

A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF LONDON AND PARIS IN THE WORKS
OF HENRY JAMES AND EMILE ZOLA

with special reference to

The Princess Casamassima and *L'Assommoir*

by

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A Comparative Study of London and Paris in the Works of Henry James and Emile Zola, with special reference to The Princess Casamassima and L'Assommoir.

ABSTRACT

The role of the city in nineteenth-century literature has been seen as a crucial factor in the development of a literature of social concern. This thesis examines the ways in which two major nineteenth-century authors, Henry James and Emile Zola, utilised their respectively-chosen cities of London and Paris as indicators of social change and instability, and, in the process, widened the scope of the English and French novel.

No artist works in a vacuum and Chapter One of the thesis considers influential work on a similar theme - that of the city described in a naturalistic context - by other contemporary writers: the Goncourt Brothers, George Gissing, George Moore and Guy de Maupassant. Chapter Two deals with the treatment of London and Paris in James's and Zola's fiction as a whole and Chapter Three focuses on the two novels chosen for special reference in the thesis, The Princess Casamassima and L'Assommoir. Chapter Four deals with the social themes that are implicit and explicit in James's and Zola's studies, including Zola's use of source material, James's debt to Zola's methodology, actual instances of social problems such as alcoholism, poverty, etc. Chapter Five then considers some of the literary connections and references between actual events, e.g. the increase in anarchist support in the 1880s, and their representation by James and/or Zola.

The thesis contends that, through the detailed description of the rôle of the city in their fiction, there is a far stronger link between James and Zola than has previously been made; and that in this and other areas, both authors deal with similar subjects in similar ways. It suggests that each of them selected a controlling metaphor - anarchism in the case of James, alcoholism in the case of Zola - and used it to convey a vision of life in the city as a kind of prison, particularly for its working-class characters.

Finally, the thesis asserts, by means of detailed references and comparisons, that James deserves more respect for his attention to social details and, conversely, that Zola deserves more respect for his ability to describe the city poetically, than either has yet received.

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INTRODUCTION

The principal aims of this study are to consider the changing patterns of urban life in London and Paris during the decades of the 1870's and 1880's, as seen through the writings of two major novelists of the period, Henry James and Emile Zola, and, using comparative methods, to examine to what extent and in what ways their work reflected these changes.

The study therefore begins by setting James's and Zola's ideas about the two cities in context, by means of a general review, in the first chapter, of the works of five other representative contemporary novelists, and of their own impressions on this subject. Chapter Two then proceeds to consider the position of London and Paris generally as seen by James and Zola respectively, during their writing careers, with special reference to the two novels chosen for their particular relevance, James's The Princess Casamassima and Zola's L'Assommoir.

Both these novels deal in depth with the conditions of the working classes in an urban context, and Chapter Three examines this with close attention.

Finally, Chapters Four and Five concentrate the two related elements within the general theme which James and Zola used as representative metaphors for the pressure of life in the city, and which are respectively anarchism in The Princess

Casamassima and alcoholism in L'Assommoir, attempting to show the relationship between the changing nature of urban life in the 1870's and the 1880's and the simultaneous upsurge in both phenomena.

The 1870's and the 1880's were periods of dramatic contrasts in social conditions in the capitals of England and France. One of the striking and indeed anomalous features of the topography of the leading cities in Europe, London and Paris, was the close proximity of the most miserable slums to some of the finest streets in Europe, for instance, the "Devil's Acre" behind St. Paul's Cathedral or the numerous alleyways and overcrowded rooming houses adjoining the Boulevard des Batignolles in Paris. A substantial area of each metropolis consisted of overcrowded tenements which accounted for the great majority of the city's inhabitants and which swarmed with poverty, disease and crime. A factual representation of these cities would therefore have brought to life an infinitely graduated social scale, with at the "upper end" a small aristocratic or wealthy nucleus, reaching down from the Royal Family itself, and, at the other end, a teeming lower class of industrial and other workers, stretching down to the unemployed, thieves and prostitutes.

In spite of this wealth of potential material for novelists, the vast majority of the novels of the period concentrated almost exclusively on the intrigues and the adventures of the upper classes. As P.J.Keating has shown in his book on this subject, The Working Classes in English Fiction, 1820-1900, when novelists of the time did tackle the lives of

the working classes, they did so very much in the manner of explorers setting out on an expedition into "darkest London". There had been very little precedent in either English or French fiction for describing the lives of the working classes; even Charles Dickens and Victor Hugo, who attempted panoramic views of society in England and France respectively in such novels as Bleak House and Les Misérables, had tended to treat the working classes as caricatures, objects of sentimentality or scorn, contempt or amusement. It was not really until the advent of Zola and his Naturalistic theories of fiction that the issue of the working classes in the city, which Zola explored most comprehensively in L'Assommoir, was taken up with any degree of seriousness and, in at least one of his major novels, The Princess Casamassima, James transported the topic from France to England. In producing these two novels, both novelists came to grips with the fundamental problems of the urban experience at the time and their works are therefore the first studies of the city which can claim to open a new perspective on it in the experience of its working-class inhabitants.

This is not to claim that James and Zola were either the first or the only writers of the period who came to be aware of the changing nature of the city and the increasing stresses which such change caused for the lives of the working classes in particular. The five novelists chosen for comparative study in the first chapter of the thesis were all aware of these stresses to a varying extent and all produced novels which represented the working classes as participating to some

degree in the life of the city. To show that this realisation was a gradual development on both sides of the channel, two English novelists, George Moore (of Irish extraction) and George Gissing, and three French novelists, the brothers Edward and Jules de Goncourt, who wrote their novels in collaboration, and Guy de Maupassant, have been selected. The Goncourt brothers can be seen as the forerunners of Zola, as they were the first to declare, in the preface to Germinie Lacerteux, that the working classes had a right to a novel of their own. The two novels of theirs which have been chosen for reference in the first chapter, Cerminie Lacerteux and La Fille Elisa, are the first major French novels to make a realistic attempt to describe working-class characters as the centre of attention, with the threatening background of the city of Paris as the major influence on their lives. However, original and striking as these novels must have seemed at the time when they were first published, they remain primarily studies of isolated individuals rather than attempts at the sustained portrayal of a wider canvas.

George Gissing, on the other hand, was producing a series of novels in England during this period, which used a large cast of working-class characters to populate studies of entire areas of London such as Lambeth and Clerkenwell. There is little evidence to show that Gissing was in any way influenced by the work of Zola but the extraordinary vigour of Gissing's working-class characters, which owed more to the peculiar personal circumstances of the author than to any larger theory of fiction, certainly shows the effects which

can be achieved by a talented and expressive writer dealing with related subject-matters to Zola's at the same time, however different his reasons and approach might be.

The two other writers chosen for comparison in the first chapter, George Moore and Guy de Maupassant, are both examples of writers who began under the influence of Zola and Naturalism and who later branched out to become novelists of distinction in their own right and with their own styles. Moore had been greatly influenced by the theories of Naturalism when they had been fashionable while he was an art student in Paris and he had returned to England, after abandoning art for the sake of fiction, determined to become known as the "English Zola". Two of his early Naturalist-influenced novels, A Modern Lover and A Mummer's Wife, are studied in the chapter to show the effect of Zola's influence on Moore in terms of his representation of city life, especially his treatment of the working classes.

The work of Guy de Maupassant provides another kind of bridge between the two central novelists in the study, James and Zola. Maupassant began as a disciple of Zola, producing one of his earliest masterpieces Boule de Suif for Les Soirées de Médan, a work which was intended as a compliment to Zola from his followers, and going on to develop his own characteristic style, which was in its turn to become a major influence on Henry James. Indeed, Maupassant's was the single influence which James was to take up most enthusiastically, once he had shaken off the influence of Zola, for the production of the novels of his major phase. Maupassant's

writing career therefore provides a link between the social realism of Zola and the more intense psychological realism which James went on to perfect in his work.

In Chapter Two and the succeeding chapters of the thesis, the extent to which James and Zola used both the ideas of their contemporaries and their own original methods in order to portray the changing nature of the city will be demonstrated. The period in which they were writing could hardly have been a more suitable one in which to embark on such a scheme in terms of developments in both London and Paris. Just as the linked problems of urban overcrowding, and misery and their effects on the working classes were beginning to be recognised, steps were being taken by the civic authorities in Paris and London, partly to alleviate the problem and partly to ensure that the middle classes would be protected from the risk of civil unrest.

In Paris, the Second Empire had already seen the construction of a network of grand boulevards and fine houses, serving a dual purpose of parading the parvenu wealth of the middle and upper classes in the period and providing a clear path for the use of troops in the event of a popular disturbance. The close proximity of working-class and wealthier areas in the capital, mentioned earlier, was becoming an embarrassment to the authorities and there was an attempt to demolish older working-class areas such as the Carrousel and move the working classes to the periphery of the city. Such urban redevelopment continued to be a focus for working-class discontent during the Third Republic and

it features in the novel chosen for special study, Zola's L'Assommoir. In this novel, which criticised the Third Republic in fact, even though it was ostensibly set in the Second Empire owing to the risks of censorship, the destruction of the Second Empire is linked to the downfall of one particular working-class family, the Rougon-Macquarts.

This family suffers from the consequences of urban redevelopment, and Gervaise, the heroine, is shown reacting with horror to the idea that the city has become a foreign place for her:

Le quartier où elle éprouvait une honte, tant il s'embellissait, s'ouvrait maintenant de toutes portes au grand air [...] sous le luxe montant de Paris, la misère du faubourg crevait et salissait ce chantier d'une ville nouvelle, si hâtivement bâtie. ¹

Gervaise, in common with other members of her class, is shown as being forced to move to ever more constricted lodgings in what has become a veritable ghetto in the city.

On a similar theme, Mark Seltzer has shown in a recent essay, "The Princess Casamassima: Realism and the Fantasy of Surveillance", how closely the central image of Millbank Prison, in The Princess Casamassima, serves for James as a representation of the 'imprisoned' nature of working-class life in London, and how much in turn the prison itself, built on the Benthamite principle of a Panopticon (a shape by which an outer circular warren of cells could be overlooked by an interior guard-tower, thus enabling a permanent view of all prisoners), suggested by extension of the metaphor, a view of society at large in the novel. ² Seltzer also sees this shape as an image for

the Realistic novel of the nineteenth century³ and it is certainly true that both Zola and James in The Princess Casamassima attempt to give a panoramic and yet self-enclosing view of society in their respective capital cities. Zola shows an entire class encapsulated in one slum suburb to the north of the Gare du Nord in Paris in L'Assommoir; James's working-class characters are spread out across the city of London in his novel, but in any social sense they are in fact static: Hyacinth Robinson, the protagonist of The Princess Casamassima, is the only working-class character with the facility to move across London both physically and socially, and ultimately this very facility helps to destroy him.

The role of Paris in Zola's work could be seen as being analogous to that of London in James's work, even though there are obvious chronological and other discrepancies between them. Zola was born in Paris and, despite spending his boyhood in Aix-en-Provence, he encountered the city again as an impressionable adolescent who was forced to live in the poorer areas of the city, areas which were very similar to the ones described in L'Assommoir. He began fairly predictably as a writer by seeing the city as a destroyer of innocence in novels such as La Confession de Claude, with all virtue seen as existing in the simplicity of country life. The physical presence of Paris later came to be a central character in his Rougon-Macquart novels, frequently appearing as a vast organism, with different areas of the city serving different functions, dealing with the financial district in L'Argent,

the department stores in Au Bonheur des Dames, using Les Halles as Le Ventre de Paris, etc.

Similarly, although he was born in New York and spent a cosmopolitan childhood shuttling back and forth across the Atlantic at the whim of his father, James shared Zola's fascinated discovery of the concept of the city when he became an adult, first in Paris in 1875, where he failed to settle, then in London in 1877. He thought of London as the centre of the English-speaking world, for, as he wrote to his friend T.S.Perry, "the dream of my life was to go and live in London".⁴ London later became for James, after his initial exploration of its values in works like A London Life and The Princess Casamassima, a central symbol for the heart of Victorian England and its hypocritical values. Each chosen city therefore plays its part as a character in the social drama which each author creates in his novels.

Both James and Zola use the living conditions of the urban poor as a whole in order to demonstrate to what an extent society has become a trap for them. In both capitals the population was growing rapidly as a result of increased industrialisation, and the inevitable stresses which this set up are discussed in Chapters Four and Five of the thesis in terms of the stress each author lays on his chosen metaphor, alcoholism in L'Assommoir, anarchism in The Princess Casamassima. Paris was especially vulnerable to the incidence of the former, which increased rapidly during this period, due to a combination of factors such as cramped living conditions, the need for a form of cheap escapism, the move from the

countryside to the town and the easy availability of drinking establishments.

James, meanwhile, accurately gauged the appeal which, in the depressed economic conditions of the early 1880's, the prospect of ideas of socialism, anarchism and social unrest in general were having in London at this time. Zola used contemporary sources, first-hand experience and note-taking for his novel, while W.H.Tilley has shown in his article on The Background to the Princess Casamassima that James relied to a far greater extent than had earlier been supposed on actual accounts of anarchistic and other bombings and attacks in London and elsewhere, as described in The Times and other journals.⁵ That James was accurate about events in the capital can be shown from the example, given in Leon Edel's biography of Henry James, of Kropotkin, the anarchist, who had reported that London was devoid of revolutionary activity in 1881, returning five years later to discover the city reeling from the growth in the incidence of bombings;⁶ the publication of The Princess Casamassima in 1886 was rapidly followed by more bombings and the riot of the unemployed in Trafalgar Square in the same year.

There has been a considerable amount of controversy in recent years over the question of whether James was influenced by Zola in his attraction to social themes in his novels of the 1880's, The Bostonians, The Princess Casamassima and The Tragic Muse. Three recent books related to the subject (Henry James and the Experimental Novel by Sergio Perosa, Henry James

and the French Novel by Phillip Grover and Henry James and the Naturalist Movement by Lyall H. Powers) have argued that James was greatly influenced by Zola at this time - although Grover lays more stress on Flaubert's influence. James's preparatory visit to Millbank prison, before writing The Princess Casamassima is cited as an example of emulating the Naturalist tradition, as indeed is his statement in a letter to T.S. Perry, written at the same time, in which he comments on the visit, adding: "[...] you see, I am quite the Naturalist".⁷

Leon Edel, in his biography of James, describes the visits which James made to working-class areas, public houses for instance, at the same time, and mentions also his jotting down working-class comments and catchphrases, again very much in the Naturalist manner.

Charles R. Anderson, another authority on James, has recently attempted to refute comprehensively this notion, however, in an article published in a recent issue of the Revue de Littérature Comparée, "James and Zola: The question of Naturalism", in which he claims that there is little concrete evidence of 'Naturalistic' note-taking to be found in James's Notebooks, and that James's claim that he was "quite the Naturalist" was intended as an ironic comment.⁸ It is certainly true that the germs of James's fictional ideas were more likely to be derived from conversations at dinner parties than from an initial interest in social reform. Nevertheless, for an intellect such as James's, it would hardly be necessary for ideas and descriptions to be jotted down in situ; it would seem far more typical for him simply to take in

the evidence of his eyes, and elaborate it at leisure. The essays on London, in James's English Hours, provide ample evidence of his ability to describe London in minute detail.

Even if James's comment to T.S. Perry is accepted as being partially ironic in intention, that does not invalidate the fact that James was imitating Zola's methodology for his own purposes. Additionally, it was certainly true that James was looking for a replacement for his 'international theme' and that he found it for a while in writing novels with an emphasis on social interest in the 1880's, even if he was later to abandon this theme for others.

If there is a dispute over the extent of Zola's influence on James's fiction, there can be no doubt that James's critical thinking was strongly influenced by him. James certainly wrote about the French writer on many occasions, and his comments reveal an increasing growth in respect for his work. Although his references to Zola were not always complimentary - he began by describing L'Assommoir as "merde au naturel"⁹ - by the time he came to write The Princess Casamassima, James had developed a genuine admiration for Zola's thoroughness and energy, even if he continued to deplore his frankness of expression.

James's references to Zola are studied here in context; in particular, Zola's statement of literary intent, Le Roman expérimental, is used as a means of comparison in conjunction with James's own essay on The Art of Fiction, in order to define how Zola's theoretical viewpoints did in fact influence James's way of thinking about the novel. The influence,

needless to say, was entirely a one-way affair; one of the reasons why James left Paris, in 1876, was the exasperation he felt at the insularity of the French novelists, including their reluctance to read the works of foreign authors. Zola was himself so typical of this attitude as to be almost totally unable to communicate during his temporary exile in England following the Dreyfus affair.

The clue for the reason which led James to give up any further attempt to emulate Zola by writing novels predominantly concerned with the lower classes and their living conditions in the city can probably be found in the level of success achieved by the two novels. L'Assommoir had initially a chequered career, in that its serialisation in the Parisian journal, Le Bien Public, which began in April 1876, was stopped in June, under threat of the seizure of the periodical, ostensibly for moral reasons, but more probably because its attack on social conditions could be seen as a political challenge. However, publication soon resumed, on July 9th of the same year, in La République des Lettres, and the novel was published to great popular acclaim early in January 1877. Both right and left of the political divide attempted to attack the book - the right because of his accurate description of the appalling social conditions, and the left because he had not sentimentalised his working-class characters. Public favour, combined with the vociferous support given to Zola by his literary allies, such as Huysmans, nevertheless established it as a best seller, especially in combination with Zola's daringly

experimental use of street argot and obscenities. James must have felt that a comparable treatment of characters and setting, translated to London and given a politer tone to match the narrower social conventions then in operation in England, would have received a similar critical and popular success.

If James hoped that this would be the case, he was disappointed. Contemporary critics condemned him for a lack of conviction in his realism:

He copies more or less the world as it is, and recognises the existence of philanthropic endeavour as a taste of the day; but he is far too dainty an artist to allow himself to be "earnest" about that or anything else. 10

In the same review James was praised for his "study of the new Socialism"¹¹ but other reviewers accused him of dilettantism and "restricted realism"¹² or else they short-sightedly accused the novel of being "overweighted with analysis and conversation".¹³ The end-result of this critical neglect, combined with poor sales of the novel, was that James felt that his experiment with Naturalism had been a failure in every sense. In a letter to W.D.Howells in January, 1888, he wrote:

I have entered upon evil days [...] I am still staggering a good deal under the mysterious and (to me) inexplicable injury wrought - apparently - upon my situation by my last two novels, The Bostonians and The Princess, from which I expected so much and derived so little. They have reduced the desire, and the demand, for my productions to zero. 14

In such a situation, it was not surprising that James felt discouraged and, shortly afterwards, abandoned his experiments with Naturalistic fiction. The Princess Casamassima has continued to suffer from critical neglect and misinterpretation,

until Lionel Trilling praised it for its convincing portrayal of social discontent¹⁵, and it is only in recent years that its portrait of the working classes in the city of London has come to be recognised as a powerful description of urban living conditions and the stresses in them which are conducive to social unrest.

James's work never regained in his lifetime the popularity which he had experienced earlier in his career with Daisy Miller and The Portrait of a Lady and in 1934, when Ezra Pound considered his work in one of the essays in his book Make It New, Pound felt obliged to give reasons why James should be read. One of the points which he made has relevance for this study:

Indeed, but for these autobiographical details pointing to his growth out of Balzac, all James would seem but a corollary to one passage in a Goncourt preface; [...]
 ("Le jour où l'analyse cruelle que mon ami, M.Zola, et peut-être moi-même avons apportée dans la peinture du bas de la société sera reprise par un écrivain de talent, et employée à la reproduction des hommes et des femmes du monde, dans les milieux d'éducation et de distinction - ce jour-là seulement le classicisme et sa queue seront tués [...]")
 [...] If ever one man's career was foreshadowed in a few sentences of another, Henry James's is to be found in this paragraph. 16

The Princess Casamassima is James's first major effort at adapting this kind of realism to a wider canvas and it is James's later novels, minutely dissecting the world of the upper classes, which represent his major claim to fame today. Even so, such novels as The Golden Bowl and The Ambassadors would have been impossible without The Princess Casamassima and the debt to the work of Zola and the Goncourt

brothers which the novel represents.

Both Emile Zola and Henry James set out to write novels which portray contemporary reality in a representative fashion, using the capital cities of France and England respectively.

Zola's novel was written out of a deep and comprehensive knowledge of the city of Paris, including some first-hand experience of life in the poorer quarters. He had arrived in the capital as an impressionable adolescent, which made it a great deal easier for him to describe Gervaise's feelings and experiences in the novel, feelings which were shared by a substantial number of people recently uprooted from the countryside and 'exiled' in Paris.

He wrote with the inner conviction that he was telling the truth about social conditions among the urban poor, "le premier roman sur le peuple, qui ne mente pas et qui ait l'odeur du peuple", ¹⁷ as he described L'Assommoir in its preface, and in so doing Zola constructed a novel in which the city of Paris itself played a significant part.

Henry James wrote The Princess Casamassima after settling in London, and putting the experience of his first year's habit of walking repeatedly in the streets into his detailed description of the city in the novel. As Harold Beaver noted in a recent review in The Times Literary Supplement, representation of the actual feel of life meant everything to him:

Form alone was not enough. Documentation was not enough (thus his quarrel with Zola). It is moral awareness - the Arnoldian appeal to the "amount of felt life" - to which James always returned. ¹⁸

In order to fulfill this role in The Princess Casamassima,

James describes Hyacinth Robinson as having "sprang up for me out of the London pavement".¹⁹ and he uses him as a protagonist to conceive what it must be like for a man "with every door of approach shut in his face".²⁰ In the course of doing so, James creates an intimate description of the working-class experience of life in urban surroundings.

This thesis seeks to demonstrate that Zola and James put forward closely comparable views of social upheavals, during a similar period of development, using to that end comparable methods of documentation. It also seeks to show that the roles played by alcoholism in Zola's novel, and by anarchism in James's, are in fact related, despite appearances, and that they are used by the two authors as parallel controlling metaphors, accurately identifying the manifestations of social malaise at the time in which the novels were actually written.

Finally, it is hoped to show that Zola deserves more credit as an artist and a deeply committed one, than as a purely Naturalistic author, while James has the ability to describe a group of people in a manner that is far more realistic and related to clearly delineated social phenomena, than has generally been recognised previously.

NOTES TO THE INTRODUCTION

¹Zola, L'Assommoir, p. 479.

²Seltzer, "The Princess Casamassima, Realism and the Fantasy of Surveillance", Nineteenth Century Fiction, 1980-1981, Vol. 35, pp. 506-34. Seltzer sees the novel as part of the discovery of the city and its underworld by realist and naturalist novelists; it is 'a novel about the mysteries of London, about spies and secret societies, and it is also a novel about spectatorship, about seeing and being seen'. ("PC:RFS", p. 508).

³"Realistic fiction in a more discreet and, for that reason, more comprehensive manner, deploys a similar tactic of detection; the techniques of surveillance and detection traverse the techniques of the realistic novel". ("PC:RFS", p. 528).

⁴Harlow, Thomas Sargent Perry, a biography, p. 300.

⁵"Among all the works of Henry James, none ventures more upon the portrayal of contemporary events than The Princess Casamassima" (Tilley, The Background of The Princess Casamassima, 1). Tilley gives extensive documentation of the contemporary events of the 1880's, showing how James was made aware of these events through his readings.

⁶"We may best judge the accuracy of the novel as observed and 'felt life' if we note that Kropotkin, arriving in London in 1881, complained that there was 'no atmosphere to breathe in'. He found the workers torpid, unorganised in that year. Kropotkin said that, during this visit, there had been 'no sign of that animated Socialist Movement which I found so largely developed on my return in 1886'. This was the year in which the Princess appeared as a book." (Edel, The Life of Henry James, I, p. 776).

⁷Letters of Henry James, ed. Edel, III, p. 61.

⁸Anderson, "James and Zola: the question of Naturalism" Revue de Littérature Comparée, 1983, Vol. 3, pp. 343-57. Anderson claims that James 'was apparently amusing himself with the label of Naturalist, as applied both to himself and to Howells'. (JZ:QN, p. 347). Anderson goes on to claim that Lyall Powers's statement that James 'provided himself with copious notes for his novel' (Powers, Henry James and the Naturalist Movement, p. 107) is untrue since James devotes less than half a

page of his Notebooks to The Princess Casamassima. Yet Anderson answers himself unwittingly by proceeding to point out that James considered 'imaginative penetration' to be an essential adjunct to note-taking, and he did, after all, take the trouble to visit Millbank prison, as well as working-class districts, where not all his impressions needed to be necessarily written down.

⁹ Letters of Henry James, ed. Edel, II, p. 44.

¹⁰ James, The Critical Heritage, ed. Gard, p. 173 (See Julia Wedgwood, Contemporary Review, 1886, 12, pp. 899-901).

¹¹ Op. cit., p. 174.

¹² Op. cit., p. 180. (An unsigned review, in Nation, 1887, 2 XLIV, p. 123-4).

¹³ Op. cit., p. 179. ('H.B.' from "London Letter", The Critic, 1886, 12, NS, VI, pp. 252-3).

¹⁴ Op. cit., p. 182 (Henry James to W.D. Howells, January 1888, Letters of Henry James, III, p. 209).

¹⁵ "In short, when we consider the solid accuracy of James's political detail at every point, we find that we must give up the notion that James could move only in the thin air of moral abstraction [...]. Quite apart from its moral and aesthetic authority, The Princess Casamassima is a brilliantly precise representation of social actuality." (Trilling, The Liberal Imagination, p. 74).

¹⁶ Pound, Make it New, pp. 269-70 (quotation taken from original French in Goncourt, Les Frères Zemganno, p. 25).

¹⁷ Zola, L'Assommoir, Preface, p. 18.

¹⁸ The Times Literary Supplement, 22nd December 1985, pp. 1327-28.

¹⁹ James, The Princess Casamassima, Preface, p. 8.

²⁹ Op. cit., p. 8.

CHAPTER I

London and Paris in the Novels of James's and Zola's

Contemporaries

The intention of this chapter is to survey books of fiction of the same period as those of James's and Zola's, relevant to their themes, in order to compare the various possible modes of expression that were used to bring to life the widely differing, and indeed respectively original, methods used by the two main authors under consideration in this thesis.

For that purpose, suitable novels were selected from both English and French authors, to ensure presentation of a balanced view of the situation in Paris and London. These novels are Germinie Lacerteux and La Fille Elisa, by the two Goncourt brothers, Demos, Thyrza and The Nether World by George Gissing, A Modern Lover and A Mummer's Wife by George Moore, together with Guy de Maupassant's Bel Ami.

A comparison of Zola's and James's work with that of other writers of the same period in England and France will show that these two authors were by no means alone in turning their attention to the allied subjects of the capital city and of the working classes at that time. While it is undeniably true that the vast majority of mid-Victorian fiction concerned itself with

the manners and mores of upper-middle class life, while addressing itself towards its readers in terms which were complacent about the status quo, a significant number of writers were interested in the same factors as those which had been instrumental in the creation of Zola's L'Assommoir and James's The Princess Casamassima.

In England, periods of industrial decline which led to an upsurge in social unrest, primarily the "hungry" 1840's and the disturbances which accompanied the growth of unemployment in the 1880's, also created a distinctive genre of novels mainly, or exclusively, concerned with the condition of the working classes.¹ Dickens turned his attention to the problem with his novel Hard Times, a novel of life in "Coketown" [Preston] in 1854; and Mrs. Gaskell's North and South (1855), George Eliot's Adam Bede (1859), together with the social novels of Charles Kingsley, are other examples of contemporary concern. The influence of the Industrial Revolution was felt later in France, but by the middle of the Victorian period, the French were turning their minds with characteristic thoroughness to the problem, with the appearance of such works as Zola's Germinal.

These novels carried with them the assumption that the novelist was making a journey into previously uncharted territory. It is significant that Dickens felt the need to set Hard Times in a northern town, and to make journeys to it to secure information. He assumed that he could not simplify the problems of London in that way, since London was a particular imaginative creation in his works, with a wide variety of characters, classes and settings. Similarly, Mrs. Gaskell felt it was absolutely

necessary to make the conventional discrimination in her work between the affluent south and the deprived north. London is the scene of the intermingling of classes in Dickens, even though, had he wanted to, he could have found equally disturbing examples of urban deprivation in the city.

When Dickens does describe individual scenes of poverty in the capital city, as in the description of "Tom-all-Alone" in Bleak House, it remains a place where only the individual like Jo, the crossing sweeper, suffers; the metaphor is not extended to a whole class. Dickens is a very individualistic writer whose favourite character is an irrepressible Cockney, like Sam Weller, and it is perhaps expecting too much for his individualism to succeed into making a coherent portrait of an entire class.

George Gissing is in fact the writer who, in the 1880's, inherited the sense of London as a centre for the masses, and made this the backbone of his early social novels. ²

France made a giant step into the realm of middle-class fiction, in the nineteenth century, with the advent of Balzac who, in a novel like Eugénie Grandet, made middle-class concerns of money-making into a respectable subject for fiction. He also made penetrating studies of life in Paris a possible topic for a novel, especially in Le Père Goriot.

However, it was not until the Goncourt brothers, Edmond (1822-1896) and Jules (1830-1870), published Germinie Lacerteux in 1864 that the unwritten taboo - that members of the working class were not a fit subject for novels - was broken. This novel which was a considerably successful one, was written as a reaction to the reading public's addiction to "false" novels

purporting to describe fashionable society:

Le public aime les romans faux - ce
roman est un roman vrai. ³

In their preface to the book, they put forward the claim that, in a democratic society, the novel of the working class will be a valid and original source for literary study, as well as for enquiries into social problems:

Nous nous sommes demandé si ce qu'on
appelle "les basses classes" n'avaient
pas droit au roman. . . ⁴

The originality of their claim was to have a profound influence on Zola's choice of subject matter, even if their technique was of a far more simplistic, individualistic nature.

The two brothers de Goncourt had begun their writing careers with an "experimental" novel, En 18.., but later concentrated their efforts on journalism and historical studies. The reason which led them to turn away again from these pursuits in order to undertake a realistic study of their contemporary society was intimately bound up with the entry in their journal for the 16th of August, 1862. Their servant for many years, Rose Malingré, died in the Lariboisière hospital on that day, and they discovered then that for many years she had been living a secret life, drinking, being promiscuous, and paying for it all with money stolen from her employers. This was a great shock to them, as they had always trusted her,

. . . une fille qui savait toute
notre vie, qui ouvrait nos lettres en
notre absence, à laquelle nous racontions
tout. ⁵

The discovery of her secret life was therefore a comment on their own lack of awareness. In hindsight, this is also a very

clear indication of the apparent invisibility of the working classes, and also of the way in which these people learned to live parasitically on the excess money usually found in the middle class households.

This discovery occurred fortuitously at a time when the Goncourt's theories were also shifting in the direction of the representation of daily reality in novels, by means of documentation concerning the period under consideration:

Le roman, depuis Balzac, n'a plus rien de commun avec ce que nos pères entendaient par roman. Le roman actuel se fait avec des documents, racontés ou relevés d'après nature, comme l'histoire se fait avec des documents écrits. ⁶

In other diary entries, they claimed that their novels would be the most historical records of their age, as they would contain the greatest number of facts and truths, and that the novel in itself was only history that might have been. ⁷ These dubious claims had a real-life example now, in the person of Rose Malingré, on whom the Goncourts could practise their art, and the quotations lead directly to the creation in France of a new kind of socially conscious novel, in particular Germinie Lacerteux and La Fille Elisa, which facilitated the later work of Emile Zola on the same themes.

It is ironic, in many ways, that the authors of the first novel in French literature who took the working classes seriously should be the eminently conservative Goncourt brothers. They were making a deliberate effort, by way of making amends to Rose, to chart the unknown regions of the "bas-fonds" of Paris. Yet, there is more than a hint of condescension about their under-

takings, and they adopt at times the pose of eighteenth century aristocrats, fascinated and repulsed at the same time by the material they use. They themselves maintained that only an aristocrat could have written such a book:

Il faut être aristocrate pour écrire
Germinie Lacerteux.⁸

They insisted on seeing Germinie from the outside, as a case history, unlike Gervaise, her direct fictional descendant (in Zola's L'Assommoir) who is allowed to see and speak for herself.

The speech, character, and nature of working-class people is studiously reproduced in Germinie Lacerteux, but always as if observed and examined like a separate species. Nevertheless, even though the Goncourts deliberately associate her and her class with theft, nymphomania and exploitation of others, she remains a potent emblem for the servants, underfed and deprived, living in the house of well-to-do families, participating in all actions of their daily lives, and yet unnoticed, well nigh invisible to their masters' eyes.

The Goncourts possessed - in spite of themselves, it seems - an ability for creating imaginatively the world of Germinie and, in so doing, they produced a sufficiently convincing portrait, able to lay the foundation for a naturalistic style. They bring to life Zola's own favourite comparison of the novel with a scientific experiment, and already proclaim for the novel the right to choose its own subject:

Aujourd'hui que le Roman s'est imposé
les études et les devoirs de la
science, il peut en revendiquer les
libertés et les franchises . . . qu'il
montre des misères bonnes à ne pas laisser
oublier aux heureux de Paris.⁹

It is therefore natural that the presentation of Germinie in the novel should be a detached and objective one. She is not seen as someone with whom the reader ought to identify, yet almost by virtue of this, he can sympathise with her. She is presented as a clear contrast to her aristocratic mistress, a rich old maid who has also suffered since the time of France's revolutionary upheavals and whose unhappy life is virtually a symbol of those upheavals.

It is significant that the second chapter of the novel, which describes the old maid's life, is intimately bound up with the history of France itself, while Germinie's life-story is told in a straightforward way, without reference to external political influences. The working classes are shown to be getting on simply with making a difficult living while the aristocrats' fortunes fluctuate considerably. Here, the matter-of-fact approach is very much in evidence as far as the old woman is concerned; as for Germinie, it is interesting to note that, despite the authors' earnest attempt at a fully objective presentation, there are numerous references to her emotional reactions, for instance when, in the first chapter, she is shown as greatly relieved by her mistress's happy recovery after her illness.

A number of similarities between Germinie Lacerteux and L'Assommoir by Emile Zola make it obvious that the earlier novel did inspire the latter one. In the first instance, the majority of the action in both novels takes place in Paris, in the working-class shops or apartment buildings. Germinie arrives in the capital, typically at that time, as a fifteen year

old girl from a country district, soon to be corrupted by being forced to watch scenes of debauch in 'private rooms' at the café where she works.

Moreover, like Gervaise in L'Assommoir, Germinie is, by nature, trusting and is soon abused by a succession of brutal and uncaring men. There is the waiter at the café who at first seems to be protecting her, but later rapes her; there is also the priest who awakens her love when she meets him in the confessional, and who brutally rejects her, and finally - and crucially - there is Jupillon, the worthless son of a local shopkeeper, who tricks her out of all her savings. All of these are illustrations of corrupt natures conspiring with the environment in order to defile Germinie and ruin her life. This point is made when she is cruelly beaten, after becoming pregnant:

Elle reçut les coups, elle ne repoussa pas les injures. Elle ne chercha ni à se défendre, ni à s'excuser. Elle ne raconta point comment les choses s'étaient passées, et combien peu il y avait de sa volonté dans son malheur. 10

Her passive acceptance of the cruelty and indifference of others is highly reminiscent of the dramatic episode in L'Assommoir, when Zola identifies the first step of Gervaise's acceptance of her debased role in the local community. Coupeau has returned to her laundry, in the middle of the afternoon, drunk, and yet she makes no effort to interfere or stop him when he starts to kiss and fondle the other work-girls and then herself:

Il l'avait empoignée, il ne la lâchait pas. Elle s'abandonnait, étourdie par le léger vertige qui lui venait du tas de linge, sans dégoût pour l'haleine vineuse de Coupeau. Et le gros baiser qu'ils échangèrent à pleine bouche, au milieu des sâletés du métier, était

comme une première chute, dans le lent
avachissement de leur vie. 11

It seems beyond doubt here that the Goncourts, as well as Zola, are making a statement about working-class attitudes towards life in general.

As in Zola's novels, the Church is represented in Germinie Lacerteux as a totally corrupt parasitical institution, exploiting the people's superstition, and interested only in the welfare of their own members. The priest's instant dismissal of Germinie when he could have helped her is similar to the behaviour of the one officiating at Coupeau's mother's funeral, where "la cérémonie fut vite baclée". In both novels, the Church is clearly shown as limiting its concern to formality, ritual and money matters.

Repeated betrayals of her trust make Germinie ultimately lose faith in everyone, except her elderly mistress who undoubtedly feels some sort of affection for her, but is so blinded by the class barrier between them that she can never really understand how terrible Germinie's situation is, how poverty and lack of opportunities have stunted her life and made her a ready prey for unscrupulous neighbours. The same applies to Zola's Gervaise.

Even the symbols of 'escape from the environment' are identical in the Goncourts' work and in L'Assommoir. Every Spring, Germinie tries to escape out of Paris to a semi-rural expanse of parkland known to the locals as "l'entrée des champs". She enjoys the fragrance of the scraggiest lilac, as if it were - and indeed for her it is - an exceptional treat. This

area is nothing but a piece of wasteland after the town ends, and before the proper countryside begins; it is covered with unfinished workmen's houses. Germinie, however, is delighted with the place and drags the unwilling Jupillon further and further into its wilderness. When it is time to leave:

Aux premiers réverbères allumés de la
rue du Château, elle tombait d'un rêve sur
le pavé. 12

This scene is closely echoed in L'Assommoir when, on a patch of wasteland, pretty similar to the one above, where they can talk freely, Goujet urges Gervaise to leave the city behind and make a new life with him in Belgium. In both cases, it is the impossible dream of lush, green countryside, fresh air and relative leisure which is expressed, the hopeless dream of city workers trapped in their miserable and unfulfilling existence.

Germinie, like Gervaise, encounters a series of mishaps and failures which gradually convince her that she is doomed to unhappiness, and make her adopt a fatalistic attitude. Her life savings are wasted on setting up the ungrateful Jupillon in business, just as Gervaise's hard earned money is wasted on Coupeau. When Jupillon rejects her, Germinie gradually sinks into a depraved existence. Her entry into this world can be seen as the beginning of a gradual, yet inevitable, descent.

In her loneliness and desperate pursuit of Jupillon, she starts following him to low-life dance halls such as the "Boule Noire". Ultimately, her shame at the spectacle she is making of herself drives her to drink. Whereas Gervaise gets into the habit of drinking after fruitlessly waiting for Coupeau to leave the pub, finally being tempted herself by the

bright lights, Germinie soon progresses to the stage of drinking alone, feeling that alcohol can lead her to insensibility, and make her forget her troubles, giving her:

[...] le sommeil congestionné de l'Ivrognerie
qui berce avec les bras de la Mort, 13

The use of capital letters emphasises the dual temptation which leads the working classes to drink, and hence to death, just as it did to Coupeau in L'Assommoir.

Drink helps Germinie to lose the last vestiges of her self-respect and to let herself be degraded sexually, just as Gervaise did when she allowed both Coupeau and Lantier to share her body. Germinie eventually takes up with a drunkard called Gautruche, better known as "Gogo-la-Gaieté" on some sort of drinking expedition in the park of Vincennes, in a way which closely parallels the wedding-scene in L'Assommoir. On the evening of that party in Vincennes, they both return to the ill-famed 'Hôtel de la Petite Naine Bleue', where a debauched existence begins for her, which ends only when she plucks up enough courage to leave Gautruche, just as he thinks he has found a way to "sponge" on her permanently. She accepts her unhappy life with her elderly mistress in preference to an existence filled with contempt for herself with Gautruche who had only appealed to her sexually. In fact, she cannot help but remain devoted to Jupillon, worthless as he has proved to be:

Son premier amour était lui. Elle lui appartenait, contre elle-même, par toutes les faiblesses du souvenir, toutes les lâchetés de l'habitude. D'elle à lui, il y avait tous les liens de torture qui nouent la femme pour toujours, le sacrifice, la souffrance, l'abaissement. 14

Ludicrous as this view of women's dedication to one man may have been, it appears to have been sincerely held by both the Goncourts and Zola who uses this to great effect in many of his novels, and in particular in L'Assommoir, to explain Gervaise's affection for Lantier.

The treatment of Germinie's death is in the same way a direct counterpart to that of Gervaise in L'Assommoir. When her mistress discovers the truth about Germinie's double life and the bills that, as a result, she has left behind, she refuses to pay for a proper burial, and orders that she should be buried in the common grave at Montmartre. However, she soon regrets this impulse and decides to go to Montmartre in order to pay her respects in some way. This visit gives the Goncourts the opportunity to describe eloquently the way in which the bodies of the poor are cast away into unmarked graves, treated as harshly in death as they were in life, still the invisible inhabitants of the great city of Paris at that time. The description of the massed jumble of crosses in the pauper's grave is a particularly effective one, and gives a vivid graphic picture of the misery of the poor:

Les croix noires, avec leurs bras étendus, prenaient un air d'ombres et de personnes en détresse. Les deux colonnes débandées faisaient penser à une déroute humaine, à une armée désespérée, égarée. On eût cru voir un épouvantable sauve-qui-peut . . . 15

A similar description of the working classes seen as an army was suppressed from Zola's opening description of the streets of Paris in L'Assommoir, where he, nevertheless refers to the workers during the Second Empire as paving the way for the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-71, and the subsequent disturbances of the

Commune. There is a parallel threat of what an oppressed class might do in the previously given quotation from the Goncourts. Indeed, they go on to say:

Ici dont la Mort du peuple est le
néant du pauvre.[...] 16

Finally, they make an appeal to the city itself:

O Paris! Tu es le cœur du monde, tu
es la grande ville humaine, la grande ville
charitable et fraternelle! . . . Chacun de
tes cimetières a un pareil coin honteux,
caché contre un bout de mur, où tu te dépêches
de les enfouir, et où tu leur jettes la terre
à pelletées si avares que l'on voit passer
les pieds de leurs bières. 17

When Germinie's mistress, Mademoiselle de Varandeuil, suddenly realises that her servant has been buried without even a cross, she throws herself on the ground in self-abasement against the cross bearing the date nearest to that of her death, an act obviously comparable to what the Goncourts themselves were doing in writing a novel about a class that had been hitherto ignored and considered unworthy of mention.

Zola gave what is undoubtedly a fuller and more comprehensive picture of working-class life in L'Assommoir, on a wider scope and with a more vibrant sense of life, but in their restricted way, concentrating on the life of one individual only, the Goncourts were actually the first to study in detail the existence of a working woman whose life was bounded by:

. . . un hôpital, une tuerie et un cimetière:
Lariboisière, l'abattoir et Montmartre. 18

There is yet another Goncourt novel which is closely concerned with working-class life (again, unlike Zola's work, and concentrated upon the plight of a single individual) La Fille

Elisa. Edmond de Goncourt had intended to write this story jointly with his brother as early as 1862, but he eventually completed it on his own after his brother's death [in 1870]. The book was finally published in 1877, the same year as L'Assommoir, and it shares many of Zola's assumptions. Above all, it reflects Zola's views in terms of methodology, with the Goncourts undertaking specific research into working-class environment as a preparation for writing. The novel is partly based on the true life-story of Jules de Goncourt's mistress, a midwife called Maria.

In the nineteenth century, the two professions of midwifery and of prostitution were often closely linked, so that it was in a way natural for a novel dealing with prostitution to focus on a midwife's daughter.

The Goncourts visited a women's prison in Clermont d'Oise as a stimulus for note-taking, much as Henry James visited Millbank prison in London before writing The Princess Casamassima. Additionally, they made the firm decision to produce a realistic novel, as a reaction to the falsely sentimental - to their mind - view of life in the 'lower depths' described by Victor Hugo in Les Misérables, published in 1862.

Edmond's intention in writing La Fille Elisa was clearly to provide a premise which could lead to social action. In the book's preface, he says that his ambition was to lead people to do research on madness in prisons, and then to petition their legislators for action on the matter. Like Zola, in his own research, Edmond was occasionally unfortunate, selecting unreliable sources and depending on such over-literal methods as

copying out a prisoner's proforma letter and a prison menu. Nevertheless, the structure of the novel, opening with Elisa's sentencing, recollecting her past life, and concluding with her death, is a convincing example of the examination of the effects of heredity and environment on a disintegrating personality. By now, this was an established technique, yet there can be little doubt that the novel influenced Zola's later work about a prostitute, Nana [1880]. Certainly La Fille Elisa is a study on a much smaller scale, but its interest is equally centred upon the destruction of personality caused by environment.

To the Goncourts, the worst consequence of being a prostitute is the loss of one's individuality, convincingly demonstrated in the novel, in Elisa's case, especially in Chapter 13, where in a comparison between prostitutes from Paris and from the provinces, Elisa is at first distinguished from them, because she is a Parisian, but later becomes just like them, losing even that spark of individuality. The novel cannot seriously be compared with Nana as a comprehensive study of prostitution, but as the study of one woman's collapse and degradation, it is perhaps all the more powerful and symbolic.

As the Goncourts wrote in their Journal, on the 16th of February 1862:

Le grand caractère de la fille tombée à
la prostitution, c'est l'impersonnalité. Elle
n'est plus une personne . . . 19

The time was evidently ripe for a novel of this nature, since 10 000 copies were sold in a few days. Edmond claimed, still in the Journal, that he had intended to reveal even more about the

lower classes, but he was inhibited by fear of prosecution. Huysmans, however, published his story of a prostitute, Marthe, at the same time, and the urgings of Daudet had encouraged Edmond to be bold. The novel remains nevertheless very mild. The basic plot concerns a prostitute who falls in love with a soldier, later kills him and dies in prison, after a terrible ordeal.

It opens with a blunt question in a Court of Law: "La femme, allait-elle être condamnée à mort?".²⁰ Goncourt involves the reader in concentrating all his attention on Elisa's fate, by making a close, detailed and dispassionate description of a magistrate's court contrast with the terror of Elisa as she holds her neck upon hearing the words:

Tout condamné à mort aura la tête
tranchée.²¹

However, Elisa's sentence is commuted to life imprisonment, which enables a résumé of her life in the style of a court report to follow this episode.

Elisa was born in the working-class district of Paris called La Chapelle, and, like Germinie, she was initiated early into the mysteries of sex, thanks to her mother's profession. She frequently witnesses:

. . . un de ces spectacles de misère,
comme seules les grandes capitales en
recèlent dans leurs profondeurs cachées.²²

Her mother, with her constant proximity to violence, sexual encounters and drunkenness, is an object of fear for her.

Elisa se levait, gardant au fond d'elle
une secrète épouvante de sa mère.²³

She catches typhoid twice between the ages of seven and thirteen. The result of all this is that:

. . . ses facultés n'éprouvèrent pas de diminution, seulement tous les mouvements passionnés de son âme prirent une opiniâtreté violente, une irraison emportée, un affolement, qui faisaient dire à la mère de sa fille, qu'elle était une "berloque" 24

It is in one of these strange 'whims', as her mother calls her sudden frenzies, that she will later kill the soldier. Much for the same lack of control over herself, she becomes a prostitute, purely to satisfy her sexual urges, attracted by violence, and without any remorse.

