassination of the Emperor, so that the Ministry which has supplanted him might be overthrown. The brutal repression he organises is followed by a 'liberal' and opportunistic phase.

L'Assommoir (1877)

Gervaise Macquart, daughter of Antoine Macquart, is abandoned in Paris with her sons, Claude and Etienne, by their father, Lantier. She subsequently marries Coupeau, a zinc-worker. They have a daughter, Nana, and achieve comparative prosperity when Gervaise establishes a laundry in the working-class district of the Goutte d'Or. Coupeau, however, falls from a roof and sustains an injury that leads him into a life of idleness and alcoholism. Lantier's return to lodge with the Coupeau family marks the beginning of Gervaise's and Coupeau's decline into abject poverty (and Nana's into debauchery). Coupeau dies of alcoholism and Gervaise from hunger.

Une page d'amour (1878)

Hélène Grandjean (née Mouret; she is the daughter of François Mouret and Ursule Macquart) is a widow who lives with her daughter, Jeanne, in the bourgeois district of Passy in Paris. She meets, through Jeanne's illness,

ZOLA'S NOVELS: A SUMMARY

Dr Henri Deberle. After wrestling with their scruples, they become lovers. Hélène experiences the passion her late husband could not arouse in her. But Jeanne, jealous of her mother's transfer of affection, dies, breaking the link between the lovers. Hélène marries an older admirer and goes to live in Marseilles.

Nana (1880)

Nana, the daughter of Gervaise and Coupeau, reappears as a sexually magnetic prostitute/actress, described in a newspaper article as 'The Golden Fly', the product of a diseased family and class. She avenges the ruling class's tyranny over the proletariat by infecting the aristocracy with her own disease. She leads a brilliant career, rapidly conquering Parisian society, ruining all men who fall under her spell – especially Count Muffat, Chamberlain to the Empress. Nana herself meets a terrible death, returning to Paris after a brief absence to die from smallpox on the day war with Prussia is declared.

Pot-Bouille (1882)

The ambitious Octave Mouret, elder son of François and Marthe Mouret, begins to make his fortune in Paris by using sex to advance his career. He lodges in a new apartment house and soon discovers that the lives of its 'respectable' bourgeois inhabitants are a continual series of adulterous liaisons. The building is a 'melting-pot' of deception, depravity and hypocrisy.

Au Bonheur des Dames (1883)

Octave Mouret's rise to fortune is continued in his transformation of the draper's shop left to him by his wife, Caroline Hédouin, into Paris' first great department store: The Ladies' Paradise. Once more, he is shown making his fortune from women, channelling the desires of his female customers into a fever of buying. He falls in love, however, with a working-class shop-girl, the virtuous Denise Baudu. He marries her, a co-operative organisation of the store being the price she puts on the marriage.

La Joie de vivre (1884)

Pauline Quenu, Lisa Macquart's daughter, lives with her uncle Chanteau in a small fishing village in Normandy. She falls in love with his neurotic son, Lazare, who is so conscious of the brevity of life that he abandons any task for fear of not being able to finish it. She sacrifices her inherited fortune to assist him in his chimerical projects. However, he marries Louise, a rich

ZOLA'S NOVELS: A SUMMARY

banker's daughter, and settles down to a life of idle boredom. Pauline, in an attempt to rid herself of the jealous possessiveness she has inherited from her family, spends her life in ungrudging charity. Her ultimate success is shown in her altruistic release of Lazare to marry Louise, and the joy she gets from living.

Germinal (1885)

Etienne Lantier, son of Gervaise Macquart and her lover, Lantier, arrives as a stranger in the coal-mining community of Montsou, in north-eastern France. He lodges with the Maheu family, with whose daughter Catherine he falls in love, and becomes a worker in the mines. He becomes the leader of a violent uprising of the miners against their bourgeois masters. The strike fails through lack of proper direction and the mass hysteria of the starving workers. The miners are forced to return to work, only to be trapped in a flooding caused by the anarchist Souvarine. Catherine and Etienne are imprisoned underground for twenty days and only Etienne survives. His unpopularity in Montsou makes him leave the community to take up a political career in Paris.

L'Œuvre (1886)

Claude Lantier, the younger son of Gervaise Macquart and Lantier, is an artist who fails to gain admission to the Salon, because he refuses to compromise an unattainable artistic ideal in the interests of popular taste. Nothing he produces satisfies him and he progresses from one half-finished canvas to another until his frustration drives him to suicide.