La paresse et la satisfaction d'un sentiment assez difficile à exprimer. . . l'accomplissement d'une chose violente, extrême, ayant, et le dédain d'une résolution contemptrice du qu'en-dira-t-on, et le caractère d'un défi. . . 25

Elisa works, at first, in a brothel in Lorraine, but later returns to Paris, which provides the Goncourts with an opportunity to contrast the two locations as centres for prostitution. The brothel in Lorraine is seen as an almost respectable part of provincial society. Whereas circumstances are different in Paris:

La prostitution! D'ordinaire, à Paris, c'est la montée au hasard, par une ivresse, d'un escalier bâillant dans la nuit . . . le contact colère, comme dans un viol, de deux corps qui ne se retrouveront jamais. 26

The angry imagery shows the extent of alienation in city life, causing Elisa to act as she does later. Other features of her character include a romantic attachment to chastity, a hatred for men sadly combined with a submissiveness to their wishes which she has had to learn. Once, she thinks that she has found a man whom she can respect, but she discovers that he is a

police informer, and is further disillusioned. She leads a nomadic existence, moving from brothel to brothel, and perpetually agitating her nervous system through the exertions of physical satisfaction. Finally, perhaps not surprisingly, she drinks to excess and finds it impossible to concentrate even for short periods.

It is interesting to note that the point is made about the aristocrats seeking prostitutes and dealing with them coarsely, while the workers approaching them look for gentility, as her soldier shows, for example, when he brings her flowers. It is the incompatibility of her wishes for fulfillment and her empty existence which finally lead her to unleash her violent impulses upon him.

Significantly, the murder takes place on the site of a former cemetery in the Bois de Boulogne. Elisa witnesses a violent sexual encounter, and then responds to her soldier's advances with the words:

Ne me tente pas, je vois rouge! 27

After this episode of turmoil and violence, when she has given in to her impulses, the novel returns to the detached tone of a severely realistic description, showing Elisa being forced to work in the cobbler's shop in the prison, and reaching the dreadfully degrading animal-like existence that the Goncourts themselves had witnessed when they visited the women's prison. She retreats into herself and dreams of her early childhood in the Vosges mountains, before the city corrupted her. The final chapter takes up the description from the standpoint of

distinguished visitors - like the Goncourts themselves - being shown over the prison, and watching the dying Elisa. At the visitors' request, the 'sous préfet' in charge urges Elisa to speak freely:

"Parlez, Parlez tout à votre aise, brave femme". La permission arrivait trop tard. Les sous-préfets n'ont pas le pouvoir de rendre la parole aux morts. 28

As a method of describing her death, this is open to the accusation of being melodramatic, but there can be no doubt that in the context of the time La Fille Elisa provided a true and powerful indictment of the attitude of the authorities towards condemned criminals and towards prostitutes in particular. The Goncourts' influence on Zola was in that sense extremely profound.

In England, at the same time, there was also evidence of the considerable influence exerted by Zola, and this virtually without any counter influence to offset it.

Zola's importance in the elaboration of Henry James's 'social' novels of the 1880's, like The Bostonians, The Princess Casamassima and The Tragic Muse will be considered in some detail in the second chapter of the present thesis. There are, however, two other major authors of the period whose works show the influence of Zola; they are George Moore and George Gissing.

George Moore was, in his early novels, a conscious imitator of Zola, having spent some years in Paris as an art student and being on friendly terms with the French writer. Gissing was

a quite different case, that of an author coming to use similar material to that of Zola, but with totally dissimilar social and political aims. Gissing's early works, up to The Nether World, deal largely with working class characters, yet the novels are not intended as detached and sympathetic studies of a deprived section of the population presented from the point of view of a lofty middle-class critic.

Gissing wrote about such people because they were the ones with whom he lived and mixed throughout, those he knew best, and it is this proximity which makes his pessimistic and, at times, unforgivingly critical view of them acceptable, even if hauntingly disturbing.

Gissing was born in Wakefield, Yorkshire, in 1857, the son of a chemist, which means that his background was, if anything, lower middle-class. He was exceptionally gifted as a child and seemed set for an academic career at London University, when it was discovered that he had stolen money to give it to a prostitute, out of pity, as it turned out. He was expelled from Owen College, Manchester, in 1876 and spent one month in prison before leaving for America, where he experienced near starvation. Later he returned to England, but was for a long time ostracised, partly because of the memory of his disgrace and partly because he was anti-social, from the bourgeois society to which he would normally have belonged. All his life, he exhibited masochistic tendencies and made his own trouble worse, for instance, when he married the alcoholic prostitute he had previously tried to help, or later, after her death, when he married another unsuitable girl whom he met by chance in the

street. Gissing's feelings about the working classes were therefore highly ambivalent. On the one hand, he wrote about them, because they were the only people he knew well; on the other hand, he felt that he was not of them, and resented the traumatic experience that had caused his descent among them. This explains why his work is more accurate in representing them than that of James or Zola, who only had their information, so to speak, at second hand. It explains also why his criticisms should be harsher.

His early novels seem to be essentially concerned with the analysis of his own experience as an imaginative and intelligent mind trapped as a kind of 'inner exile' among his social inferiors. He worked in this vein, really, from his first published novel, Workers in the Dawn (1880), to The Nether World (1889), by which time, he seems to have either come to terms with his own disgrace, or realised that that particular seam was worked out. His later novels tend to have a middle-class setting, corresponding to his progressive re-entry into a society with whom he was increasingly able to mix.

Whenever middle-class people appear in his early novels, they are often stereotypes, and never seem quite real. The Nether World does not even include any, but is deliberately concentrated upon a small district of London, Clerkenwell, an exclusively working-class area. This represents the last look at this kind of life, studied with painstaking detail. It is no coincidence that it was written towards the end of a decade which saw an upsurge of radicalism in England on a scale not experienced since the days of the 'hungry' 1840's.

Gissing's first novel, Workers in the Dawn, provoked an immediate comparison with Zola from Frederic Harrison, who later was to employ Gissing as a tutor, and who wrote to him:

It will rank amongst the works of great rank of these years. . . I especially hate the so-called realism of Zola. . . Your book therefore goes against all my sympathies in art, so that my admiration for its imaginative power is wrung from me . . . 29

Gissing was aware that the Comtian mission of social improvement with which the book starts was a little strong for Victorian tastes:

It is not a book for women and children, but for thinking and struggling men. 30

Gissing's next novel, The Unclassed, showed a similar interest in the working classes, and included a sympathetic portrait of a prostitute, which was considered utterly shocking by many readers. Other writers of the same period were taking a factual interest in the same material, for example, Booth in Life and Labour of the London Poor, while the more optimistic novels of Walter Besant also dealt with a similar theme.³¹ The reason for such interest probably lay in the growth of social unrest, as a result of increased unemployment, largely due to industrial competition from Germany and from the U.S.A. At the same time, Gissing is careful to point out, using as a mouth-piece Waymark in The Unclassed, that he has not a spark of social enthusiasm, and the novels he writes certainly do not attempt an idealised picture. In 1885, Isabel Clarendon and A Life's Morning are no longer concerned even with slums and poverty since Gissing was by now accepted in middle-class circles.

It is however interesting to note that the three novels written between 1886 and 1889 deal, as it were, with related topics. They are amongst his best known: Demos (1886), Thyrza (1887) and The Nether World (1889).

Demos, subtitled "A Story of English Socialism" suggested a most topical choice of subject for the time. Socialism had revived in England during the 1880's as a response to economic conditions, and by 1885, three new socialist organisations were in existence, drawing upon the ideas of Robert Owen, Auguste Comte, the 'Christian' Socialists and John Ruskin. While writing the novel, Gissing dutifully attended a meeting of the Socialist League in Hammersmith. partly to see William Morris, and partly to study the crowd. He was actually distressed to see Morris there, and wrote to his brother:

What the devil is such a man doing in
that galley? . . . He will inevitably
coarsen himself in the company of ruffians. 32

In February 1886, a huge meeting of the Social Democratic Federation, in Trafalgar Square, turned into a riotous mob and windows were smashed near Hyde Park and the St. James' area. Such violence accompanied by looting made a good atmosphere for the novel to be published in, and Gissing hurriedly arranged for it to appear anonymously, published by Smith, Elder and Co. 32

It is clear that Gissing had high hopes for the success of his novel: "Demos will be something, I assure you", 33 he wrote to his sister, He felt that the public was ready for a study of the effect of the upsurge of socialism on the workers

especially as it would be "a savage satire on working-class aims and capacities". Gissing's evident sympathy for the poor and the environment in which they are forced to live, so evident in Workers in the Dawn and in The Unclassed, is here completely suppressed on account of the scorn which he feels for the way in which they are 'taken in' by socialist ideals.

The novel's leading character, Richard Mutimer, a self-taught working-class radical, is removed from his London environment by a fortunate inheritance and given control of an unspoilt English valley. He wants to fill the valley with factories run on a socialist system, yet, hypocritically, betrays his childhood sweetheart in favour of a marriage of convenience with the wealthier Adela Waltham. His double standards are shown up clearly when a document is discovered, proving that the ousted aristocrat who wanted to keep the valley untouched, Hubert Eldon, is in fact its rightful owner.

Mutimer wants to destroy the document, but Adela with her stricter 'middle-class' standards for right and wrong, insists on the land returning to Eldon. The contrast between the alleged idealistic aims of socialism, and the flawed characters who try to encourage its development, is continually stressed in the novel.

Even though the concern for lost documents and a romantic love-tangle are essential elements for any Victorian plot, the subject-matter of Demos shows Gissing attempting to deal with urgent contemporary issues. Gissing considers the same influences of heredity and environment on the working classes as Zola did, but he reaches the opposite conclusion. As far as Gissing is concerned, extra money and a change of scene will

never make Mutimer a greater man than his conditioning and education have made him at the outset. He will simply transfer his hideous environment to an unspoilt part of the country, while wealth will show up more clearly the faults inherent in his make-up. When Eldon has his land restored, his first action is to close down and erase the idealistic Robert Owen-style collective factory which Mutimer had established. Gissing evidently thoroughly approves of this act, and gets Adela to signify her approval also, when after the death of Mutimer at the hands of an incensed mob, she confers ultimate respectability on Eldon, whom she had earlier judged wrongly as an irresponsible dissolute aristocrat, by marrying him.

Gissing's attitude towards Mutimer has long been seen by critics as a test-case of his feelings towards the working class in general. Gillian Tyndall describes Demos, in her book The Born Exile; George Gissing, as the novel in which the theme of a confrontation between aristocratic rurality and plebeian industrialism is made clear. She makes the unsubstantiated claim that Gissing was there expressing a kind of nostalgic feeling for the East Anglia which his parents had left before he was born. ³⁴

Adrian Poole, in his much more detailed work, Gissing in Context, seeking to place Gissing within his his social context, claims that he has set up a "wholly false opposition between the rural peace and 'culture' of the valley, and the urban unrest and vulgarity of the intruding proletariat" ³⁵, a statement which does not seem to correspond to the actual intent, nor to the demonstration given by Gissing in Demos.

Yet Gissing made his position clear when he wrote to his brother, in 1884:

I confess I get more and more aristocratic
in my leanings . . . 36

which was certainly evidenced in Demos, where there seem to be not only a violent criticism of the workers' aspirations towards a planned industrialised community, but also some reluctance to support a middle-class expansionist economy. This is not, however, to say that Gissing had lost his previous feelings of compassion for the underprivileged.

There is no denying that most working-class characters in Demos show a variety of more or less despicable attitudes towards the opportunity of acquiring sudden wealth. Mutimer's brother, 'Arry, is a marvellous caricature of the work-shy 'sponger', at first trying to spend wastefully as much money as he can, and then losing interest in it altogether and living as a tramp. His sister Alice starts by rejecting her simple, honest, hard working, suitor and moves onto a world of fantasy by reading society novels. Mutimer's mother seems to take the best course of action, a view certainly supported by Gissing, and spurns the money, refuses to have anything to do with it and insists on remaining in the house on the borderland of Islington and Hoxton, where she has known poverty, yet been able to keep her self-respect.

As far as Gissing is concerned, the essential requirement of the working classes should be to survive the present unrest without mixing with political actions, without getting into trouble, as these lead to complications and added misery, which they are not equipped to handle.

Mutimer's actions are described in detail, and then the episode of the meeting of socialists, in Chapter 6, provides a variety of types of opportunists, as well as self-deluded innocents. As Jacob Korg writes in his critical biography of Gissing:

Socialists could be seen in their most characteristic moods at public meetings . . . In Demos, both the behaviour of Mutimer on the platform, with his attitudes of self-criticism, devotion and quasi-religious fervour, and the swift, emotional responses of the noisy, uncontrollable audiences have a life of their own. 37

The copious amount of notes taken by Gissing at such meetings evidently bore fruit, for instance, in the portrait of Mr. Cullen who violently denounces drink as being the cause of the downfall of the working man at the meeting, and afterwards creeps off to a public house where he will not be recognised. Then Mr. Cowes prides himself on his grammar but makes simple malapropisms time and again. Mr. Kitshaw can only insist on the verb 'exploit' as this seems to be his whole vocabulary, and finally, Daniel Dabbs presents a touching picture of the kind of man who cannot understand the intellectual arguments of socialism but follows blindly in the simple-minded way which will lead to his being cast aside by Alice Mutimer, and end in his ultimate disillusionment.

Indeed, at that very meeting, Mutimer's speech has strong undertones of double irony:

If I live another fifty years, I shall still be of the people and with the people, no man shall ever have it in his power to say that Richard Mutimer misused his chances and was only a new burden to them whose load he might have lightened. 38

This is, of course, exactly what he is and, after the collapse of his scheme, when he returns to London in semi-poverty, it will be the spirit of 'Demos', the mob, which takes its revenge on him.

The main thrust of the attacks against Gissing has been that he presented a one-sided, anti-working class view epitomised in the character of Richard Mutimer. Adrian Poole complains about the tour of Mutimer's library being designed to show that it was confined to "social, political, religious matter" and cites Ben Tillet, an organiser of the 1889 Dock Strike, as a factual example that workers were able to read authors such as Hazlitt and Johnson.³⁹ Nevertheless, Mutimer remains a more typical illustration than Tillet ever was, of a self-made radical of the period. He is also a well rounded character, with a true psychological depth. Both Poole and Korg mention the crucial moment when Adela in the train looks at Mutimer's face and suddenly realises that she has made a terrible mistake in marrying him:

It was the face of a man by birth and breeding altogether beneath her . . . He was not of her class, not of her world, only by violent wrenching of the laws of nature had they come together.⁴⁰

Korg sees this scene as a failure on Gissing's part to see that "the ultimate course of Adela's superiority . . . was really environmental"⁴¹ He thinks that Gissing is hovering between a Zola-esque novel of the environment, and a conservative theory that heredity is all, and finally opting for heredity. Poole simply considers the scene as showing Gissing trying to pretend

that it is possible to live as Adela aspires, outside social forces.⁴² It seems strange that neither of them has understood it as a realistic reflection of Gissing's own tormented attempt to bridge the class barrier with marriages which twice ended in failure.

Gissing's frustration when faced with social forces is, moreover, seen again, at its most bitter, in the death of Mutimer. Mutimer has taken refuge from a stone-throwing mob when the angry creditors of a failed workers' cooperative group, typical of many of its time, pursued him in search of revenge. Gissing's dislike of the mob spirit which can be roused in a working-class group, and his horror at their excesses when they are overcome by mass hysteria, is clearly shown at that point in the novel, and indeed - as evidenced by its title - is its raison d'être.

Demos was roused, was tired of listening to mere articulate speech; it was time for a good wild-beast roar, for a taste of bloodshed.⁴³

A stray stone will kill Mutimer, making Gissing's point, but it can be argued further that the failure of the workers' cooperative, which is due to embezzlement, is a sign that the workers are not yet able to look after themselves and their interests.

At the beginning of the novel, Adela's mother bemoans the fact that Adela's brother Alfred is 'infected' with poisonous radical ideas:

I believe he is a clever boy; only such a dreadful radical. I can't think how he got his views; certainly his father never inculcated them.

"The air", Mrs. Waltham, "the air" murmured the clergyman.⁴⁴

This, in fact, coincides with a contemporary review of the novel in The Times:

If a tale of Socialism does not find abundance of readers, it is not because the times are not ripe for it. ⁴⁵

Gissing appears to express some of his ideas using the reflective pose of the aesthetic clergyman, Mr. Whyvern, sympathising with the successive stages of Adela's education: she is also affected by popular radicalism, but is educated out of it, as Gissing felt himself to have been, by examples of the unreadiness, if not the incapacity, of the working classes for change. Unlike L'Assommoir, Demos does not represent the workers as trapped by an environment not of their own making, it depicts them as trapped in thought-processes which restrict them from the possibility of enjoying a richer kind of life.

Gissing's London is, on the other hand, as vivid as Zola's Paris, and indeed it is in the city scenes that a comparison of the two carries the most conviction. Bernard Bergonzi's comparison of Gissing's Demos and Zola's Germinal makes the point aptly and fairly:

In a sense, Zola's sensationalism and brutality are as unsatisfactory as Gissing's evasiveness, but his novel has infinitely greater power and authority. It ends with the total victory of the system, whereas Demos concludes with the physical destruction of the factories that have been polluting a green English valley. ⁴⁶

The ultimate irony - and failure - of Demos is that Gissing is unable to make the reader believe in the idyllic future that Eldon and Adela hope to achieve. Gissing's achievement lies in the creation of a totally 'real' city out of which its poorer inhabitants cannot escape.

Gissing's next novel, also dealing with working class problems, was Thyrza, generally accounted to be a great advance on Demos from the standpoint of realism, in that the main confrontation is between a genuine representative of the middle-class capitalist society, Walter Egremont, and the various artisans in Lambeth where the novel takes place. There are also intermittent scenes in Eastbourne which are little more than temporary excursions. Egremont is the son of a tradesman who has set up a successful business, and he initiates a series of lectures on literature as a means of atoning to some extent for the materialistic way in which good fortune has come his way. In a sense, this can be seen as a reflection of Gissing's own early years in London. He had thought of giving public readings to provide an intellectual stimulus for the ordinary people. In 1879, he wrote to his brother:

I have got an idea which I fancy is by no means a bad one. It is, in short, to give public readings . . . You see, it would be a step in the direction of lecturing. ⁴⁷

A few days later, he wrote again to describe the enthusiastic reception given to a lecture in the working-class district of Paddington, on "Faith and Reason". Gissing, however, never pursued the idea of these lectures, and indeed, in the novel, Egremont's lectures and his intention to follow up an educational programme by establishing a free library in Lambeth, lead to disaster, and the wrecking of some of the people's lives.

The philosophical assumption underlying the text is that it is hopeless to try and improve the lot of ordinary people except by making them accept their fate. The two atheists,

Ackroyd and Bunce resistant to the lectures, are softened at last in their views through their marriages to the practical Totty Nancarrow and Thyrza's sister, Lydia. Gilbert Grail, who appreciated the lectures and stood to gain from his installation as librarian, rejects Egremont's final offer of help, once the latter has dashed his hopes of marrying Thyrza.

He spoke very frankly, and assured me he has all the leisure time he cared to use. He says he is not so eager after knowledge as formerly; it is enough for him to read the books he likes. 48

Similarly, Thyrza who had seemed able to appreciate middle-class values and standards is left to die, heartbroken, when Egremont's passion for her wanes. While Egremont himself, while still eager to work for the betterment of the underprivileged, comes to reflect Gissing's later opinion that the most dedicated philanthropists are also the greatest capitalists. As an example, he cites Cornelius Vanderbilt:

Personally he was a disgusting brute; ignorant, base, a boor in his manners . . . Yet the man was a great philanthropist, and became so by the piling up of millions of dollars. 49

Egremont, by then, feels "bitterly ashamed" if his former actions, and his final expectedly passion-free marriage to Annabel Newthorpe, also a bookish middle-class idealist, again illustrates Gissing's belief that people of the same class were best suited to each other.

An important feature of the novel is the description of Lambeth, as thorough as any aspect of Paris found in Zola's works. On July 31st, 1886, Gissing wrote to his sister, explaining:

I am living at present in Lambeth, doing my best to get at the meaning of that strange world, so remote from our civilisation. 50

Gissing immersed himself in low class Victorian London, to such an extent, and in such a literal fashion, that it is possible to trace the route of the novel on an actual map of Lambeth. The sense of life lived on the streets, and the way physical conditions affect human personalities, are expressed strongly and most realistically.

They went forth, and were soon in the midst of the market. Lambeth Walk is a long, narrow street, and at this hour was so thronged with people that an occasional vehicle, with difficulty, made slow passage . . . In vociferation the butchers doubtless excelled; their "Lovely, lovely, lovely!" and their reiterated "Buy, buy, buy!" rang clamorous above the roaring of costermongers . . . above all was distinguishable the acrid exhalation from shops where fried fish and potatoes hissed in boiling grease. There, Lambeth's supper was preparing, to be eaten on the spot, or taken away wrapped in newspaper. 51

Other descriptions of Lambeth, the pleasure of the children at the cream vendors', or when watching organ grinders, Thyrza's singing at the pub, Ackroyd's rapid, if temporary downwards progress through public houses and music halls to police custody, show the depth of Gissing's immersion into the life of the area. The well-to-do settings shown at the beginning and at the end of the novel appear, as previously noted, vague and unconvincing by comparison.

The boundaries of Lambeth are also the boundaries of the lives of the characters. On a night when Egremont could have eloped with her, Thyrza is shown huddled near the river, in such a way as to imply that the river is a boundary she dare not cross.

Egremont's money comes from an oilcloth factory on Westminster Bridge Road, yet is it the hated Dalmaine, M.P. for Vauxhall who, from his vantage point at the House of Commons, on the other side of the river, is the most able to change the lives of the people of Lambeth for the better, by means of his Factory Bills. He is a conceited, arrogant fool, yet his actions, because they are practical, lead to real benefits for the area while Egremont's naive attempts to bring an understanding of art to that environment prove disastrous. Once again, Gissing makes the point that certain classes are the 'ruling' classes, and that any attempts to upset the balance of things and to go against hereditary roles are doomed to failure.

If Thyrza was "centred upon problems of class relationships and the experience of the city",⁵² Gissing's final novel using a proletarian setting, The Nether World, is totally concerned with the lower classes in the city. Although Poole feels that Gissing's research is not as clearly discernible in this novel as it is in Thyrza, or for that matter in Zola's work, his diary shows him making, for instance, a visit to a die-sinkers' factory in Clerkenwell in preparation for writing on that topic. Also, as Gillian Tindall points out, he could hardly have avoided a mental comparison with Zola's L'Assommoir in writing a study of a clearly delineated working-class area of the city.⁵³ The neighbourhood of Clerkenwell was then given over to light manufacturing industry, such as the fabrication of artificial flowers which Gissing described; it was a centre of radicalism

although, according to Poole,⁵⁴ the separation of industries meant that the workers lacked a solid identity when it came to try and arrange strike action. Nevertheless, it is on record that Gissing attended a meeting at Clerkenwell Green, in 1887, and, there is no doubt that the most successful element of his novel is the way he portrays the 'quality' of life in the various ghettos, much as James does in The Princess Cassamassima, and precisely as Zola does in a more succinct way.

Ultimately, all comparisons of Gissing's London with other writers' lead to Dickens's London from which it developed. It may be that the contrast is not in the actual description, but in the feeling of optimism expressed by Dickens which contrasts so vividly with Gissing's pessimism. Poole explains:

The major shift in consciousness between Dickens and later Victorian writers is in the recession of confidence . . . The city still epitomises the challenging unknown, but the balance of power has been radically altered between perceiver and perceived. Self and Other. Instead of the active assault, the attempt to survive, instead of progressive understanding and connection, the acquiescence in ignorance and isolation Gissing's London is as empty as Dickens's was full, a world of chronic want that will be most fully dramatised in The Nether World.⁵⁵

The title of the novel explains its purpose; the idea was to encapsulate an entire 'world' and examine it, suppressing the middle-class elements which would be likely to concern the reading public, and to dissect it. It also seems to link his early social novels written between 1880 and 1887, and the more sophisticated novels he was to write soon afterwards. Like Demos, this novel explores the theme of imperfectibility of the working classes, although the study is far more complex than

than that of the former. The novel also marks a turning point in his own career, from past penury to future success and patronage, as John Goode notes accurately.⁵⁶ More dubiously, Goode makes the further claim (in his critical study of Gissing, entitled George Gissing: Ideology and Fiction) that Gissing associated Dickens with his own childhood and the death of his father, so that he felt compelled to create a London in his own image to drive back the spectre of Dickens.⁵⁷ Certainly, if this is the case, The Nether World represents his most sustained effort to do that.

The theme of the hopelessness of philanthropy is reiterated here, from the very beginning of the novel, when Michael Snowdon makes his first attempt at using his money to make a better place of the miserable neighbourhood which is to be the setting of the whole novel, an area as confined as that of L'Assommoir, barely extending to half a mile's distance from one of the railway stations of London.

Snowdon uses for this purpose his grand-daughter Jane, but she is not up to distributing the fortune he has made in Australia and his money - will melt away.

There are interesting characters, especially Sidney Kirkwood, sympathetically portrayed, struggling to do his best but trapped by the limitations of his environment. Bob Hewitt and "Pennyloaf" Candy are amongst the most fully realised descriptions of sloth, drunkenness and a few other vices. The episode of their Bank Holiday outing at the Crystal Palace is uncannily like the wedding visit to the Louvre in L'Assommoir.

Korg considers this scene as remarkable: "A great panorama

of lower-class life" ⁵⁸ and Poole detects a certain special emotional quality, different from Gissing's usual show of contempt. ⁵⁹ It is true that the energy of Bob Hewitt's revolt evokes at least some sympathetic response from Gissing.

The primary emotional impact of the novel, however, is the representation of the workers trapped in their environment. Raymond Williams, in The Country and the City, cites the description of the release of Clerkenwell factory workers as an example of the change of attitude of writers as regards the city, introducing definite feelings of repulsion. ⁶⁰ One of the saddest episodes in the novel is found in the opening lines of Chapter 39, when Sidney is shown transferred to Crouch End simply as part of the spreading outward of an ever increasing number of slum dwellings.

Another decade, and the dark patch will have spread greatly further; for the present, Crouch End is still able to remind one that it was in the country a very short time ago. . . until the time when an advanced guard of houses shall justify the existence of a slum. ⁶¹

The poverty in which Sidney continues to live seems like a bleak foreboding, while the ending, which shows Jane living alone, is full of pathos. The romance in her life is no more, there is no wealth left, and no hope of realising ever Snowdon's idealistic projects. ⁶² Jane eventually meets Stephen, whom she had once loved, on the third anniversary of her grand-father's death, appropriately enough in a cemetery, and Gissing suggests that:

. . . at least, their lives would remain a protest against those brute forces of society which fill with wreck the abysses of the nether world. ⁶³

What is peculiarly depressing, and yet powerful, in that conclusion is the evocation of unfinished lives carrying on the struggle in spite of overwhelming odds. The novel does not end, in the conventional sense; it simply stops, suspended at some arbitrary point in the narrative of continuing deprivation, a sign of the effectiveness of Gissing's presentation of the lives of the poor at that time in London.

All three novels by Gissing considered above are certainly worthy of comparison with Zola's and James's works, especially L'Assommoir and The Princess Casamassima.

Gissing was coming to terms with some of Zola's ideas, even if the circulating libraries of those days made it impossible for him to enjoy the same freedom of speech as Zola's. It is difficult to assess how true his claim not to have read Zola was (in the previously mentioned letter to Harrison) since he hinted later that he liked him as a writer. Heredity and environment are certainly as important for him as they are for Zola. It has clearly been shown that, in Demos, Mutimer has a flawed character because of his lack of initial 'good breeding' and 'finer feelings' and that this is what leads to the ruin of his hopes for the betterment of the lower class to which he belongs.

For the same reason, Gissing cannot imagine Thyrsa ever making a suitable wife for Egremont. Moreover, because of the lack of inherited intellectual qualities of the lower classes, combined, it must be admitted, with the unscrupulous schemes of a wicked character, the philanthropic efforts of Snowdon in The Nether World, come to nought.

Another point of comparison is the convincing way in which Gissing's three novels depict working-class characters and the working-class milieux in the city of London, stressing the hopelessness of their attempts to escape from the poverty trap and the oppressiveness of the slums. One does not find there the enormous vitality and the wealth of incidents of Zola's L'Assommoir, true, but the marriage of Bob Hewitt (The Nether World) has been shown to come very near the wedding scene in L'Assommoir, for instance.

Where a great difference exists, is in the two authors' feelings towards the underprivileged. Zola certainly believes in the taint of heredity and in the destructive power of an unsuitable environment, but he expresses a sort of optimism, in the sense that he sees the working class as able to improve, and eventually to free itself, until it can take its rightful place as equal with the rest of society. Not so Gissing. He has little sympathy, and little hope for the future, as far as the proletariat is concerned, but on the other hand, his compassion towards individual members of that class is in many ways more real and convincing.

On the other hand, to compare Gissing with Henry James is immediately to Gissing's disadvantage, if the quality of style - so important for James - is the main criterion. It may be, however, that Gissing avoid James's pitfall of having all his characters speaking with the voice of their creator, and displaying his own complexity of thought. It is difficult to see them as genuine, with the brilliant exception

of Millicent Henning, and possibly, of Paul Muniment, in The Princess Casamassima.

There is no doubt that Thyrza and her sister Lydia, and a number of others, are far more fully realised, and their language far more convincingly reproduced. Furthermore, Gissing shows his genuine familiarity with the kind of environment he is describing, and his sympathetic understanding of the conditions of those who dwell there; James is forced by his lack of first-hand experience to attempt 'imaginative penetration' of the characters, and the results are such that, besides Gissing, he appears unbearably ponderous and pompous.

It is fascinating to see two such authors, so utterly different themselves, responding to the same upsurge of radicalism by attempting to write novels on the same topic, and setting them within the same environment, and coming to much the same conclusions. They both feel that change is impossible in such a society, and that appreciation of the finer things in life is limited to the higher classes. Gissing was convinced of his worth as a writer. To his sister, he wrote, in 1886:

I have in my head a book which no one else can write, a book which will contain the very essence of working-class life. 64

Ironically, this book, whichever it was, only achieved limited success, while it was Henry James, using much the same material, at the same time, who was to create the greater masterpiece. If Gissing can be taken as an example of a writer coming to treat a similar subject as Zola and James from a different

angle and with a different purpose, George Moore has to be recognised as deliberately setting out to emulate Zola in English fiction. Moore had been an art student in Paris in the 1870's, and from 1877, the period generally known as his 'café education', he moved in the circles of contemporary art ranging from that of Manet to that of Zola. After reading Zola's Le Roman Expérimental, he claimed that Zola had "inebriated [him] with theory".⁶⁵

Moore returned to London in 1880 determined to give up painting for the sake of writing novels, and to do this according to Zola's theory of social realism. Moore's first novel, A Modern Lover (1883) was, he explained later, written "out of his memories of Balzac, Zola and Goncourt",⁶⁶ while his second novel, A Mummer's Wife (1885) has been described as the only Zolaesque novel in England during the French naturalism period.⁶⁷

The basic plot of A Modern Lover is simple. Lewis Seymour is an artist with a very minor, conventional talent, who achieves social and financial success at the expense of 'prostituting' what little real gift he has, and also by exploiting three women, belonging each to a different class of society. His first victim, Gwinnie Lloyd, is a trusting and innocent girl, from a working-class background, who agrees to pose for him in the nude, and is eventually cast aside. Then, there is Mrs. Bentham, a well-to-do socialite who, by purchasing his pictures, is able to introduce him into society, and finally there is Lady Helen Trevor, who confers ultimate respectability and makes his financial situation secure by marrying him.

Each of these three women realises her mistake when it is too late. and the theme of the novel, which is basically that of financial success achieved at the expense of moral, spiritual and artistic values, makes it a clear exponent of Zola's tradition. However, as Richard Cave recognises in his analysis of the novel, the lightness of the plot cannot bear the weight even of the shadows of Balzac and Zola which have inspired it,⁶⁸ so that a serious comparison with Gissing or James could hardly be justified.

The novel begins promisingly enough, with a description of artistic bohemia, living from hand to mouth in London, which can be seen as a counterpart of Zola's Parisian scenes. Lewis Seymour is first seen at the house of the wealthy but mean art dealer, Bendish, where he attempts to sell some of his pictures. Bendish is a philistine in art, but knows fashion, and refuses to buy what is not likely to please his customers. Seymour, down to his last shilling, is still reluctant to renounce his own vision of art, based on the same kind of belief which animated Claude, in Zola's novel L'Œuvre, when he expressed the credo of a new school, that had broken with the traditions of all times and all countries, and was trying to formulate a new form of art.⁶⁹

Seymour's despairing walk, after that meeting, from the bohemian part of Fitzroy Square, down Drury Lane surrounded by the rich world of theatre-goers, to the river Thames at Charing Cross, which leads to velleities of suicide, is painted in the purest naturalistic manner. In fact, the wealth of imagery reminiscent of Zola in the first part of the novel is quite

extraordinary. The presence of the city, so full of wealth, to which Seymour has recently returned in the hope of making his fortune, is keenly felt by him in his dejection:

He was like a corpse over whose grave the city that had robbed and ravished him was holding a revelling carnival. 70

Moore's poetic licence is also akin to Zola's at times:

He fancied he heard the shower of gold and kisses which fell over the city. 71

and:

The vision of wealth and beauty he had seen had darkened for him even the darkness of death. 72

Another interesting similarity is Moore's impressionistic use of colours:

The day was sloppy, but the sun shone between the showers, the violet roof of Waterloo Place glittered intensely, and scattered around reflections of their vivid colours. 73

Later, he discusses his own paintings:

You say that my sunset effects are too violet in tone? . . . Isn't everything violet? Walls, pools and carriages? Why, I can see nothing that isn't violet. 74

and this certainly is reminiscent of Zola's depiction of the roof tops of Paris in Une Page d'Amour, where the colours also reflect the emotions of the novel's heroine.

As Moore's story progresses, though, Seymour loses his dignity as an artist, together, it seems, with his artistic sense, and the novel itself loses some of its interest. One misses the café discussions of lively topics, such as Wagnerism, bohemianism, and a variety of others. Finally, the scenes of upper-class London, with Lady Helen's success in securing for Seymour a showing at the Royal Academy, cannot regain the initial vitality of the earlier chapters. The

descriptive scenes are vague, blurred:

Never had London seen more wonderful fêtes. 75

Seymour's attitude is equally vague:

Lewis, on his side, had little inclination
to leave the sweet, pleasant way of success,
to climb the thorny path leading to some
far ideal . . . 76

and he appears content to mock modern painters for what he sees as "foolish eccentricity". Even with Gwinnie's reappearance, the story remains unsatisfactory, the novel ending on a note of acceptance, satisfied and cynical, of a fashionably empty life. Zola is, nevertheless, not entirely forgotten, and his adoption of Hippolyte Taine's famous dictum is recollected here, perhaps by way of justification:

What is true in physics is true in morals,
A half sterile seed and a half formed talent
will both grow and blossom, if especially
favoured by circumstances. 77

The use of scientific data as a basis for the treatment of morality certainly reveals a naturalistic approach, yet the book does not give a fully rounded picture of a social world. Seymour moves upwards rather rapidly and painlessly through the various strata of society, and the focus is too much on him for it even to be representative of an artistic milieu.

This is perhaps why Moore, in his second, and much more successful novel, A Mummer's Wife, concentrates on the detailed study of only one specifically defined and circumscribed section of society, where the progressive moral degradation of one woman can be closely analysed.

Kate Ede, the heroine of A Mummer's Wife, makes a journey which takes the opposite direction to that of Lewis

Seymour; she falls from her respectable middle-class station to a lower working class level, but, because the distance is not so great between the two, the depth of the study can be achieved without inconsistency and in a more naturalistic way. The opening scenes, in Staffordshire, are very fully realised, with Moore making full use of poetic descriptions to show how confined and empty Kate's life is until Mr. Lennox and his "mummers" erupt into it.

Kate has a favourite spot on the hillside, overlooking the potteries of Hanley, and the way she looks at things is as symptomatic of her emotions as anything in Zola. She likes Market Street, because it is slightly less mercantile than the rest of Hanley; she looks out at the deserted ruins of collieries which cover the slopes and reflects that these were lovely hillsides in her childhood:

. . . and those vast slopes, which consequently formed the background of every street, were the theatre of all Kate's travels. ⁷⁸

Lennox tempts her to go and discover what is beyond the hills, and so to escape from a drab environment, again remarkably symbolised by a visual representation:

So black was everything that even the spire of the church remained a silhouette in the liquid sunlight. ⁷⁹

That Kate is not seeing Lennox as he really is, is also made clear in a symbolic fashion: he is like one of the heroes of her childhood story-books, and in such books there is no industry, no squalor, only gardens and fields.

So Moore has taken a giant step in the way this novel is written. He describes accurately the type of community

found in that part of England, and also shows some mastery in portraying the effect that a theatrical company has on Kate. She cannot cope with the nomadic life she is now expected to live, nor can she cope with Lennox's instability, and she resorts to drink to make reality recede and get back to the memories of the past, like Gervaise does in L'Assommoir. The striking contrast between the respectable poverty of Ralph Ede's family and Kate's own disreputable poverty is also very close to the descriptions of L'Assommoir.

For instance, Kate is at first reluctant to drink, just as Gervaise:

Oh, I don't like to go up there . . . Look
at all the men there are before the door. 80

Drink and sex are also associated in a similar way. Drink will accustom Kate to put up with the dirty stories told by the other girls of the theatre, and it will further help her to accept the idea of her lost virtue. When her baby dies, she relies entirely on drink for her comfort, and becomes the most hated and feared symbol of the late Victorian novel, the alcoholic woman.

In contrast to the vague and uninteresting closing episodes of A Modern Lover, the end of A Mummer's Wife, retracing the steps of Kate's moral and physical degradation, is extremely well documented and presented. Kate has dreamed of London as a great city, such as it was described in the fashionable novels of society life, but her lodgings, behind a cattle-market in Islington are very different. She visits the British Museum and St. Paul's Cathedral, but only to take refuge from the cold, and everywhere feels:

. . . that awful sensation of being lost amid a myriad beings, which a great city produces on a newcomer. 81

Increasingly left alone by Lennox because of her drunkenness and hysteria, she is reduced to seeing the city as more and more hideous and life-destroying.

Here, Moore's vision of London is as bleak and terrifying as anything in Gissing, or indeed in Zola:

From Lambeth, from Islington, from Pimlico, from all the dark corners where it had been lurking in the daytime, at the fading of the light, it had descended ravenous and awful as a horde of wolves. 82

The "it" referred to in the above paragraph is prostitution which, according to Moore, has for the moment monopolised the town. Eventually, Kate is left dying in the same kind of squalor as Seymour had experienced at the beginning of A Modern Lover, and, without his resourceful talent for escaping from it, there is no doubt that she would very likely have become one of the tragic army of prostitutes if death has not finally intervened. And in the manner of Zola, it is left to one of the characters, Mrs. Forest, to moralise at the end of the novel:

If the human race is to be evolved into a higher degree of perfection, no weak half measures will avail to effect the change. There must, on the contrary, be a radical change in hereditary [sic] and environment. 83

The actual death of Kate is described dispassionately in the best naturalistic style, and it is clear from the tone of some contemporary reviews that the novel was considered a thoroughly successful example of the genre. The Graphic was one of them:

A Mummer's Wife holds at present a unique position among English novels. It is the first thoroughgoing attempt, at any rate of importance, to carry out the principles of realism in fiction to their final, and possibly only logical, result. 84

The reviews were generally in agreement, being opposed to the principles, but conceding that the book painted a truthful portrait of the seamy side of life. That such a development could never have been possible without the initial explorations of the Goncourts, and of their most glorious disciple, Zola, is a matter of incontrovertible evidence.

To conclude this chapter, it seems especially relevant to consider Bel-Ami, by Guy de Maupassant, as this novel shows the work of a French writer influenced by Zola in much the same way as George Moore, and even more directly. Both Maupassant and Moore eventually went on to write in other, more personal, styles, Maupassant to develop his own concise and cruelly ironic form, reaching its perfection in the short stories, and Moore, to pass through many different stages, from Paterian æstheticism, to the Irish literary revival, and eventually to a more individual mythological presentation of ideas.

Yet they both wrote novels, in the early 1880's, which dealt with artists living in their respective country's capitals, and were, on the whole, struggling for recognition, but in a completely unprincipled manner, being 'on the make', so to speak. Of the two, Maupassant's novel is the more successful, and the reasons for this have a great deal to do with the use to which he was able to put the ideas which he borrowed

from Zola.⁸⁵

Maupassant had first come under Zola's influence during the last few years of the 1870's, following his early tutelage by Flaubert in that decade. Michael G. Lerner, in his biography of Maupassant, describes him as an "obscene idealist" at this time⁸⁶ and there is no doubt that the absence of moral and spiritual considerations in Zola's theories appealed to Maupassant, in addition to the promise of increased publicity for his own work. He enjoyed Zola's hospitality at Médan and yet felt free to mock Zola's "pretentious claim" to have created a new kind of novel. In a letter written to Flaubert on 24th April 1879, he said that he did not believe any more in Naturalism or Realism than he did in Romanticism. . . , it was simply a means to an end, the important point being to be original.⁸⁷ This was clearly seen in the story about a patriotic young prostitute, Boule de Suif, which was Maupassant's contribution to the volume of Les Soirées de Médan, a collection of short stories intended as a tribute to Zola. It is noticeable, however, that in reality this particular contribution was a somewhat back-handed compliment, as the quality of the tale far excelled the others, and since the presentation made it plain that he did not feel bound by the conventions of Naturalism.

After the success of Boule de Suif, the philosopher Taine advised Maupassant not to limit his naturalist studies to the lower classes, and, partly as a result, Bel-Ami, serialised in 1885, is the presentation of a hero, raised from the most abject poverty to the highest level of social success,

like Moore's Lewis Seymour in the novel previously considered. It is the story of Georges Duroy's social climb which forms the subject of the book, in which the means he uses, mostly the seduction and exploitation of a succession of women, are detailed. In all his seductions, the hero is meant to epitomise a 'flashy' but worthless society, in the way Zola does, mirroring the Third Republic, while describing events which supposedly take place during the Second Empire.

The road to easy wealth without any corresponding effort seems to have been very symptomatic of the age. Maupassant was quite ready to accept to be seen, himself, as the eponymous hero, as he acknowledged by signing copies of the novel under that name. Yet Georges is more vacuous and worthless than his creator, and indeed enables him to present a penetrating picture, in the best Naturalistic style, of the hypocritical worlds of the press, finance and politics - and ultimately, of the state itself.

The Parisian scenes are revealing symbols of Georges Duroy's state of mind, and of his progress in society. The novel opens with Georges sitting in a Paris café, watched by three poor girls, just as he himself watches enviously the richer customers who can afford to have a regular table. The capital is shown as a warm, steamy centre, from which Georges is excluded by his poverty:

C'était une de ces soirées d'été où l'air manque dans Paris. La ville, chaude comme une étuve, paraissait suer dans la nuit étouffante. Les égoûts soufflaient par leurs bouches de granit leurs haleines empestées, et les cuisines souterraines jetaient à la rue, par leurs fenêtres basses, les miasmes infâmes des eaux de vaisselle et des vieilles sauces. 88

The evident stress on waste, and its evil-smelling products is a preparation for the portrait of the city which follows, and the beautifully organised structure of the novel makes the concluding scene into an exact parallel. Georges is again watched, this time by the massed ranks of French aristocracy and high society, as he makes his triumphant progress up the aisle on the day of his wedding to Suzanne Walter, a member of one of the wealthiest families in France.

Cet événement eut lieu par un jour clair d'automne. Dès huit heures du matin, tout le personnel de la Madeleine, étendant sur les marches du haut perron de cette église qui domine la rue Royale un large tapis rouge, faisant arrêter les passants; annonçant au peuple de Paris qu'une grande cérémonie allait avoir lieu. 89

In other words, the people of Paris are now staring at a reflection of themselves, in that symbolic ceremony about to take place in the fashionable church of the Madeleine. Everyone is involved in this event, even the office workers who just happen to be there, or the beggars nearby, even if they pretend to be simply bemused at the way the rich choose to squander their money. Georges is now receiving the ultimate accolade of the city, and as usual, it is through a precise description of that city that his upward progression is made clear.

Other aspects of the novel's technique show a debt to Zola's methodology, for instance, the painstakingly accurate description of individual places, or the contrast between Paris being seen as a centre of corruption, while the countryside is synonymous with innocence. Even the most elegant districts of Paris are shown as corrupt:

Ils prirent un fiacre découvert, gagnèrent les Champs-Élysées, puis l'avenue du Bois de Boulogne. C'était une nuit sans vent, une de ces nuits d'étuve où l'air de Paris, surchauffé, entre dans la poitrine comme une vapeur de four. Une armée de fiacres menaient sous les arbres tout un peuple d'amoureux. Ils allaient, ces fiacres, L'un derrière l'autre, sans cesse. 90

This "armée de fiacres" or, as Maupassant also describes it, this "fleuve d'amants" are obvious examples of his use of metaphors. Then, in the same scene Mado contrasts immediately the mock rurality of the artificial "forest" which is the Bois de Boulogne, with the real forest near Georges's home, of which she has always been terrified. In turn, the term "forestier" reminds Georges of his corrupt manipulations concerning the man Forestier, so that the word seems to scream fo him from the undergrowth. "[comme s'il] eut crié du fond d'un fourré" just like a strident accusation from his own conscience. 91

He had left Madame Forestier alone in the country at the end of the first part of the novel, at a time when he was aware that he could have made a more innocent life for himself there, and the second part, where he is again in Paris, shows how this return is the final surrender of innocence, and of all hopes of leading a honest life. The opposition between the country and the capital is symbolic even more than topographical.

It is, moreover, noteworthy to recognise the originality of Maupassant's technique, in that he does not attempt to give a sweeping panoramic view of society. He concentrates on the effect that one individual can have on shaping his environment to suit his own ends, and in that way offset the

influence of heredity, despite the existence of hereditary features which cannot be denied.

Maupassant, as well as Moore, used the same methods as Zola and accepted his Naturalistic theories, but because of their individuality as writers, they transformed and interpreted these in different ways. They also replaced Zola's basically optimistic view of society with their own pessimism, with the result that there is no hint that the seed of a better society can "germinate" and lead to ultimate equality and fulfilment. For both authors, society rewards the worthless parasite while ignoring true values, artistic or moral, and it allows the strong to be secure and dominate others.

Three other authors have also been considered in the present chapter, and their more complex relationship with Zola has been explored. The Goncourts have been shown as the pioneers of a method which, in their hand, did not reach absolute mastery, remaining too individualistic and remote. Zola filled it out, so to speak, gave it more appeal, and made it applicable to whole classes of society.

Gissing, on the other hand, was neither a precursor nor an heir to Zola, but came to treat similar subjects from a wholly different point of view, making in fact many identical points quite unintentionally. While he assumed that he was adopting a firm reactionary attitude towards the working classes, and while he was convinced of the pointlessness and impossibility of educating them, he paints a broadly and unexpectedly sympathetic picture of the proletariat, a picture which cannot fail to impress the reader and make him

conscious of their stoicism, forcing him to pity the appalling conditions in which they live, and leading him to wish for change, at the very least.

Although Gissing rejected any suggestion that he had read Zola early on, he was, by the late 1880's, one of his most devoted disciples, which is clearly shown by the similarity of the areas of society they explore and of the questions they ask.

It is the measure of Zola's artistry that, while dealing with social and political issues, he did not become the mouth-piece of any political party. The fact that both left and right wing critics were equally outraged by the publication of L'Assommoir demonstrates that neither could feel that he was 'on their side'. What the novel does is to present the working class people, just as they are, and to examine their collective as well as individual reactions.

Henry James was similarly preoccupied with the political atmosphere and the social problems of the day, which certainly shows that both authors were dealing with topical causes for concern, and he is equally determined to present a true picture, based on factual observation, of the lower classes' reactions to their living conditions.

Furthermore, his questioning of the part played by the city itself - and especially the capital of a newly industrialised country - rejoins Zola's concern for the effects of urban life on the masses of workers uprooted during the period of acute social changes of the 1870's and 1880's, ⁹² all of which goes a long way towards explaining the importance of the two novels

singled out for special study, as well as the enduring fame of the two writers.

This survey of influences and contemporaries of James and Zola has not dwelt on Henry James's greatest influence from French literature of the period, Gustave Flaubert. This is because, as David Gervais has shown in his study of Flaubert and Henry James, James does not merely 'depend' on Flaubert, as he did earlier in his career on Balzac but measures his achievement against Flaubert's as a contrast or a yardstick. James's relation to Zola and the other French writers discussed in this chapter is different again in kind, in that he is borrowing their methods and subject-matter for similar ends. James shares Zola's basic optimism about social change, so that even if his style owes more to Flaubert, his subject-matter and attitude are more closely related to Zola.

The developing and reacting personalities of Zola's Gervaise in L'Assommoir and James's Hyacinth in The Princess Casamassima bear more resemblance to the characters depicted in the works of the authors discussed here than they do to Flaubert's Madame Bovary and Frédéric Moreau. Flaubert, after all, concentrated on the safer revolution of 1848 and never did write the novel of life under Napoleon III which he had planned. If he had written it, James's own development in the Princess might have been very different.

NOTES TO CHAPTER I

¹For a full discussion of the subject, see P.J. Keating, The Working Classes in Victorian Fiction (1820-1900).

²John Goode deals with the question of the influence of Dickens's London on Gissing in the first chapter of his book, George Gissing: Ideology and Fiction, "The Empty Chair".

³Germinie Lacerteux, Preface, p. 1.

⁴Ibid., p. 1.

⁵Journal des Goncourt, Vol. I, p. 1110.

⁶Ibid., Vol. II, p. 96.

⁷Ibid., Vol. I, p. 989.

"L'Histoire est un roman qui a été, le roman est de l'histoire qui aurait pu être", and "Un des caractères les plus particuliers de nos romans . . . ce sera d'être les romans les plus historiques de ce temps-ci, ceux qui fourniront le plus de faits et de vérités vraies à l'histoire morale de ce siècle" [Vol. I].

⁸Ibid., Vol. II, p. 281.

⁹Germinie Lacerteux, Preface, p. ii.

¹⁰Ibid., pp. 25-6.

¹¹L'Assommoir, p. 178.

¹²Germinie Lacerteux, p. 51.

¹³Ibid., p. 94.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 141.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 165.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 166.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 166.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 130. Compare the ending of Chapter 1, of L'Assommoir, concerning Gervaise ". . . comme si sa vie, désormais, allait tenir là, entre un abattoir et un hôpital". (p. 51).

¹⁹Journal des Goncourt, Vol. I, p. 1019.

²⁰La Fille Elisa. Opening paragraph of preliminary section before Book I, p. 1.

²¹Ibid., p. 9.

²²Ibid., p. 16.

²³Ibid., p. 20.

²⁴Ibid., pp. 21-2.

²⁵Ibid., p. 38.

²⁶Ibid., p. 64.

²⁷Ibid., p. 222.

²⁸Ibid., p. 291.

²⁹Quoted in George Gissing: A critical biography, Jacob Korg, p. 3, from Letters of George Gissing to Members of his Family (collected and arranged by Algernon and Ellen Gissing), pp. 77-8. Referred to later as Letters.

³⁰Letters, p. 74.

³¹See also Progress and Poverty, Henry George, and The Bitter Cry of Outcast London, Rev. A. Mearns.

³²Gissing published the book anonymously, partly to avoid a clash of sales with an earlier novel, partly as a means of stimulating interest. Quote from Letters, p. 169.

³³Letters, p. 174.

³⁴The Born Exile: George Gissing, Gillian Tindall. The chapter entitled 'The Born Exile' postulates this and other unsubstantiated hypotheses.

³⁵Gissing in Context, Adrian Poole, p. 72.

³⁶Letter to Algernon, June 21, 1884. Yale University Library.

³⁷George Gissing: a critical biography, Korg, p. 86.

³⁸Demos, p. 66.

³⁹Gissing in Context, p. 71.

⁴⁰Demos, p. 350.

⁴¹George Gissing: A critical biography, p. 88.

⁴²Gissing in Context, p. 72.

- ⁴³Demos, p. 453.
- ⁴⁴Ibid., pp. 8-9.
- ⁴⁵Times Review, 3.4.86, "Gissing, The Critical Heritage", p. 79.
- ⁴⁶The Turn of the Century: Essays on Victorian and Modern English Literature, Bernard Bergonzi, p. 71.
- ⁴⁷Thyrza, Notes to the text, p. xxiii and xxv.
- ⁴⁸Ibid., p. 486.
- ⁴⁹Ibid., p. 422.
- ⁵⁰Ibid., Notes to the text, p. xxiv.
- ⁵¹Ibid., p. 37. Korg also compares, in the introduction to Thyrza, the description of a man in shirt-sleeves on a Sunday afternoon, on p. 54 of Thyrza, with Eliot's use of the same image in 'The Love-Song of J. Alfred Prufrock', as an example of the objective correlative. Gissing can thus alternate between lyrical celebration and the stark depiction of urban alienation [Korg, Introduction to Thyrza, p. xiii].
- ⁵²Gissing in Context, p. 75.
- ⁵³The Born Exile, George Gissing, p. 118.
- ⁵⁴Gissing in Context, pp. 84-5.
- ⁵⁵Ibid., p. 38.
- ⁵⁶The Nether World, Introduction by John Goode, p. v.
- ⁵⁷See 'The Empty Chair', Chapter I of George Gissing: Ideology and Fiction.
- ⁵⁸George Gissing: A Critical Biography, p. 114.
- ⁵⁹Gissing in Context, p. 100.
- ⁶⁰The Country and the City, Raymond Williams. The author discusses Gissing as a novelist of working-class life in the city on pp. 222-5. of Chapter 19, 'Cities of Darkness and Light'.
- ⁶¹The Nether World, p. 364.
- ⁶²Ibid., p. 391.
- ⁶³Ibid., p. 392.
- ⁶⁴Letters, p. 184.

⁶⁵Confessions of a Young Man, p. 302.

⁶⁶Lewis Seymour and Some Women, p. v.

⁶⁷By F.W. Seinfelt in his study, George Moore, Ireland's Unconventional Realist, p. 5.

⁶⁸"From the prevailing imagery describing London as a 'siren city' given over to a 'golden nightmare' . . . one can see that Moore is attempting also to imitate Zola's poetic improvisations", p. 28, from Richard Cave, A Study of the Novels of George Moore. Cave also states: "A Modern Lover is a deliberate imitation of the French Naturalist Novel, but it seems lightweight by comparison with that prototype, because it fails to picture society adequately as a fatal determining force", p. 28.

⁶⁹A Modern Lover, Vol. I, p. 4.

⁷⁰Ibid., Vol. I, p. 10.

⁷¹Ibid., Vol. I, p. 13.

⁷²Ibid., Vol. I, p. 14.

⁷³Ibid., Vol. I, p. 67.

⁷⁴Ibid., Vol. I, p. 67.

⁷⁵Ibid., Vol. II, p. 124.

⁷⁶Ibid., Vol. II, p. 216.

⁷⁷Ibid., Vol. II, p. 213.

⁷⁸A Mummers' Wife, p. 69.

⁷⁹Ibid., p. 67.

⁸⁰Ibid., p. 211.

⁸¹Ibid., p. 356.

⁸²Ibid., p. 423.

⁸³Ibid., p. 434.

⁸⁴Graphic Review, quoted on p. 23 of Literature at Nurse or Circulating Morals, George Moore.

⁸⁵As Richard Cave points out in his book on Moore cited above, "Interestingly Maupassant, another disciple of Zola, reworked Moore's basic anecdote in Bel-Ami and did so in a fashion more deliberately in keeping with Zola's techniques", p. 29.

⁸⁶ See Maupassant, Michel G. Lerner, p. 91.

⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 128, and the entire chapter 4, 'Under the Wing of Naturalism'.

⁸⁸ Bel-Ami, p. 32.

⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 405.

⁹⁰ Ibid., pp. 263-4.

⁹¹ Ibid., p. 265.

⁹² As L.H. Powers states in Henry James and the Naturalist Movement, Maupassant continued as an influence for James after he gave up Zola: "If the Naturalist influence of the earlier years of the decade is focussed in the figure of Zola, that of the later years is focussed on Maupassant", Powers, pp. 124-5.

CHAPTER II

London and Paris in the Novels of Henry James and Emile Zola

There are some similarities in the writing careers of Henry James and Emile Zola, although these are not altogether in the same chronological order. Nevertheless, their developments as writers can conveniently be divided into three distinct periods.

In Zola's case, the most natural divisions are obviously, the period preceding the Rougon-Macquart series, that of the Rougon-Macquart, and that of the later works. The early novels reflect the time he spent in Paris as a young man, a period of learning and experimenting, which lasted until 1870 and culminated in the relatively sophisticated novel Thérèse Raquin. The Rougon-Macquart collection, written between 1870 and 1893, is Zola's greatest literary achievement, the story of a family over several generations, in the panoramic scope of the Second Empire. Zola's final novel-sequences, on the other hand, written after 1893, Les Trois Villes, and Les Quatre Evangiles, are often seen as showing a sharp decline in his powers as a novelist, although a number of pages retain the depth of rendering of his most successful works.

James's three creative periods can be seen as starting with

the novels on the 'international theme', dealing with the contrast between the old world and the new, and culminating in the major achievement of The Portrait of a Lady in 1881. He then entered a relatively short period of 'social novels', influenced by Zola's example and the need to make money, up to the publication of The Tragic Muse in 1890. Finally, he wrote a series of intensely personal works, including his three late masterpieces: The Wings of the Dove (1902), The Ambassadors (1903) and The Golden Bowl.

The importance of Paris for Zola and of London for James is considerable. Zola was, in fact, born in Paris, in the rue St. Joseph, in 1840 and, after a boyhood spent in Aix-en-Provence, he returned to live there. James was born in Washington Place, New York, in 1843, but adopted London as a place of residence, choosing to make his home there from 1876 onward. He retained his American citizenship until the First World War when his support for Britain made him want to become British.

The two authors had quite different backgrounds. James came from a family which had emigrated from Ireland to the States and had been wealthy for two generations, while Zola's father was an engineer of Italian extraction who died penniless and disillusioned, and whose widow fought a fruitless battle with the authorities to try and get some posthumous recognition for her husband's work. This was one of the reasons for her return with Emile to Paris shortly before he was due to sit for his baccalauréat es sciences. He was eventually unsuccessful in the examination.

James's father, on the other hand, believed in giving his

children the benefit of a cosmopolitan education, and Henry attended schools in Bonn and Geneva in addition to Harvard University where he briefly studied law. In James's case, therefore, the decision to settle in London was a conscious one. He could just as easily have made his home in New York or Paris, where he knew the literary world intimately. For Zola, the decision had been forced by necessity. When he had to take refuge temporarily in London at the time of the Dreyfus case, after he made a courageous stand in favour of the young officer, Zola was desperately unhappy in his exile in Wimbledon, as he spoke only a few words of English. Nevertheless, Paris was a deliberate choice for him upon his return, both as a place to live and as a setting for his novels. It performed the same function for him as London did for James, and both writers reveal as much subconsciously about the city of their choice as they do intentionally.

It does not seem that Zola was exceptionally unhappy at first, when he had to leave Aix-en-Provence, referring to it as:

Aix-en-Provence, amoureuse des grands
ombrages et de la tranquillité de cette
ancienne capitale qui n'a plus aujourd'hui
que ses souvenirs et la beauté de son ciel. 2

However, the lyrical description of boyhood pleasures which can be found in L'Œuvre, where he appears thinly disguised in company of his friends Cézanne and Baille, makes it plain that to have been thrust into the turmoil of the French capital at that time must have been to some extent traumatic. In L'Œuvre and other early works of fiction, he often stresses the nightmarish quality of existence in Paris, and contrasts it with the

innocent peace of the countryside at "Plassans", the name for Aix-en-Provence in his books.

From 1870 onwards, the Paris of the Second Empire and that of the Third Republic form the setting for many of the best of his novels, as well as the basis for his theories of how the 'new' Naturalistic novel ought to be written. There is no similar sense of the physical presence of the city in James's work, with the exception, perhaps, of his working-class novel The Princess Casamassima. Unlike Dickens, and to a lesser extent Gissing, he does not give a 'palpable' impression to compare, for instance, with the description of the fog at the beginning of Bleak House.³ Frequently, in James, the physical situation is a mere symbolic background to the conversations of the characters. In spite of these differences, important though they are, there is enough in common in the two writers' treatment of the town to make an enquiry possible into the influence which the two cities exerted on them in order to make them write as they did.

In Zola's case, there is no doubt that his arrival in Paris proved a great shock after the calm provincial life he had led. He wrote to Cézanne who was still living in Aix, that:

mon rêve de poète me dit qu'il vaut mieux un
rocher abrupt qu'une maison nouvellement
badigeonnée, le murmure des flots que celui d'une
grande ville, la nature vierge, qu'une nature
tourmentée et apprêtée.⁴

The contrast between his adolescent memories of Provence and the harsher realities of Parisian life can be identified clearly in his first novel, La Confession de Claude. The novel adopts

in its opening pages, the style of a young provincial living in the capital and writing letters to his friends in the country, just as Zola himself had done. The tone is one of sustained lament, as city life does not fulfil its promises of glamour and happiness:

La misère avait pour nous le luxe de la
lumière et du sourire.⁵

In the novel, Claude rescues a young prostitute hardened by her way of life in town, attempts to reform her and eventually, giving up in despair, returns to the solace of the countryside. Then, the stories gathered in Zola's Contes à Ninon, published in 1864, also extol his view of Provence as a kind of idealised retreat against the harshness of the city. These two books bear witness to the romanticism that Zola later attempted to suppress from his writings, yet which continued to permeate them, especially when he wrote about Paris in the Rougon-Macquart series.

The poverty of Claude, and his timidity, are reflections of Zola's own in Paris during his 'bohemian' period, from 1859 to 1862, beginning with his failed attempt at the baccalauréat and ending when he started work on a permanent basis with the publishing house of Hachette.⁶ It was as a result of these unhappy years, when penniless, he changed lodgings frequently, moving around the poorer districts of Paris, that he acquired his intimate knowledge of the more arcane aspects of working-class life. Thus was a novel like L'Assommoir made possible.

In his early writings, he also utilised under thinly disguised fictional form the many adventures which befell him at that time.

The Paris in which Zola settled in 1858 was peculiar in that most of its inhabitants had not been born there. The Second Empire was a period of entrepreneurial development where extravagant displays of wealth could be found side by side with slums, and where the slums were squeezed ever closer together by the constant expansion of middle-class dwellings under the direction of Baron Haussmann. Richard D. Burton has shown in his study of Paris, in The Context of Baudelaire's "Le Cygne", how urban renewal of the kind propounded by Haussmann was building tremendous resentment from both the artists and the proletariat.

Artists felt like exiles in their own city, living in a world they could no longer recognise, and they expressed their horror when areas like the Old Carrousel were threatened. Simultaneously, the poorer people found themselves forced to move away from the centre of town into the periphery, making way for more prosperous dwellings, so that the west side of the city in particular was given over to the middle classes. Jeanne Gaillard has compared this process to the colonisation and 'modernisation' of non-European society, in Paris, la Ville, 1852-70. The city also developed a 'theatrical' mode, whereby, for the first time, the dominant role of the inhabitants was non-participatory and, of course, finally a dual purpose was served by Haussmann's broad tree-lined avenues and splendid mansions. While the immense wealth superficially generated by the Second Empire could be shown off to advantage, barricades could no longer be erected so easily at times of civil disturbances.

Henry James had considered settling in Paris himself in the

early 1870's, and made the decision to move to London instead, not without some misgivings as he had by then many friends in literary and society circles in Paris. His childhood had been spent travelling between Europe and America at the whim of an unsettled father, and it is possible that the reason for the relatively low priority given to a sense of place in his novels is partly due to this. He admitted that he had suppressed some of changes of address which had taken place in his youth, when he wrote his autobiographical work, A Small Boy and Others, as he did not want people to know that his father was so restless.

James's æsthetic principles meant that a place-name should only be used if it represented an effective element in the story. Hence, he regretted having specifically referred to Northampton, Mass., in Roderick Hudson, when mention of a community that was as yet unfitted for art was all that was needed.⁷ Therefore, when James does identify London in a text, special attention needs to be paid to the reasons behind that identification.

James's early work is concerned with America, in Watch and Ward, for instance. In Roderick Hudson, he examines the impact of Rome on an impressionable artist, while, in The American, he describes the impact of Paris. According to the critic R.W. Butterfield, in his essay on The American, "Europe then is death for the young Henry James. . ." ¹⁸ but American life is not so special that it can be allowed to invigorate Europe. Certainly the portraits of the naïve Westerner, and of the calculating Parisians, can neither be qualified as complimentary. It seems that James did not find the French as a whole receptive, and, still uncertain about his ability to work in an uncongenial atmosphere, he decided

to take a chance, and moved into lodgings in Bolton Street, Piccadilly, in the winter of 1876. His misgivings seemed at first fully justified, but he soon regained confidence when he found out that he could produce better work, while at the same time living more cheaply and in warmer circumstances.⁹ There were certain things he missed though. He regretted the cafés, the boulevards and the Théâtre Français - and he summed up the advantages and the disadvantages of his new life in a letter to his mother, written on Christmas Eve 1876, where he stated that:

Oh no; my spirits were never higher. I take very kindly to London and am immensely contented at having come here. I must be a born Londoner, for the place to withstand the very severe test to which I am putting it: Leaving Paris and its brilliancies and familiarities, the easy resources and abundant society I had there, to plunge into darkness, solitude and sleet, in mid-winter - to say nothing of the sooty, woolsy desolation of a London lodging - to do this and to like this murky Babylon really all the better, is to feel that one is likely to get on here. I like the place. I like the feeling in the midst of the English world, however lost in it I may be, I find it interesting, even exhilarating.¹⁰

Unlike Zola's Paris of tenements, James's remembered Paris was a city of leisure and of light, obviously because of the upper-class circle he moved in there. On the other hand, London represents for him the same kind of city that Paris is for Zola, a "murky Babylon" filled with "darkness, solitude and sleet" in which he as an individual is left lost and wandering, very much like Hyacinth Robinson in The Princess Casamassima. London was in fact undergoing some changes at this time, similar but less dramatic than those taking place in Paris. Whereas, in Paris, the development was mainly physical, spatial and visual, and this on a grand scale, in London, the nature of the transformation was

rather simpler and more functional, leading to a different moral and social system. As D.J. Olsen has shown, in his study of The Growth of Victorian London, "the nineteenth century saw the systematic sorting-out of London into single-purpose, homogenous specialised neighbourhoods".¹¹ The distinctions between the City and the West End began to be made. A.F. Weber wrote in 1899:

The entire process of civilisation is a process of differentiation, and the city is the greatest differentiator.¹²

The speculative builder was responsible for the largely unchecked growth of Victorian London. As a result, London was in fact different from Paris in several ways. In London, areas seemed to be responsible for their own type-casting but in Paris, each district had a mixture of functions. London built cheaply in stucco and brick while Paris built in stone. The land, in London, was mainly leasehold, yet in Paris it was freehold throughout. Therefore, when James refers to "Lancaster Gate" in The Wings of the Dove, he is making a series of assumptions about the neighbourhood. Unlike Zola who, in L'Assommoir, could write about a small homogenous section of the town which was wholly working-class, James in The Princess Casamassima has Hyacinth Robinson crossing areas of the West End, trekking between pockets of working-class dwellings. Zola's work was therefore rendered that much easier when he wanted to describe the experience of a class, he could simply focus on the area he had selected and describe it in great detail.

In the winter of 1871, Zola had a furnished room in the rue Soufflot, little more than a tenement which housed a semi-

brothel, later used for certain scenes in Zola's novel about prostitution, Nana. A homeless prostitute was sheltered at the time by Zola, an event akin to the experience of the first-person narrator in La Confession de Claude. Zola later admitted that he had put a great deal of his own life into this novel:

L'œuvre est une étude un peu âpre que je crois plus virilement écrite que mon livre de début. Je désire vivement vous voir juger en toute franchise ces pages où j'ai mis beaucoup de ma chair et beaucoup de mon cœur. 13

There was a reaction in this novel to the earlier romanticism of Zola in, for instance, Les Contes à Ninon, and Les Nouveaux Contes à Ninon, published in 1874 although written before 1868. The characteristics of these stories, as John C. Lapp has pointed out in his interesting study, Zola before the Rougon-Macquart, are their autobiographical nature and the polarities they reflect. In these stories, Paris stands for dull and disillusioning reality, whereas Provence remains a place of dreams with "les clairs soleils, les midis ardents". The contrast between the author and Ninon, a beautiful girl from the Midi, is in itself a contrast between the values of the city and the country. While Zola later rejected the sentimentality of the early stories to comply with his new creed of realism, the presence of the city had already been assimilated into his fiction. The innocent who dreams of adolescent purity in Provence in the Contes had already become a realistic narrator by the time of La Confession de Claude, a man who accepts the city for what it is, "un Paris corrupteur". Zola said of the novel:

L'œuvre est le cri d'un enfant qui pleure et qui se révolte. 14

There has been much discussion over whether the Confession can truly be said to be an autobiographical work, but even the bare outline shows its importance in Zola's life. Claude abandons his attempts to help the young prostitute Laurence in the face of the corruption of Paris. The innocent prostitute Marie, who dies tragically, is a genuine victim of the city while Laurence, like Nana, illustrates how certain types of individual can only prosper in such an environment. Zola moralises at the end on the difference between Paris and Provence:

Je trouvais une grande leçon dans ma
jeunesse perdue, dans mes amours brisées.
Mon être entier répétait: Que n'es-tu resté
là-bas, en Provence, dans les herbes hautes,
sous les larges soleils. . . Il te fallait
vivre jeune, dans le travail, et aimer la
virginité. 15

In order to recover his sense of lost innocence, Claude returns to Provence at the end of the novel. This is undoubtedly Zola's first realist work. He even describes the book in the letter-preface as being about "la lutte entre le songe et la réalité".¹⁶

Later, Zola did not try to convey his experiences of Parisian life in so straightforward a fashion, but his novels make it nevertheless possible to see when his initial attraction to city life is finally destroyed. This thesis will seek to demonstrate that, however much he attempted to suppress emotion in his later works, the poetic impact of the city retained its power to influence his writings, and can be discerned there as a continual under-current.

Zola was intimately affected by the changes that Paris was undergoing at this time. The overcrowding which the widespread demolition of working-class dwellings entailed meant that conditions

in the areas with which the writer was familiar would progressively deteriorate. One tenement house, for example, in which Zola's mother had previously lived, in the rue Monsieur-le-Prince, was eventually divided into fifty apartments.

Within such apartment houses, there was a hierarchy of occupancy, and it is no coincidence that in L'Assommoir which is probably Zola's greatest study of working-class conditions Gervaise's station in her house becomes worse and worse in direct relation to her progressive social and mental decline, until she finally dies alone in an unused cupboard under the stairs.

It is therefore not surprising to find Zola describing his own first reactions to Paris in a curiously ambiguous way:

Je m'attendais à une succession de palais,
[mais] pendant près d'une lieue, la lourde
voiture roulait entre des constructions
longues, des cabarets, des maisons suspectes,
toute une bourgade . . . Plus on s'enfonçait
dans les rues noires, Paris se montrait plus
étranglé et plus sombre que la petite ville
qu'on venait de quitter. 17

only to change to a harsher 'naturalistic' style in his major novels. This was not simply in response to Taine's and Bernard's theories, as is often assumed. It was above all the result of his living in Paris, and the subtle influence of the capital city which called for a more vigorous, clear and powerful form of expression. In the novels, Paris became almost a character in its own right, and this made Zola a great writer.

Henry James's initial reactions to London can be gauged from his essay on London, written in 1888 and published later in English Hours. In these essays, which recount many of his own

early experiences, James wrote of his fascination with the aristocratic hierarchy of British society. It was a typically American reaction, of course, but it was tempered by a sharp consciousness of the many disturbing examples of poverty much in evidence on the streets and in the parks of London. He certainly felt that he could not ignore these most distressing aspects of city life:

London is so clumsy and so brutal, and has gathered together so many of the darker sides of life, that it is almost ridiculous to talk of her as a lover talks of his mistress, and almost frivolous to appear to ignore her disfigurements and cruelties. She is like a mighty ogress who devours human flesh. 18

He extends the simile of an ogress to cover the capital's tendency to destroy anything that comes into its path. 19

However, he forgives this as it is a blind instinct which manifests itself mainly when one falls flat on one's face directly in front of her. . . . The only danger he foresees for an author is that London may teach him to become more cynical and hard-hearted, and this simply by presenting to him such a wide focus of suffering humanity. 20

James was essentially impressed by the immensity of the scale of London, and this, on his first visit, left him with a very vivid memory: "The immensity was the great fact; and that was a charm". 21 On the other hand, on his first cab ride from Euston to Morley's Hotel, he was also aware of the awful glow coming out of the gin shops:

... at frequent corners, there was a flare of light more brutal still than the darkness. 22

The following day, as he made his way up the Strand, in the direction of St. Paul's, the portico of Exeter Hall revived all the childhood expectations of England which had come to him from such sources as Punch, The Illustrated London News and the novels of Thackeray. It only took one more day, however, for him to be overcome by "a sudden horror of the whole place":

London was hideous, vicious, cruel and
above all, overwhelming . . . as
indifferent as Nature herself to the single
life. 23

Later still, he was able to welcome its all-embracing cloak of anonymity, as it permitted everyone to be both included and yet left alone. In this sense, too, London's anonymity made it a vast centre for English-speaking people, it was open to all races, and just as there was nothing which was not available there, there was nothing that could not be studied there at first hand. For this reason, in particular, James expressed his pleasure at accepting 'Londonisation', though not without certain reservations. He commented on the lack of style in the city, and on the lack of elevation in the landscape, both deficiencies which compared unfavorably with Paris. And while he admired "a chapter of accidents" in some parts, he deplored the "existence of mile upon mile of dreariest, stodgiest commonness" ²⁴ 'consisting of mediocre identical housing. The honest appraisal he made of this, feeling that one could not love London until one loved it for its defects also, led him to consider seriously these aspects of the town which contributed to the condition of the poor. This was to lay the foundations for The Princess Casamassima, with its detailed topographical features of London on the one hand, and on

the other, its sympathetic approach towards the characters whose growth is stunted in the harsh environment.

Two particular features of the 1888 'London' essay are specially relevant to demonstrate the importance of the city in James's work. One is his description of the parks, represented as the drawing-rooms of the poor, the only place where they could escape from their tightly-penned miserable existence in the slums. ²⁵ He describes, for example, St. James's Park, where:

... there are few hours of the day when a thousand smutty children are not sprawling over it, and the unemployed lie thick on the grass, and cover the benches with a brotherhood of greasy corderoys. ²⁶

It could obviously be argued that this is hardly a flattering portrait of working-class London, yet it makes it clear that James was far from being solely interested in the upper-middle classes, as quite a few of his critics have asserted.

There is a second significant point to be found in the above-mentioned essay, and that is the continuous 'presence' of the poorer elements of society in James's perception. He notices these people on his favourite walks from Kensington to the City. He sketches their attitudes, their clothes, the way they walk, in his mind; and there is no doubt that this will be the substance he draws upon for his subsequent writings.

At the same time, he is able to see the contrast between them and the rich at close quarters, and more particularly the pathetic difference existing between the rich being driven to their dinner engagements and the poor crowded in groups at street corners to watch them. He commented favourably on the sympathy that prevailed between classes as a rule, and pointed out that on the whole the

people were well off, as the "numbers of diners-out were large".²⁷ These mild reactions can be ascribed partly to James's reluctance to criticise his host country, but there can be no doubt that his imagination was profoundly affected by it, and that London life, its slums, its paltriness and vulgarity, became a source of inspiration for him.

Indeed, he stated that The Princess Casamassima was "the ripe round fruit of perambulation" during the early years of his long residence in London:

The attentive exploration of London, the assault directly made by the great city upon an imagination quick to react fully explains a large part of it. ²⁸

Soon, however, he realised that he could be accepted into London society in a way that was never possible in the alien, closed Parisian world. He began to accept dinner engagements more and more often, finding that, as an unattached bachelor, he was welcome at many society functions. This, in turn, proved beneficial for his fiction, as the starting point for a novel could often be some chance remark made at a dinner table, as happened with The Spoils of Poynton. His reactions to his increasing success as a literary star, particularly after the international fame of Daisy Miller, were of great interest in cultivating it, and also of gratitude.

Even the company of a "rather battered female diner-out" gave him a feeling of respect - of a kind - for London society.

What strikes me here is that everyone is someone or something . . . has, in some degree or other, an historical identity. ²⁹

This historical identity of London was one of the features which

James felt was lacking in contemporary America, and his discovery of it in London, helped to convince him that he would have to make his home there. His relations with other social classes tempered up to a point, however, his respect for the English. After paying his landlady, for instance, he wrote that such people had all the greed of their French counterparts without the corresponding grace. Nevertheless, he found many things to admire in London, and by February of 1877, he was stating:

I am more and more content to have come to England, and only desire to be left soaking here an indefinite period. I positively suck the atmosphere of its intimations and edifications. 30

This did not extend to considering taking an English wife though, as he felt he could never do that.

Of his love for England, and for London in particular, there can be no doubt, but it does not blind him to reality. From Paris, at the end of a visit, he writes with evident relief:

I am going back to poor, smutty, dusky, Philistine London . . . 31

Having now established what London meant for James, especially in the early days, it is possible to examine the use he made of the city in his fiction. Immediately, it is clear that, as James does, his characters relate to London from the outside, as it were, comparing and contrasting it with other European cities. The centres of art have a particular fascination for them. Italy has a pervasive, and ultimately destructive, attraction for Roderick Hudson in the person of the symbolically named Christina Light, who also destroys Hyacinth Robinson by taking him out of the enclosed moralistic dungeon of London and exposing him to the

largely artistic influences with which he cannot cope, in The Princess Casamassima. The mansion of the Bellegardes which Christopher Newman attempts to storm in The American is in itself a symbol of the centuries of tradition and hypocrisy for which Europe seems to stand in the novel. Paris is undoubtedly the centre of the dangerous world of art which is so threatening to Lady Agnes Dormer at the opening of The Tragic Muse. Compared with Paris, London stands for what is safe, accepted and restrained, despite James's often ironic comments upon the standards of some members of the English upper classes. It can therefore be stated that, in a different way but to the same extent, London is the centre for James's fiction just as Paris is for Zola.

The novels of Zola produced between La Confession de Claude and the first of the Rougon-Macquart series, La Fortune de Rougon (1871) show Zola consolidating his impressions of the early influence Paris had upon him, in much the same way as James does in his letters and essays about London. Zola experienced the seamy and threatening aspects of the city in a more direct way than James did in London, as can be seen in his description of the alleyway at the beginning of Thérèse Raquin, for instance. Le Vœu d'une Morte, similarly concerns itself with the harsh life of society's outcasts. Jeanne, the pathetic young prostitute that Daniel, the hero of the novel, tries to help is irrevocably the victim of her environment, just as the prostitute that Zola himself had befriended:

Les émotions que les paroles de Daniel
faisaient parfois naître en elle, étaient
rapidement étouffées par l'étourdissement
continu du milieu où elle se trouvait. ³²

Only a day spent in the Normandy countryside, away from the oppressive atmosphere of the town, can bring back some peace of mind to the hero, and this, together with similar instances in other novels, shows the extent to which Zola identified the country - and especially Provence - with a peaceful idyllic existence opposed to Paris' corruption.

The novel which provides the best example of Zola's vigorous and realistic treatment of the theme of the city is also the best overall of his early novels, Thérèse Raquin. This was produced at a time when Paris held its celebrated World Fair, and the animation, the superficial gaiety which surrounded the events coincided with a period of depression for Zola who was living in impoverished circumstances, making it all the harder to bear. His sombre mood made him ignore the merrymaking and the bright decorations of the capital and concentrate on its darker side. The opening pages of the novel and the sinister aspect of the Pont-Neuf and its immediate surroundings create a feeling of evil which is maintained throughout the book. The visual impact is enormous, and this led the critic Sainte-Beuve to complain that one particular street was presented as having: "l'aspect sinistre d'un véritable coupe-gorge" ³³ but that he knew the street well and could vouch for the fact that it possessed no such sinister qualities. It is interesting to note that Zola's remarkable use of the Romantics' 'pathetic fallacy' in passages such as this one, has led to recent reappraisals of his work from both poetic and

even more significantly, structuralist viewpoints.

The description is ominous and provides a reflection of the dreadful events in the book as a whole, and this is clearly intended:

On dirait une galerie souterraine
rougement éclairée par trois lampes
funéraires. 34

The elements of damp and rust are again present in the first portrayal of Thérèse, while her husband is seen as "petit, chétif, d'allure languissante". These impressions are further reinforced, together with a feeling of nausea, almost unbearable, when Laurent forces himself to visit the Morgue, looking for the drowned Camille:

Lorsqu'il entrait, une odeur fade, une
odeur de chair lavée, l'écœurait, et des
souffles froids couraient sur sa peau;
l'humidité des murs semblait alourdir ses
vêtements qui devenaient plus pesants à
ses épaules. 35

The mortuary is, of course, the most telling illustration of the horrors which are to be found in a big city, and Zola describes it in great detail, painstakingly emphasising the mixture of disgust and yet fascination with which most of the onlookers gaze at the naked corpses displayed. A fashionably dressed lady stares at the body of a young stonemason, while louts jeer at the sight of some dead girls, all signs of the strange attraction of the city for its most gruesome or corrupt aspects.

The murder of Camille, which is central to the novel, occurs outside Paris, a fact which makes his dislike of open spaces possibly premonitory. While Thérèse enjoys trips to Saint-Ouen or Asnières because they remind her of her childhood visits to

countrified Vernon, and because she loves the Seine flowing freely, Camille would like to see the whole area of the islands on the Seine turned into some version of a city park:

[...] en déclarant qu'on devrait changer
tous les îlots de la Seine en jardins
anglais, avec des bancs, des allées sablées,
des arbres taillés, comme aux Tuileries. 36

Ironically, Zola explains how difficult it has become to carry out his murder in town because there are crowds everywhere, accompanied by a strong smell of fried fish, and the prostitutes of the Latin Quarter. Here again, his description of the crowds is masterly; it is one of the major features in the novel and one can feel his own personal observations enriching the text. He is also familiar with typical outings from his picnic excursions to the upper reaches of the Seine with his future wife Alexandrine.

Once the murder has taken place, Thérèse continues to see the decomposed body of her husband Camille rising out of the water; a nightmare has started for her then which can only end with her death. Zola is careful to explain something of her passionate nature by the fact that she possessed African blood, but this dark side of her nature is also powerfully symbolised by the ghostly passageway. When Madame Raquin confronts Thérèse and Laurent with her accusing silence, they remain in the shadows while she is in the light:

Ils plaçaient toujours la vieille
impotente sous la clarté crue de la
lampe. 37

and there she stays, staring at them, sustained by her implacable hatred. Darkness and the influence of evil are tangible at the

very end, as they have been throughout, expressed with a poetic force emanating from the strong visual impact of the scenery as it is described, despite Zola's claim to have been completely detached and working as an experimental scientist:

J'ai simplement fait sur deux corps
vivants le travail analytique que les
chirurgiens font sur les cadavres. 38

Later, in Madeleine Férat, Zola speaks of the loneliness of life in the big city, as opposed to the restful solitude of the countryside. Guillaume is a sentimental and somewhat romantic character who is most unhappy there: "Paris lui faisait peur". 39 and who feels as isolated as Hyacinth Robinson does in London.

The main female protagonist, Madeleine, is as sadly naive as Guillaume, and is shown living in squalid circumstances in a small hotel in the Latin Quarter. The autobiographical note can be spotted as Zola himself lived for a time in a similar place, 11, rue Soufflot, and the point he makes is clear; that to escape the omnipresent corruption which is slowly enveloping Madeleine and getting her used to the life, she and Guillaume must go away because it is their only hope for a future together. The melodramatic ending in suicide shows perhaps that, at that time, Zola was not prepared to look beyond his simplistic fear and dislike of the kind of life Paris reserved for his lower class inhabitants. At the end of the novel, the sight of Louise, the beggar woman, who looks old at thirty, is a grim reminder of what would have happened to Madeleine, had she remained in the city. 40

In a sense, therefore, Madeleine Férat is a farewell to a certain period of Zola's life, the period between his arrival in

Paris as a penniless student and the start of his employment on a regular basis with Hachette, the publishers. There is no doubt that, in these early days, he considered Paris mainly as a lure for the young, a place where dreams were slowly destroyed, where corruption threatened, the only hope for purity and happiness being to escape towards the sunlight and the peace of the countryside.

This now gave way to a more mature attempt to examine closely how people lived, and tempted him to write a complete history of a family, placing it within a clearly defined time scale, that of the Second Empire, in such a way as to include the entire society of that period. As a result, the Rougon-Macquart series of novels was begun. The fleeting glimpses of artistic power which were recognised in some earlier novels, such as Thérèse Raquin could not give an idea of the mastery achieved by Zola in that new series. L'Assommoir and Germinal, to name only the two best known, represent Zola at his best.

By then, he had increased his awareness of the importance of descriptions, feeling that he wanted to depict human beings in terms of their environment. Paris, therefore, becomes an integral part of the plot of the novels, just as London impregnates the writings of James; for both, it is virtually an extra character.

It was, however, important to examine closely the early works of both these writers, as they provided some valuable clues to explain the wealth of references, physical as well as symbolic, to these two cities of Paris and London, which will be found in the mature production of the two writers.

The major Works

Zola conceived his vast cycle of novels, Les Rougon-Macquart, as a portrait of the downfall of one particular family during the Second Empire. One of his aims was to illustrate the new theories of Lucas, Taine and Bernard, as Zola's theoretical treatise, Le Roman expérimental, clearly shows. However, it is also a vivid portrait of the corruption of that period as Zola saw it (historians do not all agree on that point) leading inevitably, again in his opinion, to the 'débacle' of the Franco-Prussian War and to the Paris Commune of 1870-71.

As such, it is essentially a study of Paris and of the effects that the Second Empire had on it, in all its facets. Zola describes aspects of the city in a way never realised or even attempted elsewhere in nineteenth-century fiction. As a comparison, Dickens's London springs to mind, but there is no doubt that his depiction of the city is exaggerated and owes much to the imagination, peopled as it is with vivid caricatures.

Paris, on the other hand, is shown in a truly realistic way, in the sense that it conveys to the reader what it feels like to inhabit the city. The narrow 'naturalistic' aim of the author may be doubtful, but the presentation of the town itself, crowd scenes in particular, have turned out to be, as Naomi Schor and other critics have pointed out, the most remarkable aspect of the artistry of Zola. The different novels of the series focus on differing aspects of the city, for instance, the markets in Le Ventre de Paris, the art world in L'Œuvre, the evils of

alcoholism in L'Assommoir and of prostitution in Nana, culminating in the destruction of the Second Empire, and the agony of Paris itself in La Débâcle. Ironically, in his later unsuccessful novel, Travail, Zola attempted a portrait of an ideal city, which seems disappointingly insipid, especially if one compares it to the real city, a powerful, throbbing, living entity which he had already painted in L'Assommoir, for example.

The first novel of the series is set in Plassans [which is Zola's literary name for Aix-en-Provence], La Fortune des Rougon. It purports to explain why the two families - the Rougon and the Macquart - have developed as they have, based on the theories of hereditary and environmental influences and their effects on the individual. The action then moves to Paris with the second novel, La Curée⁴¹ which deals with the fortunes to be made at the time of the modernisation of Paris, the 'Hausmannisation' as it was ironically called. In this, Zola took into account Taine's criticism of Madeleine Férat, when Taine told him that he should ignore personal tragedy and advance towards mirroring the whole of society, in the same way that the painters whom he admired, like his childhood friend, Cézanne, or his protégé, Manet, were painting modern society as it was. That both representations were equally shocking to contemporary Parisian opinion did not deter Zola.

La Curée begins in the Bois de Boulogne, in itself an innovation, epitomising Napoleon III's taste for elegance and his admiration for London, since it had been arranged as an imitation of Hyde Park. Renée is surfeited by luxury which no longer satisfies her: "Je veux autre chose!". She lives with a corrupt financier who is typical of those who make their fortune under the

new regime. The financier, Saccard, lives in one of the new flats in the rue de Rivoli which is the pure expression of Second Empire taste, and Zola makes a pointed contrast between the flat and Renée's childhood home in the Ile Saint-Louis, at the heart of old Paris.

Là, au fond de cette cour fraîche et muette comme un puits, éclairée d'un jour blanc d'hiver, on se serait cru à mille lieues de ce nouveau Paris où flambaient toutes les chaudes jouissances dans le vacarme des millions. 42

The contrast between the innocent childhood - and, by implication, the innocent Paris which it represents - and the new Paris into which she is initiated is marked when Renée wants to see the gaudy night-life in Paris:

Ça ne vaut pas la peine de faire le mal ... C'est une affaire d'éducation, comprends-tu? 43

At the novel's end, Renée's father is left to pick up the high charges that her 'education' has entailed in a society which refuses to pay its bills.

The specific ill against which La Curée is aimed is the possibility existing at the time, despite strenuous efforts by the government, to collect speculative fortunes based on the high payments made to property owners in Paris when compulsory purchase orders were issued in order to rebuild parts of the city and modernise it. Zola's next novel, Le Ventre de Paris, takes the image of a 'devouring' animal one stage further. Here, the whole of Paris is likened to a vast stomach which cannot digest all the new found prosperity it enjoys under Napoleon III.

Et il retrouvait Paris, gras, superbe, débordant de nourriture, et il lui semblait que tout cela avait grandi, s'était épanoui dans cette

énormité des Halles, dont il commençait
à entendre le souffle colossal, épais
encore de l'indigestion de la ville. 44

The "indigestion" from which Paris is suffering, in Zola's view at least, is the result of unassimilated development. Some people, of course, have little to complain about, one such being the pork butcher who caters for Paris's appetite, in the novel. It is an interesting fact that the whole action is situated in the neighbourhood of Les Halles, which was until recently the central market of Paris, the "ventre de Paris" itself. This is really the first of Zola's novels where a building, rather than a character, represents the central element.

Le ventre de Paris, les Halles, où la
nourriture afflue, s'entasse, pour rayonner
sur ses quartiers divers. 45

This was the initial canvas of the novel, as written by Zola in his preliminary notes. This passage heralds the later developments in his fiction where buildings will have focal positions. Indeed, the city of Paris itself will be given this place, and descriptions of it will become symbolic, in Une Page d'Amour, for instance, while certain locations will assume an almost mystical significance, such as the railway station in La Bête Humaine.

By now, Zola's 'naturalistic' method was well established, as evidenced by the sub-title of the Rougon-Macquart. "Histoire naturelle et sociale d'une famille sous le Second Empire". This necessitated a scientific approach. The first step was what would today be known as data-collection. Zola started by taking notes; in the case of La Curée and Le Ventre de Paris, he made

use of Les Comptes fantastiques d'Hausmann, a satirical work by Jules Ferry, and Paris, sa Vie et ses Organes, by Maxime du Camp. He visited the places which could be of interest; in the case of La Curée, he spent many hours in front of the mansion built by a millionaire chocolate manufacturer in the Park Monceau; for Le Ventre de Paris, he made early morning visits to the Halles market. Prior to writing the story of the prostitute Nana, he asked his more experienced friends to take him to brothels, and for La Bête humaine, he donned the blue overall of an engine-driver and rode on the platform of a locomotive, beside the real driver, from Paris to Nantes.

Such devotion to detail may seem excessive, but it sufficiently impressed Henry James when he was himself seeking new inspiration, in the 1880's, to make him go on a visit to Millbank Prison before making careful notes for The Princess Casamassima.⁴⁶

Zola then went on to make a preliminary 'ébauche' of his proposed work; in the case of Le Ventre de Paris, the market was an obvious symbol to represent the bloated city, and Les Halles appear to the hero of the novel as anthropomorphic:

La bête satisfaite et digérant, entripaillée,
cuvant sa graisse, appuyant sourdement
l'Empire.⁴⁷

What Zola had done for the property speculators in La Curée, and for the food merchants in Le Ventre de Paris, he went on to do for the department store employees in Au Bonheur des Dames and for the working-class population in L'Assommoir.

Henry James was also making a transition from his early

writings at this time. The influence of French literature was causing him to shift from his preoccupation with the 'international' theme towards a closer and more accurate study of an actual type of society. He developed an interest in the role of the city, as can be seen from A London Life. He felt sufficiently at home with British society to write stories which were not mainly about Americans at a loss amidst an older civilisation. In one sense, A London Life could be said to continue with the 'international' theme, in which innocent travellers from the new world are exploited by cunning and mercenary Europeans, but in another sense, however, the novel paves the way for James's studies of youth affected by the immoral activities of their elders, What Maisie knew and The Awkward Age.

'A London life' is the life led by Lionel and Selina Berrington, which so disgusts James's 'necessary candid outsider' Laura. The infidelities which culminate in Selina leaving her husband are seen as an almost inevitable aspect of life in London, in contrast to American virtuous behaviour;

"Bolted?" Mr. Wendover repeated.

"I don't know what you call it in America".

"In America, we don't do it". 48

The fact that Selina is able to take advantage of the hypocritical double standards of London society in order to compromise Laura is another example of what James meant by the term 'A London life'. Both the Berrington's country house, Mellows, and the town house in Grosvenor Square are reflections of their arid pleasure-seeking lives, but these are compensated for by the dower-house and the society of old Lady Davenant.

A simpler, but similar, contrast is drawn by Zola in his early Rougon-Macquart novels between the refined 'old' Parisians and the brash emergent class of the Second Empire. A further contrast between present-day London society and its past is shown when Laura wants to take her innocent American friend, Mr. Wendover, to such institutions as the British Museum and St. Paul's Cathedral:

She planned a general tour of inspection of the ancient churches of the City and a pilgrimage to the queer places commemorated by Dickens. 49

but, when she follows contemporary American precedent by walking into a London museum alone with Mr. Wendover, the double standards of the day are used against her by her unscrupulous sister. The flight to America at the end is really a scaled down version of the crisis which overtakes Hyacinth in The Princess Casamassima, even though it leaves open the chance that Laura will recover under the regenerating influence of American standards.