La Terre (1887)

Jean Macquart, the son of Antoine Macquart and the brother of Gervaise, is a former soldier who settles down in the farming community of the Beauce, where he marries Françoise Mouche, the daughter of Père Fouan and the sister of Lise. Buteau, Lise's husband, kills Françoise and Fouan in his greed for more land. Jean leaves the Beauce to enlist in the war against Prussia.

Le Rêve (1888)

Angélique, the illegitimate daughter of Sidonie Rougon (*La Fortune des Rougon*, *La Curée*), lives in the town of Beaumont with a family of chasuble-makers. She attempts to model her life on that of the saints, and her dream seems fulfilled when she falls in love with Félicien, the son of the archbishop, Monseigneur de Hautecoeur. Monseigneur's opposition to the match almost

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-83594-7 - The Cambridge Companion to Zola

Edited by Brian Nelson

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

ZOLA'S NOVELS: A SUMMARY

kills Angélique, but he relents and the marriage takes place. But Angélique dies at the first kiss of love to join the virgin saints of her dreams.

La Bête humaine (1890)

Jacques Lantier, the son of Gervaise Macquart, is a train driver on the Paris–Le Havre line. He is beset by a hereditary madness which manifests itself in a desire to murder as a substitute for sex. He glimpses the murder, on a train, of Grandmorin, President of the Railway Company, by Roubaud, an assistant station-master, and Roubaud's wife, Séverine, who had been seduced by Grandmorin. Jacques becomes Séverine's lover. His sexual relationship with her encourages him to hope that his insanity is cured, but her confession of guilt arouses his desire to kill. They plan to murder Roubaud, but at the last moment, in an access of homicidal mania, Jacques murders Séverine instead. He meets his own end in a fight with his stoker, Pecqueux, jealous of his mistress Philomène's interest in Jacques. The two fall to their deaths from a moving train.

L'Argent (1891)

Aristide Saccard, having abandoned the world of property speculation, creates a banking company, the Banque Universelle, and attempts to wrest control of the stock exchange from the Jewish financier Gundermann. After a period of fantastic but artificial expansion, created by Saccard's financial and advertising genius, the bank collapses, ruining hundreds of small investors. Eugène Rougon enables his brother to be released from prison, and the latter flees to Belgium.

La Débâcle (1892)

Following his flight from the Beauce, Jean Macquart has enlisted to fight in the Franco-Prussian war. Through Jean's friendship with the intellectual Maurice Levasseur and their experience of warfare, Zola recounts the disastrous military defeat of France at Sedan and the Emperor's fall from power, aggravated by civil strife. After imprisonment and escape, the two are separated, Maurice joining the insurrectionists of the Commune and Jean joining the government troops. By chance, during the 'Bloody Week' which saw the Commune crushed, Jean shoots and kills Maurice across a barricade.

Le Docteur Pascal (1893)

Pascal Rougon, a doctor who lives near Plassans, is the chronicler of the Rougon-Macquart family, cataloguing its hereditary patterns and ills, and

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-83594-7 - The Cambridge Companion to Zola

Edited by Brian Nelson

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

ZOLA'S NOVELS: A SUMMARY

attempting by medical science to discover a cure. Pascal's joyous sexual relationship with his niece Clotilde echoes Zola's happiness with Jeanne Rozerot. His life's work appears to be destroyed when his mother, Félicité, and his servant, Martine, jealous of Clotilde, burn his precious notes. But hope for the future and for the regeneration of the family lives on in the birth of Pascal's and Clotilde's son shortly after Pascal's death.

*Les Trois Villes**Lourdes* (1894)

Pierre Froment, a priest, joins a pilgrimage to Lourdes, and begins to doubt the authenticity of the supernatural cures that are allegedly performed there.

Rome (1896)

Pierre Froment has written a book, *La Rome nouvelle*, based on his experiences in the Paris slums, in which he calls on the Pope, Leo XIII, to put himself at the head of the new socialist movements in Europe. To defend his book against the threat of condemnation by the Congregation of the Index, Pierre travels to Rome. He is disappointed to find the Church both conservative and corrupt.

Paris (1898)

Pierre Froment's elder brother, Guillaume, is a brilliant chemist who has invented a powerful explosive. Pierre dissuades his brother from putting the explosive at the disposal of anarchists. However, he falls under the influence of Guillaume and his circle of scientists and revolutionary social thinkers and activists, and gradually his Catholicism is replaced by the Religion of Science.

*Les Quatre Evangiles**Fécondité* (1899)

Pierre Froment and his wife Marie have produced four children: Mathieu, Marc, Luc and Jean. The family of Mathieu and his wife Marianne grows enormously over several generations; all those characters in the novel who practice birth control meet sad ends.

Travail (1901)

Luc Froment, a reform-minded engineer, founds an ideal socialist community, La Crêcherie – the model of a new and better civilisation.

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-83594-7 - The Cambridge Companion to Zola
Edited by Brian Nelson
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

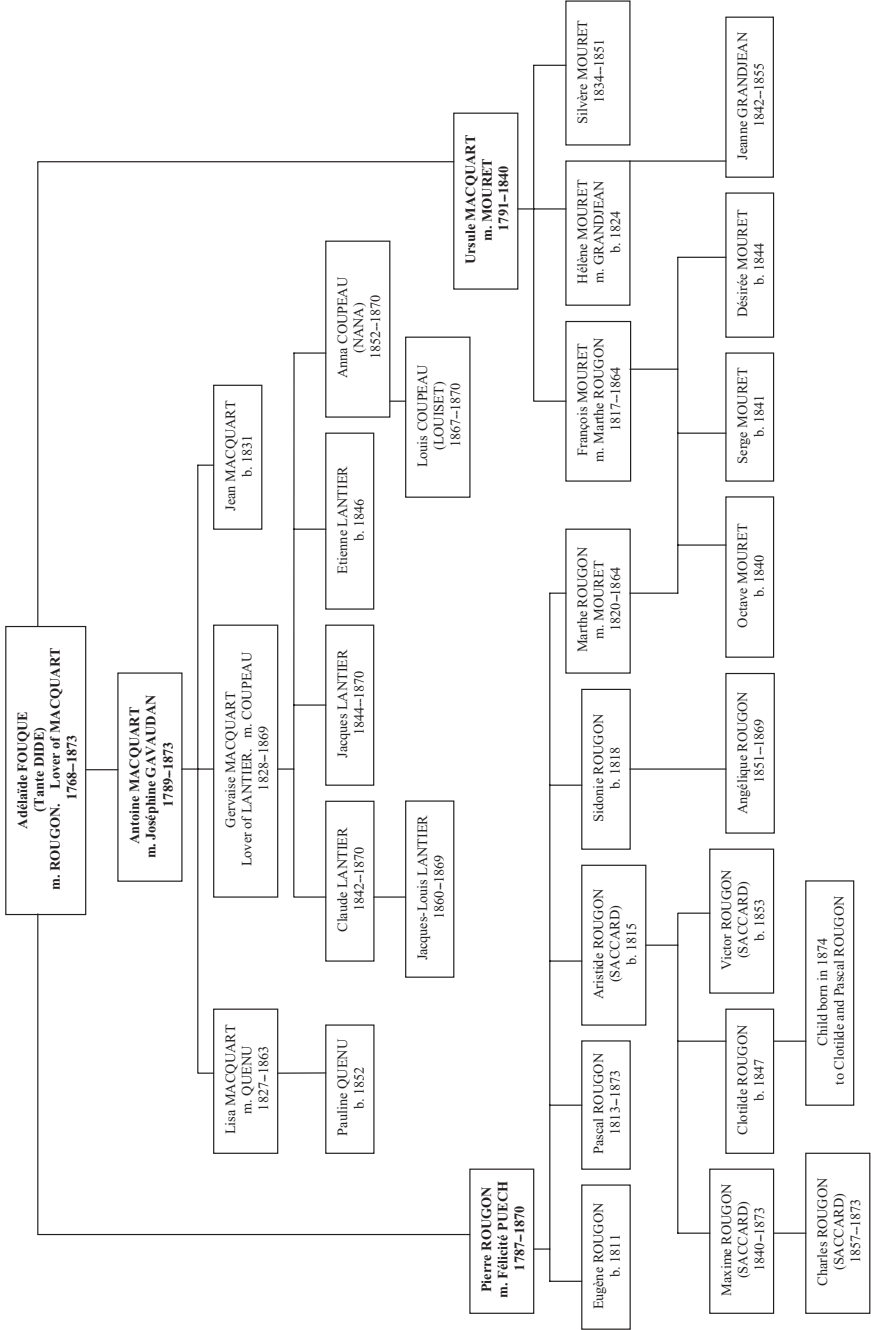
ZOLA'S NOVELS: A SUMMARY

Vérité (1903)

Marc Froment, a schoolteacher passionately devoted to truth and justice, struggles heroically and ultimately successfully on behalf of a Jewish colleague, Simon, who has been wrongfully accused of having sexually abused and murdered his young nephew. The real culprit is a monk, Gorgias.