In James's later and more substantial work, London remains the focal point of dubious standards. It is not symbolic of artistic life in the way that Paris is, for example, in The Tragic Muse. Yet, in The Awkward Age, it is significant that Mr. Longdon, the Jamesian 'observer', has been absent from London for thirty years and is completely out of sympathy with contemporary morality in the town. 50 The whole action of the novel takes place within the drawing rooms of the capital, and the absence of description making the novel dependent on narrative alone emphasises the pervasive atmosphere of corruption in the city. By that stage in James's writing, the city has become a threat to the

developing consciousness of a young girl, and she can only be preserved from it by a mature, older 'observer'. In 1881, when The Portrait of a Lady was published, London society represented nothing more than a stage in the development of Isabel Archer. The hotel to which Ralph Touchett brings the group sounds very similar to the place James came to, when on an early independent visit to London, and which he describes as "a quiet inn in a street that ran at right angles to Piccadilly".⁵¹

Some of James's early democratic instincts are in evidence here, when Ralph apologises for the fact that, in September, "there wasn't a creature in town". As James points out in his travel notes, this means really that the aristocracy are absent. Indeed, Miss Stackpole replies bitterly, in the novel:

There's no-one here of course but three or four millions of people. What is it that you call them - the lower-middle class? They are only the population of London, and that's of no consequence.⁵²

Beneath this lower middle class, there is the submerged and almost literally invisible working-class population, at least in the Victorian fiction of the time. Zola strikes a new note when, in L'Assommoir, he depicts this class in great detail. James, in The Princess Casamassima, undertakes a similar task, perhaps only to a lesser extent. James is less ready to be critical of the upper class, and Ralph can answer mildly to Miss Stackpole's comments:

[...] for the stale September days, in the huge half-empty town, had a charm wrapped in them as a coloured gem might be wrapped in a dusky cloth.⁵³

The scene where Isabel talks to the poor children in Kensington

confirms yet again his view that the parks were a haven and the "drawing rooms of the poor". 55

The novels by both authors under consideration which show more clearly how the city affected them and influenced their literary production are respectively L'Assommoir and The Princess Casamassima, and they will be singled out for special study. Zola's novel, as part of the Rougon-Macquart, is, as we have seen, set during the Second Empire, and was published just a few years after its dissolution, while The Princess Casamassima appeared during the following decade, and describes London in the late 1870's. By then, James had had time to assimilate some of Zola's ideas, and to that extent one novel influenced the other.

However, they presented pictures of the two capital cities as they became engraved in the memory and captured the imagination of the two writers, at a time when they were at their most impressionable age.

In James's case, the connection between the city itself and the novel is made explicit in the introduction, where he states about Hyacinth Robinson that:

He sprang up for me out of the London pavement. 56

Zola shifts slightly the emphasis, in his own preface to L'Assommoir, nevertheless stressing the influence of those who live and work in the city, willing his novel to be:

Une œuvre de vérité, le premier roman sur le peuple, qui ne mente pas et qui ait l'odeur du peuple. 57

It might have been a slight exaggeration to say that it was the

first time that this had been undertaken - as we have seen, the Goncourts' Germinie Lacerteux was already concerned with the social condition of the poor, but it was nevertheless a study on an unprecedented scale of the working class and of the Parisian districts in which they lived.

Both L'Assommoir and The Princess Casamassima provide the best opportunity for a comparative analysis of the role of the city in the literary production of both authors. Insofar as L'Assommoir was the first to be published, and, moreover, influenced the other, it will be appropriate to consider it first.

There is certainly some irony in the fact that, when L'Assommoir was published in book form in 1877, it earned enough money to relieve Zola from financial worries, virtually for the rest of his life, and enabled him to build a country house in Médan, since it describes one of the most overcrowded suburbs of Paris, the result of Haussmann's policy of large boulevards and new houses surrounded with gardens in the heart of the town. There are some reminiscences of Germinie Lacerteux in this novel, and even the initial title suggested was quite similar: "La simple vie de Gervaise Macquart". The final title, however, gives a far better idea of what Zola had actually achieved - which is not the life story of any one individual. The sub-title of the work [as it first appeared in instalments in the periodical, Le Bien public] was equally clear: "Etude de mœurs parisiennes".

Zola's study was so outspoken in its description of misery and degradation that he was soon accused of sensationalism. To

these critics and to those, from both the left and the right of the political spectrum, who accused him of having presented a deliberately dreary and cynical picture of the lower class, using to this end an unnecessarily crude language, he replied angrily:

Mon crime est d'avoir eu la curiosité
littéraire de ramasser et de couler dans
un moule très travaillé la langue du
peuple. 58

This evidently demonstrates that his preoccupation with verisimilitude extended to the form of speech of the people he described, a rather novel stylistic technique which James will find illuminating.

It has been said that Zola had used an out-of-date dictionary, Le Dictionnaire de la Langue Verte, by A. Delvau, together with Le Sublime, by Denis Poulot, a sociological study, to collect the material for the way the lower-class people in the novel express themselves. It has even been asserted that the name given to the type of disreputable bar where the still manufactures the raw alcohol - l'assommoir - was an anachronism, although there is little evidence that the word had been in use previously. Slang is a fast-changing language which can easily become outdated, and it is not impossible that Zola was mistaken in some cases. It is, however, important to note that he made frequent visits to the area concerned, in order to study the expressions popularly used and that he recorded them in his Carnets, together with details of the way of life of the inhabitants.

Henry James, as Leon Edel reports, heard about Zola's

practice of noting turns of phrase and expressions at one of Flaubert's gatherings, and undertook to do the same, copying down such working-class terms as "He cuts it very fine", or "that takes the gilt off", as well as the oft repeated "you know". His problem was perhaps that he lacked Zola's rebellious commitment to total truth, it certainly was that, in the climate of the time, he was forced to bowdlerise for the sake of his Victorian reading public, so that a comparison between the style of the two writers undoubtedly shows Zola's book as very much closer to the real speech of the people.

L'Assommoir opens dramatically with the contrast between a crowd scene and a lonely face at a window, which, according to Naomi Schor and Angus Wilson, are recurring themes in Zola's work. The heroine, Gervaise is wondering when her lover, Lantier, will return after being out all night. Until recently, they had lived well, and now, although staying at the relatively shabby Hôtel Boncœur, boulevard de la Chapelle, they are at least in the best room on the first floor, overlooking the boulevard. From her window, Gervaise can hear the workers on their way to the factories:

Il y avait là un piétinement de troupeau, une foule que de brusques arrêts étalaient en masses sur la chaussée, un défilé sans fin d'ouvriers allant au travail, leurs outils sur le dos, leur pain sur le bras; et la cohue s'engouffrait dans Paris où elle se noyait, continuellement. 59

The image of these men being drowned one after the other as they enter Paris, which builds upon Gervaise's fear for the safety of her lover - she has already imagined him stabbed somewhere in the night - establishes an atmosphere of foreboding, reminiscent of

Thérèse Raquin.

One man stands out at this stage, Coupeau, sober and reliable, and Gervaise tries to avoid his questions about Lantier:

Nous avons nos chagrins comme tout le monde,
mon Dieu. ⁶⁰

exhibiting already her passive acceptance of things. Another fact is also revealed at that early stage, although no special emphasis is put on it then: some of the men stop at the local bars on their way, and a few stay inside, taking the day off. The rise in alcoholism which seems to correspond to times of change and insecurity appears here as an inherent feature of their plight.

Statistics quoted in an article on "Social Drinking in the Belle Epoque" published in the Journal of Social History, [Winter 1974] show that the Second Empire was the period where alcohol consumption was heaviest in France. Shortly afterwards, one notices the appearance of women drinking in contemporary paintings, while, in 1880, the "Société française de Tempérance" was founded, but without great popular following. Zola's picture is therefore accurate, and there is no doubt that he felt that the problem of alcoholism, especially where it affected those who had but recently emigrated to the city and who were disillusioned by it, was an essential component of his study of social ills.

Zola does not limit himself to talking about the mass of the workers. Despite their numbers, and their similarity to a marching army - a reference later suppressed from the text - he carefully marks them out: unskilled labourers, office workers "regardant leur montre pour régler leur marche à quelques secondes

près", ⁶¹ as well as working women, such as florists, a profession dear to Zola's heart as this had been his wife's occupation before her marriage.

Finally, the boulevard belongs to the middle classes, and especially to mothers and children. This should present a cheerful picture, but it is offset at once by Gervaise's sudden realisation that Lantier is about to leave her, so that the mood remains tragic.

The actual area of Paris dealt with by Zola in L'Assommoir can be clearly delineated. It is bounded by Montmartre to the west, rue de la Chapelle to the east and rue Muscadet to the north, while the Gare du Nord limits it to the south. There is only one foray out of this square mile and it is the wedding excursion to the Louvre which, in the middle of the novel, seems a tragicomic counterpoint to the narrow horizons of the heroes' everyday life. As Jacques Dubois has mentioned in his book, L'Assommoir de Zola: société, discours, idéologie, and as a semiotic analysis would show far more rigorously, the itinerary of the novel follows a cycle which starts and ends in complete solitude for Gervaise, allowing for some temporary happiness at the centre, with her laundry business, but with a linear development of steady degradation.

Part of her downfall is due to her character, moulded by her working class heredity. Crucial to Zola's perception of her and of the poor in general, is her passivity and the fact that it never occurred to her during her high living with Lantier to save any money:

Mon Dieu, je ne suis pas ambitieuse, je ne demande pas grand chose. ⁶²

It is this carefree attitude which marks every step of her downfall, since she does not use her influence to get Coupeau back to work after his accident, for example, or because she allows herself to be talked into drinking more and more heavily.

On the other hand, such a fatalistic attitude is compounded by the environment. The neighbourhood provides opportunities for work, but offers little for leisure, except the music-hall to which Gervaise's daughter, Nana, escapes on the first rung of her elevation to the world of the rich through prostitution, or the bars which will lead many others like Gervaise downwards to extreme poverty and death.

It is significant that the district is called the Goutte d'Or which symbolises in its cruel irony the solitary golden glow afforded to the inhabitants, the "goutte", the drop of brandy distilled in bars like l'Assommoir. Such districts are virtually autonomous, separated from others by a community of occupations, of habits, of language even:

Dans L'Assommoir en effet, le peuple parisien du quartier de la Goutte d'Or est uni par la langue. Uni, et séparé des autres. Le roman dit l'histoire d'un ghetto. Ailleurs, on parle autrement. 63

To that ghetto the workers return after their day's work; they are confined to it and have nothing to do with the big city nearby

L'Assommoir [est] l'histoire d'une tribu d'exclus aux portes de la ville: les ouvriers sans intimité, la maison ville, le quartier qui se dissout. 64

The importance of the area, of its buildings is so overwhelming that it is difficult to agree with some critics that an individual

like Gervaise, for instance, can be the unifying symbol of the book, as does Marie Claire Banquart, stating that:

La vie de Gervaise fait l'unité de
L'Assommoir. Dans Pot-Bouille c'est bien
la maison qui compte, plus que ses
habitants considérés séparément. 65

Zola certainly has achieved in his portrait of Gervaise a most successful study of character, and this contributes to the worth of the novel, and to its interest. The buildings, however, which encompass and shape Gervaise's life contribute to make the city the dominant element of the book

Three of them in particular can be identified. The first is the wash-house, which Gervaise visits in the first chapter of the novel. The oppressive atmosphere, the steam, the noise, are described in a way that personalises the machinery:

A droite des réservoirs, le tuyau étroit
de la machine à vapeur soufflait, d'une haleine
rude et régulière, des jets de fumée blanche. 66

When the attendant opens the ventilators, and the heaters stop, the relief of the women is so great that they cheer and clap. The feeling that the machine dominates people's lives is recurrent in the novel. This machine will be found again in a slightly modified shape, but just as steamy and noisy, when Gervaise visits the second building which entraps her, the bar of L'Assommoir itself, where the infernal contraption which distils the spirit stands at the rear of the room.

Its first description, at the beginning of the second chapter, is muted, within the seemingly harmless conversation between Gervaise and Coupeau:

Mais la curiosité de la maison était au fond
[...] l'appareil à distiller que les

consommateurs voyaient fonctionner, des
alambics aux longs cols, des serpentins
descendant sous terre, une cuisine du diable
devant laquelle venaient rêver les
ouvriers soulards. 67

Its demonic quality, and therefore its potential for temptation, is already evoked, but later, it will become almost comical in its effort to appear friendly, innocent, so that Gervaise will not be afraid to taste the drink:

Cette sacrée marmite, ronde comme un ventre
de chaudronnière grasse, avec son nez qui
s'allongeait et se tortillait, . . . 68

and Gervaise is seduced, approaching with a mixture of fear still but also of curiosity and desire.

The third building which symbolises also the oppressive nature of the area is the forge where Goujet struggles with the hammers which are soon to be replaced by yet another machine, warns Zola.

They are, however, not the only ones participating in the life of Gervaise and dominating it. There are also the hospital, Lariboisière, and the great slaughterhouse.

C'était sur ce pavé, dans cet air de
fournaise, qu'on la jetait toute seule avec
les petits; et elle enfilait d'un regard les
boulevards extérieurs, à droite, à gauche,
s'arrêtant aux deux bouts, prise d'une
épouvante sourde, comme si sa vie, désormais,
allait tenir là, entre un abattoir et un
hôpital. 69

The impact of the city is felt profoundly, as a poetic, almost epic force, reaching further than Zola's quest for naturalism. Coupeau does not escape the power of the buildings. It is a fall from the hospital roof which forces him to stop work, he will also get caught in the warmth of l'Assommoir, and he will die, mad

and screaming, in the nearly asylum.

Yet, occasionally, a brief ray of sunshine pierces the gloom and dazzles the reader, bringing Paris to life and showing its true beauty. This is a moment of respite which Zola will develop in later novels, like Une Page d'Amour and L'Œuvre. This sudden variation in the light and the elation it creates, bring to mind impressionist paintings where each object is represented essentially in terms of the surrounding light which provides its environment.

Just as the description of the railway station at the beginning of La Bête humaine, is like Claude Monet would have impressionistically rendered it, Paris in L'Assommoir is as Claude Lantier tries to paint it in L'Œuvre.

The various smells of the neighbourhood have also some special part to play, and in their study, The Moral and the Story: the novel as a social document, Ian Gregor and Brian Nicholas compare Flaubert's and Zola's methods, demonstrating the fastidiousness with which Zola made every point:

While Flaubert's ideal novel was one which would be "about nothing", Zola's was one which explained away everything. 70

For example, Zola's depiction of the laundry, which is not too dissimilar to that of the bar, gives a 'smell' which is both toxic and yet anæsthetising in its effect. ⁷¹ The fumes are to a large extent responsible for the behaviour of the characters: "l'air de Paris où il y a une vraie fumée d'eau-de-vie et de vin".

On the one occasion when the heroes leave their neighbourhood to visit the Louvre, they feel lost and virtually insulted by the attitudes of the attendants, they are equally unhappy

at the way they imagine they are patronised by the other members of the public, and they return to their own little area with relief. It is difficult to say whether Bazouge, the undertaker, holds a different opinion, as he is so drunk, but he makes a rather startling statement:

Quand on est mort ... écoutez-ça ... quand
on est mort, c'est pour longtemps. ⁷²

Be it as it may, Gervaise ultimately sees him as the only person who represents a possible escape from the area, and there is enormous emotional power in the final words of the novel which are his, and serve as an epitaph for Gervaise:

Fais dodo, ma belle. ⁷³

In a similar way, the Princess Casamassima represents a symbol of escape from the narrow world of Hyacinth Robinson, and yet the escape will there also end in death because of comparable pressures of heredity and environment.

During the last stages of her degradation, Gervaise sinks to the level of a beggar and would-be prostitute, but for one moment, with Goujet, she gets an illusion of escape. Goujet suggests that they could attempt to live a new life in Belgium, but he takes her as far as a strip of waste ground in Montmartre, still bedevilled by industrial buildings, "entre une scierie mécanique et une manufacture de boutons" ⁷⁴ and it is the measure of unreality in the mind of Gervaise which makes her think that there they could be in the country.

The most eloquent comment on the effect of inner-city Parisian life on Gervaise is made by her when she considers the way in which the neighbourhood is being transformed by the

contractors who pull down house after house to make it respectable:

Ce quartier, où elle éprouvait une honte, tant il embellissait, s'ouvrait maintenant de toutes parts au grand air. Le boulevard Magenta, montant du cœur de Paris, et le boulevard Ornano, s'en allant dans la campagne, l'avait troué à l'ancienne barrière. ⁷⁵

These words show how she, and other members of her class, have mixed feelings when looking at the growing prosperity of the time, and feel lost in front of these newly-opened vistas which will have the effect of pushing them further out and constricting their lives into an ever-narrowing space.

As in the great tragedies of antiquity, the protagonists of L'Assommoir are given a chance to save themselves. Gervaise gets a job in the laundry, whose function, literally and metaphorically, is a cleansing one, while Coupeau has an opportunity to work for the hospital, a place of healing. That chance is, however, illusory, and from the laundry, Gervaise, losing her self-respect, will end in dirt, the dirt of prostitution and that of the cupboard where she dies. Coupeau will find pain in his fall from the hospital roof and after mental as well as physical agony will scream himself to death in the Sainte-Anne "maison des fous". Different from the Aeschylean plays though, the gods are not in L'Assommoir guilty of "killing them for their sport". Or rather, the gods are there, too, but they are the mysterious emanation of the city; they are the area itself, the buildings, the smells, the sounds, the crowd, the language even, all that makes life there and escape equally impossible.

Until The Princess Casamassima, James had been more circumspect than Zola in relying on atmosphere rather than in making use of actuality in his novels. In that instance, however, he made an effort to bring the scene of the action to life, to treat it as an entity, a full part of the plot.

James pictured his hero, Hyacinth, as created by the very streets of the city, imagining him walking the same avenues as he himself did, looking at the same sights, but with an important difference. Whereas all doors were open to James who was an admired member of upper-class society, his hero finds at first that all doors are firmly shut to him, and when he manages to get inside, the pressure is too much for him and ultimately destroys him.

The importance of London in the novel was acknowledged fully by James:

It is a fact that, as I look back, the attentive exploration of London, the assault directly made by the great city upon an imagination quick to react, fully explains a large part of it. 76

His use of the phrase "an imagination quick to react" is significant here in that it is reminiscent of the statement in his essay, The Art of Fiction, that a novelist need not know the army for example, in order to write about it:

The young lady living in a village has only to be a damsel upon whom nothing is lost to make it quite unfair (as it seems to me) to declare that she shall have nothing to say about the military. 77

Those critics who have accused James of knowing little, other than what he read in the newspapers, about anarchism, for instance, have

missed the point that, in James, atmosphere counts for more than mere actual representation.

Nevertheless, no other novel presents a city in such personalised detail as The Princess Casamassima. This was partly because James was making a conscious effort to reproduce the methods of French naturalism (possibly in order to boost his flagging sales) and partly because he had become tired of the 'international theme' he had exploited somewhat fully and which never took his heroes out of their drawing rooms.

His first efforts at striking a new note having failed, he turned first to an exploration of the world of drama, based on rather hackneyed Second Empire models, and ending with his humiliating reception at the first night of Guy Domville, and then decided to return in his final novels to the acceptance of the introverted complexities of the drawing rooms. The Princess Casamassima is therefore different from L'Assommoir in that it is unique within the James canon.

It contains his only convincing working-class character, the vivid cockney Millicent Henning and, even if Hyacinth is less convincing, he is of sufficiently realistic stature to make the book a success. London, however, is everywhere, dominates the action and is indeed, it does not seem too strong to claim, the chief character in the novel, giving it its originality and its literary worth.

The setting of the opening sequence, Lomax Place, in the grim inner suburbs of London, has been attacked as presenting too Dickensian a picture. This is true up to a point, especially as the visit from the ponderous Miss Bowerbank tends to remind one

of some of his theatrical aspects, and also because Miss Pynsent is reminiscent of many worried women of her class in his works. Yet, there is more to it than that. Millicent is a strong-willed character, whose determination to escape Lomax Place to reach her "high position at a great haberdasher's in the neighbourhood of Buckingham Palace" sounds real enough.

A semiotic analysis of the novel would also make the central importance of the area, Lomax Place, very clear, and show it as the pivot of the action. While Millicent's family are evicted from Lomax Place for failing to pay the rent, Millicent herself, by an ironic twist, goes up in the world, passing Miss Pynsent who is on the way down. Miss Pynsent's pretence at fashionable bonnets becomes more and more ludicrous in a way which highlights the sense of place in the novel.

James's appreciation of the techniques of Zola in depicting 'realism' in fiction had increased since he had met the novelist at one of Flaubert's regular gatherings in Paris. James had already fallen under the spell of French fiction before that, it is true, as Philip Grover, for example, demonstrates amply in his book, Henry James and the French Novel: a study in inspiration.⁷⁸ Cordelia Kelly, in The Early Development of Henry James, points out in particular his debt to Prosper Mérimée, while it would be simple to show how much he owes to Balzac and Gautier in Roderick Hudson. His closest link is possibly with Flaubert in their common search for a 'unified language' with no break between narration, description, dialogue and inner monologue.

However, after the publication of his Art of Fiction in 1884,

he had distanced himself, and his 'social novels', The Bostonians, The Princess Casamassima and The Tragic Muse, are in a different vein. Zola interested him most then, although he criticised him for "thinking that there are certain things that people ought to like, and that they can be made to like", he gave qualified praise to his "prodigious effort, an extraordinary effort vitiated by a spirit of pessimism". In a letter to T.S. Perry, he clarified his views even further:

Zola's Naturalism is ugly and dirty, but he seems to be doing something - which surely (in the imaginative line) no one in England and the U.S. is and no one here. 79

And he added, in the same letter:

The literature is painfully thin. Il n'y a que Zola!. 80

This consideration, combined with the need to find a new source of inspiration led to his decision to write realistically about London.

For his proposed novel, The Princess Casamassima, James followed the guidelines he had set out in The Art of Fiction, "life without rearrangement" so as to give an air of reality, and combined this with Zola's technique of note taking, which he adapted to give more freedom to his imagination:

To have adopted the scheme was to have met the question of one's notes.[...] notes were a gathered impression, to haunt the great city and by this habit to penetrate it, imaginatively, in as many places as possible. [...] imagination is needed or you are a fool in the very presence of the revealed and assured. 81

James therefore walked through Camberwell and Cheapside in order to extract the working-class atmosphere of these districts, noting

people's sayings, also making the famous visit to Millbank Prison. He wrote about the narrow-fronted, squat London houses rather than the more squalid and overcrowded tenement houses which are found in L'Assommoir, but he made the same effort at penetrating the truth of the moral and social interiors. 82

Leon Edel, commenting upon James's saying that London had "the most romantic town vistas in the world", judged that by writing The Princess Casamassima, James was showing that he had by then really taken root in London.

The novel begins, by a deliberate effort, with a dismal description which attempts to emulate the opening pages of L'Assommoir, insisting upon narrowness, confined space and a impression of tiny forecourts and dirty passageways. The overall feeling conveyed is not, however, as in L'Assommoir, one of tragedy and of foreboding, but more one of shabbiness and mediocrity.

The characters have strong, well defined personalities, more so than the heroes of the corresponding French novel, indeed, R.L. Stevenson, in a letter to James, asserts:

As for your young lady [Millicent Henning] she
is all there; yes, sir, you can do low life,
I believe!. 83

Millicent provides the link with a world which is to destroy Hyacinth. His anomalous position in society is a reflection of hers, and, having contemplated the splendours of high society and fallen in love with them, he can no longer accept his place in life.

The buildings also occupy a prominent position in the story, especially Millbank. where Hyacinth goes with Miss Pynsent to pay

the horrifying visit to his mother. There is also the Strand theatre, a suitably artificial venue as the meeting point for the little world of Lomax Place and the much larger one of high society. Hyacinth's invitation to the Princess's box opens the door to an infinity of opportunities, Mayfair, the country, Paris, Venice, anywhere.

The streets are, rather unusually for James, more real than the rather insipid drawing rooms. Hyacinth's walks to visit Poupin, Paul Muniment or Paul's sister, have an immediacy which is striking. Cultural points are not lost:

Audley Court, with its pretty name, which reminded Hyacinth of Tennyson, proved to be a still dingier nook than Lomax Place. 84

But, most extraordinarily, the description of the characters themselves are connected with the city:

I arrived so at the history of little Hyacinth Robinson - he sprang up for me out of the London pavement. 85

The description of Millicent is even more striking in that sense:

She was to her blunt, expanded fingertips a daughter of London, of the crowded streets, and bustling traffic of the great city; she had drawn her health and strength from its dingy courts and foggy thoroughfares and peopled its parks and squares and crescents with her ambitions; it had entered into her blood and her bone, the sound of her voice and the carriage of her head; she understood it by instinct and loved it with passion; she represented its immense vulgarities and curiosities, its brutality and its knowingness, its good nature and its impudence, and might have figured, in an allegorical procession, as a kind of glorified townswoman, a nymph of the wilderness of Middlesex, a flower of the clustered parishes, the genius of urban civilization, the muse of cockneyism. 86

The first half of the novel prepares the reader for switches

in scene from Lomax Place, Audley Court and Lisson Grove in Marylebone, the home of the Poupins, while Millicent, as the shop-girl in Buckingham Palace Road is practically across the social boundary. The area, although well defined, is not as claustrophobic at Zola's *Goutte d'Or*. A number of characters move freely across this social boundary, even if Millicent does not quite. Captain Sholto straddles the divide between Mayfair and the meeting place of the anarchists, the Sun and Moon public house. Yet, without physically doing so, it is the Princess who crosses over most markedly. After his meeting with Millicent and Hyacinth, at the theatre, Sholto makes Millicent realise what a new world is opening for Hyacinth, while he attempts to reassure Hyacinth: "Don't be afraid - you'll go far".⁸⁷ When Hyacinth visits the Princess then, in South Street, Mayfair, he is left to wait in her salon and his amazement at all the fine furnishings is the first step towards his change of heart concerning revolutionary ideals.

The Princess's desire to "cross over" to the people of Lomax Place is paralleled by Lady Aurora's desire to do the same for moral reasons. It is therefore clear that, unlike Zola, who insisted on dealing only with facts, letting readers decide on moral issues in their own way, James is making a number of moral statements here. In the first place, he shows that there is in London more fluidity, more freedom to mix among the classes; he also suggests that social advancement is not necessarily a good thing.

Certainly, Hyacinth and his fellow workers are not trapped

in a ghetto, as in Paris; the working class areas are more thinly spread out, the workers living side-by-side with wealthier neighbours and coming across them during Sunday walks. There is redevelopment in the town but, again different from Paris, it is piecemeal, the town is like a series of inter-connected villages, and the crossing over of boundaries is an almost inevitable process. Hyacinth's introduction to Mayfair leads him to the country-house, Paris, Venice and even - ultimate freedom - to self-destruction at the hopelessness of the promise he had previously given when he was at the Sun and Moon.

There is a public house in The Princess Casamassima, and as a meeting-place for anarchist sympathisers, it is as important as the one which gives its title to Zola's novel. Yet, it is not described in any great detail. It is in Bloomsbury, and in a vague and undefined way is said to be where these nihilists and revolutionaries meet. One of the reasons for the ill-defined way it is presented is undoubtedly James's lack of personal knowledge of such places. He found most of his documentation from what he read in The Times,⁸⁸ which is not quite the way Zola worked.

James tends to use symbolism to illustrate the themes of the novel, using a technique similar to Zola's. The Strand Theatre, for instance, is the perfect setting for what is theatrical, artificial, as well as being a place where all worlds can meet. The Princess, seen for the first time there, takes part in the symbolic play-acting, imagining that she wishes to get to know better the lower echelons of society. What she offers Hyacinth is make-believe, and the theatre then becomes an obvious

symbol for the illusions of grandeur, those of happiness and of overwhelming generosity, and above all for the illusory structures of society.

James had altered, as we have seen, Zola's painstaking technique regarding extensive gathering of facts, in order to give more place to the imagination of the writer. Similarly, he endows his characters with the kind of imagination which goes much further than poor Gervaise's dream of being in the country when she finds herself on a spot of wasteland between two small factories.

Hyacinth day-dreams of passing for a Frenchman, having learnt some French from a friend and a dictionary bought for a shilling in the Brompton Road:

He had never seen a blouse in his life,
but he knew exactly the form and colour of
such a garment and how it was worn. 89

He knows this from his imagination; the point is that when his imaginings are replaced by genuine knowledge he cannot persist in his illusions, as he also possesses an artist's honesty and appreciation for beauty. When he goes for walks with Millicent, he can't help noticing what is around him:

He liked the reflections of the lamps on the wet pavements, the feeling and smell of the carboniferous London damp; the way the winter fog blurred and suffused the whole place, made it seem bigger and more crowded; produced halos and dim radiations, trickles and evaporations on the plates of glass. 90

His resemblance to James himself is clear, and shows that he is not the result of a 'naturalistic' search for a real individual; Millicent is nearer the mark. She is only interested in looking

in the shop windows and cannot wait to reach the bright lights of the Edgware Road.

In the later stages of the novel, Hyacinth, back from his European journey can no longer allow his imagination to obscure reality. No longer James's reflected personality, he becomes increasingly genuine. He discovers that Lady Aurora's supposed attraction to Audley Court is mainly for Paul Muniment. He sees through the Princess's artificial democratic ideas:

Muniment questions him:

"Surely, at any rate, you've seen nothing more worthy of your respect than Camberwell?"
The Princess reacts as if this were an extra enticement:
"So this is the worst part?"
and adds to Lady Aurora:
"I want so much to know London - the real London. It seems so difficult"

She then shocks Hyacinth by informing him that she will go on foot, as she never takes cabs now, to her new address in Madeira Crescent, Paddington, and that she will pass on the way:

... a part of the street where there were small shops, those of butchers, greengrocers and pork-pie men, with open fronts, flaring lamps and humble purchasers.

and commenting as she does so:

Ah, this is the way I like to see London! 91

It becomes plain to Hyacinth that she finds excitement in mixing with the lower aspects of life and she seems tedious to him. He finds himself more in sympathy with the genuine, more practical, socialist, Paul Muniment. At the same time, he cannot really feel great indignation at her attitude. His views of the city are overlaid by the splendid scenes he had seen abroad, and the slums now leave him indifferent.

Mr. Vetch is more direct with her, rebuking her first for her pretended concern for the poor, by stating flatly: "I don't give a fig for the wretchedness of London" and then accusing her of showing an interest in Hyacinth only to discard him.

Hyacinth has travelled the whole way, he can no longer find a place in life, and his mounting realisation is suitably framed by the various streets he now walks at random, blindly, a sign of his mental turmoil.

Anyway, he went forth again into the streets into the squares, into the parks, solicited by an aimless desire to steep himself yet once again in the great indifferent city he so knew and so loved and which had had so long so many of his smiles and tears and confidences. London had never appeared to him to wear more proudly and publicly the stamp of her imperial history. 92

He pays a final call to Millicent's shop, hoping for a last chance to taste the simple life of London, but Captain Sholto is with her, and in any case he knows that he could never have been happy there. No longer prepared to fight against the social injustices and not willing to acquiesce to it, he opts for death. He does not try to avoid the responsibility of assassination he had previously undertaken, but when the moment comes, he turns the pistol on himself.

His self-determined suicide is a far cry from Gervaise's slow degradation. Even when she is starving, abandoned by her husband, she still wants to live and tries to sell her ugly, limping body for the price of a crust of bread.

When he wrote The Princess Casamassima, in 1886, James was conscious of writing a social novel. He set out to express

the atmosphere of the city and to describe the social and political situation in 1886. Similarly, Zola was determined to produce a precise account of life in a certain area of Paris at a certain time during the Second Empire.

It is however noticeable that, neither for Zola, nor for James, the didacticism overrode the poetic description.

They did not allow the power of the social protest they wished to make to submerge the artistic presentation of the work. Both James and Zola recognised that the balance of social forces would have to change, if the lives of people like Hyacinth Robinson, Gervaise Macquart, and countless others, were to acquire meaning instead of being at the mercy of events and situations beyond their control, of evils such as alcoholism or the fallacy of anarchism.

The relevance of both novels to their times can be shown in many ways; for instance, the Demonstration of the Unemployed in London, in 1886,⁹³ the French Temperance League, or the furore that greeted the publication of L'Assommoir. Both authors depict working-class characters at the mercy of a predatory city which reduces them to an helpless state and eventually condemns them to death, and both do it, not from the standpoint of the characters themselves, but by placing at the centre of their novel the city itself.

In a letter to T.S. Perry, James wrote that the dream of his life was to go and live in London.⁹⁴ In writing The Princess Casamassima, he created that dream in fictional form and made an admittedly smaller, but parallel, achievement to that of Zola in writing L'Assommoir.

Later novels

It is clear that James and Zola have more in common than appears to have been generally thought. Under the theoretical cover of Naturalism, Zola is in reality a poet who lets the sensations and the emotions of the city permeate his writings and dominate the plot as a character in its own right.

Similarly, James who tends to be considered as a cold and calculating maker of dramas about the upper classes of society in his fiction, reveals himself as more substantially based, steeped in the poetry of London, using quite a number of Zola's techniques, from note taking to preliminary writing up of possible plots in order to achieve this.

From his early revulsion against Zola, whom he saw as immoral, James came to appreciate first his technique, then his achievements, and finally to admire him as a great artist.⁹⁵ Zola's single minded dedication to his theories allowed no influence beyond the French classics, and he pursued his efforts to present the city as an entity and a social force. In Une Page d'Amour, he prefaces the novel by a declaration:

J'avais rêvé d'écrire un roman dont Paris,
avec l'océan de ses toitures, serait un
personnage, quelque chose comme le chœur
antique.⁹⁶

To James, London was a kind of creative ferment. He pursued however a number of other quests, mainly related to new stylistic techniques, and his fascination for what was difficult. His change of inspiration was not unrelated to the decisive failure of The Princess Casamassima both in England and in America, while Zola

achieved financial independence, thanks to the enormous success of L'Assommoir.

It is not surprising, then to find Paris's influence expressed again in the next novel he wrote. In Une Page d'Amour, the distant view of Paris, appearing at a number of evenly-spaced crucial moments, has different effects each time, both on the young woman who is the heroine of the novel, and on the reader. In April 1977, Zola notes that he visited Passy to obtain the kind of view of the city which the novel demanded and which is painted with Zola's most subtle impressionistic palette. The novel has often been overlooked and tends to be considered as lightweight. This seems unjustified, and it is a landmark of transition. The five views of Paris, depicted in the fifth chapter of each of the five parts, show Zola's increasing mastery of symbolism. They also reveal an undercurrent of moral preoccupation. At one level, the story is nothing but a minor example of middle-class adultery, yet when the symbolism is analysed as the progressive betrayal of youthful hopes, one sees the importance of the novel which makes it relevant to Zola's work as a whole

His aim is explained fully in the preface, which somewhat belies the assumption that Zola always followed a difficult novel by an easy one:

Aux jours misérables de ma jeunesse, j'ai habité des greniers de faubourgs, d'où l'on découvrait Paris entier. Le grand Paris, immobile et indifférent, qui était toujours là, dans le cadre de ma fenêtre, me semblait comme le confident tragique de mes joies et de mes tristesses. J'ai eu faim et j'ai pleuré devant lui; et devant lui, j'ai aimé.. 97

The betrayal of early hopes prefigured here is translated in the

novel as Hélène's experience. At first, the city seems to reflect the opportunity of a new life, as Hélène is stimulated by the dynamically expanding capital. The optimism with which demolition and rebuilding are undertaken explodes joyfully:

Toute une volée sans fin de constructions
entassées. 98

Later, the landscape reflects her tarnished hopes:

Puis il sembla qu'une cendre grise tombait,
et les quartiers restèrent debout, légers
et noirâtres comme des charbons éteints. 99

Yet, hope is rekindled as the later vision of Paris shows:

Cependant, sur Paris allumé, une nuée
lumineuse montait. 100

Finally, she can understand that she will never enjoy the new life which Paris had once seemed to offer her:

A l'horizon, Paris s'était évanoui comme
une ombre de ville, le ciel se confondait
dans le chaos brouillé de l'étendue, la
pluie grise tombait toujours, entêtée. 101

The tenderness of love, which Hélène has never experienced, is connected in her mind with the Paris she has never seen; but she will never know love just as she will never visit Paris.

The setting of Nana, on the other hand, takes us right back to the heart of the capital, but mostly in the interior scenes of Nana's boudoir. Zola's special visits to such places obviously enabled him to give exact descriptions, and Nana, living in gilded luxury is likened to a 'golden fly' wallowing on the dung of the age. She has, however, the opportunity to return once to her little flat, on the fourth floor, rue Véron. She is tempted to live again near the cheap dance-halls where she escaped from the misery of the slums near l'Assommoir, when she was with her mother,

Gervaise. She is tired of her fashionable dwelling, even her country house seems contaminated by all the Parisian visitors, and she yearns for the simple life. Zola maps out her social climb through the various districts, as a way of showing the problems - and attraction - of prostitution, rife behind the glitter. Courtesans became famous figures in society, and this decadence, Zola maintains, was a major cause in the downfall of the Empire.

The final scene, with Nana dying in her opulent apartment, is orchestrated by another of Zola's extraordinary crowd scenes. With Germany poised to attack, in 1870, there is a surge of patriotism, and past Nana's window, the chant "A Berlin!, à Berlin!" can be heard. Inside, Nana's prostitute friends debate whether they should leave Paris for London, submit to the Prussians, or perhaps try and fight against them.¹⁰² Nana, like the Empire about to be punished for its degeneracy, is dreadful to look at, a heap of pus and blood. Paris will be singled out for a special holocaust.

Unlike Zola, James had been disappointed, not only with The Princess Casamassima's lack of success, but also with the failure of his second 'social' novel, The Bostonians, dealing with the condition of women. The subject matter was not the only reason for this. His style was getting less and less accessible to the average reader, while the prudery of the age prevented him from treating frankly his subject matter. It appears that he had little talent for making himself popular in other ways, judging from the unflattering portrait of George M. Flack, in The

Reverberator, which shows his contempt for publicity. 103

His next major novel, The Tragic Muse, combined his interest for the theatre and the world of art, and there he contrasts the spirits of the two cities of London and Paris.

At the beginning, Paris is shown as a living symbol of the artist's life; a gallery in the Palais de l'Industrie is the setting for a group of waiting English tourists, some having extreme misgivings about Paris. Lady Agnes Dormer is evidently fearful of the effects of the city on her son, Nick, whose attention she wishes to direct towards a rich wife, Julia Dallow, and a political career, in his father's seat in the House of Commons. The first chapter of the novel outlines sharply the distinction between the Parisian atmosphere and the moral outlook of the English in general:

They had about them the indefinable professional look of the traveller abroad; that air of preparation for exposure, material and moral, which is so oddly combined with the severe revelation of security and of persistence, and which excites ... the ire or admiration of foreign communities. 104

Paris and its influence will lead Nick to abandon his promising career and Lady Agnes already suspects this; just as she feels that "they go very far in art" in Paris, she fears that his interest in the city is already symptomatic of an interest - to her mind, unhealthy - in art. It is interesting to compare this with Zola's similar feeling that, for an artist, Paris is an obsessional place. Claude Lantier, in L'Œuvre will ultimately destroy himself because he cannot achieve the single, all-engulfing painting of Paris which is his aim, but, initially

for him as for Nick, Paris has been an agent of inspiration. On the other hand, in The Tragic Muse, London is seen as standing for the acceptance of life. It represents a middle point between the "art world" of Paris and the practical realities of standing for Parliament in the suitably named constituency of 'Harsh'.

The other strand of the novel is the discovery by Miriam Rooth of theoretical potential within herself, and both Miriam's preparation for artistic pursuits and Nick's investigative prowlings begin in Paris, while subsequent developments take place in London. Lady Agnes is deeply resentful of what she is missing because of Nick's wilfulness. Instead of concentrating on dowry and career, he rents a studio in Rosedale Road, and decides to take his chance there, rather than going to Paris or Florence. Miriam, equally wilful, is not tempted by an offer of marriage but will place herself in a West End theatre.

London is the city of decision, and at the end:

Nick stayed on in London with a passion of work fairly humming in his ears; he was conscious with joy that for three months in the empty Babylon, he would have generous days. 105

while Miriam:

... had mounted in a bound, in her new part, several steps in the ladder of fame, and at the climax of the London season this fact was brought home to her from hour to hour. 106

London had also been the city of decision for James. Just as there was a part of Hyacinth that was himself, he was also in part Nick and Miriam - Miriam perhaps even more so, since he was then very much involved with the stage, and such autobiographical

features can never be found in the works of Zola.

In fact, Zola's intention, for his next novel, was to expose the Parisian middle class just as he had done already for its working class. The novel, Pot-Bouille, was not at all successful, and a number of reasons have been advanced to explain why. It might have been that Zola did not know enough about that class to write competently about it, or that he was not emotionally involved as he had been with the more disadvantaged group. The facts may well be simpler. The novel is very long, not to say lengthy. It deals with a large apartment house and numerous tenants and contains literally enough intrigue for a dozen stories. To make things worse, his 'naturalistic' approach compels him to scrutinise each of them in great detail, but perhaps - more damaging than all the rest - he set out to paint the despised bourgeois as mediocre and boring. The impression given by the book is unlikely to be more fascinating than the material.

This did not deter him, and the following book is about the same class, or very nearly. One of the great innovations of the Second Empire had been the creation of department stores, like 'Le Bon Marché'. Zola made interested visits there, and called the department store in his novel 'Au Bonheur des Dames' which is also the title of the novel itself. It is known that he wrote to the manager of 'Le Bon Marché' for permission to make enquiries about the working conditions of the employees. ¹⁰⁷

This enabled him to discuss economic topics, and also to consider the place of women in society. Not surprisingly, Zola did not like department stores anymore than he liked Napoleon III and his

regime. They become symbols of vulgar wealth, and, here again, at the centre of the novel is the shop itself, a powerful monster, which under the direction of Octave Mouret. not only enslaves the poor workers who serve him, but ruins and destroys the small businesses all around.

The most vital parts of the novel are the crowds which come and go throughout the various departments, especially when sales are on, when Mouret takes chances, cuts prices, hoping to sell enough to make up for the tiny margin of profit.

Zola, then, takes his heroes, in the person of Etienne Lantier, away from Paris, to a small mine in northern France, where the action of Germinal takes place, a remarkably objective study of life at its hardest.

Objectivity is also the aim of Claude Lantier, in L'Œuvre, his great work should be an objective study of Paris, but unable to paint it, he kills himself. Robert J. Neiss thinks that he can discern a little of Zola himself in the person of Claude, together with echoes of the careers of Cézanne and Manet, and gives his reasons in his book, Zola, Cézanne and Manet: a study of L'Œuvre. 108

Zola's portrayal of Claude as a failure is in its way an homage to Paris and to the impossibility to capture it in any work of art so that the hero of the novel is not Lantier but, once again, Paris. Neiss explains:

Claude Lantier ... is not the hero of the novel, for there is none, nor the central figure, for that is either the nude of the 'Apotheosis of Paris', or Paris itself. 109

The opening of the book is typical of Zola at his best. There

is a great storm over Paris at night. Lantier walking outside is at first afraid of the violence of the elements, but soon forces himself to walk more slowly to savour the atmosphere. Then a flash of lightning illuminates the Ile St. Louis as a sign that he must paint it soon. Later he elaborates upon what he wants to achieve:

Claude, frémissant, cria: "Ah!, ce Paris.
il est à nous, il n'y a qu'à le prendre!"

to which, his interlocutor, Sandoz, replies:

"Eh bien! nous le prendrons!" 110

Later Sandoz and Lantier reminisce about their happy childhood years in Provence, and Claude, at one time, attempts to live a simple life in the country. Meanwhile, Sandoz dedicates his life to writing novels about Paris. The downfall for Claude will be when he attempts to introduce a naked woman into his painting, a touch of romanticism which does not succeed, although he had previously painted, with success, a naked figure among fully clothed men - which is, it seems, identical to Manet's notorious 'Déjeuner sur l'herbe'.

Yet, Claude loves Paris and understands all its moods:

Quand il traversait Paris, il
découvrait des tableaux partout, la
ville entière, avec ses rues, ses carrefours,
ses ponts, ses horizons vivants.. et il
rentrait frémissant, le crâne bouillonnant
de projets, jetant des croquis sur des bouts
de papier, le soir, à la lampe, sans pouvoir
décider par où il entamerait la série des
grandes pages qu'il rêvait. 111

Eventually, his obsession grows too strong. He loses friends, wife, but, after his suicide, he is fortunate to be buried in a peaceful cemetery overlooking the whole city. The sound of a locomotive, soft and heralding a new age of progress and of reason

is the only break in the silence, until Sandoz speaks:

Cela me calme, cela me fait du bien, de croire que nous marchons à la raison et à la solidité de la science. 112

These sentiments may seem faintly absurd, yet they do not detract from the power of the novel. Lantier may have been the spirit of the age, but the spirit of Paris survives.

In La Terre, Paris is left behind as country life is explored, while La Bête humaine shifts its action to follow the journey of the train. Zola uses also this opportunity to study criminals:

Je vais être obligé de tasser un peu les uns sur les autres les mondes qu'il me reste à étudier. C'est pourquoi, dans le cadre d'une étude sur les chemins de fer, je viens de réunir et le monde judiciaire et le monde du crime. 113

Crime and the railways may seem an odd mixture, yet in Victorian fiction, for instance, they are often inextricably linked, especially as corridor trains increased the opportunities for assault or killing. On the other hand, the train was also the symbol of a dynamic and forward-looking age. The railway station has been compared to a "cathédrale des temps modernes". In English Hours, James recalls his fascination in standing in a railway station, and Dickens makes considerable use of the railways in his short stories. The genuine setting of the Gare St. Lazare gives Zola an opportunity for a superb impressionistic set-piece, while the little station near Médan provides its provincial equivalent.

The novel opens with the view of the railway station as Roubaud sees it.

Tout un coin de l'espace en était blanchi,
tandis que les fumées accrues de l'autre machine
élargissaient leur voile noir. 114

The ending of the novel is not unexpectedly a train filled with soldiers running out of control, without a driver. The train is meant to be taking soldiers to the front line on the Rhine. The symbol is clear, and the evocation of the Prussian victory and of the deposition of Napoleon III looms ahead. Either way, death is at the end.

L'Argent examines the Paris of high finance and of the fever of speculation which seizes it at times. The inevitable crash at the end also foreshadows the end of the Empire, while La Débâcle takes the argument a step further to demonstrate how the stresses within the Empire needed only the disaster of Sedan to pull apart the rotten fabric of Parisian society. The argument is debatable and Bismarck may well have felt that he had a major part to play in all that, yet the novel is enormously rich because of the epic poetry which fills it, Paris burning during the Commune gives Zola the opportunity of a vision of a reborn nation:

Paris brûle, rien ne restera. Ah!, cette
flamme qui emporte tout, qui guérit tout,
je l'ai voulue, oui! elle fait de la
bonne besogne. 115

Jean kills his friend Maurice in tragic circumstances, but despite his sorrow is filled with an extraordinary optimism, watching Paris aflame in the sunset:

Et pourtant, par-delà la fournaise,
hurlante encore, la vivace espérance renaissait,
au fond du grand ciel calme, d'une limpidité
souveraine. C'était le rajeunissement
certain de l'éternelle humanité, le renouveau

promis à qui espère et travaille, l'arbre
 qui jette une nouvelle tige puissante,
 quand on en a coupé la branche pourrie,
 dont la sève empoisonnée jaunissait les
 feuilles. 116

He walks on, ready to help with the rebuilding of a new France, now that the time of pestilence is past.

It is ironic that La Débacle which, despite some inspired pages, is not a very good novel, became one of Zola's best sellers because of its actuality. Zola had meticulously checked the military details, the army maps, the position of the guns, of the troops, and one could follow the battle step by step. In retrospect, it did not seem too bad, after all, that Paris had not really been wiped out by fire, and even Napoleon III's graceful Opéra could be admired.