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-83594-7 - The Cambridge Companion to Zola
Edited by Brian Nelson
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

FAMILY TREE OF THE ROUGON-MACQUART



CHRONOLOGY

1840–1858: Childhood and adolescence in Provence

- 1840 Emile Zola born in Paris on 2 April, the only child of Francesco Zola (b. 1795), an engineer of Italian origin, and Emilie Aubert (b. 1819), the daughter of a glazier. The naturalist novelist was later proud that ‘zolla’ in Italian means ‘clod of earth’.
- 1843 The Zola family moves to Aix-en-Provence, Francesco having been commissioned to build a dam and a canal necessary to provide the town with an adequate water supply. Aix will become the town of ‘Plassans’ in the Rougon-Macquart novels.
- 1847 Francesco Zola dies suddenly on 27 May, leaving the family nearly destitute.
- 1848 The rule of King Louis-Philippe (the so-called ‘July Monarchy’, which began in 1830) is overthrown and the Second Republic declared. Zola starts school at the Pension Notre-Dame.
- 1851 The Republic is dissolved after the *coup d’état* of Louis-Napoleon Bonaparte, who in the following year declares himself emperor as Napoleon III. Start of the Second Empire, the period that will provide the background for Zola’s Rougon-Macquart cycle.
- 1852 Zola becomes a boarder at the Collège Bourbon in Aix (now the Lycée d’Aix), and forms friendships with Jean-Baptistin Baille and the future painter Paul Cézanne.

1858–1862: Paris and Bohemian life

- 1858 Moves to Paris with his mother in February. His father’s friends secure for him a place and a scholarship at the Lycée Saint-Louis. In November he falls ill with ‘brain fever’ (typhoid) and convalescence is slow.
- 1859 Fails his *baccalauréat* twice.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-83594-7 - The Cambridge Companion to Zola

Edited by Brian Nelson

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

CHRONOLOGY

- 1860 Finds employment as a copy clerk in the Excise Office of the Paris docks, but abandons it after two months, preferring to eke out an existence as an impecunious writer in the Latin Quarter of Paris. A period of severe hardship begins. These years see the height of the rebuilding programme undertaken by Baron Haussmann, Prefect of Paris from 1853 to 1869, which is reflected in several of Zola's novels.

1862–1865: The beginnings of a literary career

- 1862 Joins Hachette, the well-known publishing house, as a shipping clerk (February). Within a few months becomes the firm's head of publicity. This gives him special insight into the workings of the literary marketplace. He gets to know Michelet, Sainte-Beuve and Taine. Naturalised as a French citizen on 31 October.
- 1863 Makes his *début* as a journalist in January. On 1 May Manet's *Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe* exhibited at the Salon des Refusés, which Zola visits with Cézanne, who is now living in Paris.
- 1864 Zola's first literary work, *Contes à Ninon*, appears in October.
- 1865 Meets his future wife, Gabrielle-Alexandrine Meley (b. 1839); they marry in 1870. Publishes his first novel, *La Confession de Claude*, in November.

1866–1868: Literary journalism

- 1866 Leaves Hachette, determined to make a living by his writing. Becomes a literary critic on the recently launched daily *L'Événement*. Writes a series of provocative articles attacking the art establishment, expressing reservations about Courbet, and praising Manet and Monet. Begins to frequent the Café Guerbois in the Batignolles district of Paris, the meeting-place of the future Impressionists. Antoine Guillemet takes Zola to meet Manet. *Mes Haines* (collected articles, mainly on literature and art) published in June. Summer months spent with Cézanne on the Seine at Bennecourt. *L'Événement* suppressed by the authorities in November. *Le Voeu d'une morte* published in the same month.
- 1867 Article on Manet, 'Une nouvelle manière en peinture: Edouard Manet', published in *Revue du XIXe siècle* in January. *Les Mystères de Marseille* published in June. *Thérèse Raquin* published in December.