It was less fortunate that, with the passing of the Second Empire, Zola's great topic had disappeared. It would only be possible to try and enlarge upon the prophetic note at the end of La Débacle. He embarked upon a new series after tying up the loose ends of the Rougon-Macquart with Le Docteur Pascal. This was to be a study of three cities, Lourdes, Rome and Paris, and the name, Les Trois Villes would attempt to gather the spirit of the new Third Republic. Each of the towns would be a symbol but this was not a success. It is hardly surprising that an idealisation of the utilitarian values of a society of which Zola approved on the whole should fail to hold the same interest for the reader as the bitter novels of the Rougon-Macquart. Even Paris turns out to be most disappointing.

Henry James felt that the reason for Zola's comparative failures at that time was not one of subject-matter, but that it was the result of his almost entirely theoretical approach to novel-writing. While The Ambassadors was being serialised, James was asked to write an article on Zola for the Atlantic Monthly. He expressed admiration for his work in general, but referred to a conversation they had had when Zola was in London.

James told him that he was amazed to hear that he was planning to write a novel about Rome when he admitted that his knowledge of Italy consisted of a few days spend at Genoa. ¹¹⁷ This fundamental difference between their two approaches left James free to modify his writing so that his later work probed deeper and deeper into human motivations, while Zola's novels turned increasingly into symbols where place-names were used for his theories only. It was upon the anecdote on Rome that James based his argument, and this seemed to him to confirm that nothing had ever happened to Zola other than to write his books:

It was as if the Rougon-Macquarts had written him. ¹¹⁸

This opinion, in fact, reflected a fear that was not unknown to James himself. In The Ambassadors, Strether advises Little Bilham in this way:

Live all you can; it's a mistake not to. It doesn't so much matter what you do in particular, so long as you have had your life. If you haven't had that, what have you had? ¹¹⁹

It is possible that James felt that life had passed him by, partly on account of his "mysterious ailment", but it noteworthy that his work continues to be concerned with physical actuality, even as

it increased in psychological power. It is equally true that, by that time, Zola had become more and more theoretical, losing touch with the physical presence of Paris which had inspired him for so long, and ignoring also the human touch.

The consequences are unavoidable. James's final major novels are his best, but Zola's production is by and large insignificant.

At the same time, James became increasingly critical of the society in which he lived, seeing its structure as basically unsound, and wondering whether it had led to the outbreak of the First World War, in a way that brings to mind Zola and his unavoidable "débacle", while Zola developed an idealistic belief in the future, only finding again his old virulence and rhetorical talent at the time of the Dreyfus Case, outside the confines of literature.

Both What Maisie Knew and The Awkward Age are critical of a society which is so corrupt that it permits a child like Maisie, or an adolescent like Nanda, to see so much of the amoral behaviour of adults. These novels, written after his 'dramatic phase', gave little indication of their setting or of the physical presence of a London drawing room. Mr. Longdon, who has been 'outside' London society for a time, is a kind of morally-responsible Jamesian figure who rescues Nanda from the vicious circle of her acquaintances in a London which has lost its moral standards. James felt that the presence of an older admonitory figure was badly needed there.

Zola seems to have felt unable to make further comments on

the state of contemporary society. Naturalism was no longer in fashion and his inspiration flagged. The novel Paris has already been mentioned and it is a perfect illustration of the way philosophy replaces vivid descriptions and symbolism. E.A. Vizetelly, claimed in the introduction of its English translation that it was:

...no guide book to Paris, but it painted the city's social life, its work and its pleasures [adding that] the whole world of Paris passes before one. 120

This is the core of the problem; the book has no life of its own. Henry James called it "the great desert sand" and while Paris is praised in it as a great sower of ideas, the ideas themselves have buried the characters.

The book opens with the central character, Abbé Froment, outside the basilica of the Sacré-Cœur:

Et avant d'entrer, un instant il regarda Paris, dont la mer immense se déroulait à ses pieds. Un Paris de mystère, voilé de nuées, comme enseveli sous la cendre de quelque désastre, disparu à demi déjà dans la souffrance et dans la honte que son immensité cachait. 121

Abbé Froment, already disillusioned with the religion of Lourdes and Rome, now hopes to find the truth in Paris.

Si le monde antique avait eu Rome, maintenant agonisante, Paris régnait souverainement sur les Temps Modernes, le centre aujourd'hui des peuples, en ce continuel mouvement qui les emporte de civilisation en civilisation, avec le soleil, de l'est à l'ouest. 122

Paris is the new Rome, and the book ends with a symbol of regeneration which is the opposite of the destruction in La Débauche:

Le soleil oblique noyait l'immensité de Paris d'une poussière d'or. Mais, cette fois, ce n'étaient pas non plus les semailles, le chaos des toitures et des monuments ... ce n'était pas non plus la ville avec ses quartiers distincts. Il semblait qu'une même poussée de vie, qu'une même floraison avait recouvert la ville entière... Paris flambait, ensemencé de lumière par le divin soleil, roulant dans sa gloire la maison future de vérité et de justice. 123

The abstract terms "vérité", "justice" seem rather thin and explain the unforthcoming aspect of these pages. The city has lost the individuality of its many distinct areas, the strength of its many buildings and even the fascination of ugliness, it is instead bathed in a rosy unconvincing light of humanity. There is undoubtedly still some poetic dimension and some charm, but this new Jerusalem is not Paris.

Zola's subsequent search for the city of the future continues in Les Quatre Evangiles, confirming the extent to which he has lost touch with reality.

Religion is under attack in Paris, together with many of the familiar institutions of the city. The Abbé Froment considers the visible symbols of Paris: the Bourse representing greed, the Palais de Justice representing unfeeling and often unjust law, the Arc of Triomphe, symbol of military prowess, and finally the Sacré-Cœur itself, the house of God, of which the Abbé's brother, Guillaume, says:

On n'imagine pas un non-sens plus imbécile ... Paris, notre grand Paris, couronné, dominé par ce temple bâti à la glorification de l'absurde. 124

Zola cannot see any good coming from the religious revival which followed the Franco-Prussian War, but he pins his hope on a less

passive acceptance by the poor of their social condition. It is from their struggle that Zola thinks he can see the ideal, just, city of the future emerging. These people are, however, never allowed to speak, here. Abbé Froment, alone, is their interpreter and their judge. Above all, the book proves far too optimistic, in contrast to the stark, exaggerated pessimism of his first writings.

This was the time when James developed his art into a rarefied stylistic technique which produced his three final masterpieces. He entered a period of renewed energy, analogous to that of his hero Strether in The Ambassadors - written before, but published after The Wings of the Dove.

The change of Strether comes about, mainly, from his contact with a city, in this case, Paris. Even when he is disillusioned with Chad's ability to appreciate the potential of Paris - Chad is, after all only a provincial American businessman who, like Newman in The American, must return home - Strether is permanently affected by his contact with Paris. True, doubts have assailed him in England about the propriety of his mission there, but nevertheless the city is as much an actor in the drama as in any of Zola's novels. Strether feels that Chad was right to stay on, under the spell of the city, as long as it had something to offer him, even if Chad's liaison is revealed as ultimately sordid, and he will inevitably go away. The city also helps Strether to realise that he can never marry Chad's respectable mother, in

America, too conscious of what he has lost. The city has a mood that can easily defeat the strongest philistine like Waymarsh, or the second ambassadress, Mrs. Pocock. It is, significantly, on a visit outside the city that Strether realises, and here again, the pictorial imagery dominates as the scene steps out of a picture, that Chad's idyll is in reality no more than an affair.

In The Ambassadors, Paris is the city of light, but unfortunately, it is too late for any of the characters, with the exception of Strether, and possibly Little Bilham, to benefit from it.

The Wings of the Dove opens in a dismal street, Chirk Street, in an equally dismal part of London, where Kate Croy is waiting for the opportunity to offset the impoverishment of which her father is the cause. The view from her window is suitably unattractive:

The vulgar little street, in this view,
offered scant relief from the vulgar
little room ... one felt them [the
narrow black housefronts] in the room
exactly as one felt the room - the hundred
like it, or worse, in the street. 125

Her anger at living there is frequently stressed, and goes some way towards explaining why she conceives her evil plot. She emphasises her sense of family failure to Densher. It is inevitable that she will attempt to exploit the chance offered by the arrival of Milly Theale. This "American princess" takes her up "as the wondrous London girl in person". Kate's "easy, and yet the least bit dry" manner makes Milly realise the possibilities of her status for the first time. Densher also comes to understand

that Kate has a plan for him, when she meets him - at the half-way stage of the novel - on his return from America, in Euston station. Afterwards, she leaves him and he takes a walk in Regent's Park, where Milly has walked a day or two earlier. He realises, then, that Kate - "my cleverness, I assure you, has grown infernal" - is preparing an extraordinary sequence of events.

The moral development at the end, when Milly's goodness inspires Densher to refuse any of her money after her death - the dove has stretched her wings to cover both him and Kate - shows that Kate's evil planning could be defeated. Shortly before the final decision, Kate and Densher travel together through various working- class neighbourhoods;

They crossed the river; they wandered
in neighbourhoods sordid and safe. 126

in some sort of parallel to their moral uncertainty. Equally, the constrictions placed on Kate in exchange for living in Lancaster Gate are a partial cause of the evil in her. Like Hyacinth Robinson, she has been given a taste of the life of the rich, and passionately rejects poverty. The lesson she unwillingly learns by the end of the book is that, unable to find happiness in her 'correct' place, with Densher, she can have neither wealth nor happiness, since the power of good exerted by Milly over Densher has converted him, and he is now in love with Milly's memory.

This shows a more conservative James, but his concern with good and evil is unchanged, and the influence that a person's place in society - and therefore in a certain area in a town - has upon their behaviour.

The first sentence of The Golden Bowl evokes a strange view of London, one which was referred to, earlier, in connection with Zola's Paris:

The Prince had always liked his London, when it had come to him; he was one of the modern Romans who find by the Thames a more convincing image of the truth of the ancient state than any they have left by the Tiber. 127

The novel is a study of this imperial city, split between three sites: The Cadogan Place residence of the Assinghams, the Eaton Square, home of the very wealthy Mr. Verver, and the Portland Place house in which the deceiver and the deceived, the Prince and Maggie Verver, set up home together. In this milieu, Cadogan Place represents relative poverty, and Fanny Assingham is the familiar type of second-rate interferer.

The three sites form a triangle, outside which are Mr. Verver's country house, Fawns, and the country house at Matcham, where the Prince and Charlotte can both be immoral in amoral surroundings. In each of the three London houses, situations occur which closely reflect the surroundings; even the Prince's laugh is said to have a different meaning in Portland Square from its meaning in Eaton Square. The Assinghams exist on the outer edges of this society, possibly very typical of the reduced circumstances of the British in the world of the very rich. The Ververs are a rich American pair with a passion for collecting what the elder assumes to be the best specimens of European culture.

Maggie has even been on a trip to the British Museum to study the family's genealogy when she discovers what is to be the

fragile basis of their marriage in the Golden Bowl, with its flawed gilt surface.

Eaton Square represents ultimate wealth in the novel, so that Portland Place is really the dividing line between richness and poverty, connected by the Jew in the back street shop with the Golden Bowl - himself typical of those suppliers of treasures to Mr. Verver. In the same way, the opportunities for Charlotte and the Prince to meet are directly connected with their London homes:

But at present, Charlotte was almost always there when Amerigo brought her to Eaton Square, and Amerigo was constantly bringing her there when Charlotte brought her husband to Portland Place, where Charlotte was constantly bringing him. 128

As in The Ambassadors, there is a significant stroll to Regent's Park from nearby Portland Place, made by Maggie with her father, while she ponders over Amerigo's reasons for wanting to marry her. They return to find Amerigo and Charlotte awaiting them almost as a challenge.

In fact, this novel represents a change in the nature of Jamesian challenges: this one is taken up and the Golden Bowl is smashed; there is genuine passion in the adulterous kiss which Charlotte and Amerigo exchange and, at the end, the feeling is clear that Maggie finally understands what she must do. The presentation of London as a triangle of competing desires complements artistically the concentration on the small group of leading actors. This is an enclosed world, and the sense of betrayal, followed by a dawning of understanding, is therefore all the more effective.

Even in their final works, James and Zola are still very drawn to the city of their choice, although their treatment of it is different. Paris remains as important to Zola as London is to James. ¹²⁹ Another interesting point is the importance of Paris in the works of James, which does not find a parallel in the novels of the French writer, and the fact that James's Paris is very much like Zola's.

For both, the metropolis is the essential foundation for their plot. At times, it has been shown as cruel and destructive, at others, gentle and understanding. Shown in a variety of settings and lightnings, it was a symbol and maintained its essential place at the heart of each novel.

Eventually, both cities came to be used by the two writers to present the vision of an ideal. Zola had evolved this theme as a result of his philosophical development towards optimism, while James was looking for a society with a solid moral basis. These changes of viewpoints were also partly related, for both, to the fact that they had reached a certain level of fame and fortune and could please themselves about their literary production - within reason - and they wrote from the heart.

They were also getting older, and found it more difficult to identify in their works with an active, vibrant and perhaps dangerous city. Instead, it could be said that both men drew closer in their methods, as Zola began to think in terms of moral progress, while James moved to more detailed direct observations.

London for James and Paris for Zola appear as the inheritors of the antique Roman city, and the guardian of its laws and

traditions.

James saw London as a gentle city, where class distinctions were found but without proving insuperably divisive. At times, his portrait of London is fleetingly tender, or fragile as the Golden Bowl itself, but the most lyrical homage to Paris is that of Zola in the novel of the same name.

In a certain sense, it can also be said that both writers had deliberately adopted their city. It is true that Zola was born in Paris, but for most of his childhood and adolescence, he lived under the blue skies and warm sun of Provence, yet despite his dreams of sunshine and green meadows, which also appear in most of his novels - as dreams - he never attempted to make them into reality. His country house was only a stone's throw from the capital. James came from another continent and his adoption had been more dramatic and more final. He moved down to Rye eventually but made frequent trips to London, where he died. Before that, of course, he had taken British citizenship.

Zola was perhaps too optimistic when he felt that society could improve through literature, yet he managed to do a great deal. His real achievement is not, however, as he hoped, as a scientific dissector of life in Paris, it is as the poet of the city. James sought and realised a more complex role as the moral analyst of an entire society, the Babylon and Rome of its age; yet from the lessons he learned from Zola, he also created, by paying close attention to detail, the illusion of a city of symbols and moral imperatives. Whichever of the two writers was the best is not really relevant here. What matters is that through them, it is

possible to see the two most important capital cities of the nineteenth century, to examine closely their monuments, their streets, as well as the people who lived and worked in them, and this through the filter of exceptional intelligences, able to combine accurate observations, painstaking research and artistic genius.

The final result is that by adopting consciously their respective "cities", neither Zola nor James gave a cold, dry, detached account of what life was like. The city impregnates their work far more deeply, as a function, omnipresent and reactive. As Zola's reputation as a simple scriptor of sordid facts or propagandist for naturalism faded away, his fame was helped by the city itself. He fulfilled his ambition to write novels where the city would be essential, like a Greek tragedy chorus. James was never accused of being too down-to-earth, on the contrary he was judged over-refined and difficult to read. He learnt to become more practical as a chronicler, to look for more accurate spoken English and came to present a full and variegated portrait of life in London.

Both are shown here as having more in common than was previously realised as well as having added a new dimension of poetry to realism.

NOTES TO CHAPTER II

¹Emile Zola was born in Paris, in 1840, then returned to live there in 1858, and the city remained the central focus of his life and writings. When he became wealthy, after the publication of L'Assommoir, he built himself a country house at Médan, just outside the city, but he remained closely associated with Paris. He died there in 1902, of asphyxia, most likely from the fumes of a defective chimney, blocked by birds' nests, although an attempt has been made to show that he could have been murdered (See J. Richardson, Emile Zola, pp. 213-215).

Henry James was born in New York, in 1843, and spent his boyhood attending schools in Europe and America. He made a permanent home in London in 1876, and died there in 1916, having lived for some time at Lamb House, Rye, Sussex.

²E. Zola. O. C., Vol. IX, p. 896 (Le Petit Journal), 1 June, 1865.

³However, in The Princess Casamassima, James does at least, as Leon Edel points out in The Life of Henry James, Vol. I, p. 771, set the book on Sundays, the only days when the working classes were free to walk about the streets.

⁴E. Zola, Correspondance (1858-67), 14 June 1858, p. 96.

⁵E. Zola, La Confession de Claude, O.C., Vol. I, p. 12.

⁶Zola's mother had brought him back to Paris during her attempt to recover money and gain recognition, for the work done by her husband, François Zola, Emile's father. He had built an important canal and a barrage which now bear his name. (See J. Richardson, op. cit., p. 7).

⁷See the preface to the New York edition of Roderick Hudson, p. x.

⁸R.W. Butterfield, "The American", in The Air of Reality: new essays on Henry James, p. 25.

⁹Letters of Henry James, Vol. II, p. 82.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 86.

¹¹D.J. Olsen, The Growth of Victorian London, p. 18.

¹²Ibid., p. 19. quoting A. Weber, The Growth of Cities in the Nineteenth Century, N.Y., 1899, p. 442.

¹³From an unpublished letter in the collection of J.C. Lapp, quoted in his book, Zola before the Rougon-Macquart, p. 49.

¹⁴E. Zola, Correspondance, Vol. I (1858-67), 8 January 1866, p. 434.

¹⁵E. Zola, La Confession de Claude, O.C., Vol. I, p. 108.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 9.

¹⁷"Aux Champs", Le Capitaine Berle, an article in Vestnik Europhy, August 1878, quoted Emile, Zola. See F.W.J. Hemmings, The Life and Times of Emile Zola, p. 12.

¹⁸H. James, English Hours, p. 15.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 15.

²⁰Ibid., p. 16.

²¹Ibid., p. 3.

²²Ibid., p. 3.

²³Ibid., p. 4.

²⁴Ibid., p. 9.

²⁵Ibid., p. 14.

²⁶Ibid., p. 14.

²⁷Ibid., p. 28.

²⁸H. James, The Princess Casamassima, p. 7.

²⁹The Letters of Henry James, Vol. II, p. 95.

³⁰Ibid., p. 102.

³¹Ibid., p. 144.

³²E. Zola, Le Vœu d'une Morte, O.C., Vol. I, p. 183.

³³E. Zola, Thérèse Raquin, O.C., Vol. I, p. 526.

³⁴Ibid., p. 526.

³⁵Ibid., p. 576.

³⁶Ibid., p. 564.

³⁷Ibid., p. 632.

³⁸Ibid., Preface, p. 183.

³⁹E. Zola, Madeleine Féral, O.C., Vol. I, p. 733.

⁴⁰J.C. Lapp points out that Zola often uses a woman as a harbinger of destruction, Zola before the Rougon-Macquart, p. 150.

⁴¹As H. Mitterand writes in his Preface to the novel (O.C., Vol. II, p. 306):

"C'est le Paris de la société composite, frivole, cynique ou hypocrite."

⁴²E. Zola, La Curée (O.C., Vol. II), p.378.

⁴³Ibid., p. 422. Zola describes it as "ce mot profond de cynisme naïf", p. 422.

⁴⁴E. Zola, Le Ventre de Paris, (O.C., Vol. II), p. 576.

⁴⁵Ebauche pour Le Ventre de Paris, quoted O.C., Vol. II, p. 813.

⁴⁶Henry James wrote to J.S. Perry, "You see, I am quite the Naturalist". Letters of Henry James, Vol. III, p. 61.

⁴⁷E. Zola, Le Ventre de Paris, (O.C., Vol. II), p. 677.

⁴⁸H. James, A London Life, p. 138.

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 79.

⁵⁰James is himself the perpetual observer of the life of the city, as in English Hours, and its relationship with his characters. J. M. Luecke in "Hyacinth's Fallible Consciousness",

50 (cont'd)

(Henry James: Modern Judgements, ed. Tony Tanner, pp. 184-193) feels that Hyacinth in The Princess Casamassima is a flawed character, as he undeniably is, yet there can be no doubt that he also represents the Jamesian observer, a perpetual outsider in European society.

⁵¹H. James, The Portrait of a Lady, p. 138.

⁵²Ibid., p. 138.

⁵³Ibid., P. 138-9.

⁵⁴Ibid., p. 139.

⁵⁵H. James, English Hours, p. 14.

⁵⁶H. James, The Princess Casamassima, p. 8.

⁵⁷E. Zola, L'Assommoir, Preface, p. 18.

⁵⁸Ibid., p. 18.

⁵⁹Ibid., p. 21.

⁶⁰Ibid., p. 22.

⁶¹Ibid., p. 24.

⁶²Ibid., p. 61.

⁶³M.C. Banquart, Images littéraires de Paris 'Fin-de-Siècle', p. p. 73.

⁶⁴Ibid., p. 69.

⁶⁵Ibid., p. 80.

⁶⁶L'Assommoir, ed. cit., p. 31.

⁶⁷Ibid., pp. 52-3.

⁶⁸Ibid., p. 410.

⁶⁹Ibid., p. 51.

⁷⁰I. Gregor and B. Nicholas, The Moral and the Story: The novel as a social document, pp. 66-7. P.J. Keating, in The Working Classes in Victorian Fiction, describes L'Assommoir as "the archetypal" nineteenth century slum novel, p. 128.

⁷¹I. Gregor and B. Nicholas, The Moral and the Story, p. 70.

⁷²L'Assommoir, ed. cit., p. 122.

⁷³Ibid., p. 518.

⁷⁴Ibid., p. 302.

⁷⁵Ibid., p. 479.

⁷⁶The Princess Casamassima, ed. cit., Preface, p. 7.

⁷⁷The Art of Fiction, in The Portable Henry James, p. 397

⁷⁸Grover states that James felt that naturalism was insufficient to reveal the moral nature of the characters and agrees with Lionel Trilling's view, expressed in The Liberal Imagination, (pp. 56-88), that Paul Muniment is certainly one of James's most successful secondary characters. See Henry James and the French Novel (pp. 93-103).

⁷⁹V. Harbour, Thomas Sargent Perry: a biography, 2 November 1879, p. 304.

⁸⁰Ibid., p. 304.

⁸¹The Princess Casamassima, ed. cit., Preface, pp. 21-3.

⁸²Lyall H. Powers writes in Henry James and the Naturalist Movement (p. 89) that, as he walked the streets of Cheapside and Camberwell, James gained the impressions he needed to provide his description of the "low stucco-fronted house" in Madeira Crescent, Paddington, a contrast to her earlier life, to which the Princess's descent, together with the sale of her pictures and fine objects, serves as a confirmation for Hyacinth of the hopelessness of his situation.

⁸³

Letter from R.L. Stevenson, quoted in Henry James and the Naturalist Movement, p. 102 (28 October 1885, Henry James and Robert Louis Stevenson, p. 106).

⁸⁴The Princess Casamassima, ed. cit., p.101.

⁸⁵Ibid., Preface, p. 8.

⁸⁶Ibid., p. 63.

⁸⁷Ibid., p. 168.

⁸⁸Yet W.H. Tilley has shown in his study of The Background of The Princess Casamassima (pp. 18-33) that James made considerable use of contemporary periodicals, and that consequently he took more interest in social matters than has generally been assumed by critics. He called the reports of anarchism in The Times "mealy-mouthed", viewing these reports ironically as "the sentiment of the majority". Bombings had begun in England in March 1883 and, as The Times remarked when the Local Government Board offices were blown up in 1883, it "marked the end of an era of self-deception". London felt the waves from the postponed coronation of Alexander III in Russia in 1882 out of the fear of assassination and the 1886 Demonstration of the Unemployed led to street disorders in London.

⁸⁹The Princess Casamassima, ed. cit., p. 72.

⁹⁰Ibid., p. 76.

⁹¹Ibid., pp. 366-71.

⁹²Ibid., pp. 529-30.

⁹³George Gissing used the character of a vicar who sympathised with the radical cause in Demos (1886) to say that at that time a man could pick up radicalism as it was "in the air". Gissing was influenced by the pressure of events to rush to his publishers, Smith Elder & Co. with a synopsis of this radical novel, as it seemed topical after the 1886 riots.

⁹⁴V. Harbour, Thomas Sargent Perry: a biography, 13 September 1878, p. 300.

⁹⁵Leon Edel has traced James's attitude to Zola in his Life of Henry James. Harold J. McCarthy discusses the same subject in "The Sensuous Surface", the first chapter of his book, Henry James: the creative process, where he states: "James was not blind to the power Zola sometimes achieved and realised that while Zola did not consider man's finer possibilities, he could yet provide, in his promiscuous, collective way, a penetrating and true illustration of "our natural allowance of health, heartiness, and grossness". p. 29.

95 (cont'd)

Sarah B. Daugherty shows, in her book on The Literary Criticism of Henry James, how James's admiration for Zola grew continuously. Similarly, James expressed his respect for Zola, even in his negative reviews. Though he wished that Zola had "more horizon", he called his work on the Rougon-Macquart "one of the most remarkable literary tasks of our day"; and though he disliked both Une Page d'Amour and Nana, he praised L'Assommoir for its "extraordinary technical qualities". (Daugherty, p. 60). James's earlier suspicion of the naturalists in the 1870's developed into a qualified admiration in the 1880's.

⁹⁶E. Zola, Une Page d'Amour, Preface to the illustrated edition of 1884, O.C., Vol. III, p. 1219.

⁹⁷Une Page d'Amour, ed. cit., p. 1219.

⁹⁸Ibid., p. 1010.

⁹⁹Ibid., p. 1060.

¹⁰⁰Ibid., p. 1111.

¹⁰¹Ibid., p. 1160.

¹⁰²E. Zola, Nana, O.C., Vol. IV, p. 348. Most of the novel takes place in the interior of rooms. There is deliberately little of the feeling of the city as it is in evidence in L'Assommoir.

¹⁰³James had himself had an unsatisfactory experience as a reporter in Paris for the New York Tribune newspaper, where his journalistic career was abruptly terminated. See Literary Reviews and Essays, Preface, p. 13.

¹⁰⁴H. James, The Tragic Muse, p. 7.

¹⁰⁵Ibid., p. 492.

¹⁰⁶Ibid., p. 493.

¹⁰⁷E. Zola, Au Bonheur des Dames, O.C., Vol. IV, Introduction, pp. 701-06.

¹⁰⁸Niess assesses the claims of each of the three to be the original basis for the character of Claude, and argues for a synthesis. See pp. 189-91. (R.J. Niess, Zola, Cézanne and Manet).

- ¹⁰⁹ Ibid., p. 218.
- ¹¹⁰ E. Zola, L'Œuvre, O.C., Vol. V, pp. 491-92.
- ¹¹¹ Ibid., p. 60.
- ¹¹² Ibid., p. p. 733.
- ¹¹³ Interview with Van Santen Kolff, quoted in Emile Zola, Hemmings, p. 239.
- ¹¹⁴ E. Zola, La Bête Humaine, O.C., Vol. VI, p. 24.
- ¹¹⁵ E. Zola, La Débâcle, O.C., Vol. VI, p. 1118.
- ¹¹⁶ Ibid., pp. 1121-22.
- ¹¹⁷ H. James, Notes on Novelists with some other Notes, p. 36. Discussed in in Henry James and the Creative Process, Harold T. McCarthy, p. 28.
- ¹¹⁸ Notes on Novelists, ed. cit., p. 24. Also discussed by Leon Edel in The Life of Henry James, Vol. II, p. 494.
- ¹¹⁹ H. James, The Ambassadors, p. 140.
- ¹²⁰ E. Zola, Paris, English edition (1898), Preface, P. 10.
- ¹²¹ E. Zola, Paris, O.C., Vol. VII, p. 1175.
- ¹²² Ibid., p. 1566.
- ¹²³ Ibid., p. 1567.
- ¹²⁴ Ibid., p. 1539.
- ¹²⁵ H. James, The Wing of the Dove, p. 5.
- ¹²⁶ Ibid., p. 448. These neighbourhoods are safe because sordid; areas like Lancaster Gate are filled with hypocrisy and deception, with the exception of the influence of Milly Theale. Unusually for James, there is also a certain Christian tone to the end of the novel. Densher is said to be hanging about London at Christmas time. Lord Mark has betrayed him to Milly in Venice and he goes for solace before a crucial interview with her: "To what church was he going, to what church, in such a state of his nerves,

126 (cont'd)

could he go?" (p. 428)' he goes to the Brompton Oratory. The actual interview, which could have been of paramount importance to most novelists is actually missed out, and the whole novel is pervaded by James's familiar sense of betrayal.

127 H. James, The Golden Bowl, p. 29.

128 Ibid., p. 352.

129 James wrote of Zola's art in Notes on Novelists, stating that Zola wrote particularly well on "the alienation of the monstrous city" (p. 34), and Diana Festa-McCormick analyses this achievement in her book, The City as Catalyst: a study of ten novels, as an example of "Paris's stranglehold on the lives of the poor" (pp. 33-48), concluding that "in this carefully built novel [...] Gervaise is the principal character, but Paris is the dominant force". (p. 47). The city is a catalyst in the works of both James and Zola, the catalyst which brings to life the submerged sufferings of the working classes in the nineteenth century.

CHAPTER III

Treatment of the Working Classes in Zola's "L'Assommoir" and James's "The Princess Casamassima"

The representation of London and Paris in literature is not the only subject which links James and Zola, but it is a connecting thread which can be discerned throughout the writing careers of both authors, and which is worthy of sustained analysis insofar as their attitude towards the city changed with age. Their views on the condition of the working classes must be analysed in a different way since, while Zola returned to that topic many times in his fiction, James seems to have felt that the upper middle classes were his natural milieu, and he only dealt with lower class characters and situations in any depth in one novel: The Princess Casamassima.

Indeed, as was indicated in the previous chapter, he appears to have decided to write a novel about the working classes in London under the influence of Zola's theories of Naturalism, and in particular, of Zola's novel, L'Assommoir. Therefore, in order to move from the general theme of the city as described by James and by Zola to the more specialised theme of the condition of the lower-class inhabitants of the city, it is clearly necessary to select for particular study these two novels which summed up James's and Zola's feelings about this.

Both Henry James and Emile Zola were deliberately looking for renewed inspiration in their fiction when they came to write these major novels. Zola had planned a story dealing primarily with the working classes from as early a stage in his writing career as the original outline for the Rougon-Macquart series which he had submitted to his publishers. The seventh novel was to be:

... un roman qui aura pour cadre le monde ouvrier. Peinture d'un ménage d'ouvriers à notre époque, drame intime et profond de la déchéance du travailleur parisien sous la déplorable influence du milieu des barrières et des cabarets. ¹

Half a page of jottings made soon after the 1870 war shows that many of the elements of the finished novel were already in Zola's mind: the scenes in a laundry, women looking for men in pubs, a feast given by one of the laundresses, etc. are mentioned there.

Similarly, James, a decade later, in the 1880's, was pursuing his 'social' theme and searching for a new subject, in order to compensate for the disappointing reception given to The Bostonians, which had dealt with the condition of women. Many of the citizens of Boston had been offended by his portrait of their staid society, and this may have encouraged him to choose a new locale for his next work. He now felt sufficiently confident to write about the town which had become truly his home, the London where Hyacinth Robinson simply "sprang up [...] out of the [...] pavements". ² Anarchist bombings had become a focus of popular attention and, in order to write about these as well as other socialist disturbances, James had to deal primarily with working-class characters and their surroundings.

Zola was, of course, far better qualified to write about the working classes from a vantage point of personal knowledge than was James. Whereas James was born into the American upper-middle class, in a family which had been wealthy for two generations, and continued to move in the circles of 'society', Zola had been acquainted with poverty from an early age. It is a well-known fact that, ironically, it was the success of L'Assommoir which definitely freed Zola from money worries. His publisher made a generous decision to tear up the previously agreed contract and replace it with one more favourable to Zola, based on the number of copies sold. By writing about the working world of Paris, Zola finally severed his links with it, going to live in his newly purchased country house at Médan.

James, on the other hand, did not find the same success, and his novel on the related subjects of anarchism and the working classes did not appeal to the English reading public. After publishing a second novel on a social theme, The Tragic Muse, he turned his attention to the stage, while attempting to concentrate on writing more dramatic novels.

We know that Zola's knowledge of working-class life was obtained mainly between 1859 and 1862, when he moved from tenement to tenement in Paris, having left full time education and not yet found stable work. His notes on L'Assommoir were made under the heading: "Roman ouvrier - le roman aux Batignolles" which was the district where he was living at the time. As F.W.J. Hemmings has shown, Zola's memories of city slums went back to the early sixties, ever since his mother brought him back to the capital.

Zola's uncle, Adolphe Aubert, had been a house decorator, but then, finding himself unemployed, tried to get any work he could, and was for a time a concierge. He might quite conceivably have been one of the sources for the character of Coupeau, while his daughter, Anna, known as "Nana", is a very likely reflection of Coupeau's own daughter. Even Zola's wife, Alexandrine, who came from a working-class family, and who had herself gone out to work, being trained as a seamstress, but also helping at a florist's when money was short, could provide some useful information for his notebook, together with her relatives and acquaintances. It would appear that Zola decided to make his central character a laundress because, unlike the majority of the working population, laundresses worked in the open air, and could be made a focal point in the community. Here again, his knowledge of the area and the opportunities he had to mix with such people furnished additional elements for the book.

When Zola finally came to write the novel, at the beginning of the Autumn of 1875, his mind was still full of all these vivid memories. Additionally, the example of the Goncourt brothers spurred him on. In the preface of Germinie Lacerteux, they had written:

Nous nous sommes demandés si ce qu'on appelle "les basses classes" n'avaient pas droit au roman. 3

and this proved for Zola an invitation which he could not resist, first of all because the subject was dear to his heart, but also because these lower classes had never before been depicted in

literary works of fiction, except incidentally and superficially. Even the 'realist' novels of Balzac and Stendhal did not explore the working-class elements of the population, and they are notable chiefly for the already unusual way in which they introduced and dissected middle-class characters.

Furthermore, Zola had more claim to be able to write a realistic novel about the proletariat than, for instance, the Goncourt brothers. The fact that they used as a model the life of one of their servants, as a kind of expiation for the unassuaged guilt they felt at their ignorance of her submerged life, is proof enough of their lack of accurate observation of the working class in general; this does not apply to Zola.

What is more, such a subject conformed to all the requirements laid down in Zola's declaration concerning naturalism: Le Roman naturaliste, where he stated that the material should be rigorous, bleak and largely pessimistic. It also conformed to his belief in the importance of the twin pressures of heredity and environment. He stated explicitly what his aim was:

Montrer le milieu peuple et expliquer par ce milieu les mœurs peuple; comme quoi, à Paris, la soulerie, la débandade de la famille, les coups, l'acceptation de toutes les hontes et toutes les misères, vient des conditions mêmes de l'existence ouvrière, des travaux durs, des promiscuités, des laisser-aller, etc. En un mot, un tableau très exact de la vie du peuple, avec ses ordures, sa vie lâchée, son langage grossier, etc. ⁴

Zola further points out in his Ebauche that the environment will be the moulding factor, but that the working classes will be the operators of oppression against members of their own class. The

leading characters, like Lantier, and the behind-the-scenes manipulators, like Père Colombe, control the destiny of the majority of the workers, who are trapped in some vicious cycle by a combination of the environment and of their heredity.

The particular area which Zola chose for his study was most suited to his purpose; it encompassed a section of Paris north of the Gare du Nord, bounded by la rue de la Goutte d'Or, la rue Polouceau, la rue des Poissonniers (to-day le boulevard Barbès), le boulevard de la Chapelle and the rue de la Charbonnière, described as "le Quartier: les rues, les cabarets et les bals"⁵ This was an area which Zola knew well, as he explained to a member of the working class who had written to him, expressing his admiration for L'Assommoir:

J'ai longtemps vécu parmi le peuple. J'étais très pauvre et je l'ai vu de près. C'est ce qui m'a permis de parler de lui sans mensonge.⁶

The neighbourhood had everything needed to symbolise the constrictions imposed on lower-class life: the hospital, the slaughterhouse, the laundry, and, above all, several bars. One of them was "L'Assommoir" itself:

Nom d'un cabaret de Belleville, qui est devenu celui de tous les cabarets de bas étage, ou le peuple boit les liquides frelatés qui le tuent.⁷

It formed one of the numerous ghettos left - practically invisible - in small pockets within Haussmann's central Paris, resulting from the reconstruction of the capital:

La transformation de Paris [écrit Corbon], ayant fait refluer forcément la population laborieuse du centre vers les extrémités, on a fait de la capitale, deux villes: une riche, une pauvre. La classe malaisée est comme un immense cordon enserrant la classe aisée.⁸

Zola's self-appointed task was to make the existence of these people known to the French reading public. In the creation of his major character, Zola was again influenced by Germinie Lacerteux. He acknowledged this in the opening sentences of his essay on the novel, later reprinted in Mes Haines:

Je dois déclarer, dès le début, que tout mon être, mes sens et mon intelligence, me portent à admirer l'œuvre excessive et fiévreuse que je vais analyser. 9

He appreciated especially the energy and audacity of the story and claimed to be fond of this 'décadent' work because it was part of the spirit of the age, and there is no doubt that his own central figure, Gervaise, resembles Germinie:

Imaginez une créature faite de passion et de tendresse, une femme toute chair et toute affection . . . Placez cette femme frémissante et forte dans un milieu grossier qui blessera toutes ses délicatesses, s'adressera à tout le limon qui est en elle, et qui, peu à peu, tuera son âme en l'étouffant sous les ardeurs du corps et l'exaltation des sens. 10

This description by Zola of Germinie sounds like a draft for the character of Gervaise. They are both destroyed by the pressures of their environment:

Pour moi, l'œuvre est grande en ce sens qu'elle est, je le répète, la manifestation d'une forte personnalité, et qu'elle vit largement de la vie de notre âge. 11

Whereas the Goncourts are limited to the depiction of one individual, Zola can place his character at the heart of an entire neighbourhood of working-class people.

Zola, in that way, was able to portray a variety of workers performing their different tasks, while Germinie remained, more traditionally, a servant. True, domestic servants constituted a

large part of the working population, especially for those who came from the country, and this until late in the nineteenth century, yet more interest was generated by a representation of the life of laundry workers, publicans, undertakers, "concierges", members of the police force, roofers, and several other tradespeople, all the more so because Zola could be very specific about their occupations and related roles.

When other writers tried to study the working classes, they were apt to generalise. Victor Hugo, like George Sand, tended to sentimentalise, Alphonse Daudet remained vague, although he was probably the closest to showing working class life at the time, in Fromont jeune et Risler aîné (1874), a novel he had set realistically in a drab area of Paris, and perhaps also in Jack, where he described a metallurgical factory.

In every case, however, the workers remained a sort of moving backcloth, behind the real hero who was, as often as not, temporarily exiled among them, before finding his true destiny elsewhere. Artists were less inhibited and Manet's study of a laundry (La blanchisserie), Monet's Pont de chemin de fer à Argenteuil, and his Gare St. Lazare, Degas's Les repasseuses, or Renoir's Les grands boulevards, were nearer to Zola's heart. He championed their cause against hostile critics and a scornful public. The cast of L'Assommoir comprises many similar workers, with the exception of those in industry. This was to be the subject of another novel, Germinal.

At first sight, Henry James's description of the working classes seems to lack the feeling of their entity. He moreover

appears to fall prey to the common cliché in making his leading character in The Princess Casamassima a member of the working class only by accident. Hyacinth Robinson is in fact the illegitimate son of an aristocratic father, while his mother is French, and when jilted, kills the father. The novel involves other classes throughout.

In writing in this fashion, Henry James was conforming to his own literary principles, as set out in his Art of Fiction¹² just as Zola was, in respect of his own Roman naturaliste. James was a firm believer in the importance of an 'inclusive' portrait of the whole of society and, as Sergio Perosa has demonstrated in his study of Henry James and the Experimental Novel:

James stays mostly with his main character, but he gives the narration such a frankly panoramic and processional movement, he works with so many characters and types, he insists so much on the sense of place, he gives such a detailed picture of London and its various milieus, its streets and pubs, its shops and palaces, moving out to Medley, Paris and Venice, that the final result may indeed be compared to a vast chiaroscuro painting.¹³

James's aim here is to portray the whole of society, not so much in the manner of Titian as The Art of Fiction suggests, but in that of Tintoretto, as Perosa so perspicuously states.

A second vital feature of both novels, clearly common to James's and to Zola's thinking, is the importance of heredity as a factor. Gervaise is seen as doomed from the start to follow a downward path, because her parents conceived her during a frenzied bout of lovemaking while they were drunk. Similarly Hyacinth's inauspicious beginnings will be crucial in leading

him to a rebellious state, and to a political stance which will be against all classes, because he feels excluded from his 'rightful' inheritance amongst the upper reaches of society.

He too is seen as an essentially sensitive, vulnerable human being caught in the meshes of the class system, as Phillip Sicker has pointed out in Love and the Quest for Identity in the Fiction of Henry James:

More than any other character from this period, Hyacinth Robinson of The Princess Casamassima embodies James's vision of bifurcated personality, of a sensitive human being caught in a false social role. ¹⁴

Hyacinth's tragedy is that he is in-between classes, too educated for the one he is in, excluded by an accident of birth from the one to which he truly belongs. On the other hand, Gervaise's tragedy is that she belongs all too much to the class in which she is born, and is therefore carried along on its destructive tide; yet for these very reasons, both Hyacinth and Gervaise are victims of their respective heredity in a society which is firmly class-based.

Present also in the two novelists' work is a basic counterpoise between the static nature of the working-class environment and the various moves - and initiations - made by the central characters. Gervaise is immersed in a world which, despite all the physical demolitions and rebuilding in progress, remains the same, but her own material conditions extend from a state of initial poverty to a reasonably prosperous standard of living when she works as a laundress - the zenith of her fortunes - only to end in decline and ultimate collapse, as she dies like an abandoned animal. The apartment house in which she lives is in

itself a metaphor for these changes. From a relatively comfortable and respectable flat while she works in the laundry, she removes to ever smaller and darker rooms until she ends up in a walk-in cupboard. Similarly, James's hero finds himself in the static atmosphere of working-class districts of London, yet his condition also rises and falls, bearing in mind, of course, as several commentators have pointed out, that his journey through life is far more spatially extended than that of poor Gervaise.

Elizabeth Allen, in her study of A Woman's Place in the Novels of Henry James, explains:

In terms of social place (in both senses) the bulk of the characters in The Princess Casamassima are static, and provide reference points for the progress of Hyacinth and the Princess. Miss Pynsent belongs to Pentonville and so does Mr. Vetch - though his feeling of having moved 'down' accentuates the poverty of Lomax Place. Paul and Rose Muniment belong to Camberwell, and despite Paul's revolutionary activities, his general aspirations stretch no further than Blackheath. ¹⁵

Hyacinth, on the other hand, travels all the way from Lomax Place to Mayfair via the theatre in the Strand - and subsequently goes on to Paris and Venice, although ultimately, he too meets a squalid death. The Princess makes a parallel journey in the opposite direction even if it has fewer wishes attached to it.

In both novels, the principal characters are cutting a swathe through a section of society by experiencing different elements of that society. These journeys are a succession of initiations into differing aspects of life in both capital cities. Gervaise experiences a new-found self-confidence when she has a worthwhile occupation, but then discovers sloth and idleness in common with her husband Coupeau until she finds solace and

of course degradation in alcohol itself. Hyacinth is initiated into anarchism which was a kind of comparable answer by the working-class population to their restricted and unhappy conditions. Princess Casamassima further initiates him into the world of art and high society with the result that the conflict between the two worlds destroys him. Both he and Gervaise can be seen as victims of the processes inherent in their environment.

We know, for instance, that alcoholism increased considerably in France during the latter half of the nineteenth century, partly as a result of the constant influx of population to the towns, just as we know that anarchism was rife among the mass of unemployed milling around in the city of London in the 1880's, as W.H. Tilley demonstrates in The Background to The Princess Casamassima, when he examines the considerable amount of accurate information James had to hand at the time on that subject.

Neither Gervaise nor Hyacinth are strong enough to fight against the general trend, and they have to bear the consequences of this. What is more, they do not only go under with the rest, they suffer more, as the rest of the working class exerts its power to destroy them as aberrant characters, insofar as Gervaise as well as Hyacinth have aspired to escape from their milieu. Gervaise, who has looked to the "noble" Goujet to take her away, finds herself the prey of Coupeau, trapped in his working-class world and of a merciless exploiter of the working class, Lantier. It seems as if the whole weight of opinion there, opposed to change, conspires against Gervaise at every opportunity.

From the opening sequence, with the fight in the laundry,

where Virginie makes her listeners laugh by mocking Gervaise's limp "Elle est tombée de pourriture, sa jambe!"¹⁶ to the way in which Gervaise's relative success as a laundress is resented by the other inhabitants of the area, she is made the scapegoat for all kinds of humiliations at the hands of other people of her class. Similarly, Hyacinth faces an intolerable position on account of the secret society he has joined – despite the fact that this had been virtually imposed on him by the frustrations of his adolescent life. He also suffers from the innate 'conservatism' of his class. Vetch and Poupin are powerless to help him, and Paul Muniment cannot appreciate the nature of the dilemma which faces him: "Surely, at any rate, you've seen nothing more worthy of your respect than Camberwell"¹⁷ is what Muniment throws out as a challenge to Hyacinth towards the end of the novel. Admittedly, the Princess does nothing either to help Hyacinth, on the contrary she adds immense complications to his life, but the fact remains that his vow, in the first place, was taken in the name of his fellow workers, and that none of them can do anything to assist him when he most needs their help.

It is therefore fair to state that Hyacinth's suicide, like Gervaise's slower destruction, is ultimately a consequence of the pressure of a working-class environment, exerted by its own members, unwittingly or deliberately, upon a relatively sensitive individual.

Zola's general attitude towards his characters is best described as objective yet sympathetic, as was his purpose, according to the Roman expérimental. He begins with a description of Gervaise sitting alone at the window, a recurrent Zolaesque motif,

waiting for Lantier to return from an evening spent drinking in the company of another woman. In order to make her isolation felt by the reader, there is the description of the massed ranks of early morning workers converging towards the centre of Paris. While the suggestion is that of an objective survey of the workers' life, the inner reality is that of a deeply emotional human situation.

The point is made even clearer when Zola mentions:

[...] aux deux coins de la rue des Poissonniers, à la porte des deux marchands de vin qui enlevaient leurs volets, des hommes ralentissaient le pas; et, avant d'entrer, ils restaient au bord du trottoir, avec des regards obliques sur Paris, les bras mous, déjà gagnés à une journée de flâne. ¹⁸

At one level, this is a simple description of what happens at that time of day, in that area of the city, yet it already prefigures the tragedy of Gervaise herself. Indeed, the other workers do not look at these loafers, they march steadily on, to be 'devoured' by Paris and their work. Gervaise does not really notice all this, she does not appreciate that the first to appear are the most poorly-paid menial workers, followed by the fairly respectable skilled workers, and later by the middle class employees, after which the pavement is left to well-off women taking a stroll. She remains still, dazzled by the sun rising and filled with foreboding. Her isolation makes her in some mysterious way the epitome of all she has witnessed.

In another sense, Gervaise is typical of the class to which she belongs. Like most of them, she is a recent 'immigrant' from the provinces. She was originally from Plassans, which is the name that Zola gives in the series to his own Aix-en-

Provence. This, she did, partly at Lantier's instigation, and partly to escape as she hoped from the constraints of rural life and from her father's strictness. Lantier, having inherited some money, brings her to Paris, together with their two illegitimate children, Claude and Etienne - both later to play important roles in the Rougon-Macquart series - and, again characteristically for their class, they spend most of the money in high-living, extravagantly staying in expensive hotels, until they are reduced to the single room in the Hôtel Boncœur.

By that time, Lantier who has tired of her and become acquainted with a Parisian prostitute, Adèle, a livelier companion, feels no concern for Gervaise who is reduced to selling or pawning any valuable items she possesses in exchange for ready money.

Zola's tone remains carefully neutral, that of a detached 'scientific' observer. It is possible to discern some subconscious sympathy for her plight but no excuses are offered for Lantier's attitude as amoral spendthrift, only really interested in himself, perpetually convinced that a scheme can be found around every corner, which will enable him to live without working. At the same time, he is shown as largely successful, battenning on to Gervaise and Coupeau in their prosperous period, and deserting them afterwards.

Similarly, Gervaise's failings are not glossed over. She is shown as happy to fall in with Lantier's plans without too much reticence so long as the money lasts. She can work hard, but also inclines towards indolence and certainly lacks resolution.

Neighbours are also a realistic mixture. They can be

sympathetic, like Mme Boche who triggers off Gervaise's confidences and listens to her reminiscences of what now seems a happy life in Plassans. Gervaise's idyllic memories flow, in contrast with her hard existence in Paris as a laundress:

Oui, oui, blanchisseuse! [...] Il y a douze ans de ça. . . Nous allions à la rivière. . . ça sentait meilleur qu'ici. Il fallait voir, il y avait un coin sous les arbres, avec de l'eau claire qui courait . . . Vous savez, à Plassans . . . Vous ne connaissez pas Plassans? .. Près de Marseille? 19

What gives such pages their overall poignancy is the true emotion they contain. There is no doubt that Zola's own heart-ache and his memories are those described here, yet the aim of the writing is to be deliberately uninvolved.

Gervaise's character is an amalgam of what is best and what is worst among the working classes: she is tolerant, forgiving, courageous, making at first a good start after Lantier has left her, setting up in business with some helpers, skilled as a laundress, and doing well as she lives with her former neighbour Coupeau, all qualities found in the proletariat at its best. Coupeau, himself a hard-working and competent roofer, also displays these same qualities. The building trade is booming at that time and he is willing to give of his best. One could be forgiven for supposing that they have found together the recipe for happiness.

There is, however, a flaw in his character, and when he falls from the roof while putting the finishing touches to a new building, and is condemned to inaction during a prolonged convalescence, he turns against the idea of working again. This

might have not been a permanent feeling, had it not been for Gervaise's own tendency to let things go. Her tolerance and lack of foresight is the flaw - a fatal one - in her character. When Coupeau, once upright and sober, finds himself short of money after a drinking bout, he simply sends the bill to his wife, and she accepts it, only shrugging her shoulders:

[...] puis, comme ses quarante sous ne suffisaient pas, il avait envoyé la note à sa femme par un garçon, en lui faisant dire qu'il était au clou. Celle-ci riait, haussait les épaules. Où était donc le mal, si son homme s'amusait un peu? Il fallait laisser aux hommes la corde longue, quand on voulait vivre en paix dans son ménage. D'un mot à un autre, on en arrivait vite aux coups. 20

Both men in Gervaise's life have been able to exploit this weakness in her nature although they themselves represent opposite aspects of the lower classes' failings, therefore lending credence to the 'reality' of the story. A deliberate intent of describing all facets of these classes, even if they have to be condensed within a few characters, can nevertheless be discerned.

Lantier is haughty, he considers himself a cut above the others around him. In terms of aspirations and projects, he tends to go further than the majority of his neighbours, and his philandering itself appears rather elegant. While he encourages Coupeau to drink, he remains moderate and seeks to take advantage of the other man's drunkenness. His complete absence of moral sense is depicted with the same detached precision.

One evening, he has offered to take Gervaise out:

Lantier, le soir, voyant la blanchisseuse ennuyée, lui proposa de la conduire au café-concert, histoire de passer un moment agréable. 21

When they come back together, they discover Coupeau, drunk, stretched out on the floor. Lantier takes advantage of the situation and makes love to Gervaise, the episode being watched by Coupeau's vicious young daughter, Nana.

Contempt for Lantier is felt by the reader, who suspects that Zola shares that feeling, yet Zola is ready to show some grudging respect for the way in which the man is always able to extricate himself in a way which seems acceptable. For example, once money becomes short in the Coupeau household, because of his drunkenness compounded by Gervaise's careless attitude towards saving, Lantier notices very rapidly that the meals served then are having a disastrous effect on his waistline, and he loses no time in negotiating a change in the tenancy so that the Poissons can take over the lease. He has been clever enough to exploit the Coupeau's lackadaisical attitude and their inability - typically working-class, says Zola - to look beyond short-term advantages. Zola stresses in the narrative what is Lantier's complacent self-satisfaction at this juncture:

Et Lantier, sans se mêler davantage de la cession, en home qui a conclu enfin sa petite affaire, se confectionna une énorme tartine de fromage de Brie; il se renversait, il la mangeait dévotement, le sang sous la peau, brûkant d'une joie sournoise, clignant les yeux pour guigner tour à tour Gervaise et Virginie. ²²

There is also irony, shared between the author and the reader, but unrealised by the protagonists, when, for instance, Coupeau invites others to join in their little feast, even the undertakers!, stating : "Nous ne sommes pas fiers, nous sommes tous des travailleurs!"²³ which is undoubtedly true for the undertakers, but not for Lantier who is remarkably work-shy, nor

for Gervaise or himself who are even then giving up their hold on any will to work.

Coupeau shares this complexity of make-up, which shows up Zola's characters as compendia of working-class traits and attitudes rather than lifelike individuals. At the start, he is the Parisian worker at its best, he is earnest, quite opposed to any form of drinking, as he realises how important it is for a man who works on roofs to have a clear head and steady legs:

Coupeau, lui aussi, ne comprenait pas qu'on pût avaler de pleins verres d'eau-de-vie. Une prune par-ci par-là, ça n'était pas mauvais. Quant au vitriol, à l'absinthe et autres cochonneries, bonsoir! Il n'en fallait pas. Les camarades avaient beau le blaguer, il restait à la porte, lorsque ces cheulards-là entraient à la mine à poivre. ²⁴

His scorn for those who drink, for men like "Mes Bottes" and his cronies, is all the more ironic in that they will be the very people who become his friends when he takes to alcohol, until they give him up in disgust, when he has reached the very opposite of his initial attitude.

In the same way, Coupeau is at one time moderate in the way he spends money, yet exhibits a fondness for food which Zola sees as characteristic of the lower classes. He overeats, he enjoys huge celebration dinners, he likes pigs' trotters with parsley sauce. Gervaise's name-day festival, a set piece in the novel, covers ten pages largely devoted to details of food and drink, while the point of no-return, when, after having left home early to go to his new job, Coupeau, under the influence of Lantier, gives in to a day-long drinking session, represents by its painstaking attention to every fact a strangely convincing and compelling effort to make the reader accept that

this is a realistic picture and that a man can change so much.

From then on, it becomes easier to accept that Coupeau will slowly decline into an inevitable alcoholic's death. By the time he has been sent to the doctor, at the Sainte-Anne lunatic asylum, treatment would no longer be effective and nothing can be done except 'drying him out' and sending him back on the streets until he eventually returns. The description of his death in the agony of delirium tremens is horrifyingly explicit, yet the detachment and objectivity with which it is detailed limits the emotional impact while bringing to the fore the demonstration that this is only to be expected of a class where people are unable effectively to control their lives.

This appears in some way an object-lesson which apportions responsibilities, taking into account the part played by environment in the tragedy.

Gervaise, oddly enough, without being consciously aware of it senses the extent of the problem. Even instruction could not remove that taint on its own, as heredity would still prevent the individual from assimilating it. She compares Coupeau with Lantier:

Bien sûr, le zingueur manquait d'instruction, mais le chapelier en avait trop - ou du moins il avait une instruction comme les gens pas propres ont une chemise blanche, avec de la crasse par-dessous. ²⁵

A further archetypal worker will be introduced in the form of Goujet. For a while, he will seem to offer the chance of a new life for Gervaise, presenting himself as an alternative prospect. He is the perfect illustration of the noble worker, upholding the dignity of labour, and

interestingly enough, represents the new industrial working class. His work in the foundry is hard but satisfying, and the continuity of production is important to him. Certainly Zola contrasts his task with the day-to-day, hand-to-mouth existence of those, like Coupeau or Lantier, involved in the demolishing and rebuilding of the capital. He feels deeply involved in his labour and is proud of it, explaining its details to Gervaise with obvious pleasure;

Et comme elle lui demandait si le poignet ne s'engourdissait pas à la fin de la journée, il eut un bon rire. Est-ce qu'elle le croyait une demoiselle? Son poignet en avait vu de grises depuis quinze ans, il était devenu en fer, tant il s'était frotté aux outils. ²⁶

He has even the delicate touch of a medieval knight, as shown during the episode of his trial of strength with Bec-Salé, when following his 'victory', he takes Gervaise's hand, gently, "comme s'il l'avait conquise". ²⁷

True, he has to suffer from economic crises, and feels that machinery may be threatening to a man's livelihood:

Un jour, bien sûr, la machine tuerait l'ouvrier, déjà les journées étaient tombées de douze francs à neuf francs, et on parlait de les diminuer encore. ²⁸

but this does not really lead him to extreme Luddite frenzy, he restrains himself with the thought that ultimately such machines may make for universal happiness although they will never equal his own work for precision and beauty.

Like the other workers in L'Assommoir, he is not overtly politicised. Indeed, the reactionary policeman Poisson and the pseudo-revolutionary Lantier are made fun of, and his

views are those of an ordinary man, honest, full of solid qualities, the 'salt of the earth' among working class people, even if he dreams of escape at times. When he takes Gervaise to a small expanse of waste land just outside Paris - soon to become a building site - he feels as elated as she does with the glimpse of countryside it affords, and talks of their going together far away to Belgium. They both toy with the idea, although they know well that it is but an impossible dream.

After this brief instant of togetherness, their life will diverge and it will be a final irony that he reappears at the nadir of Gervaise's degradation, when she tries vainly to prostitute herself for a crust of bread.

Other working-class characters complete that gallery of typical vices and virtues, on the one hand, simply 'products of society like sugar and water' as Zola's maître à penser Hippolyte Taine maintained, yet on the other hand, immensely moving in their humble realism or repulsive in their cruelty. There is the pretty obtuse policeman, Poisson, the neighbours, nice when all goes well, contemptuous when Gervaise fails, the penny-pinching Lorilleux, caricatures of what happens when some working-class people acquire enough money through exploitation of their peers, and typical of those who have some sort of authority or control and are merciless in the way they exert it. Such is the landlord Marescot, or in a more abstract manner, the Père Colombe, owner of the bar of l'Assommoir, who presides over his infernal spirit-making machine like an implacable demoniac figure.

It is one of the strengths of the novel that those who exploit as well as those who are exploited come from the same class, creating some kind of oppressive hermeticism. When middle class individuals flittingly appear, they either attempt to moralise, like the doctor at the asylum, or they proceed rapidly with the business in hand, like the priest. No individual, not even Goujet, is held up as a model or as a moral antidote for the corruption encountered. Zola uses a different technique: he holds up a mirror, as it were, so that society can see what it is like, with its good points, but also with its cruel or disgusting aspects, and there is no doubt that it recognised itself in L'Assommoir, and that this was the reason for the outraged fury the book created, not only among the purists who objected to the vulgarity of the narrative, nor among the 'decent' people who thought that such degrading episodes ought not to be publicised, but also among the left wingers who felt that the proletariat had been slandered and shown as despicable and devoid of moral values - none of which, of course, affected adversely the success of the novel.

Zola's use of naturalistic techniques extends to the representation of the whole spectrum of working-class life in the city. Even in points of detail, precise references are made like, for instance, when Bijard, the drunkard, whips his little daughter Lalie, or when the work of the undertakers is described, with the extraordinarily character, Bazouge, who seems to appear at significant moments, and always frightening Gervaise in a way which is both truly sinister and yet inexplicable to her.

The presence of these undertakers is evidently powerfully symbolic in a manner which belies with consummate artistry the claim to scientific documentary made for fiction writing in Le Roman expérimental. The importance of Bazouge as a kind of warning about the mortality of man, and as a 'memento mori' for Gervaise herself is highlighted when it is he who is responsible for her poor unmourned funeral arrangements, and even more so when he is left to utter the concluding words of the novel:

Tu sais . . . écoute bien . . . c'est moi,
Bibi-la-Gaieté, dit le consolateur des
dames . . . Va, t'es heureuse, Fais dodo,
ma belle. 29

At the same time, little touches of kindness, feelings of comradeship, and other gratifying features of working class life are also depicted. The spirit of unity shown in the wash-house, the delight everybody takes in other people's good fortune, the sense of camaraderie are particularly stressed. When Gervaise's business prospers, she does the accepted thing and invites all the neighbours in, so they can have a good time:

Maintenant, les après-midi se passaient tous
ainsi. La boutique, dans le quartier, était
le refuge des gens frileux. Toute la rue de
la Goutte d'Or savait qu'il y faisait chaud.
Il y avait sans cesse là des femmes bavardes
qui prenaient un air de feu devant la mécanique,
leurs jupes retroussées jusqu'aux genoux,
faisant la petite chapelle. 30

The Lorrilieux and the Boches tend to make fun of Gervaises's friendly attitude, yet they use it too. Unfortunately as Gervaise goes downhill, her neighbours cannot stand by her, because of her coarseness and drunken behaviour. In the end, they do what possibly is kindest, they ignore her.

It is interesting to note that the overall impression left by the novel is not one of horror, or even of vulgarity, but one of extreme vitality. One is made deeply aware of the existence of the characters, who become like real acquaintances. One feels sorrow when they are unhappy, but one finds enough moments of happiness to rejoice with them; above everything else, one gets a feeling of survival. The energy emanating from the novel is considerable, and with a touch of cunning here, and some good humoured banter there, life goes on. There is no doubt that Lantier, or Nana, are born survivors, and that others like the Lorrilieux will manage through sheer will-power tinged with determined meanness.

There are colourful celebrations and fullsome merriment:

Par exemple, il y eut là un fameux coup de fourchette, c'est-à-dire que personne de la société ne se souvenait de s'être jamais collé une pareille indigestion sur la conscience. Gervaise, énorme, tassée sur les coudes, mangeait de gros morceaux de blanc, ne parlant pas de peur de perdre une bouchée. . . Et le vin donc, mes enfants! ça coulait autour de la table comme l'eau coule à la Seine. Un vrai ruisseau, lorsqu'il a plu et que la terre a soif. Coupeau versait de haut, pour voir le jet rouge écumer; et quand un litre était vide, il faisait la blague de retourner le goulot et de le presser, du genre
familier aux femmes qui traient les vaches. 31

This is a real celebration of excess, reminiscent of some of Rabelais's most jocund descriptions. An additional touch of irony, again shared by author and reader, but unrecognised by the protagonists, is that this vision of Gervaise eating with such gluttonous appetite brings to mind her previous contempt at seeing the Lorrilieux' oyster-shells left in their drain.

No effort is made to gloss over the down-to-earth nature of the scene, yet one feels a certain indulgent sympathy for these unfortunates, on account of the penny-pinching and hard-working life they have to endure when it is not a red-letter day. There is no doubt that, in some subtle way, this feeling is conveyed by Zola's descriptions. In the wedding-party episode, for instance, there is something very moving in the way they are out of their depth, having ventured into the severe beauty of the Louvre museum:

Et la noce, déjà lasse, perdant de son respect, traînait ses souliers à clous, tapait ses talons sur les parquets sonores, avec le piétinement d'un troupeau débandé, lâché au milieu de la propreté nue et recueillie des salles.³²

Similarly, in the robust, if pathetic, comments of Boche on the paintings they see there, and in the general defiance of the wedding party, there is evidence of Zola's wish to express the genuine solidarity, the mutinous attitude and the strong sense of identity of his working-class characters.

The Princess Casamassima is not, as we have seen, confined to a study of the working classes, and this probably because of James's wider personal experience as well as because of his intention to present a complete spectrum of society in England at that time, together with a survey of the various areas of the city in which they lived. Nevertheless, the majority of his characters belong to what could be termed the upper working class, partially educated artisans, amongst whom the tendency to rebel against the social system was likely to be strongest.

James, at the outset, places the novel firmly in the optic of the proletarian Lomax Place, but it is interesting to note that the place itself, not the inhabitants - as in Zola's introductory scene - sets the tone of forlorn shabbiness and slow deterioration. The awareness described by "Pinnie" of how the neighbourhood has come down in the world makes that point. His descriptions of the characters in the novel, without being in the least condescending or patronising, are more detailed than those of Zola's, revealing the feelings from the outside, as it were. Such is the opening description of the ragged street-girl, Millicent "Enning", nursing a dingy doll and whose "extraordinary luxuriance of dark brown hair was surmounted by a torn straw hat".³³

Similarly, Hyacinth is described as fond of reading, particularly enjoying the cheap serials which always involve aristocratic heroes. The reader is also informed that as Hyacinth grows older, he develops a taste for books dealing with the French Revolution, while being still very keen on the type of cheap literature favoured by the working-class readers, that of aristocratic romanticism. This explains why, when he discovers the truth about his illegitimacy, Hyacinth finds a ready-made grudge against the aristocracy, grudge which enables him to satisfy his inner need to exercise psychological revenge - under the guise of striking a blow against society's oppressors.

Hyacinth, in this way, stands straddled between two classes, just as James's previous heroes were caught between two worlds - the Old and the New. He, no more than they, can

fit in with neither and his ultimate destruction is prefigured, since his illusions of social justice must eventually be shattered.

This ready-made grievance of the hero might, it has been argued, have made it possible for James to avoid the straightforward issue of class conflict, yet, this hereditary element combines genuinely with the environment to lead Hyacinth into positive action, which is well in keeping with Naturalistic analyses of motivation.

Another argument, based on the fact that most of James's working class characters aspire to escape from it, appears to carry more weight. Certainly, apart from Paul Muniment, who is truly satisfied with belonging to the working class, the others long for something else. Millicent may appear to be the epitome of a perfect Cockney, yet she has higher values:

To hear her talk, [she] only asked to
keep her skirts clean and marry some
respectable tea-merchant. 34

She wants to achieve the archetypal happiness of the bourgeois world:

She was none the less plucky for being at
bottom a shameless Philistine, ambitious
of a front garden with rockwork; and she
presented the plebeian character in none
the less plastic a form. 35

Indeed, Hyacinth remembering his readings on the French Revolution, imagines her wearing a red cap, fighting at the barricades, and singing the Marseillaise.

To this can be answered that Zola's characters also have, as previously shown, velleities of escape, to the

suburbs of Paris, to Plassans and even to Belgium.

Where the difference lies is in the fact that they are all hopelessly trapped both in their class and in their surroundings, while James's heroes are for the most part socially mobile. Captain Sholto comes and goes at will between the Sun and the Moon public houses, the Strand theatres and the supremely elegant Mayfair salons. He is in fact Hyacinth's guide and mentor through the social labyrinth, all the way up to introducing him to the Princess in her box at the theatre. At the same time, he is remarkably unimpressed by the upper classes. He persuades Hyacinth to pay a visit to the Princess by saying to him and to Millicent:

Therefore I'll tell you the whole
truth: I want to talk with her about
you. 36

Following upon this introduction, the voyage that Hyacinth makes is largely across social classes, until it takes him ultimately outside all of them, forcing him to recognise that he could no longer co-exist happily anywhere.

Without reaching this final stage, there is in Zola one character who escapes successfully, it is Nana, Gervaise's daughter, but not in L'Assommoir, only later in the novel in which she is the eponymous heroine, and this will be effected by a curious coincidence via the theatre, even though she comes to be appreciated more for her body than for her acting ability.

Hyacinth, on being invited to call on the Princess, thought that this was rather similar to an event which could happen in a French novel, and one may wonder to what extent James

was thinking of Zola:

Being whistled for by a princess presented itself to Hyacinth as an indignity endured gracefully enough by the heroes of several French novels in which he had found a thrilling interest. 37

Even the more obviously plebeian characters in the novels seem somewhat ambivalent about their status. Rose Muniment is, in a sense, the most completely 'trapped' as she is not only very poor, but also an invalid confined to her bed, up several flights of stairs. Despite all this, she expresses a loyal conservatism, vigorously extolling the English aristocracy's ability to fight back against a revolution such as the one in France. When Lady Aurora asserts that, in England, the aristocracy would not desert the country:

[...] I mean, like the French nobles who emigrated so much. They's stay at home and resist; they'd make much more of a fight. I think they'd fight very hard . . .

Rose responds enthusiastically:

I'm delighted to hear it, and I'm sure they'd win! 38

Later, while Rose would like Lady Aurora to travel by cab, she accepts Lady Aurora's effort to mortify herself by walking back to Belgrave Square, as perhaps illogical but remarkably admirable.

A character such as Rose Muniment would probably have been sentimentalised by Dickens, but James avoids that pitfall. Similarly, Miss Pynsent appears totally devoid of any sentimentality despite her situation as a frustrated spinster.

She certainly would not want Hyacinth to go on believing, or pretending, that Millicent is the most suitable woman for him - especially since, in former times, Lomax Place would very likely have had Millicent and her family evicted for non-payment of various arrears.

Miss Pynsent has had high fashionable standards:

Miss Pynsent had had assistants in the past - she had even once, for a few months, had a 'forewoman'; and some of these damsels had been precious specimens, whose misdemeanours lived vividly in her memory. Never, all the same, in her worst hour of delusion, had she trusted her interests to such an exponent of the latest thing as this. 39

This, of course, is Millicent reappearing as a young lady of fashion!

James follows his pattern of symbolism in representing Miss Pynsent's retreat from her previous elegance through the decline of her neighbourhood, but he rejoins Zola in adding to it a more deeply psychological element, making her "l'aboutissement d'un ensemble de phénomènes" ⁴⁰ She blames herself for having given in to the temptation of acquainting Hyacinth with his tarnished parentage. The more she has attempted to atone for this, looking after him and protecting him, the more she has come to realise that he can never fit in with the ordinary background of which she is, in a sense, the protectress. James does not, however, present her as a tragic figure. One feels for her a certain benevolence and perhaps even a degree of compassion, tempered by some reservations before

the limitations of her outlook.

Her most endearing feature is her loyalty to Hyacinth. She defends, for instance, the trade of bookbinding against Millicent's scorn, despite its working-class connotations. She does not appreciate fully, however, that this is on the one hand the work of a craftsman, and that, on the other hand, it gets him involved in a close relationship with a world of ideas. It is, deliberately or not, a perfect metaphor for his position in society, similar, and similarly described, as that of Goujet in L'Assommoir.

The importance of the various trades and professions is also reminiscent of the above novel. Mrs. Bowerbank, the prison official is typically bossy, sinister, and full of rough and ready common sense. Eustache Poupin, who works alongside Hyacinth at the bindery, is energetic but also, not unexpectedly, emotional and romantic, an old-type republican of '48, both kind and idealistic, disappointed because he cannot find in his new country, the same thirst for 'liberty, equality and fraternity'. While he exerts a beneficial influence on Hyacinth, he is too weak to counter the revolutionary challenges of the 1880's.

Mr. Vetch also proves beneficial for Hyacinth, since he is ready to help him out whenever he can, although he is also, quite unwittingly, the instrument of Hyacinth's changing fortune, insofar as the theatre tickets he obtains for him, to see The Pearl of Paraguay, together with Millicent, will also lead him to the Princess. There is

more than a touch of ironic premonition in the way he presents them to Hyacinth:

He accompanied it [his gesture] with the injunction: "You had better put in all the fun you can, you know!" 41

His similarity with Goujet as a respectable, sympathetic and well adjusted working-class character does not end there. The considerable effort he has made to acquire the tickets is typical of his industry; he works hard to save the money needed to purchase the book of Bacon's Essays which he wants to give to Hyacinth as a present; it is, of course, also typical of his kindness. He will comfort Hyacinth later when his reason is beginning to waver, and he will offer him a room next to his. Finally, he tries to save Hyacinth from himself, by exacting a promise:

"That you'll never, under any circumstances whatever, "do" anything. . ."
 "Do anything?"
 "Anything those people expect of you" 42

The promise is made in Pinnie's memory, and, while it can prevent the criminal act, he will commit Hyacinth to an equally cruel resolution, that of killing himself.

The working-class character on which most praises have been heaped, as a true representation, is however Paul Muniment. Lionel Trilling⁴³ in particular sees in him James's most successful attempt to portray a revolutionary worker. There is a great deal of truth in that, and the fact that the characterisation succeeds, where it might so easily have failed, given James's lack of first hand knowledge with his subject, can be ascribed to the way

in which James places him in the midst of the working-class environment. By having him next to Rose, so uncomplaining despite her disabilities, an effective contrast is created in the response of similarly placed individuals to the constraints of that environment. Whereas Rose seems to be horrified by Lady Aurora's condescension in writing to them, Paul complacently accepts it as the honour paid by the rich to the poor in anticipation of the forthcoming revolutionary onslaught. He fully realises the effect that his virile political stand will have on the emotions of wealthy, but rather unstable, patrons like the Princess or Lady Aurora.

It is left to Rose to keep an ironic eye on him, and to notice his progressive transformation from a puritanical idealist to a sycophant revelling in the reflected glory of the Princess. When Paul is getting ready to meet her, Rose observes drily:

"My dear Mr. Muniment, you're going to see the Princess".
 "Well, have you anything to say against it?" Mr. Muniment asked.
 "Not a word. You know I like princesses. But you have!" 44

Rose's cleverly understated irony, and the element of play-acting involved in their formal manner of addressing each other, captures exactly the essence of their relationship.

Against her physical entrapment, with only Pinnie's quilt and her dreams of the aristocracy to console her, Paul certainly seems the free spirit, yet the subtle pen of

James shows how he is equally trapped in a self-limited set of assumptions of social or moral values, and in his naive illusion that he can influence the Princess while remaining unaffected by her.

This makes him as true to life as Trilling believes, even if it shows him up as incapable of being a true revolutionary activist, as Trilling imagines him to be.

Close comparison of the characters in Zola's and in James's novels, could all too easily become an artificial and sterile exercise, yet James and Zola both express the oppressive feeling of inescapability, and to that extent Rose is a sister of Gervaise under the skin, while Millicent could be compared to the later Nana, a queen of her neighbourhood, fully in control of it. She is universally recognised as a magnificent Cockney specimen and represents perhaps the most remarkable working-class character created by James. R.L. Stevenson, one of the first to notice her, wrote in an ecstatic letter to James:

As for your young lady, she is all
there; yes sir, you can do low life,
I believe. ⁴⁵

A more recent critic, Charles R. Anderson, initially reached the same conclusion, basing his opinion on the way in which Millicent's speech catches the rhythms and peculiarities of the London idiom, although later, he inclined to feel that James, at that time, had been too heavily influenced by Zola and his Naturalistic theories. ⁴⁶

It can be said that Millicent is the opposite of everything the Princess stands for, except that they are both craving for excitement. In her eventual 'high position' in a great haberdasher's near Buckingham Palace, Millicent imagines that she will dazzle Hyacinth by her relationship with the wealthy, and feels bewildered when Hyacinth is taken to meet a real princess. She recovers, though, when she decides to settle, even if only temporarily, with the charming Captain Sholto, thinking that he may provide a more secure source of entertainment. His character has never been extensively considered by critics, yet, as an intermediary between the classes, the raffish Captain presents a most interesting personality.

By creating such a vulgar, but extraordinarily energetic specimen of the working class as Millicent, James has not only demonstrated conclusively that Hyacinth could never have been content to accept a prosaically happy married life, he has also shown the extent of his ability to represent the most rumbustious aspect of working-class people that breathe the air of London streets.

In that sense, James created a gallery of portraits which rivals Zola's achievement, and yet which reflects the philosophical differences already determined in their theoretical works. Whereas Zola stressed the importance of inclusiveness and objectivity, James produced a highly subjective consciousness, using to that end a few selective details.

Despite this, there is a wider spectrum of working-

class characters in The Princess Casamassima than in L'Assommoir, because James features also the kind of quiet moderate people of modest means, who are unlikely ever to complain, accepting life as it comes to them. Such are Miss Pynsent, Rose Muniment and Mr. Vetch. Their only similarity to Zola's heroes is perhaps that form of passivity, while the real revolutionaries like Mr Poupin go further than Zola's workers in their activist roles. There is an interesting distinction between the older man, more in tune with events of an earlier age, and the younger, more pragmatic fighter, Paul Muniment, which serves to complete the picture.

These social elements are overlooked by Zola, who at that time was still following the principle laid down in his Roman Naturaliste, that of observing phenomena without attempting to deal with either moral or sociological reasons which might be responsible for them. Zola's ideas on this would have changed by the time he came to write his searching studies of revolutionaries in Germinal.

This different approach led James to feature an extraordinarily potent social force, that of anarchism, yet the effect of that political 'drug' on immature and emotionally vulnerable minds is not basically different, and equally as devastating as the force of alcohol depicted in L'Assommoir.

This similarity of effect is served by a similar methodology, based on naturalistic viewpoint. Theoretically, both authors believed on the need for precise referential

documentation. Zola's obsessive note-taking was echoed by James, in the Art of Fiction, when he stated that:

[...] Mr. Besant is well inspired when he bids him [the novelist] take notes. He cannot possibly take too many. He cannot possibly take enough. 47

In the same way, James speaks of "the French, who have brought the theory of fiction to remarkable completeness", and it is evident he is there thinking of Zola - which indicates a reversal of his previous dismissive attitude towards all things Naturalistic or Realist in general. One can compare this, for example, to what he said earlier of Flaubert's Madame Bovary:

Realism seems to me with Madame Bovary to have said its last word. I doubt whether the same process will ever produce anything. 48

James had also expressed his disgust for the tendency of Naturalist writers to concentrate on the more sordid aspects of life. He was offended on moral as well as on æsthetic grounds, and this led him to criticise severely, amongst other novels, the Goncourt brothers' La Fille

Elisa:

M. de Goncourt's theory is perfectly respectable, novelists are welcome to become as serious as they please, but are the mysteries of such a career as Elisa's the most serious things in the list? M. de Goncourt's fault is not that he is serious or historical or scientific or instructive, but that he is intolerably unclean. 49

And it is certainly true that James never contemplated writing a novel on prostitution, like La Fille Elisa, or even Nana, yet he goes further in The Princess Casamassima

than his earlier pronouncements could have led one to expect, and indeed he feels able to praise the vitality and the scope of Zola's work, and his "extraordinary technical qualities", even though he still felt it as "pervaded by [a] ferocious bad smell", so that reading it was "very much such an ordeal as a crossing of the Channel in a November gale"⁵⁰.

Besides the seventy-odd pages of notes which Zola produced for L'Assommoir, he also accumulated information regarding the medical problems of alcoholics, the effect of excessive drinking upon the various organs of the body, the treatments available; he obtained first hand experience of such scenes as the delirium tremens seizure suffered by Coupeau in the Sainte-Anne lunatic asylum, at the end of the novel.

He used lists of several hundred words borrowed from the Dictionnaire de la Langue verte, by Alfred Delvau, which went to inform his remarkably accurate use of slang and evocative nicknames, like Bec-Salé, for instance. He was meticulous in his depiction of conditions of work and workers' salaries, as confirmed by studies of contemporary historical accounts. As Colette Becker points out, in L'Assommoir: profil d'une œuvre, Zola avoids any impression of romanticisation, and this particularly by an accurate representation of the contemporary conditions - especially the cost of living:

De ce point de vue, Zola nous donne un document excellent sur la vie ouvrière de l'époque (outils, prix, salaires, conditions de travail ...), que les historiens et autres sources confirment. 51

There is certainly enough evidence to justify the above statement. His representation of the workers as carefree to the point of stupidity, as incapable of appreciating the value of money, and unable to put anything by, while at the same time seizing any opportunity to waste time in amusements, finds echoes in other contemporary writings. An article published in Le Gaulois, by Francisque Sarcey, gives a similar impression:

La plupart des ouvriers sont des rigoleurs, et quand ils ont vingt francs en poche, ils n'ont rien de plus pressé que de festoyer jusqu'à la complète extermination de la pièce jaune. 52

All this was, of course, enriched by Zola's own recent experience of working-class life. He made a point of revisiting the neighbourhood, and described as fully as he could the atmosphere of the streets, such as the rue de la Goutte d'Or, or of the bars, like that of Père Colombe:

Une nappe de soleil entrant par la porte, chauffait le parquet toujours humide des crachats des fumeurs. Et, du comptoir, des tonneaux, de toute la salle, montait une odeur liquoreuse, une fumée d'alcool qui semblait épaissir et griser les poussières volantes du soleil. 53

Finally Zola accumulated a further thirteen pages of notes from Denis Poulot's Question sociale: le Sublime ou le Travailleur comme il est en 1870 et ce qu'il peut être, a daunting title, commonly abbreviated to Le Sublime. This work,

Zola's most important source - after his own theoretical pronouncements - is divided into two sections, the first being a description of the working classes, while the second is a list of suggested solutions to the problems highlighted in the previous section. Zola retained the facts contained in the first half, but did not use the second, as he was not interested in political topics at the time.

He stated in his *ébauche* for L'Assommoir, in 1875:

Le roman de Gervaise n'est pas
un roman politique. ⁵⁴

and this was precisely because what he required then from the book bore no relation to a manifesto, but was limited to the accurate representation of proletarian life. That this was transformed into art by means of Zola's unique poetic genius, is the measure of the way he was able to deal with the most unpromising material if he saw it as vitally important.

James was undoubtedly influenced by Zola's theories as much as by his own as expressed in The Art of Fiction. Not only did he take copious notes, as he wrote to T.S. Perry, after visiting Millbank Prison ⁵⁵, he further added comments such as "He cuts it very fine" or "That takes the guilt off, you know" ⁵⁶, just as Zola did in between his own notes. In addition, as W.H. Tilley points out in The Background to the Princess Casamassima, he was living during a time of serious revolutionary disorder, and found himself interested in it, to a greater extent than is

generally supposed. In May 1882, Lord Frederick Cavendish and Thomas Burke were murdered in Phoenix Park, Dublin; there were explosions at the Local Government Board offices in London in 1883, at Victoria Station in 1884, and at the Houses of Parliament and elsewhere in 1885. James's own political views were undoubtedly more liberal than those of The Times where he read about these various outrages, and it is interesting to note that he compared the condition of the British aristocracy, unfavourably, with that of the French before the Revolution.

It is also a fact that he never seems to contradict the princess Casamassima's critical remarks regarding her own class, so that it is possible to assume that he recognised, and perhaps had some sympathy for, the kind of social pressures that led some individuals to become anarchists, especially amongst the proletariat. Tilley concludes, as most commentators have done, by saying that there is in the novel a first class rendering of literal social reality. That this is so is, without doubt, in great part due to Zola's influence, with the crucial difference that anarchism plays the role in The Princess Casamassima which the then apolitical Zola gives to alcohol in L'Assommoir.

If one wanted, however, to judge these two novels on the extent to which they recreated the texture and solidity of working-class life, one would have to give the advantage to the latter, despite its more limited scope, because of the sheer strength and pathos of his

characterisation. As he stated, he wanted to show :

[...] le milieu déplorable dans lequel vit la jeune femme [Gervaise], et dont elle est la victime. ⁵⁷

and this allows him to be objective and, as it were, pitiless, painting virtues and vices as if they were simply products of the environment. James was attempting something rather different and more universal in application, which was the analysis of psychological motivations, and which as a result put social classes and social actions before the underlying principles of art. While recognising, as shown above, Zola's enormous importance in the formation of a theory of the novel, James nevertheless, quite rightly points out where Zola stops:

[...] yet he [Zola], reasons less powerfully than he represents. ⁵⁸

adding also that:

He has an air of working in the dark; if he had as much light as energy, his results would be of the highest value. ⁵⁹

It is true that the overall 'darkness' of L'Assommoir is oppressive; Marc Bernard makes a very similar comment in his own study of Zola's work:

Il suffirait d'un rayon de lumière dans un coin du tableau pour que nous ayons une œuvre chrétienne. . . ⁶⁰

and Zola would be the first to agree, except, of course, that he would refuse to see in it a cause for criticism.

James, while lacking Zola's vigorous artistry, was prepared to illuminate some aspects of working-class life with a certain divine grace.

A study of both these novels makes it possible to reach an awareness of the profound interest with which both authors attempted to understand this forgotten class of people, and the dedication they brought to depicting them, an experience which neither was to repeat so fully.

For Zola, it was a successful achievement, from the standpoint of fame as well as of finance, while James was unfortunately driven to say that The Princess Casamassima had helped to reduce the demand for his work to zero!

Posterity has been kinder, and both novels are now recognised as bold attempts to describe life amongst the humblest inhabitants of the city, and they are rightly held to be amongst the finest representations of the working classes in nineteenth century fiction.

NOTES TO CHAPTER III

- ¹ Zola, Oeuvres Complètes, Vol. III, p. 946.
- ² The Princess Casamassima, p. 8.
- ³ Edmond et Jules de Goncourt, Germinie Lacerteux, p. 2.
- ⁴ L'Assommoir, Notes, p. 543.
- ⁵ See also Marc Stefan, Les Métamorphoses de la Grande Ville dans les Rougon-Macquart, p. 91.
- ⁶ Quoted in Hemmings' Emile Zola, p. 111.
- ⁷ L'Assommoir, Notes, p. 551.
- ⁸ La Notice de l'Assommoir, p. 1537.
- ⁹ Mes Haines, p. 67.
- ¹⁰ Ibid., p. 69.
- ¹¹ Ibid., p. 84.
- ¹² "The Art of Fiction", from The Portable Henry James, p. 387-414.
- ¹³ Perosa, Henry James and the Experimental Novel, p. 33.
- ¹⁴ Sicker, Love and the Quest for Identity in the Fiction of Henry James, p. 64.
- ¹⁵ Allen, A Woman's Place in the Novels of Henry James, p. 97.
- ¹⁶ L'Assommoir, p. 43.
- ¹⁷ The Princess Casamassima, p. 366.
- ¹⁸ L'Assommoir, pp. 22-23.
- ¹⁹ Ibid., p. 34.
- ²⁰ Ibid., p. 170.
- ²¹ Ibid., p. 319.
- ²² Ibid., p. 369.
- ²³ Ibid., p. 369.
- ²⁴ Ibid., p. 60.

²⁵Ibid., p. 343.

²⁶Ibid., p. 202.

²⁷Ibid., p. 208.

²⁸Ibid., p. 211.

²⁹Ibid., p. 518.

³⁰Ibid., p. 228.

³¹Ibid., p. pp. 259-61.

³²Ibid., p. 102.

³³The Princess Casamassima, p. 26.

³⁴Ibid., p. 129.

³⁵Ibid., p. 130.

³⁶Ibid., p. 154.

³⁷Ibid., p. 154.

³⁸Ibid., p. 109.

³⁹Ibid., p. 68.

⁴⁰Odette L'Henry-Evans, "Emile Zola", in Voix de France (BBC Broadcasting Publication) 7 juin 1961, pp.17-19.

⁴¹The Princess Casamassima, p. 142.

⁴²Ibid., p. 142.

⁴³Lionel Trilling's introduction to a new edition of The Princess Casamassima (1948), later reprinted in The Liberal Imagination, pp. 65-96. Bruce McElderry, Jr. agrees in his book Henry James, that "James's grasp of lower-class London in this novel [The Princess Casamassima], is remarkable, p. 71.

⁴⁴The Princess Casamassima, p. 439.

⁴⁵Smith, Henry James and Robert Louis Stevenson: a record of friendship and criticism, p. 106.

⁴⁶See the section on The Princess Casamassima in Person, Place and Thing in Henry James's Novels, by Charles R. Anderson. Also, by the same author, "James and Zola, the question of Naturalism", in Revue de Littérature Comparée, 3, 1983, pp. 343-57.

⁴⁷"The Art of Fiction", in The Portable Henry James, p. 399.

⁴⁸"The Minor French Novelists", Galaxy, 21st February 1876, p. 226.

⁴⁹Review of La Fille Elisa, in Nation, No, 24 10th May, 1877.

⁵⁰Review of Nana, in The Future of the Novel, pp. 89-91.

⁵¹Becker, L'Assommoir. Profil d'une Œuvre, p. 40.

⁵²Ibid., p. 39.

⁵³L'Assommoir, p. 53.

⁵⁴Becker, op. cit., p. 41.

⁵⁵Edel, Letters of Henry James, Vol. III, 1883-95, p. 61.

⁵⁶Matthiessen and Murdoch, Notebooks of H, James, p. 69.

⁵⁷Becker, op. cit., p. 41.

⁵⁸The Art of Fiction, p. 405.

⁵⁹Ibid., p. 414.

⁶⁰Marc Bernard, Zola par lui-même, Le Seuil, Paris, 1959, p. 52.

CHAPTER IV

The Treatment of Social Themes in "L'Assommoir" and "The Princess Casamassima"

Both the above novels are fundamentally concerned with the social conditions of the age in which they were written. As far as Zola is concerned, the intention that this should be so is evident from the outset; even if social conditions are not explicitly criticised, they are starkly exposed in a manner which compel the reader to draw his own conclusions about the urgency of reforms.

James's manner of presentation of social conditions is predictably more oblique, as they form the backdrop for a novel which, like most of James's work, remains essentially concerned with a psychological portrait of character, and with one character in particular, that of Hyacinth Robinson. Nevertheless, The Princess Casamassima is the most society-conscious of his novels, and the only one set mainly among working class people. In dealing with the social conditions of his time, James shows clearly the impact which the works of Zola and other Naturalist writers were having on him when he wrote that novel. ¹

In addition, both Zola and James focused on one particular social condition - alcoholism, in L'Assommoir, and anarchism, in The Princess Casamassima - and made it serve a dual purpose, that

of stressing the significance of the social conditions of the day, as well as that of providing controlling metaphors for the state of the society as they saw it.

The purpose of the present chapter is to explore and evaluate the reasons which led to the choice of these particular themes, to compare the way both writers treated them, and to see how they became symbols of larger designs.

In Zola's case, this choice had been made as far back as 1869, when he wrote to the editor Lacroix that the seventh novel of the Rougon-Macquart series would be:

[...] un roman qui aura pour cadre le monde ouvrier, et pour héros Denis Lantier, marié à Gervaise, fille d'Antoine Machard. Peinture d'un ménage d'ouvriers à notre époque. Drame intime et profond de la déchéance morale et physique du travailleur parisien dans la déplorable influence du milieu des barrières et des cabarets. ²

L'Assommoir is indeed one of only two of Zola's novels to be principally concerned with the conditions of the lower classes in an urban context. Although Germinal depicts working-class people, it does so in a provincial setting and deals primarily with political issues never directly mentioned in L'Assommoir, while La Terre shows the life of peasants whose conditions and surroundings are totally dissimilar.

Zola kept very closely to the plan he had himself outlined, since, if the working classes are the subject of the novel, the conditions in which they live form the objective framework within which the novel's action takes place, and furnish the basic material which Zola is able to use to provide a compelling critique of society.

It seems that he was aware of the risks he was taking, hinting at the need for reforms under a repressive regime. The novel is set, officially, as it were, during the Second Empire, of which, like the other novels in the series, it is supposed to be a damning indictment. In fact, there is no doubt that, under the Third Republic, these evils had not disappeared, and it would have been clear to Zola's readership that - even if the argot was dated and unrealistic then - the novel was in reality a study of contemporary France.

Censorship needed to be taken into account, fines and even imprisonment were possible, and Zola wanted to avoid these risks. What he criticised was however still in evidence. The authorities wanted at all costs to avoid other civil disorders, such as the Commune uprising of May 21st to 28th of 1871, and he knew from personal experience that they were likely to react, as had happened for instance in connection with one of his earlier novels, La Curée, which had been forced to cease serial publication in the magazine La Cloche, under threat of suppressing the magazine itself. Indeed, another periodical, Le Corsaire, was banned on December 22nd, 1872, following the publication of a provocative article by Zola, entitled: "Le lendemain de la crise".³

Following the appointment of Marshall MacMahon as president of the Republic, to replace Adolphe Thiers, the pressure for conformity in the political, religious and social spheres further increased. Such publications as the Mémoires de Casanova, and even La Fontaine's Contes were banned, and Zola voiced criticisms against the new 'gouvernement de l'ordre moral' in the novel La Conquête de Plassans. This was however mild and therefore over-

looked.

On the other hand, Léon Claudel, who wrote a novel, Les Maudites, which praised the Communards, was sentenced to one month in prison and fined 500 francs, while Jean Richepin paid the same penalty for his Chansons des Gueux, and the manager of the newspaper La Tribune was gaoled for three months and fined 4000 francs for publishing similarly subversive material.

This explains the enormous political outcry which greeted the first publication of L'Assommoir, in serialised form, in the paper Le Bien Public on 13 April, 1876.

The question of the freedom of the press was, as can be imagined, a lively issue at the time, many commentators complaining especially of the arbitrary fashion in which censorship was imposed. The very issue of Le Bien Public which contained the first episode of L'Assommoir, began with an article on "La Liberté de la Presse?", which attacked the continual changes in the law governing press censorship:

Eh bien! M. Defaure est-il jamais arrivé à faire une loi sur la presse qui ait paru stable, définitive, qui n'ait été bientôt remplacée, amendée ou aggravée par une autre? Est-il jamais arrivé à faire produire à l'une de celles qu'il a faites directement ce qu'il en attendait? 4

Even though Yves Guyot, the radical editor of Le Bien Public, modified certain aspects of the novel, it was still far too shocking, both for public and for political taste, and when publication ceased in June, 1876, it was made clear that this action was being taken for puritanical as well as political reasons. This is how Henri Mitterand described it:

A Paris, la polémique surgit presque immédiatement. Les audaces du langage, en dépit des coupures pratiquées par le journal, choquaient un public raidi dans son puritanisme, rassoté par les tabous de 'l'ordre moral'.⁵

Both sections of the political divide were outraged, the Right for moral reasons essentially - "M. Emile Zola est le chef de la Commune littéraire", wrote, for instance, Dancourt in La Gazette de France⁶ - while the Left felt that Zola ought to have painted a more idealistic portrait of the working classes. Serious writers, such as Gustave Flaubert, the Goncourt Brothers, or Huysmans, Alexis, Céard and Hennique were, on the other hand, united in support of the novel, as were indeed Louis Desprez, Octave Mirbeau, Edouard Rod and Stéphane Mallarmé.

L'Assommoir resumed publication on July 9th, 1876, this time in La République des Lettres, a review published by the Parnassian poet Catulle Mendès. It appeared in book form, published by Zola's customary editor, Charpentier, at the end of January 1877. The controversy which it had provoked ensured its success then, and, with his background in journalism, Zola exploited to the full, for financial profit, the moral outcry of the previous months. The novel sold 1,366 volumes in June 1877, and another 1,800 volumes in July of the same year. A sure sign of success was the proliferation of parodies and of theatrical versions which followed. Many were staged in the various theatres of the "Boulevard", comparable to what happened to Dickens's work in England from the moment of his first major success, The Pickwick Papers.

L'Assommoir went through thirty-eight editions in 1877, twelve in 1878 and, by 1885, one hundred thousand copies had been

sold [203,000 by 1923]. Zola himself wrote a stage version of the novel and, more recently, at least nine film versions of it have been produced. ⁷

In England, however, Zola's publisher, Vizetelly, was imprisoned for publishing this work, and curiously enough, Henry James expressed a typical opinion of the time when he praised Zola for his realism while condemning him for being crude.