CHRONOLOGY

- 1868 Preface to second edition of *Thérèse Raquin*, in which Zola declares that he belongs to the literary school of ‘naturalism’, published in April. Manet’s portrait of Zola exhibited at the Salon. ‘Mon Salon’ published in *L’Événement illustré* in May. *Madeleine Férat* published in December.

1869–1871: Political journalism

- 1869 Writes for *La Tribune*, *Le Rappel* and *Le Gaulois*. Zola’s proposal for a series of novels (later to be called *Les Rougon-Macquart*) accepted by the publisher Lacroix.
- 1870 Outbreak of the Franco-Prussian War leads in September to the fall of the Second Empire. The Zola family moves temporarily to Marseilles because of the war. The Third Republic is declared. Paris is besieged by Prussian forces. Spends several months in Bordeaux, reporting on the deliberations of the provisional Government of National Defence. *La Fortune des Rougon* begins to appear in serial form.
- 1871 Returns to Paris in March. Becomes a political reporter for *La Cloche*, *Le Sémaphore de Marseille* and *Le Corsaire*. Witnesses the civil war of the Commune and the carnage brought about by its fall. *La Fortune des Rougon*, the first novel in the Rougon-Macquart cycle, published in October.

1872–1877: Towards *L’Assommoir*

- 1872 *La Curée* published in February. Part of it had appeared in serial form from September to November 1871, but publication had been suspended by the censorship authorities.
- 1873 *Le Ventre de Paris* published in April by Georges Charpentier, Zola’s new publisher. Forms friendships with the Goncourt brothers, Gustave Flaubert, Alphonse Daudet and Ivan Turgenev.
- 1874 *La Conquête de Plassans* published in May. First independent Impressionist exhibition. *Nouveaux Contes à Ninon* published in November.
- 1875 Employed as a foreign correspondent for the Russian newspaper *Vestnik Evropy* (*European Herald*), starting a monthly column in March (this will last until 1880). *La Faute de l’abbé Mouret* published in April.
- 1876 *Son Excellence Eugène Rougon* published in February. Second Impressionist exhibition. Becomes a drama critic for *Le Bien public* in April. *L’Assommoir* begins to appear in serial form and causes a

CHRONOLOGY

sensation with its depiction of life in the Parisian slums. The Zolas move to a comfortable apartment at 23, rue de Boulogne (now rue Ballu).

1878–1885: From *L'Assommoir* to *Germinal*

- 1877 *L'Assommoir* published in book form and becomes a bestseller. Zola's fortune is made and he is recognised as the leading figure of the naturalist movement.
- 1878 Buys a house at Médan, on the Seine, forty kilometres west of Paris. *Une Page d'amour* published in June.
- 1879 *Nana* appears in serial form, before publication in book form in March of the following year. It attracts further scandal to Zola's name. A theatrical adaptation of *L'Assommoir* is successfully produced.
- 1880 Publication in May of *Les Soirées de Médan*, an anthology of short stories by Zola and some of his naturalist 'disciples', including Maupassant. In October, Zola loses his much-loved mother (her death following that of his literary mentor, Flaubert, earlier in the year). A period of depression follows and he suspends *Les Rougon-Macquart* for a year. *Le Roman expérimental*, which expounds the theory of naturalism, published in December (having appeared in *Vestnik Evropy* and *Le Voltaire* the previous year).
- 1881 More theoretical essays, *Le Naturalisme au théâtre* and *Les Romanciers naturalists*, are published.
- 1882 *Pot-Bouille* published in April. *Une Campagne*, a collection of articles written for *Le Figaro*, published.
- 1883 *Au Bonheur des Dames* published in March. Death of Manet on 30 April.
- 1884 *La Joie de vivre* published in March. Preface to catalogue of Manet exhibition.
- 1885 *Germinal* published in March. The play based on the novel is forbidden by the censorship authorities.

1886–1893: The end of *Les Rougon-Macquart*

- 1886 *L'Œuvre* published in April. Cézanne reacts badly to Zola's portrait of him in the novel, and ends their friendship.
- 1887 *La Terre* published in November. Five of Zola's 'disciples' sign a manifesto, published in *Le Figaro*, against the novel; they viciously denounce Zola as an onanistic pornographer.

CHRONOLOGY

- 1888 *Le Rêve* published in October. Zola begins a relationship with Jeanne Rozerot, a seamstress employed by Madame Zola.
- 1889 Birth of Denise, daughter of Zola and Jeanne, on 20 September. The Zolas move to 21bis, rue de Bruxelles. Zola's candidature for the Académie Française fails, as will his nineteen subsequent attempts to gain membership. He develops a keen interest in photography.
- 1890 *La Bête humaine* published in March.
- 1891 *L'Argent* published in March. Elected President of the Société des Gens de Lettres in April. Jacques, son of Zola and Jeanne, born 25 September.
- 1892 *La Débâcle* published in June.
- 1893 *Le Docteur Pascal*, the final novel in the Rougon-Macquart cycle, published in July.

1894–1898: *Les Trois Villes* and the Dreyfus Affair

- 1894 *Lourdes*, the first novel of the trilogy *Les Trois Villes*, published in August. On 22 December a Jewish army officer, Captain Alfred Dreyfus, is found guilty by court martial of spying for Germany and sentenced to life imprisonment in the penal colony on Devil's Island, off the coast of French Guiana.
- 1896 *Rome* published in May. Publishes a new series of articles in *Le Figaro*.
- 1897 New evidence suggests that Dreyfus' conviction was a miscarriage of justice. Zola publishes three articles in *Le Figaro* demanding a retrial.
- 1898 'J'accuse . . . !', Zola's open letter in support of Dreyfus, addressed to Félix Faure, President of the Republic, is published in *L'Aurore* on 13 January. Zola is tried for libel and sentenced to one year's imprisonment and a fine of 3,000 francs. *Paris* published in March. In July, while waiting for a retrial (granted on a technicality), Zola goes into voluntary exile in England.

1899–1902: *Les Quatre Evangiles* and the end of the Affair

- 1899 Returns to France in June after the Dreyfus case is reopened. *Fécondité*, the first of a series of four novels, *Les Quatre Evangiles*, published in October. Dreyfus is retried before a military tribunal in Rennes. He is again found guilty, but is granted a pardon (complete exoneration will not come until 1906).
- 1901 *Travail*, the second 'Gospel', published in May.

CHRONOLOGY

- 1902 On 29 September dies of carbon monoxide fumes from his bedroom stove, the chimney having been capped either by accident or by design. It is still widely believed that in effect Zola was assassinated by anti-Dreyfusards. Madame Zola survives. On 5 October Zola's funeral in Paris, at the Cimetière Montmartre, is witnessed by a crowd of 50,000.
- 1903 *Vérité*, the third 'Gospel', is published in March. *La Justice* was to have been the fourth novel in the series.
- 1908 Zola's remains are transferred to the Panthéon on 4 June.

Cambridge University Press
 978-0-521-83594-7 - The Cambridge Companion to Zola
 Edited by Brian Nelson
 Frontmatter
[More information](#)

ABBREVIATIONS, REFERENCES AND TRANSLATIONS

The following abbreviations are used in this volume to refer to works by Zola:

- RM *Les Rougon-Macquart. Histoire naturelle et sociale d'une famille sous le Second Empire*, ed. Henri Mitterand, 5 vols. (Paris: Gallimard, 'Bibliothèque de la Pléiade', 1960–7)
- OC *Œuvres complètes*, ed. Henri Mitterand, 15 vols. (Paris: Tchou, 'Cercle du Livre Précieux', 1966–70)
- Cor. *Correspondance*, ed. Bard H. Bakker *et al.*, 10 vols. (Montreal/Paris: Presses de l'Université de Montréal/Éditions du CNRS, 1978–95)

References to these works will be given in the form (RM ii 297) (except when an essay focuses on a single text, in which case only the page number will be given), (OC x 845), (Cor. xii 521), etc. The Cercle du Livre Précieux edition is in the process of being superseded by the Nouveau Monde Editions edition (see Further Reading), but is widely available in libraries worldwide. References to other items will be provided in full in a note on first mention, and in abbreviated form thereafter.

All quotations are accompanied by a translation into English, unless the meaning of the original is self-evident. The translation usually precedes the original, unless there is good reason – in the context of textual commentary, for example – to reverse the order. Translations are those of the individual contributors unless otherwise specified.

BNF, NAF, Ms Bibliothèque nationale de France, Nouvelles acquisitions françaises, Manuscrit. . .