Whatever forms the various criticisms about Zola's novel took, there is no doubt that the fundamental element was the extraordinary vividness with which Zola had described the social conditions in Paris, never before encountered in any novel. The fact that Zola had based his investigations on principles borrowed from Hippolyte Taine and Claude Bernard imparted them new and unexpected strength. From Taine, he took the idea that the artist was like a plant or a vegetable in need of a certain atmosphere, a favourable "temperature" to grow properly and bear fruit. This "temperature" is an essential part of the environment:

Les productions de l'esprit humain, comme celles de la nature vivante, ne s'expliquent que par leur milieu. Donc, il y a une température morale faite du milieu et du moment; cette température influera sur l'artiste, trouvera en lui des facultés personnelles et des facultés de race qu'elle développera plus ou moins. ⁸

Equally, Zola believed, following Claude Bernard's theories, about experimental medicine, that vice and virtue were "produces" like any others, and could be measured in their effects as the effects of chemical substances are measured by scientists.

Thus, by putting his working-class characters into their environment, Zola was attempting a scientific analysis of the

effects of environment on man. As far as he was concerned, the purpose of his work was limited to demonstrating the existence of such social problems. Any further action, he left to others:

Libre ensuite aux législateurs et aux moralistes [...] de prendre mon œuvre, d'en tirer les conséquences et de songer à panser les plaies que je montrerai. 9

These theories are essential for an understanding of what Zola saw as his own aims, even if today he is valued more for his artistic achievement than for his integrity as a detached and 'scientific' observer of mankind.

While it is fair to state that French literature had not, before Zola, tackled the problem of contemporary social conditions, some of the ground-work had been done by the radical journals of the time, short-lived though they were. La Tribune, which lasted from 1868 to 1869, comes to mind, together with Le Rappel (1869-70) and La Cloche (1870-72) already mentioned. They made a conscious effort to report on living conditions, especially where the disadvantaged members of society were concerned.

The same could not be said of novels insofar as, when they featured working-class characters, they tended to sentimentalise them, as George Sand or Victor Hugo had done. It was not until the Goncourts' preface to Germinie Lacerteux appeared that their rights to be seen and heard, just as they were in reality, was stressed:

Vivant au XIXe siècle, dans un temps de suffrage universel, de démocratie, de libéralisme, nous nous sommes demandé si ce qu'on appelle "les basses classes" n'avaient pas le droit au roman, si ce monde sous un monde, le peuple, devait rester sous le coup de l'interdit littéraire, et des dédains

d'auteurs qui ont fait jusqu'ici le
silence sur l'âme et le cœur qu'il peut
avoir. 10

As we have seen, however, and despite this brave opening, the novels of the Goncourts did not go further than depicting single individuals, without studying their "milieu" in any real depth.

Zola had, in addition, prepared himself for this type of novel by contributing numerous articles on related topics to various magazines. He spoke of the "grande voix du peuple qui a faim de justice et de pain", in La Tribune, in 1868,¹¹ where his description of the workers already prefigures the accents of L'Assommoir:

Les ouvriers étouffent dans les quartiers étroits et fangeux où ils sont obligés de s'entasser. Ils habitent les ruelles noires qui avoisinent la rue Saint-Antoine, les trous pestilentiels de la rue Mouffetard. Ce n'est pas pour eux qu'on assainit la ville; chaque nouveau boulevard qu'on perce les jette en plus grand nombre dans les vieilles maisons des faubourgs. Quand le dimanche vient, ne sachant où aller respirer un peu d'air pur, ils s'attablent au fond des cabarets; la pente est fatale, le travail demande une récréation, et lorsque l'argent manque, lorsque l'horizon est fermé, on prend le plaisir qu'on a sous la main. Mais, ouvrez l'horizon, appelez le peuple hors des murs, et vous le verrez peu à peu quitter les bancs du cabaret pour les tapis d'herbe verte. 12

This quotation is given in its entirety, since it sums up many of the criticisms of society which are implicit in L'Assommoir. Zola undoubtedly felt that the lower classes were ignored in Haussmann's elaborate schemes of modernisation, since it resulted in their being forced out of the centre of the city, to gather in the immediate suburbs, living in more and more

overcrowded conditions, and becoming prey to the most easily accessible recreations to be found in public houses and dance halls. He feared that the overall effect of all the re-building schemes would make the lower classes more and more remote from the glitter and the pageantry found on the boulevards, that it would create kinds of ghettos where they would find themselves trapped, without the solace of fresh air or green meadows.

Having established Zola's aims, it is important to see to what extent he has given a factually accurate and representative picture of life in the capital at that time. The latter part of the nineteenth century was a period of considerable change in the fabric of French society. While the peasants deep in the countryside remained the largest single element among the "working classes", industrial workers were increasing in number and came to represent another, virtually as important, section of that class, and a force to be reckoned with in society.

Studies have been made which give precise illustrations for the nature of this transformation, especially between the 1850's and the 1870's. Two books are worthy of mention here: La Vie Ouvrière en France sous le Second Empire, by G. Duveau, and La Vie Quotidienne sous le Second Empire, by M. Allen, where it is interesting to note that the facts, statistically proved, very frequently correspond to Zola's hypotheses. Let us take the industrialisation which Goujet fears in L'Assommoir, for instance:

Cependant Goujet s'était arrêté devant une des machines à rivets. Il restait là, songeur, la tête basse, le regard fixe. La machine forgeait des rivets de quarante millimètres,

avec une aisance tranquille de géante. 13

and Goujet is anxious at the thought that the machine might make his job and its skills irrelevant. This is, of course, what happens, in Paris, for example, where the number of steam-operated workshops increased from 6,503 in 1852 to 22,851 in 1870. Mention is also made of all the reconstruction projects which make Gervaise feels uneasy and like an outsider in her own area. This feeling of alienation was certainly very real, if one bears in mind that in 1863, for instance, there were more than 60,000 labourers operating at any one time in Paris, under the supervision of at least 1,500 architects.

Furthermore, the overcrowding described by Zola is easily verified when the massive emigration from the country (where few opportunities existed for making money rapidly) towards a town which offered full employment is proved by the official records kept at the time, and one can easily see how such a work force, instead of being grateful for being given work, may well resent its own inability to use pleasurably its leisure time, as well as, very likely, the lack of alternative employment in their home town or village, This represented an ideal breeding ground for a proletariat which was prepared to contribute to the comfort of the capitalistic classes, and yet which realised its alienation from it, its enslavement even, and which was likely to react and search for futile escape-routes like alcohol, so readily available.

The period of Napoleon III's reign also witnessed the widening of the gulf between all the various social classes.

As G. Duveau states:

Sous le règne de Napoléon III, deux faits d'ordre général et d'une très grande importance créent un climat social qui rend chaque jour plus sensible à l'ouvrier la séparation des classes. D'une part, le rôle que tient l'argent dans la cité apparaît primordial. De l'autre, le capitalisme, en se développant sur une vaste échelle, prend un aspect menaçant pour l'ouvrier [...]. Sous l'ancien régime, un ensemble de liens - traditions religieuses, féodales, corporatives, compagnonniques - unissaient les hommes [...]. Le capitalisme détruit les uns après les autres tous ces liens. Les relations directes entre patrons et ouvriers se raréfient. [...] L'homme mesure de plus en plus le cercle de son univers avec l'argent dont il dispose; la plupart des rapports sociaux sont fixés par un intérêt matériel brutal, excluant toute chaleur, toute poésie. 14

The entrepreneurial nature of Second Empire society could offer little to replace these traditional bonds. It became more and more unlikely that working-class individuals could reach a level of social equality with the rich bourgeoisie, something which, in earlier time, could easily have been the case; through hard work and dedication, they could have become employers themselves then, but no longer was it so.

Zola expresses the weariness of the laundresses, their aching limbs, and in truth the conditions of work were brutal everywhere, as were the conditions of life itself. The majority of Parisian workers spent at least eleven hours at work per day, slightly less than in the provinces though, where twelve-hour days were the norm, extending at times to sixteen hours.

Statistics show that, partly as a result of the above, life expectancy was low, as low as thirty-seven years for miners, and seldom above forty-five (Département de la Loire). In Paris, salaries were above average, but still very low, when compared to

the unearned income of the upper classes. In 1853, salaries averaged 3.81 francs per day, and by 1871, they had only risen to 4.98 francs. It was also common for workers to be only employed for part of the year when there was work, and to remain unemployed for extended periods. For example, mechanics could expect to be out of work for three months every year, and house-painters for five months on average, depending on the weather.

Similarly, in L'Assommoir, Coupeau's principal excuse for his idleness and drunkenness is that there is no work available and that he is waiting for something to turn up. For women, salaries were lower still; florists, for instance, earned 1.70 francs per hour, as Zola probably knew very well from his wife who had herself worked in a flower shop. His sympathetic portrayal of the hardships which Gervaise had to endure to make ends meet certainly has the ring of truth.

The cost-of-living indexes show conclusively that workers saw little of the prosperity of the period, where money-lenders, speculators and building contractors could make vast fortunes in a very short time. Inflation further eroded their wages, so that the cost of a litre of wine rose from 59 centimes to 83 centimes between 1850 and 1870, while the price of two kilos of bread rose from 52 centimes to 74 centimes during the same period.

It is even possible from the documents extant to pinpoint the widening gap between the rich and the poor, if one looks at rents in the rue de la Goutte d'Or, which approximated 100 francs per year, while Zola's own middle class house at Médan, complete with garden, had only cost him 1,640 francs. The demolition

of so many dwellings exacerbated the problem, and the cramped conditions described by Zola in the neighbourhood of La Chapelle are factual. In areas such as this one, anything which offered a temporary respite from the pressures of the environment was almost a necessity for survival, and drinking was unavoidable, hence the many cabarets where cheap alcoholic beverages were served.

Here again the social gap was enormous. Entrance to a Club in the Champs Elysées cost 3.50 francs in 1862, virtually a working man's daily wage, while one could go to a drinking place such as the Bal Perron - typical of the establishments where Lantier likes to take his girl-friend Adèle at the beginning of the novel - for as little as seven sous. ¹⁵

The only possible alternatives to visiting places like these in their free time would be for the Parisian workers to go on long walks with their families on Sunday, and this certainly happened. On foot, they could not, however, hope to get outside the city and they could only stare at buildings, either half demolished, or half built. This is what is described, for instance, in Denis Poulot's book Le Sublime which, as we know, had a great influence on Zola. From La Goutte d'Or, one could perhaps get as far as the fortifications, since the nearest open space, the Bois de Vincennes, would take several hours to reach on foot, and it is scarcely surprising that the local residents preferred more effortless amusements. Reading was not a serious contender as an alternative, although illiteracy was rare, because of the high cost of newspapers and magazines, between 5 and 10 centimes.

On the other hand, it has been estimated, that in Paris, in 1860, there were in addition to the 160 cafés, and 235 "bals publics", possibly 25,000 drinking establishments of some description or other, a fact which has no doubt contributed to giving the Parisian workers something of a reputation for irresponsible behaviour. This is certainly in evidence in the popular literature of the period.

It is clear, therefore, that here, by presenting his working-class characters as very much under the threat of alcoholism, Zola was both following a well established precedent and stating a commonly observable fact about the social reality of Paris.

The role of alcohol in L'Assommoir is to keep the workers quiescent and contented despite their appalling living conditions, and ultimately to prevent them from escaping the consequences of that entrapment. It is clear that Zola intended the very name he gave to the bar, "L'Assommoir", to be a symbol for the area he was describing, a place where these wretched inhabitants could knock themselves out with raw alcohol, so as to deaden the pain of their existence. The name is also connected with the reason which made Zola select that quarter of Paris in the first place - the extraordinarily apt name of the main street, the rue de "la Goutte d'Or", that golden but poisonous drop of forgetfulness.

Duveau confirms that places like "L'Assommoir" are the only real source of relaxation for the working classes:

Le cabaret est la grande distraction pour
l'ouvrier [...]

and he quotes Augustin Cochin, a philanthropist of the period, especially concerned with the moral and material isolation of

the urban workers, who said in 1864:

Le cabaret [exerce] un attrait bien puissant
sur un homme qui va retrouver, à la fin d'une
journée de travail, des enfants qui crient et
une femme qui se plaint, entre les murs de sa
mansarde. . . [Voilà] qui ouvre brusquement
une fenêtre sur deux mondes, le monde habité
et le monde imaginaire. . . 16

There is little doubt that such comments apply equally well to all kinds of drinking establishments, but they highlight especially the place taken by the low-class bars in the life of the most destitute workers. LeRoy-Beaulieu makes the point even more graphically:

Le cabaret tient pour les classes ouvrières
dans la société actuelle la place de l'église
dans la société passée. 17

LeRoy-Beaulieu then modestly adds that his comparison is banal which, at all events, is not the case, but it certainly reinforces Zola's description of the still, the spirit-making machine, "squatting on its throne" in the back room of Père Colombe's bar, as a godly figure, a supernatural monster which holds dominion over, and threatens, the entire city of Paris.

L'alambic, sourdement, sans une flamme,
sans une gaieté dans les reflets éteints de
ses cuivres, continuait, laissait couler
sa sueur d'alcool, pareil à une source lente
et entêtée, qui, à la longue, devait envahir
la salle, se répandre sur les boulevards
extérieurs, inonder le trou immense de Paris. 18

Alcohol certainly invades its victims and becomes part of them. It is interesting to see, for instance, what happens to Coupeau who, at the beginning of the novel is nicknamed "Cadet-Cassis" by his fellow workers because he is unwilling to drink as they do, after he has started drinking to excess. In hospital, he refuses even to take soup or lemonade, because to

him they now taste of alcohol:

"J'ai soif, oh! j'ai soif!" grognait-il
continuellement.

L'interne prit un pot de limonade sur une
planchette et le lui donna. Il saisit le
pot à deux mains, aspira goulûment une
gorgée, en répandant la moitié du liquide
sur lui; mais il cracha tout de suite la
gorgée, avec un dégoût furieux, en criant:
"Nom de Dieu! c'est de l'eau-de-vie", 19

Alcohol is seen to degrade all its victims, reducing them to the state of animals, and eventually sending them mad, as the specialist explains to Gervaise at the end of the novel. It seems to Zola that alcohol is able to unleash the "bête humaine", the beast which is a subconscious part of man and which can make him capable of all crimes, including murder, as in the case of the drunkard Bijard.

Several other indications of what Zola was intending to achieve with L'Assommoir can be deduced from the comments noted by his daughter, Denise LeBlond-Zola, in her book about him.

In the first place, there is evidence of a deep conviction that the lives of the working classes had never been properly represented in fiction before, and of the need to set the record straight:

"Je crois que la vie de la classe ouvrière
n'aura jamais été abordée avec cette
carrure", confia-t-il à son éditeur, dans
une lettre du 29 septembre 1875. 20

And indeed, as he wrote in his ébauche for the novel, this desire to explain the nature of the people through a study of their living conditions is made explicit:

... montrer le milieu peuple et expliquer par
ce milieu les mœurs peuple; comme quoi, à
Paris, la soulerie, la débandade de la famille,
les coups, l'acceptation de toutes les hontes

et de toutes les misères, vient des conditions mêmes de l'existence ouvrière, des travaux durs, des promiscuités, des laisser-aller, etc. En un mot, un tableau très exact de la vie du peuple avec ses ordures, sa vie lâchée, son langage grossier, etc. 21

Denise LeBlond-Zola puts forward several reasons why this subject appealed to Zola:

Balzac ne s'était pas intéressé à l'ouvrier, mais Zola, pauvre, avait vécu pendant un certain temps chez un oncle dans une maison des faubourgs. Il avait vu de près les tares et les lamentables misères, les vices de la classe prolétaire. Animé d'une immense pitié, quoi qu'on en ait dit, il se donna un mal inouï pour représenter, dans sa vérité crue, la vie de Gervaise. Il dévoila des détails ignorés du public; on refusa de le croire. 22

That he was attacked violently as a result of his descriptions of vice, of irresponsibility and of crude or vulgar behaviour is, as we have seen, very true; that it was done out of pity and of compassion was less evident - even to the working-class readers themselves.

It was generally assumed that his aim was political, and that he was trying to foment unrest. He was accused of having the most despicable "republican" instincts. In La Gazette de France, a right-winger, Armand de Pontmartin, a long-standing opponent of Zola's theories, claimed that the regime of the new Republic had favoured the development of "cette littérature infecte", epitomised by Zola's book. 23

Some of his adversaries were, however, themselves deeply republican, and they also rejected him for ideological reasons. Arthur Rowe, for example, one of the leaders of the republican party, criticised him violently for the scorn he had poured upon manual work, "le représentant comme répugnant" 24 in a pamphlet entitled Monsieur Zola et L'Assommoir, published in Brussels.

There is certainly no evidence to link L'Assommoir with political propaganda in Zola's mind. At the same time, a conscious effort is made not to show any explicit compassion; on the contrary, the author has detached himself from his characters from the outset. The documentary form adopted makes this possible, and Zola takes great care not to omit any factual detail, no matter how distasteful.

He relies less on first-hand experience than Denise LeBlond-Zola suggests. His essential source is Denis Poulot's enormous compilation: Question Sociale. Le Sublime, ou Le Travailleur comme il est en 1870 et ce qu'il peut être. In writing this, Denis Poulot had tried to clarify as much as possible the position of the manual workers in the city:

[...] plus spécialement les mécaniciens
de Paris, avec lesquels nous sommes en relation
depuis plus de vingt ans [...] 25

as he is convinced that it is only when all social classes in the capital get to understand each other better that they will be able to live together harmoniously.

Ce n'est pas une question de fraternité,
c'est une question de sécurité, impossible de
l'isoler, ni de le fuir, il faut vivre avec
lui, il vous suivra partout. 26

Thus Poulot is writing for a purpose and with a definite readership in mind. He explains carefully the different types of workers and their special roles, indicates how vital their contribution is to the life of the city, and urges his readers to consider these general ideas, the "contrat social" and to forget about the faults or the weaknesses of the workers themselves:

A vous, lecteurs, à juger. Dans une pareille
question, les idées sont tout, les hommes rien. 27

It is from that standpoint that the notion of Zola's compassionate attitude can be argued, and if it was inspired by Poulot's ideas, it is clear that it was not simply directed to the working classes, but that it looked for understanding on the part of the more fortunate members of society, to enable both to live together without conflicts. To read the novel as a revolutionary manifesto is to misinterpret its message.

To provide a sense of kinship and individuality, Poulot describes each worker in a different way, even to the extent of providing names and nicknames in some cases. Zola uses the same technique and achieves the same end. One notes with interest, however, that whereas Zola compared himself to a scientist like Claude Bernard when he expounded his methodology in Le Roman expérimental, Poulot compares himself to a doctor looking unflinchingly at all kinds of diseases. He explains why at the beginning of his book:

Le médecin est souvent forcé, pour amener la guérison, de sonder les plaies hideuses. 28

and he set out his own credentials to justify his enquiry in that way:

Pendant plus de vingt ans, nous avons collaboré avec dix mille travailleurs, comme compagnon et comme chef. Ce long stage nous a permis d'étudier la question sociale. La première condition, pour guérir un malade, c'est de bien connaître son tempérament, les causes, les ravages, le progrès de la maladie. 29

This reads uncannily like an analysis of Zola's method of describing the onset and the progress of Coupeau's alcoholism, so that one is hardly surprised to hear Poulot explain that the sub-title of his book, "Le Sublime", is the name of a drinking

establishment in Belleville, which seems to him to sum up the qualities of the workers in general, much as Zola will later take the name of another of Belleville's cabarets, "L'Assommoir" as a fitting title to sum up the content of his novel.

Poulot then uses a rather strange terminology to categorise his workers, placing them into eight groups, in descending order of respectability:

L'ouvrier vrai
 L'ouvrier tout court
 L'ouvrier mixte
 L'ouvrier simple
 Le sublime flétri
 Le vrai sublime
 Le fils de Dieu
 Le sublime des sublimes ³⁰

suggesting a new interpretation for the term "sublime", which Poulot eventually clarifies, having first given his readers a chance to consider the facts for themselves.

He looks at the importance of the interrelation between the workers and the state, distinguishing between those who tend to be helpless and expect the authorities to take charge of them, and those who are fiercely independent and "use" the government to their advantages - with perhaps a touch of The Princess Casamassima's anarchism:

Ceux qui veulent que l'Etat soit tout, au détriment de l'initiative individuelle.

Ceux qui veulent que les individus soient tout, et que l'Etat soit serviteur. ³¹

Poulot then proceeds to analyse each of his varieties of workers

in turn, and "Bec-Salé" for instance, appears on page 154. There is:

l'ouvrier vrai, qui ne fait jamais de dettes,
le républicain par excellence, il prêche par
l'exemple. 32

How these workers spend their free time is very important, as it is an excellent guide to their characters, thinks Poulot, echoing the Victorian obsession perhaps for the devil and idle hands.

Even the ordinary worker can be trusted with using his leisure hours sensibly, arranging outings with his family:

Quand il fait beau le dimanche, à une heure,
tout le monde [est] en route, à Saint-Ouen,
Joinville, Romainville ou Bondy. 33

but the "mixte" type is more easily led, and less careful with his money:

Le samedi de paie, il s'émeut très bien avec
les camarades; son émotion dépasse rarement
l'allumette de compagnie. 34

This "allumette de marchand de vin" is also found in L'Assommoir, it is just a quick drink, a friendly warming up glass of alcohol to celebrate pay day and the end of a week's work. This can, of course, become a dangerous habit, and at the lowest end of the scale, the "sublimes" cannot keep away from the bars, they have sublimated their life into an alcoholic stupor:

Les marchands de vins sont pour les sublimes
le médecin, le pharmacien; ses salles sont
leur réunions publiques, le cabinet, le
laboratoire des réformes sociales ou de
l'éreintement. 35

Just as "Bec-Salé" is described as a Poulot worker, so are "Mes Bottes" and "Bibi-la-Grillade", the true origin of these picturesque nicknames for which Zola is so often praised by critics.

The infrequency of work among these "sublimes flétris" ou "vrais sublimes" which one notices in Zola's novel, is fully explained by Poulot:

Le sublime simple fait de deux cents à deux cents vingt-cinq jours de travail au plus, par année. ³⁶

Slang terms, for example "minzingo" for wine merchant, which are given in Poulot's Le Sublime, are again used in L'Assommoir, and the pleasure found in drinking, the solace it brings to tired limbs and worried minds, are analysed by Poulot with the same painstaking detail that Zola will adopt when he describes Gervaise's first encounter with "la goutte" in Père Colombe's bar.

Poulot at the end does not wish either to preach or to criticise, even less to "attitudinise" in the manner of many well-intentioned nineteenth-century reformers who were convinced they had a "solution" to the problems of urban life, drunkenness, and all others. In his concluding paragraph, he begs the reformers to abandon their theories, whether they call for the end of capitalism, or the end of God or private ownership, and to realise that what is needed is a form of love and understanding:

A tous les réformateurs qui crient, pour arriver à la régénération tant proclamée: Plus de capital!, plus d'intérêt!, plus de Dieu!, plus de famille!, plus de propriété!, nous répondons par le cri de notre conscience et de notre profonde conviction:

Plus de Sublimes !!! 37

Zola's vivid description of Gervaise and Coupeau serve the same purpose, and because they are more artistic and effective, they serve it even better, and generate immense compassion.

There were some suggestions of plagiarism at the time, and of course the line between legitimate use of source material and

actual plagiarism is difficult to define, but Zola had several other sources, equally as significant. Alfred Delvau's Dictionnaire de la Langue Verte: Argots parisiens comparés has already been mentioned, and proved invaluable since it was correct for the supposed period in which the novel was set, even though the slang was out-of-date at the time of publication.

Delvau took his work very seriously, and separated the various forms of slang peculiar to each social unit, from thieves to pimps, using his own experience to help him decide on the best words to adopt:

Moi, qui, Beni-Mouffetard et d'une famille où l'on est faubourien de père en fils depuis cinq ou six générations [...] j'ai cueilli sur leur tige et ramassé sur leur fumier natal tous les mots de mon Dictionnaire, tous les termes bizarres, toutes les expressions pittoresques qui s'y trouvent accumulées: il n'en est pas une seule que je n'aie entendue de mes oreilles, cent fois au moins, dans la rue Saint-Antoine ou dans la rue Neuve-Bréda, dans un atelier de peintres ou dans un atelier d'ouvriers, dans les brasseries littéraires ou dans les cabarets populaciers, ici ou là. 38

Through the lists of slang provided, one can "feel" the life of the streets at the time, almost as clearly as one does in the pages of L'Assommoir. One notices, for instance, the proliferation of alcohol-related terms, which must be significant. A "gloria" is a cup of coffee with eau-de-vie in it, while the hours between 4 and 6pm are known as "heures de l'absinthe", and "assommoir" deserves a special mention:

Assommoir, s.m. Nom d'un cabaret de Belleville, qui est devenu celui de tous les cabarets de bas étage, ou le peuple boit les liquides frelatés qui le tuent, - sans remarquer l'éloquence sinistre de cette métaphore, que les voleurs russes semblent lui avoir empruntée, en la retournant, pour désigner un "gourdin",

sous le nom de vin de Champagne. 39

There Zola found the basic groundwork for a study of social conditions, and it was left to him to translate it into a work of fiction.

In addition, he was dealing with a topical subject in presenting a picture of degeneration through drink. As LeRoy-Beaulieu points out in his study of working class life in the nineteenth century, La Question ouvrière au XIXème siècle,

La société française est devenue une société de parvenus et d'aventuriers, dont le seul but est de s'éclipser les uns les autres et d'exciter l'envie publique. Toutes les ressources des particuliers se sont tournées vers le luxe extérieur . . .

Que les populations ouvrières aient été affectées de la contagion de ce mal, qui pourrait s'en étonner? On les accuse à bon droit d'ivrognerie, mais que font sur nos boulevards, ces lignes de cafés regorgeant d'oisifs ou de buveurs d'absinthe, qui envahissent la chaussée. On leur reproche de l'inconduite et de l'immoralité. Mais qui nourrit ces courtisanes élégantes? La population ouvrière des grandes villes n'a d'ordinaire devant elle que des exemples corrupteurs. Son grand crime est d'être trop prompte à imiter ces classes opulentes qu'elle envie. 40

Drunkenness and immorality among the poor are not denied, but they are explained by their tendency to imitate the behaviour of their betters; what they saw or what they heard about prompted them to do the same. It was said for instance that the emperor's conduct was notorious, that the idle rich drank a great deal and kept mistresses, which is, according to LeRoy-Beaulieu, what led the proletariat to frequent bars and prostitutes.

To what extent this was true is difficult to determine, but LeRoy-Beaulieu makes a further more convincing point. He points out that lack of privacy among the poor made any instance

of misbehaviour obvious to many people, and could provide a bad example and the feeling that this was an acceptable way of life.

He indicates that a "Décret de la Préfecture" passed in 1851 gave the Préfet de Police the necessary authority, at least in theory, to close bars and cafés, in order to protect public morals, but that in fact the number of bars progressively increased during the Second Empire. Shops which were licensed to sell spirits were also created at that time, while the sale of wine declined, to be replaced by more potent alcoholic beverages - such as the home made eau-de-vie of Père Colombe. Very accurately, wine, in L'Assommoir is only drunk at meal times.

That his description of Gervaise's working life is as realistic as is his depiction of Coupeau's alcoholism, is verified by another work by LeRoy-Beaulieu: Le Travail des Femmes au XIXème siècle.

This study divides the feminine work-force of the time into five main categories: In the first, he placed those who were not concerned with the actual production of goods, but with their supply and sale. They comprised clerks, shop assistants, wrappers of goods for instance, and while by virtue of their contact with the wealthy, they imitated their manners, they were in fact very poorly paid, about 2.50 francs a day - so that they lived in genteel poverty. LeRoy-Beaulieu thinks that there were more than ten thousand such women in Paris then.

Then, there were women who performed needle-work. With the exception of a privileged few, who designed clothes, the majority

lived just above the poverty line.

Gervaise would come into LeRoy-Beaulieu's third category, that of women who did domestic work other than sewing. Laundry and ironing were the two most important jobs in that category. Seven eighths of all laundresses earned between 2 and 2.50 francs a day, dyers and cleaners earned slightly more.

A fourth class offered a wider range of earnings, with women who were purveyors of luxury articles, and who could, in some case, earn up to 3.50 francs, but the fifth class was that to which Gervaise would eventually belong, at the end, and one that many women dreaded, as it was so easy to get trapped there:

C'est celle des femmes de tout âge et de toute origine, les unes encore enfants, les autres déjà vieilles; celles-ci qui ont connu des jours prospères; celles-là qui ont été dans le dénuement dès leur berceau, toutes dépourvues de ressources, de relations et de savoir-faire, vouées par leur incapacité à tous les travaux faciles, grossiers et peu rétribués... C'est pour ces femmes que le salaire se tient à des taux tellement bas qu'on a peine à comprendre qu'il puisse suffire à leur subsistance. 41

It is therefore one of Zola's best touches to have picked as a central character a woman who was highly representative of Parisian life, a tradeswoman, skilled and popular, but who nevertheless fell from her position - somewhere near the top of LeRoy-Beaulieu's third category - as a self employed laundress, to the total degradation of the bottom of the fifth category, where even prostitution could not support her.

Contemporary social historians were also aware of the conditions of the time, and realised that, if they were not altered and improved, they would eventually give rise to violence.

Alexandre Privat d'Anglemont gave a description, in his book Paris inconnu, published in 1861, of an overcrowded house which stood directly opposite the Collège de France, and stressed the irony of these parallel versions of society: on the one side, the elegantly proportioned, and well-nigh empty university building, and on the other, a dwelling, separated into hovels, where fire-eaters, acrobats, sword-swallowers, strolling musicians, and rag-pickers squeezed together.

The dangers of a social explosion inherent in such crowded surroundings are shown again by Joanna Richardson in her study of La Vie Parisienne. In the chapter also titled "Paris inconnu", she gives as an example the writer Jules Vallès who was turned into a revolutionary by social conditions, and who was later exiled for his part in the Commune. Vallès claimed that the working classes had a choice between settling down and accepting their fate, or becoming insurgents - and that, in effect, meant a choice between either becoming drunkards or facing execution by a firing squad. ⁴²

This theory cannot be said to hold good for Coupeau who is totally apolitical, but it has some relevance for the scenes of drunken looting in the Tuileries which followed the news of the overthrow of the Empire during the Franco-Prussian War, after the battle of Sedan, in September 1870.

One of the ironies of Second Empire Paris, as S.G. Burchell has pointed out in Upstart Empire: Paris during the brilliant years of Louis-Napoléon, is that as soon as the old slums that were meant to be replaced by fine buildings were torn down, new slums emerged in the wake of the new buildings:

Little was done to prevent new slums from rising in the place of old, and often, behind prescribed façades and buildings of uniform height, crowded and airless tenements grew up quite as loathsome as the ones which had been torn down. [...] Even at the centre of Paris the poor continued to live in misery, although high rents forced most of them to move to the burgeoning slums of the new arrondissements. 43

A century later, only the handsome buildings would remain, the slums finally destroyed, but such slums were unavoidable at the time, because of the re-building, but also because they were the inevitable concomitant of rapid industrial progress. During the Second Empire, the number of steam engines in use in Paris quadrupled to reach twenty-five thousand, railway mileage quintupled to ten thousand, and industrial progress, fuelled by the inflationary borrowing of Haussmann and others, surged ahead.

There were so many slums that Zola, when he made his preliminary notes, filled over forty pages of description, which are now contained in two octavo volumes at the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris. He mentions and describes streets, cabarets, dance halls, small shops and public laundries, compares newly built areas with old untransformed quarters of the city, and thereby carries the reality of living conditions in such places,

In that way, he was to use descriptions in his novel to explain the quality of life of his characters beyond the confines of dialogue or situation.

Denise LeBlond-Zola makes a further controversial point in her book about her father, She claims that, far from being the detached pseudo-scientist, he offered a number of solutions to

improve the condition of the working class, or at least that he underlined the changes that would be needed to achieve that goal:

Ces remèdes, d'ailleurs Zola les indique aussitôt: "Fermez les cabarets, ouvrez les écoles. L'ivrognerie dévore le peuple. Consultez les statistiques, allez dans les hôpitaux, faites une enquête, vous verrez si je mens . . ." and again: "Assainissez les faubourgs et augmentez les salaires. Le question de logement est capitale. Les puanteurs de la rue, l'escalier sordide, l'étroite chambre ou dorment pêle-mêle les pères et les filles, les frères et les soeurs, sont la grande cause de la dépravation des faubourgs. Le travail écrasant qui rapproche l'homme de la brute, le salaire insuffisant qui décourage et fait chercher l'oubli, achèvent d'emplir les cabarets et les maisons de tolérance. 44

And certainly, her argument is supported by the facts. It is clear that Zola links drunkenness and immorality closely to inadequate living conditions, to the lack of alternative outlets for the working classes, too poor and too weary to fight back the temptations of superficial warmth and comfort. Zola's prescription for social change can be seen to derive from a conviction that environment and social problems are inexorably bound together.

The idea is not an unusual one. Georges Duveau, in his Vie Ouvrière en France, has also examined the salaries and their buying power; he has assessed various living conditions and looked at the quality of family life, establishing parallels and working out social models. His conclusions were that family life was closely dependent on the whole on the financial situation, but that it also varied significantly in quality with the other social pressures.

He stated that:

La grande industrie - en particulier l'industrie textile, qui fait très largement appel à la main d'œuvre féminine - entretient une atmosphère peu propice à la bonne harmonie des ménages. Tout d'abord, les exigences mêmes du travail restreignent considérablement les moments d'intimité dans la vie du couple. ⁴⁵

Then he gave a number of examples of the way in which family life was disrupted by the long working hours and the resulting absence from home of the female worker, an increasing trend at the time. The inevitable result was precisely what Zola points out in L'Assommoir as being the fate of Gervaise:

[La femme] est le plus souvent considérée moins comme compagnon que comme une servante et traitée avec rudesse. Cet assujettissement tient peut-être à ce que le travail des fabriques, détournant les femmes de leur mission naturelle, comme épouses et comme mères, a fait d'elles un simple rouage dans le mécanisme de la production industrielle. ⁴⁶

Even if one sets aside the question of whether the writer is correct in his interpretation of a woman's natural function, the fact remains that family life must have suffered greatly from the prevalence of female employment. Additionally, as Duveau found out:

C'est l'ouvrier le plus payé qui montre le plus de répugnance à avoir une très nombreuse famille. ⁴⁷

The families who were the least able to cope with these combined pressures were, of course, the ones that were most burdened and who suffered most; and this in turn led them to try any kind of escape from the dismal reality of their lives.

Not surprisingly, in his chapter entitled "Les mœurs",

Duveau dealt with the problem of alcoholism. He found evidence of general increase in the consumption of spirits, but noted that this increase was not evenly distributed, it was most noticeable among the poorer categories of workers:

[L'ivrognerie] est particulièrement vivace dans le monde artisanal, dans la petite industrie. 48

It is therefore clear that Zola, having selected this section of the working population in order to test his theories, was fully justified in pointing to alcoholism as the most devastating consequence of their way of life.

Other enquiries were conducted at the time, one rather quaintly by the British Embassy in Paris towards the end of Napoleon III's reign, and - while one ought to approach this evidence somewhat cautiously - one notices the interesting suggestion that drunkenness may be hereditary:

Les enquêteurs anglais sont frappés par le taux de la mortalité infantile dans la population ouvrière de la capitale. Ils voient là une conséquence directe de l'ivrognerie des pères: d'après ces enquêteurs, si à Paris tant d'individus sont incapables de lutter avec les dures nécessités de la vie, c'est qu'ils sont des fils d'alcooliques. 49

This may sound like a harsh judgment, yet in L'Assommoir, both Gervaise and Coupeau are children of drinkers. This, in fact, explains why they are almost total abstainers. At their first meeting, Gervaise confides this to Coupeau:

[Elle] raconta qu'autrefois, avec sa mère elle buvait de l'anisette à Plassans. Mais elle avait failli en mourir un jour, et ça l'avait dégoûtée; elle ne pouvait plus voir les liqueurs. 50

Similarly, the memory of his father's death from a drunken fall

at work keeps Coupeau sober, until he too suffers a serious injury. Moreover, both are descended from that side of the family which is tainted with alcoholism beyond their immediate parents.

In the final section of his study on the effects of alcohol, Duveau suggests that many of those who manned the barricades during the Commune had the blood of alcoholics flowing in their veins, a somewhat fanciful statement perhaps, which may be more suggestive of his own political views than a fitting conclusion to his study, but one which may be seen as echoing other statements on the part played by heredity in the spread of this disease.

Alcoholism, however, has to start somewhere, and the kind of life led by urban workers would seem sufficient in itself to explain heavy drinking. It may be that France adapted rather late to the demands of the Industrial Revolution, stepped as it was in agricultural traditions. There are certainly lean years for those who work on the land, but sudden destitution, such as can be experienced when a worker loses his job, is not known there. Then the inadequacy of salaries for those who had jobs was a contributory factor. The gulf between the rich and the poor increased as time went by, which created resentment and envy and led to manifestations of disaffection such as drunkenness.

Violence then seemed a natural way to express frustration and anger, and crime followed, made easier by the anonymity of a large city.

Gervaise's memories of a happier time in her native Plassans must have been shared by many of these wretches:

Il y a douze ans de ça. Nous allions á la riviére. . . Ca sentait meilleur qu'ici.

Il fallait voir, il y avait un coin sous
les arbres. . . avec de l'eau claire qui
courait . . . Vous savez, à Plassans. 51

The Industrial Revolution did not, of course, affect only the masses, the bourgeoisie itself found it difficult to adjust, and this explains some of the moral contradictions of the whole period. The Emperor's views leaned towards socialism, and he made strenuous efforts to improve the quality of life in Paris, with complete sewerage systems, health education, and increased job opportunities. It would be wrong to think of the conditions of the working classes as a complete indictment of the Empire, and equally wrong to suggest that easy solutions existed which were wilfully not applied. Various ideologies propounded equally various theories, yet things did not improve; the working classes themselves, while fully aware of what was wrong, were not able to make concrete proposals:

L'ouvrier peut recréer et dépasser les
idéologies que lui offrent les bourgeois,
mais il est puéril de le présenter comme
construisant ab ovo une théorie. 52

The only way forward may well have been that already proposed by Duveau and applied by Zola: to increase everyone's awareness of the existence of a working class, to explain fully what their problems were, and to make the point that, in many ways, they were not so much the creators of their environment as the victims of it.

In comparison with the wealth of material available to Zola, and which, as demonstrated above, he used fully for his descriptions of social conditions in France, there is scant

evidence of the factual basis on which James constructed The Princess Casamassima.

Charles R. Anderson, attacking those who wish to recruit James as a sympathiser with Naturalism, is factually right when he points out that there are few notes extant on the novel to be found in James's Notebooks, and that even what is there can be on the whole described as trivia.⁵³ Where he is not so quite correct however is in suggesting that the very technique used by James in taking copious and trivial notes, as for instance during his visit to Millbank prison, is not a purely Naturalistic approach.

In fact, the influence of Zola is felt everywhere in connection with that novel, from the taking of notes already mentioned, to the painstaking accumulation of working-class expressions, and the detailed descriptions of clothing worn by the very poor, as a prerequisite ébauche to the work.

James himself described how closely he observed the lower classes of London, in English Hours, during his long walks throughout the capital, which not only provided the material but also the genesis of The Princess Casamassima, as indicated in the novel's preface.

It cannot be construed as an overstatement of the case to accept what Tilley says in his article on "The Background of The Princess Casamassima" to the effect that James must have used reports in The Times on anarchism, as background material, and that his wide reading - a well-documented fact - must have included commentaries and reports on social conditions, in both magazine and book form.

There was no shortage of such material and it painted a picture as depressing as that of Zola's Paris. When the Reverend A. Mearns and W.C. Preston published The Bitter Cry of Outcast London as one of the Tracts of the London Congregational Union in 1883, they bitterly attacked the emphasis on the solely exterior manifestation of Christianity in Victorian society:

While we have been building our churches and solacing ourselves with our religion and dreaming that the millenium was coming, the poor have been growing poorer, the wretched more miserable, and the immoral more corrupt; the gulf has been daily widening which separated the lowest classes of the community from our churches and chapels, and from all decency and civilisation. ⁵⁴

That increased attention was being paid to this problem from a wide variety of religous organisations is also made clear:

There is no more hopeful sign in the Christian Church of today than the increased attention which is being given by it to the poor and outcast classes of society. ⁵⁵

James was certainly actively engaged in a process of discovery of Victorian England at that time. This included the work of Booth and, going back, that of Dickens, in order to realise the full extent of its unsavoury and unacceptable "underside". And the fact that the statistics were as grim in London as they have been demonstrated to have been in Paris is evident as soon as one looks at Mearns' and Preston's analyses.

There were one hundred "gin palaces" in Leicester Square alone, one public house per hundred people in Euston, for instance, and from the above publication, one gets a clear picture of the poverty, appalling sanitary conditions, diseases and endemic drunkenness in one of the areas selected as typical, "Collier's Rents" with its numerous thieves and prostitutes. One of the worst

features of such areas was that respectable working-class people were compelled to live alongside such dreadful tenants, working for an average of seventeen hours a day to earn one shilling.

As the authors explain:

That people condemned to exist under such conditions take to drink and fall into sin is surely a matter for little surprise. 56

One is hardly likely to disagree, and it would appear equally probable that they would be tempted to supplement their earnings through mugging or robbery, and that they would readily listen to subversive propaganda.

Journalists, together with novelists such as Gissing when he wrote Demos, were becoming attuned to such issues, and there is no doubt that they contributed to direct James's interest towards some association with movements trying to promote better social conditions.

Any comparison between social problems in France and in England at that time needs to consider the political differences between these two countries as well.

The French system, under Napoleon III and later under the Third Republic, appears at first sight to have been more autocratic and inimical to personal liberty than the English system. Further analysis shows, however, that within the limits set by the authorities, writers were a great deal freer to criticise adverse social conditions in France. The apparently more liberal Victorian political set-up was inhibited by a consensus of public opinion as to what could be said and what could not, far stronger and stricter than any legal code. Writers were therefore not inclined to disregard or deliberately break such a social 'code' of propriety in order to describe conditions as they really were among the

lower classes. Gustave Flaubert, for example, was prosecuted by the French censors, on the publication of Madame Bovary, but that was "pour outrage à la morale publique et religieuse" and it was not instigated by public opinion, nor supported by it, on the contrary. There is no doubt that certain passages could be seen then as verging on the obscene, and that religion was mocked, yet it was rumoured that a political reason might have been behind it and that the editor of La Revue de Paris in which the novel was serialised was the object of the attack. He was Laurent Pichat, an outspoken opponent of the regime.

Similarly, all kinds of objections which were made to Zola's own novel, L'Assommoir, related mainly to his attitude towards the conditions of his characters or to his style and as such could never have been made where James's The Princess Casamassima was concerned. James is seen as avoiding instinctively any discussion of the possible moral effects of the social conditions he describes, and he takes every precaution to omit all coarse expressions such as Zola freely used.

As the Saturday Review pointed out in 1866:

French novels differ from ours in so many respects that it is hard to believe that they belong to the same period in civilisation. ⁵⁸

Many other features of the social conditions of the times can, on further examination, be identified as resulting directly from the completely different systems of government.

After the Coup d'Etat of Napoleon III in 1851 state education, like every other institution, became totally subordinated to the authority of the government. Every teacher was required to swear allegiance to the regime and those who

refused to do so were dismissed. Others elected to resign, but as Napoleon III inherited an efficient school system from the time of his uncle, Napoleon I, this was of little consequence. Under the leadership of his remarkable Education Secretary, Victor Duroy, himself a great educationalist, a number of reforms were initiated, aimed at the laïcisation of education, together with the elimination of all school fees. Following the Law of 1867, a girls' school was established in every commune with more than 500 inhabitants, while mixed schools were created to serve the remotest villages. The baccalauréat was reformed in 1864 to reduce the importance of memory-testing, and the whole educational system tried to strike a balance between culture and vocation.

This, in view of the pressures of increased industrialisation, was probably inappropriate, but in L'Assommoir, for instance, one is made aware that for Nana the principal problem is not so much the irrelevance of the education she receives as the corrupting atmosphere in which she lives the rest of the time.

In England, the reforming spirit of Arnold was felt in education at the same time, but the reforms remained largely confined to the public school sector until the Education Act of 1881, which was at least a start at universal primary schooling.

James is certainly criticising implicitly the lack of educational facilities in England by showing the effect on Hyacinth of the combination of an absence of formal education - on the unfair basis of class distinction - with the kind of surreptitious indoctrination which preached that only revolution would improve the lot of the working classes.

Subsequently, of course, Hyacinth receives a belated but

intoxicating education from the Princess which makes him see that his former revolutionary stance was untenable, but this has the result of making him realise how ill-equipped he is to exist in any society.

Fundamentally, English public opinion was not yet prepared for wider access to education to be granted, and moreover it was hostile to the domination of education by the state.

It is interesting to note, bearing this in mind that James believes in the need for reforms similar to those already made in France in order to defeat the risk of revolutionary activities and anarchism but that this is only implicitly shown in The Princess Casamassima, and never expressed, even by other characters in the novel.

The role of religion in the two countries is also worthy of a comparative examination. The swing to the Right which had taken place in France in 1848 had essentially been a bourgeois movement associated with the Church's fear of socialist thinkers such as Proudhon. While certain Christian socialists continued to make their presence felt in associations such as "Le Cercle de la Démocratie", their influence was on the wane, and on the whole Socialism and the Church could be seen as in opposition.

In England, the influence of Christian Socialism, from the publication of Politics for the People in 1848, was much stronger. The movement was led by F.D. Maurice, professor of Theology at King's College, London, in association with Charles Kingsley, the novelist, and Charles Maurice, a scientist.

In 1850, the public conscience was further stirred by Henry Mayhew's revelations of conditions among the urban poor in

what he termed "London's slumland" in The Morning Chronicle. The unfortunate fact though - and perhaps not all that surprisingly - was that the clergy were not really successful among this particular class and that they felt it pointless to try on the whole. As a French observer of the time, Esquiros, noted in an article published in the Revue des Deux Mondes, the custom of pew-renting did not help, and the poor always felt ill-at-ease in church amid well-dressed congregations. 59

Consequently, the kind of well-intentioned, but basically half-hearted and occasionally self-seeking philanthropism of Lady Aurora, in The Princess Casamassima, had become the established norm for much of Victorian society, in fiction as well as in reality, a much satirised attitude for that matter. That in urban conditions religion played a very little part is recognised by James, and he treats it lightly in the novel.

The non-conformist views which were becoming such a force for radical change in parts of Wales and the North of England during the latter part of the century failed to make any visible impact in London, and this further contributed to the success of socialism which presented itself to the urban masses as a kind of substitute religion. This being the case, anarchism could be seen in the same light, making a stronger appeal and attracting the fanatically minded.

In France, there was a clear distinction between town and country as well. The situation in the city, despite the fact that a curé would more likely come, in any case, from a working-class background himself, was not dissimilar from that existing in England. It was a prop for the middle classes in their search for stability

while the working population remained largely beyond the pale. This is shown by the indifference of the priest during the wedding ceremony in L'Assommoir, and his desire to get through an embarrassing ceremony performed for an alien race:

Il dépêcha sa messe, mangeant les phrases latines, se tournant, se baissant, élargissant les bras, en hâte, avec des regards obliques sur les mariés et sur les témoins. 60

Because of his years of training, a priest would be removed from the real problems of the working classes by his acquired manners as well as by his vocation, and he would find it difficult to make contact with the people, even if they came to him.

In England as in France, however, as Sunday was the only free time that the working folk had to relax or enjoy themselves, they were unwilling to spend such precious hours of freedom in religious pursuits, preferring the political meetings where grievances could be aired and championed or, at least in France, the ever-open nearby tavern.

In the area of general morals and conventions, France was considered by the Victorian public in England, as a generally morally lax country, although there were baffling contradictions in their observations. It was recognised that, in France, young girls were kept under strict supervision by their parents, more so than was customary in England. Indeed, as James showed in Daisy Miller, American girls were freer still.

Victorian opinion was also periodically subject to bouts of "Sabbatarianism" where the example of the godless French Sunday was severely criticised, and compared to the quiet atmosphere of its

English counterpart.

An essential problem in both countries was that of prostitution. The major difference between them was that while, during the Second Empire, the "demi-mondaines" as they were usually described in England as well as in France, were found at every level of society, from the elegant hetaïre to the Gervaise-type of common street walker, and on the whole accepted as part of the world as it is, the same did not apply to England.

There, their existence was ignored until much later in the century when the excesses of Edward, Prince of Wales, later Edward VII, meant that courtesans, such as "Skittles", Catherine Walters, became notorious. Then, much of Victorian charity and philanthropy was devoted, as in W. Gladstone's case, to the salvation of prostitutes; attempts were made to reform them and to convert them to respectable life and professions. The so-called "midnight missions", sometimes "moonlight missions", set up in places like the Haymarket in London, supervised by the clergy, and offering meals, were not a success nor were the homes for penitents where a dreadfully strict regime was imposed, making the rescue attempts virtually pointless.

France's attitude to prostitution was, however, seen as much worse, and the glittering life and magnificent apartments, as well as the celebrity achieved by such women as Lola Montez or Cora Pearl, seemed disgraceful to Victorian minds. It was certainly true that they were more admired than reviled in France and, in fact, that the immorality of court ladies such as Madame la princesse de Metternich meant that the dividing line between society and the "demi-monde" was at time a tenuous one,

particularly since the 'genuine' aristocracy, that is to say those who were the descendants of ancien regime titles, abolished during the Revolution, but fondly preserved, made it a point of honour to avoid the imperial court, where all the titles were new.

Zola demonstrates in Nana how easy it was for a prostitute to rise to the highest levels of French society, and enjoy its privileges, because, even if it was fair to say that it was a world of arrivistes or parvenus, many people looked up to them with admiration. Nana attempts to behave like an aristocrat, and lives in a château, but rapidly becomes bored with this kind of existence and returns to Paris, where she goes down the scale with the same rapidity and ultimately dies a squalid death. Her appearance on stage during a play, in some sort of vehicle, and the acclaim of a fashionable Parisian audience, followed by the greetings of a fictional "Prince of Scotland", clearly a likeness of the Prince of Wales, certainly reflects the reality of the period, and echoes the impression given by English literature.

James does not go so far as to discuss prostitution in his novel, but its prevalence is implied when he explains the absence of reasonably paid employment for women, and their status on the lowest ring of the economic ladder even in the hierarchy of the working classes.

Personal female liberty as a normal adjunct of social liberty was also perceived differently in the two countries at the time. Although "universal suffrage" was restored under the laws of the Second Empire, it still did not extend to women; this in fact did not happen until 1946. In England, property

restrictions meant that a smaller proportion of the population was entitled to vote, but the agitation on behalf of what came to be known as the "Woman Question" increased as the century advanced. J.S. Mill, who wrote the famous Treatise on the Subjugation of Women, introduced the first bill for female suffrage in 1867, and the matter was debated almost annually from 1870 until the end of the century. In England, the Married Women's Property Act of 1882 gave women rights to own property, which had hitherto been denied them.

Property rights for women existed, at least for property owned before marriage, under the "régime dotal" in France, where, on the other hand, divorce had been abolished in 1816, and not restored until 1884. Divorce was possible in England, but largely reserved for the rich. However public opinion was simply not prepared for tackling the subject of women's rights at the time, and the overall attitude seems to have been a reflection of Henry James's own in his creation of Miss Birdseye in The Bostonians, as a caricature of a feminist, giving the impression that agitators for women's rights were usually fanatical and sometimes demented busybodies.

No-one could deny, certainly, that in his sympathetic portrait of Gervaise in L'Assommoir, Zola was extending the range of understanding of the problems faced by women in society, even if there is no explicit condemnation of a society which forced them to lead such pathetic lives.

James, by contrast, presents a portrait of a woman of one of "the greatest houses" who is, by virtue of her exalted position, able to exercise control over both men and material

possessions. The contrast between the Princess and Gervaise, who had few legal rights and no means of escape from the drunken Coupeau, could not be more complete.

Judicial separation [séparation de corps] was possible in France then, if the wife could prove that the husband kept a concubine in the family house, if he was guilty of grossly insulting or ill treating his wife, or if he had been condemned for a crime involving the loss of civil rights. The fact that such an idea does not occur to Gervaise, or at least that it only occurs in the context of a hopelessly idealistic attempt, perhaps to go away to Belgium with Goujet at one stage, is a sign of how impracticable, if not downright impossible, such a course of action would be.

The fundamental problem for women such as Gervaise, and for example, Rose Muniment in The Princess Casamassima, is that they are too hopelessly trapped by overcrowding, overwork and consequent ill health or lassitude, lack of ready money, ever to be able to make such a momentous decision.

The next question is really whether, considering the different social conditions prevailing in England and in France, it is possible to explain logically the relationship between these conditions and the direction of efforts made to improve them or escape from them in some other way.

The first consideration in this context could be the political regime. In France, it is worth noting that, in 1848, Louis Napoleon polled more than four million more votes than his nearest rival, General Cavaignac. He saw himself as a socialist, and was considered the champion of universal

suffrage by the masses; certainly, he was interested in social reforms and he had ideas. On December 21st, 1851, he was confirmed in office by seven million voters. Only six hundred thousand people had voted against it. As Renan wrote:

La majorité de la France était parfaitement contente. Il avait ce qu'il voulait, l'ordre et la paix. La liberté manquait, il est vrai; la vie politique était des plus faibles, mais cela ne blessait qu'une minorité d'un cinquième ou d'un sixième de la nation, et encore dans cette minorité faut-il distinguer un petit nombre d'hommes instruits, intelligents, vraiment libéraux, d'une foule réfléchie, animée de cet esprit séditieux qui a pour unique programme d'être toujours en opposition avec le gouvernement et de chercher à le renverser. 61

In other words, the majority of people was satisfied. It was left to intellectuals like Victor Hugo, and later Emile Zola, to think of the importance of freedom, or to attack more systematically and actively the government in power. For the rest, either they had little interest in politics, or they felt that the new electoral system gave them a chance to change things if they wanted to. Every male over twenty-one who had resided for six months in the commune and had not lost his civic rights through a criminal condemnation, was entitled to vote. Secret voting was the rule, so that it would have been very unusual for voters to be influenced or intimidated, as J.E.C. Bodley explains, in his France during the Third Republic:

The best proof that neither bribery, treating nor intimidation exists in an acute form at French elections is that the legislation which penalises those unlawful acts dates from the beginning of the Second Empire, and has been found to suffice for the cases that have arisen under the Republic. 62

It was a different story in England, where, during much of the nineteenth century, elections such as the one described in The Pickwick Papers were more or less the norm, involving bribery, various forms of cheating and much drunkenness. The overwhelming impression given of the reason for the greater emphasis on revolutionary politics in England can be traced to what Henry James detected, and indeed bitterly condemned, which was a sense of suffocating and stultifying class system. This perpetuated the concept of privileges which mainly benefited the rich or the members of the aristocracy - often the same people - and which was resented as patently unfair.

While there was probably a closer surveillance of the citizens by the French police than ever occurred in England, it seems that resentment was far stronger in this country. It is noticeable, for instance, that in L'Assommoir, the policeman who supports the imperial regime openly, Poisson, is primarily a figure of fun.

Finally, the freedom of the press which was in France limited by the decree of 1852 (which remained in force until 1868) did not suffer from similar restrictions in England. As Zola's own experience with his novel L'Assommoir tended to show, the Third Republic retained much of the severity of the Second Empire, mainly because it feared a return of the lawlessness of the days of the Commune. Writers therefore became circumspect but were not for all that silenced, and this, perhaps paradoxically, defused the atmosphere to a large extent.

In England, there was virtually no limit to the freedom of

expression, especially after the abolition of stamp duty, in the year 1861. Public opinion, however, was inherently conservative, and in deference to it, writers and journalists submitted themselves to a kind of self-censorship, which made them seem far too ready to accept complacently a rather ill-defined status quo.

The reality of prevailing social conditions was more of a ferment of discontent than appeared on the surface, all the more so because of the lid which was kept firmly clamped over it. There were, in fact, some outbursts which can give an idea of the true state of affairs and which James accurately highlighted in The Princess Casamassima. Thus, it seems fair to say that in England the efforts to escape from the appalling poverty and suffering tended, in the lower classes, to be political in nature, hence James's study of the rise of anarchism.

In France, it would appear that the urban populations looked for solace in addiction to drink, and that Zola's work accurately reflects this. Both authors exposed different consequences of the same dissatisfaction with the conditions of life in both capital cities. It seems that in both cases, moreover, the aim was to assist in the process of making known to the middle-class reading public the true nature and the true extent of the plight of those who lived and worked in urban surroundings.

In that, it has been shown that both Zola and James were able to make accurate use of their sources, after extensive enquiries, and that in doing so, they probably were instrumental in the long term in awakening public consciousness, and in

bringing about much-needed reforms.

NOTES TO CHAPTER IV

¹The Princess Casamassima (1886). Page references are to Penguin edition, 1977.

L'Assommoir (1876). Page references are to Gallimard edition, Paris, 1978.

²Oeuvres Complètes, Vol. II, p. 297.

³Le Corsaire, 22 décembre 1872.

⁴Le Bien Public, 13 avril 1876. Subtitled "Etude de mœurs parisiennes".

⁵L'Assommoir, Oeuvres Complètes, Vol. III. Notice, p. 546.

⁶La Gazette de France, 19 avril 1876.

⁷See Filmographie: L'Assommoir. Zola, Colette Becker, p. 78.

⁸Zola, Mes Haines, p. 219.

⁹Ms. 10, 345, F^o S, Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris.

¹⁰Goncourt, Germinie Lacerteux, Preface, p. 1.

¹¹Becker, op. cit., p. 19.

¹²Ibid., pp. 19-20.

¹³L'Assommoir, p. 210.

¹⁴G. Duveau, La Condition Ouvrière en France sous le Second Empire, pp. 414, 415.

¹⁵See Becker, Chapter 2, La Condition Ouvrière en France dans la Seconde Moitié du XIX^{ème} Siècle.

¹⁶Duveau, op. cit., p. 498.

¹⁷Duveau, p. 499.

¹⁸L'Assommoir, p. 62.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 507.

²⁰Quoted in Denise LeBlond-Zola, Emile Zola raconté par sa fille, p. 103. Correspondance, Zola, Vol. II, 1868-1877, p. 422.

- ²¹ Oeuvres Complètes, Vol. III, L'Assommoir, p. 946.
- ²² LeBlond-Zola, op. cit., p. 105.
- ²³ Ibid., p. 106.
- ²⁴ Ibid., p. 106.
- ²⁵ Denis Poulot, Le Sublime, p. 6.
- ²⁶ Ibid., p. 6.
- ²⁷ Ibid., p. 11.
- ²⁸ Ibid., p. 16.
- ²⁹ Ibid., p. 17.
- ³⁰ Ibid., p. 24.
- ³¹ Ibid., p. 26.
- ³² Ibid., p. 33.
- ³³ Ibid., p. 44.
- ³⁴ Ibid., pp. 53-4.
- ³⁵ Ibid., p. 138.
- ³⁶ Ibid., p. 67.
- ³⁷ Ibid., Conclusion (final page).
- ³⁸ A Delvau, Dictionnaire de la Langue Verte, Introduction, p. iii.
- ³⁹ Ibid., p. 14.
- ⁴⁰ Paul LeRoy-Beaulieu, Le Travail des Femmes au XIXème Siècle, pp. 301-3. Quoted on p. 88 of Joanna Richardson, La Vie Parisienne.
- ⁴¹ LeRoy-Beaulieu, Le Travail des Femmes au XIXème Siècle, pp. 117-8. Quoted in La Vie Parisienne, p. 94.
- ⁴² La Vie parisienne, p. 97.
- ⁴³ S.G. Burchell, Upstart Empire, p. 107.
- ⁴⁴ LeBlond-Zola, op. cit., p. 108.
- ⁴⁵ Duveau, La Condition Ouvrière en France sous le Second Empire, p. 422.

⁴⁶ Ibid., pp. 422-3. Quoted from A. Audiganne, Populations Ouvrières, Vol. I, pp. 61-2.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 429.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 515.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 522.

⁵⁰ L'Assommoir, p. 60.

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 34.

⁵² Duveau, op. cit., p. 550.

⁵³ Anderson, James and Zola: The Question of Naturalism, p. 348.

⁵⁴ Mearns and Preston, The Bitter Cry of Outcast London, p. 4.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 3.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 11.

⁵⁷ Duveau. op. cit., p. 152.

⁵⁸ Saturday Review, Vol. XXI, 26th May 1866, p. 615.

⁵⁹ Revue des Deux Mondes, Paris, 15 décembre 1865.

⁶⁰ L'Assommoir, p. 91.

⁶¹ Renan, La Réforme intellectuelle et morale de la France, p. 16. Quoted on p. 99 of J.C. Green's A Comparative View of French and British Civilization. 1850-1870.

⁶² J.C. Bodley, France during the Third Republic, p. 371.

CHAPTER V

The Literary Application of Social Themes in Henry James and Emile Zola.

The relationship between literary theory and social conditions is difficult to define precisely, but a clear link exists between the similar developments in England and France, which were outlined in the preceding chapter, and the kinds of literary theories which they helped to produce.

Hippolyte Taine was the pioneer of the predominantly French perspective which saw man's evolution as conditioned by the forces that govern all nature, so that he is the product of "la race, le milieu et le moment", a view which led directly to Zola's own beliefs, as also did Taine's theory that vice and virtue were nothing more than substances like vitriol or sugar, and that they could therefore be assessed in the same way.

In England, Matthew Arnold was evidently influenced by similar considerations in his Essay on the Function of Criticism, dated 1864, which appears to echo some of Taine's recently published ideas. In a review of Sainte-Beuve's Portraits contemporains, in the Academy, he praises him for "carrying into letters [...] the ideas and methods of scientific natural enquiry".¹ Such an attitude to literature must have appealed

to the Victorians in general, if not to James himself, since their belief in the inevitable march of progress required an enterprising spirit of enquiry, even if the findings, as in Darwin's Origin of Species (1859) and Renan's Life of Jesus (1863), were not always to their liking.

However, it is important to recognise that there was an influential line of Victorian thought which opposed the concentration on facts and scientific enquiry as a means of discovering the truth, seen for example in Dickens's portrait of Gradgrind in Hard Times. Taine was impressed by the emphasis on facts shown in England in preference to the kind of general ideas popular in France, and certainly there was little inclination there for the adoption of theories to be used to literary ends. Nothing could compare, for instance, to Zola's wholehearted adhesion to the views of Claude Bernard, perhaps without sufficient scientific open-mindedness.

Henri Bergson had praised Bernard's theories, pointing out that they expressed a close collaboration between facts and the general ideas elicited from them - ideas which could be abandoned at any time if the facts proved this to be necessary.² Zola's weakness was that, having adopted such theories, he was very reluctant to discard them, and in the end, after completing the Rougon-Macquart series, he concentrated on the theoretic at the expense of the real social conditions to the extent that his novels seem to be atrophied as a result.

In James's case, naturalistic methods of relating real social conditions were used, as a kind of literary experiment for a time, while it seemed to have some value in his personal

development as a novelist, but he later returned to a more private labyrinth, so to speak, once the method tried showed signs of limiting his scope for further developments.

In spite of the relative tolerance which, as has been shown, existed in French society in the latter half of the nineteenth century, it is still fair to say, as F.W.J. Hemmings does, in his introduction to Culture and Society in France, 1848-1898:

The period of fifty years surveyed here seems to have been characterised, as no previous period was in France, by a marked hostility on the part of all the great artists - the writers and the painters mostly - towards the society in which they lived and for which they were obliged to work. A deep chasm yawned between the creative genius on the one side, and the vast majority of ordinary citizens on the other, whether they belonged to the working class, too hard driven by economic pressures or too poorly educated to appreciate the works of art and literature that were being produced, or whether they were members of the middle and upper classes, who in disappointment and incomprehension turned for preference to purveyors of inferior art-substitutes. ³

That there was a feeling of disaffection towards the arts at the time is in no doubt, and that this, in turn, led the artists either to reject or to mock "le grand public" is equally obvious, but what is interesting is the fact that Hemmings blames this on a mixture of social and political reasons. He claims that the collapse of democratic socialism in 1848 proved mortifying for the intellectual classes, and that it led to an abandonment of political activity on their part, on the one hand, and on the other, to the rise of a strong attachment to materialistic values in the middle class, so that artists found themselves pushed to the sidelines, except where they could prove entertaining to the

middle-class bourgeoisie, always fond of light relief to occupy its leisure time.

Even if one were to agree with Hemmings's explanation, one would need to note that Zola did, at least, profess to see some good in the society in which he lived - if only to the extent that it contained within itself the seeds of a better future. James, critical as he was of English society, had a similar feeling that this was a world which offered the most potential for improvement, which proves that the events of 1848 could not be seen as the only cause of the French attitude towards artists.

In the same way, Hemmings describes the autocratic censorship of the Second Empire as the "blue-pencil regime", and it is true that whether a certain play could be staged or not, for instance, depended on government permission. Yet Alexandre Dumas fils insisted that such a censorship was a useful tool, as it compelled playwrights to use their judgement and to exercise restraint, and left them free to relax once censorship was satisfied. This seems a rather strange comment, although it must be admitted that a play such as La Dame aux Camélias, which sailed through France's strict censorship, could not be shown in England, because of a more subtle process of public disapproval for that kind of subject-matter.

The vast majority of plays produced in France at that time were primarily suited to public taste for light entertainment, and the quintessential art-form of the Second Empire was the operetta. This meant that even serious plays had to have some musical interludes in order to please the spectators, and Zola describes some of the debasing effects of this fashion in the

novel Nana, where a play becomes purely the vehicle in which prostitutes can disport and exhibit themselves. In fact, many simplified versions of Nana itself were produced for the music halls within a short time of the novel's publication, just because of his enormous success.

This could not have been done where serious literary journalism was concerned, despite the fact that there was not a dividing line, such as exists to-day, between the serious novelist and the literary journalist. Novelists such as Zola were, at least initially, literary journalists for financial reasons since this was the only way in which they could make enough money to live on. As 'journalists', however, they were very vulnerable to censorship.

James, on the other hand, had given up serious journalism quite early on, when he realised that there was no real market for it in the Anglo-American world. He saw his 'rejection' by the periodical Galaxy as final, and never returned to it. In that kind of society, to use Hemmings's own expression, the artist was "seen as a pariah"⁴, yet a pariah who could prophesy more accurately than others the future shape of society.

The need for such new breed of men was, it seems, commonly felt in France, judging from the Goncourt Brothers's comment in their novel, Les Hommes de Lettres, that contemporary French society was in need of an invasion of barbarians who could infuse new life, physiologically, to an enervated and exhausted country. They went so far as to speculate that the most suitable individuals for this task might be the French workers themselves.

This view could foreshadow the Commune uprising, and even suggest one of the possible causes for it, in the same way as Zola

himself did, in his novel La Débâcle, where he laid the blame for the excesses of the Commune, as well as for the final defeat of the Franco-Prussian war, on the mediocrity of the Second Empire.

There is no doubt that James never had the intention of condemning the society in which he lived to that extent, but some similarity can be discerned, if one considers how far he went in his criticisms in The Princess Casamassima. The attack was certainly more veiled and diffuse, but it was hardly less severe.

The point made by the Goncourts regarding an enervated and exhausted society seems to find an echo in Zola's L'Assommoir, and perhaps in the whole collection of the Rougon-Macquart novels, and, as the century nears its end, it will become a general theme of decadence - or indeed "décadisme" - as Verlaine will call it. This dominated French consciousness after the eclipse of Naturalism, and probably originated with Joris-Karl Huysmans, once a disciple of Zola, and his extraordinary novel A Rebours (1884).

As far as Zola was concerned, his vision of decadence is primarily physiological, which makes his warnings of punishment to come all the more strange and, despite the fact that he would never have agreed to that interpretation, very near Huysmans's later religious mysticism. The leading characters in the Rougon-Macquart series, whether they are businessmen or members of the bourgeoisie, artists or labourers, are all vitiated by a streak of degeneracy which can be traced back through the generations to the co-founders of the family, Adélaïde, wife of the first Rougon, an hysteric, and Macquart, the father of her two children, a drunkard.

This streak is further emphasised by the inability of the family to produce children, and one notices that, for various

reasons, there are very few descendants of the family left by the end of the series. Gervaise even bears a physical mark of this degeneracy in the shape of her malformed foot, which causes her to be nicknamed "Clip-clop".

There is, however, a vital difference between Zola's attitude to that decadence and that of the other writers of the period. While they welcomed it as a sign that this would force artists to reject such a diseased and pernicious world, as Des Esseintes did in A Rebours, in order to produce ever more refined and beautiful works of art, Zola refused such a way out.

His efforts all tended to awaken public consciousness, and to help in establishing a sane, healthy and just society. The fact that, in his later novels, he attempted, albeit unsuccessfully, to depict versions of such an ideal society, amply demonstrates this. His vehement condemnation of the Second Empire is not altogether destructive, it is not even really aimed at this particular regime, it is a loud cry of caution, an urgent effort to make the French aware of the need to reform if there is to be a future for them.

This explains the violence of his descriptions and his use of alcohol as a symbol of the working classes' degeneracy, since its dangers are readily recognisable. Death caused by a drunken fall, for instance, is not an unusual occurrence and, at a time when the notion of heredity became a scientifically demonstrable fact, physical and mental deformities resulting from alcohol abuse could be seen as a direct consequence, as obvious as the poverty engendered by wages being spent in the local bar.

This made it possible to show the ravages of alcohol wrought

upon the weakest and the more pitiful members of society, the women and the children, thus increasing the strength of the symbol and emphasising the necessity to heed Zola's warning.

There is, however, another theory regarding Zola's use of alcoholism as a symbol, put forward by Susanna Barrows in her recent book on a related subject, Distorting Mirrors. She indicates that public opinion had, in France, become increasingly concerned with the psychology of the masses, as a result of the various upheavals which accompanied the overthrow of the Second Empire until the creation of the Third Republic. Gustave Le Bon had indeed just published a treatise on La Psychologie des Foules, which not only blamed the 'crowd' for social disorders but singled out two of its most violent elements: women and alcoholics, and Barrows suggests that in its fear, the middle classes demanded scapegoats - women and alcoholics being ideal for that role. This seemed all the more likely since rumours were rife about "pétroleuses" having roamed the streets during the Commune, setting buildings on fire, while, it was also claimed, the first action of a mob had been to break into cellars and drink the wine on the spot.

Barrows concludes from the above facts that:

If Taine was the historian of crowd psychology, Zola was its poet. 5

While this statement is certainly true in expressing Zola's ability to create vivid and exhilarating crowd scenes, it seems inaccurate to accuse him of perpetuating false myths about the lower classes. His crowds, in L'Assommoir, especially in the scene where they visit the Louvre in groups, are certainly not a

threat to the bourgeoisie, and this, despite the ironic fact that if they were not partially anaesthetised by the wine they had drunk, they could constitute a fearsome body.

Zola's talent for depicting large crowd scenes has often been praised by critics, and this must be seen as a testimony of his factual realism in that connection.

His depiction of the evils of alcoholism is similarly factual, as we have seen. What needs to be noted here, though, is that society at large appears to be unaware of the problem, and certainly unconcerned by it. Even its most directly affected members accept the situation with indolence and equanimity. From the moment when he describes the early morning workers on their way to Paris, at the very beginning of L'Assommoir, Zola makes the reader aware of the temptation which the proximity of the bars represent for them:

Cependant, aux deux coins de la rue des Poissonniers, à la porte des deux marchands de vin qui enlevaient leurs volets, des hommes ralentissaient le pas et, avant d'entrer, ils restaient au bord du trottoir, avec des regards obliques sur Paris, les bras mous, déjà gagnés à une journée de flâne. 6

He expresses the seemingly innocuous nature of this pastime, as tolerantly seen by society, in the quite agreeable terms of "une journée de flâne", only to create a greater shock and sense of horror, when he comes to describe the full horrors of alcoholism at the time of the death of Coupeau, for example:

Là-dedans, Coupeau dansait et gueulait. Un vrai chienlit de la Courtille, avec sa blouse en lambeaux et ses membres qui battaient l'air; mais un chienlit pas drôle, oh! non, un chienlit dont le chahut effrayant faisait dresser tout le poil du corps. 7

The nature of his warning to society is unambiguous at all stages of the novel, from the manner in which he 'justifies' the addiction to drink, as being the only solace for the workers' monotonous drudgery, heavy manual labour and lack of education, to the guilelessness which leads these ignorant people to copy their betters: "une prune, rien qu'une, dans le seul but d'arroser ensemble la ferme résolution d'une bonne conduite"⁸ is the explanation that Lantier gives for leading Coupeau to La Petite Civette pub. Contemporary society could not help but recognise this custom of "arroser" any contract or newly-taken decision as perfectly normal.

Therefore, two main themes intermingle here, the need to lighten the load of the working classes and improve their living conditions, as well as the need to set them a good example. An effort was certainly made later in the century and laws were passed which would ensure a better education for all, mainly when Jules Ferry was Minister for Education, in the early 1880's; at the same time, Louis Blanc and other socialists called upon the state to assume responsibility for social reforms, outlining the possibility of setting up various associations of production, the "ateliers sociaux", some of which were initiated then with limited success. Temperance movements were also started, but they certainly did not gain ground in France as they did, for instance, in England and in America.

Turning towards England now, Henry James certainly started work on The Princess Casamassima as a result of his observations

and of his feelings of compassion for the lower classes of the London society. He states himself that ideas came to him as he watched the people going about their daily business, and that "it proceeded quite directly [...] from the habit and interest of walking the street".⁹

It is true that he was more readily influenced by other writers than Zola, and some of his critics make the valid point that his sources did not come from observation alone. It is worth considering criticisms of this nature now, in order to establish whether James was, as they imply, only interested in writing a novel that would sell, or whether he really had a social message he wanted to impart.

The first of this line of critics was perhaps Oscar Cargill who stressed the importance of his literary indebtedness in The Princess Casamassima: a Critical Reappraisal (1956). It also appears that, later; as a result of a chance remark of his in a graduate seminar, Daniel Lerner studied the similarity between James's Princess and Turgenev's Virgin Soil, from which he concluded that:

Henry James borrowed wholesale from
Turgenev in plot, story and characters.¹⁰

W.H. Tilley, in his more detailed analysis, The Background of The Princess Casamassima, also notes the fact that the basic idea of James's novel is the same as that of Virgin Soil.

Virgin Soil is certainly concerned, just as The Princess Casamassima is, with revolutionaries who mean well but lack the single-mindedness which they would need in order to carry through their principles and translate them into action to their logical

ends. It is, nevertheless, difficult to agree that mere literary indebtedness, not to say virtual plagiarism, could explain the power of James's novel and its long-term success. He had certainly read Turgenev's Virgin Soil, and mentions this fact in a letter to T.S. Perry, but he had found it somewhat uninteresting on the whole:

The book will disappoint you, as it did me. It has many fine things, but I think is the weakest of his long stories (quite!). 11

It is likely then that James took some of the "fine things" in the Russian novel, and incorporated them in his own version of revolutionary London, using them to complement his own experiences and observations, thus raising them from the personal to the general and giving them greater significance.

Similarly, F.R. Leavis's contention that The Princess Casamassima only had any merit insofar as it echoed Dickens, has long since been discounted by scholars,¹² although it is quite possible to see a likeness between Rose Muniment and Jenny Wren. But then, Mrs. Jellaby or other "philanthropists" found in the works of Dickens can be recognised as so many Lady Auroras. These vague literary reminiscences, if they exist at all, belong more rightly to the influence of things remembered, as would childhood adventures, such as a long ago visit to Sing Sing prison being held to have inspired the Millbank prison episode. 13

Zola, in that sense, would appear a stronger influence, having given James the taste for precise note-takings as a necessary preliminary to writing a novel, so that the actual visit to Millbank prison, while being James's idea, could be said to have come from Zola's realist theories. This in no way detracts

from the social reality of James's novel. It is even more directly inspired by the immediate reality of contemporary London, since James could not depend on earlier sociological studies as Zola did. Poulot and Delvau had no counterpart in England, unfortunately.

James was not unaware of the political significance of the radical movements in England, and he had also heard his father discuss the arguments behind Charles Fourier's theories concerning socio-economic problems. His letters show how radical his own views were at the time and how concerned he was by the difficult living conditions of the more disadvantaged members of society. ¹⁴

It is also important to remember that he had been close to Turgenev in Paris when he, Turgenev, was writing his study of revolutionary pursuit, and that he heard Turgenev relate in turn how he had lived with Mikhail Alexandrovitch Bakunin earlier in Berlin, Bakunin being the Russian aristocrat who fled into exile because of his revolutionary views as a disciple of both Proudhon and Marx, and who served as a model for Zola's Souvarine in Germinal.

Turgenev had also met Piotr Kropotkin, the leading anarchist who was then living in Paris and who was the author of Paroles d'un Révolté (1885), and there is ample evidence that James and Turgenev corresponded regularly after James settled in London, and that they subsequently met, so that Kropotkin would have been known, at least by name, by James, when he came to live near London, following a term spent in a French prison in 1886.

More was to come, and the biographer of Mrs. Robert Louis Stevenson reveals that the intercession of James had led to a meeting between Mrs. Stevenson and Kropotkin:

[...] At the urgent request of Henry James, she consented to meet him, and found him to be a most charming person. 15

which must mean that James had, once again, done an exercise in fact-finding, and was knowledgeable about Kropotkin, as well as, probably, well-disposed towards his views.

In his book, A Little Tour in France (1885), James shows that he was well acquainted with French left-wing newspapers. He refers to a bomb outrage which took place in Lyons:

Of course, there had been arrests and incarcerations, and the Intransigeant and the Rappel were filled with the echoes of the explosion. The tone of these organs is rarely edifying, and it has never been less so than on this occasion. I wondered, as I looked through them, whether I was losing all my radicalism; and then I wondered whether, after all, I had any to lose. 16

And here, we find him equally knowledgeable, although less well-disposed, towards revolutionary activities.

The inventory of James's library shows that he possessed a large collection of controversial texts, amongst others, copies of Théophile Gautier's Tableau de Sièges (1871), and Jules Zeller's Les Tribuns et les Révolutions en Italie (1874). He had earlier been very enthusiastic about George Sand, whose personal style of socialism he admired, and he had some of her political novels, together with the seminal revolutionary story, Jacques Vingtras, by Jules Vallès, which he described curiously as "odious but remarkable". 17

In connection with James's library, Cargill makes the

suggestion that James may well have personally taken his books to the bookbinders and thereby come to know a type of people who, by tradition, were anarchistically-minded. This seems quite attractive insofar as it is true that bookbinders tended to have and express such views, and because it would fit in well with James's interest in "personal research". It is only fair, however, to point out that there is no evidence for that fact, and indeed that there is a letter in existence which states that he has "just sent 100 vols. to the bookbinders" (my emphasis). 18

Even so, it is no coincidence that James chose this particular trade for Hyacinth, and that he makes the point that despite the fact that bookbinders are ordinary workers, their job brings them into contact with the ferment of the most advanced intellectual ideas.

Finally, James's ability to distinguish between the various factions of radicals shows an intimate knowledge of the situation. The "radical of 1848", Poupin, may possibly have been inspired by "a fierce little Jacobin" that he met in Carcassonne:

Such a personage helps one to understand the radicalism of France, the revolutions, the barricades, the sinister passion for theories . . . It is yet untouched by the desire which one finds in the Englishman, in proportion as he rises in the world, to approximate to the figure of a gentleman. 19

This last comment explains Hyacinth's attitude, of course, since the conviction that he should have been a gentleman is partly what drives him to become an anarchist, and it is his inability to belong to either the working class or the middle class, or indeed the upper class, which ultimately destroys him.

Paul Muniment represents quite a different kind of revolutionary; he is the working-class Englishman who considers society unfair to the honest working man, and his main source of appeal is to the Princess. Hoffendahl is a shadowy Kropotkin-style of anarchist, and his unsubstantial figure, even if it does not add anything to the novel itself, contributes to the portrait gallery of those individuals yearning for violent action. Had he been less indistinct and able to melt in the shadows, his ability to operate would have been curtailed, and his power to threaten society lessened.

Moreover, James held strong social and political views, and he felt that a quiet belief that "all is for the best in the best of all possible worlds" was to the detriment of social progress:

Transitory organisation of the actual social body [is essential]. The only respectable state of mind is to constantly express one's dissatisfaction with it. 20

The kind of society which he saw in England was struggling with years of agricultural depression, brought on by the introduction of massive grain crops from the U.S.A. and the consequent widespread drift of population from the land to urban factories. An upheaval of this kind, and on this scale, was bound to produce the same types of pressure towards dissatisfaction and resulting anarchy which had in France caused strikes and riots, but which in England tended to remain seething below the surface.

James had in fact noted that, even in France, revolts were only like the tip of an iceberg, while resentment often proved more dangerous for being hidden. As he wrote to his brother William during a visit to Paris, in 1872:

The want of comprehension of the real moral situation in France leaves one unsatisfied. Beneath all this neatness and coquetry, you seem to smell the Commune suppressed, but seething ... 21

This impression of a suppressed and seething underworld was transferred from Paris to London, quite justifiably, and the pull of heredity was reinforced by giving Hyacinth a French mother, as this could explain some of his "French" reactions to the situations he encountered in The Princess Casamassima.

Actual social events were readily available to inspire James, the most significant, perhaps, being the assassination of Czar Alexander II of Russia in March, 1881, as this was a signal for a series of bomb throwing and other assassinations. These were to mark the subsequent decade, in England as well as on the continent. The murders of Lord Frederick Cavendish, Chief Secretary for Ireland, and of his undersecretary, Thomas Burke, in Dublin's Phoenix Park, in May 1882, shocked public opinion in England at the time, while the series of explosions in London most probably gave James the impetus to write a revolutionary novel.

In January 1885, when James had actually signed the contract for the novel, he certainly felt very pessimistic about the state of Britain:

The country is gloomy, anxious, and London reflects its gloom. Westminster Hill and the Tower were half blown up two days ago by Irish dynamiters. 22

And this explains why his attitude towards the aristocracy in England bears a close resemblance to Zola's own towards the 'nouvelle noblesse' of the Second Empire:

The condition of that body [the English aristocracy] seems to me to be in many

ways very much the same rotten and collapsible one as that of the French aristocracy before the Revolution - minus cleverness and conversation; or perhaps, it's more like the heavy, congested and depraved Roman world upon which the barbarians came down. In England, the Huns and Vandals will have to come up - from the black depths of the (in the people) enormous misery. [...] At all events, much of English life is grossly materialistic and wants blood-letting. 23

From the French aristocracy, that of the Ancien Régime, or that of Napoleon III, down to the Romans at the time of the decadence, the feelings expressed by James sound strangely familiar after a study of French society in connection with Zola's work; even the hoped-for arrival of the barbarians to bring new blood to a decayed society awakens echoes.

It is all the more significant, therefore, to discover that James, after all, and very much for the same reasons as Zola, did not welcome the revolutionary dream of the annihilation of civilisation, and that he felt the need to issue a stern warning to society, pointing out the real danger in which it stood because of its very corruption.

In a different form, a similar message was passed on by the reports published in The Times, and it is clear that a genuine threat existed at the time and James was alluding to an existing concept of evolutionary violence. This is one of the points made by Tilley in his study of The Princess Casamassima and it seems perfectly valid. It has however been disputed by some critics, among them Yvor Winters who explains:

The trouble appears to the present writer to be that, as a motivating force for a

two-volume novel, especially a novel which purports to spread so vast a canvas for the representation of various levels of society, these "vague motions, sounds and symptoms" have little more force or dignity than a small boy under a sheet on Hallowe'en; they repeatedly approach the ludicrous: the adult in broad daylight, that is the reader of a Jamesian novel, is unlikely to experience terror without admitting a good reason. 24

It is true that each individual reacts differently, and that novels, or films for that matter, which create feelings of terror for some may make others laugh in scornful disbelief. This is, however, merely a subjective reaction, and it should not be used, in the absence of substantial arguments, to discredit the authenticity of what is presented to the reader or to the spectator.

The previous chapter and the present one have furnished detailed evidence for what Lionel Trilling aptly sums up in one sentence:

There is not a political event of The Princess Casamassima, not a detail of oath or mystery, or danger, which is not confirmed by multitudinous record. 25

What James's imagination supplied, of course, was the detailed planning for the various anarchist bombings, since it is in the nature of such things that they must remain a secret, but there is nothing in his description of events which contradicts the factual accounts as reported for instance in The Times.

In addition, he was careful to remain within the boundaries imposed by the sense of conformity of English society as epitomised by The Times reports.

On March 11, 1881, the main section of the above daily

was devoted to providing a background for the events which had led up to the assassination of Czar Alexander II. It traced the history of nihilism from the Treaty of Berlin, via the founding of the secret society known as "The Will of the People" in 1879, to previous attacks on the Czar's life on a Moscow train as well as at the Winter Palace.

The point of the article seems to have been to prove that the assassination had not been an isolated incident, and that such outrages could happen at any time and to any head of state wherever "the will of the people" led them to revolt.

The assassination of the Czar, though perpetrated by the Nihilists of Russia, appears to have been instigated by an international society, having for its watchword the murder of Monarchs and the overthrow of Governments. 26

Later, on May 8, 1882, commenting on the Dublin assassinations, The Times linked Fenians and Nihilists. The note of warning was clear, and it was timely, as explosions followed explosions, hitting underground trains, demolishing part of Victoria Station, Scotland Yard, damaging St. James's Square and Nelson's Column, and even, in 1885, the House of Commons, Westminster Hall and the Tower of London, to say nothing of an attempt to blow up the offices of The Times itself in March 1883.

It was also reported that a New York newspaper, The Irish World, had offered a reward for the assassination of the Prince of Wales, so that by July 1885, which is, according to James, when he started work on The Princess Casamassima, he could hardly have been accused of scandal-mongering.

Any other outbreak in Europe was seen as part of the same

underground current of violence perpetrated by uncontrollable working-class mobs. The Times lumped together the Ultimati, the Philadelphians, the Nihilists, the Communists and the Fenians and 'exposed' them as threats to the security of decent society. ²⁷ It soon added to these the Socialists, Syndicalists, Blanquists and Reformists which were attacking the Third Republic and occasionally rioting in Paris, especially during the latter part of 1884.

In February of the same year, a demonstration of several thousand unemployed had been organised in London by H.M. Hyndman, which must have been very much like "the more systematic out-of-door agitation" referred to by Captain Sholto in The Princess Casamassima, and at which the existence of a secret society for revenge on the upper classes was discussed.

There were also riots in Frankfurt and Amsterdam during the same year, while political plotters were arrested in Switzerland and Denmark. Such happenings tended to confirm Hyacinth's statement in The Princess that:

Under the feet of each one of us, the revolution lives and works [...]. The invisible, impalpable wires are everywhere. ²⁸

The impressions gained by both the readers of The Times and by those of The Princess Casamassima must have been very similar, and the events recounted equally worrying and unnerving to a Victorian society confused by a variety of terminology and trying to hide under a stable surface a dreadful fear of the unknown.

While The Times and James's work were identical in their genuine reporting of real actions, and in the 'respectable'

attitude they adopted towards such events, there is however some difference in interpretation. The Times expressed on every occasion a very conservative viewpoint, in that it was totally opposed to all popular demands and that, by a skilled juxtaposition of those who called for reforms and those who advocated violence, it blurred the social issues.

It explicitly condemned the "Socialist" tendency, character and effects of the recent legislation which had been moving towards an improvement in working conditions as so much political demagoguery:

The mania for curing everything by social action has been endemic for a long while past, and the politicians are only utilising it. 29

The point was reinforced, as the newspaper added immediately afterwards that it would like to be able to wipe out "the whole band of dynamitards, regardless of nationality", in order to ensure that the readers did not make any distinction between reform and revolution.

James, on the other hand, because of the nature of the novel, was able to move between the world of the readers of The Times, as it were, and the revolutionaries themselves. While Hyacinth is under the spell of the anarchists, he sees them in a sympathetic light which is reflected by James's comments, and even later, when he is largely cured of his mistakes, there is still the Princess who can say with confidence:

The old ferocious selfishness must come down. They won't come down gracefully, so they must just be assisted!. 30

Admittedly, the Princess is portrayed as somewhat hypocritical,

but there is no doubt that, just as Hyacinth regains at her words some of his old romantic attachment to revolt, the reader does, with James's complicity, realise that the iniquitous disparity in the social conditions of the period create the kind of climate in which such words are acted upon.

In order to involve the reader to that extent, it was of course necessary to keep as close as possible to the actuality of the time, and this is another reason which would prevent James from indulging in flights of fancy in the novel. Tilley suggests that not only were the events "real" but that a number of characters in the novel were also taken from life. He refers in particular to Friedrich August Reinsdorf as having been the model for Hoffendahl, arguing that Reinsdorf was also a German and that he belonged to the most secretive tradition of anarchism.

This is certainly possible, and there seems to be too little detailed information available now, regarding Reinsdorf, either to support or contradict this view although there is no evidence that he himself took part in anarchist outrages, being more likely to have incited others - like Hoffendahl - to act. The correspondent of The Times wrote that his behaviour showed the "festering discontent [...] below the surface of German society", ³¹ which is very near Hyacinth's description of an "immense underworld". Reinsdorf chose a simple-minded boy called Franz Reinhold Rupsch, an apprentice saddler, to assassinate the German Emperor, and in that sense, it is possible to see a similarity, with the exception that Hyacinth is committed to the cause himself and not just an

innocent instrument.

An interesting feature of the novel, which is typically Jamesian, is that Hoffendahl is only seen through Hyacinth's eyes, which adds enormously to the sense of mystery which surrounds him, but which, for the same reason, makes it difficult to identify him as Reinsdorf rather than as Bakunin or as Johann Most, who have also been considered as possible models by other critics. Whether Hoffendahl is a single or a composite portrait does not, however, detract from the intrinsic realism of the novel which remains a credible piece of reportage in the sense of Zola's Naturalism.

The most telling point remains the observation of urban social conditions in the London of the time, and the clear presentation of its inevitable consequences, as far as the attitudes of people towards revolution are concerned. In this way, it may well have disappointed many readers who looked for reassurance as to the stability of their world. The fact that, at the end of the novel, Hoffendahl is still at large may be close to what happened in reality, but it was hardly comforting.

The reading public would probably have felt more at ease if the revolutionaries depicted had been Irish, since the Irish were responsible for most of the London bombings; this would have polarised their hatred as it circumscribed the nature of the enemy, and encouraged them to think in terms of political counter-measures.

That this was precisely what James wanted to prevent, can

be stated, and substantiated convincingly, in a way that will define James's essential purpose in writing The Princess Casamassima.

In the first place, writing about the Irish would have detracted from the universal relevance of the novel, which it would also have made political rather than social. This would, in turn, have left James little scope for an investigation of motives as these were well known and totally unrelated to the living conditions of any particular class in London, conditions which accurately reflected the underlying malaise in both English and continental societies.

Undeniably, James was ahead of his time in treating anarchism, and social revolutions in general, primarily as a reaction against social conditions, but he was convincing because he based the situations, the events and the characters in his novel on actual observations which could readily be verified by his readers and which therefore could not fail to have a profound impact.

Zola had already stated that "le milieu détermine et complète l'homme" and gone to great lengths to make his readers feel precisely how oppressive a life the lower classes had to endure, in order to compel public opinion to realise how badly and urgently reforms were needed. Lewis Kamm, in his study of The Object in Zola's Rougon-Marquart, examines the extent to which painstaking description of inanimate objects contribute to the general impression of a cramped, confined and miserable existence. One of his examples is taken from L'Assomoir:

We observe that he describes things with an hypertrophy of true detail that

contributes to the creation of a dismal atmosphere. Gervaise, for example, lives in a "misérable chambre" where her children's heavy iron bed fills two third of the room. Lantier's trunk, located in a corner of the room, reveals a man's hat "tout au fond, enfoui sous des chemises et des chaussures sales", while along the wall hang a "châle troué" and a "pantalon mangé par la boue". 32

Kamm traces the progress of the invasion of objects to the hotel itself, to Père Colombe's bar and ultimately to the whole neighbourhood. James's descriptions move in a similar way, and a close examination of the text shows that objects are also used to involve the reader in a feeling of well-nigh unbearable oppressiveness.

One notices, for instance, the "huge dark tomb" dominating the prison where Hyacinth's mother is incarcerated, and then the suffocating "little world" of Lomax Place closes in.

Zola also uses the reality of hunger to bring home to the reader the realisation of deprivation, and the memory of Gervaise "tenaillée par la faim" cannot easily be shrugged aside. James makes the same reference to hunger, but is more explicit in linking it to revolt.

While they sat still and talked [at the Sun and Moon pub], there were about a million of people in London that didn't know where the hell the morrow's meal was to come from; what they wanted to do, unless they were just a collection of pettifogging old women, was to show them where to get it, to take it to them with heaped-up hands. 33

Hyacinth, however, because he is weighed down by the oppressiveness of the social conditions will not be able to carry out his act of liberation, and he will ultimately turn against

himself the emotions stirred at such gatherings. A comparable burst of anger and revolt, this time against the ravages of alcohol, shakes Gervaise:

Etait-il Dieu possible que des hommes
pussent lâcher leurs femmes et leur
chez-eux pour s'enfermer ainsi dans un
trou où ils étouffaient. ³⁴

This will be equally self-defeating in the end because revolt is always thwarted, and Gervaise will find herself dragged down into alcoholic oblivion.

Both authors thus convey with the conviction of truth the emotional and moral cul-de-sacs in which their characters are trapped.

Terror is perhaps of all emotions the strongest and yet one of the most difficult in which to involve readers. Zola and James use it effectively to their ends. There is, for instance, the cruelty of the strong - relatively speaking - for the weak, which can take place within the family. Coupeau keeps "un gourdin qu'il appelait son éventail à bourriques" and the whole family takes a perverse pleasure in beating each others as their circumstances get worse. The alcoholic Bijard whips his little daughter Lalie to death in a scene undoubtedly meant to shock the readers, even if the final effect appears almost grotesquely Dickensian.

The mental cruelty of Coupeau, towards the end of the novel, goading his wife towards prostitution so that he could live off the profits, comes into the same category.

James, meanwhile, hints at the role played by the social "fixers" such as Captain Sholto or a philanthropist like Lady

Aurora, and shows through Paul Muniment the more cruel and more scientific theories behind direct revolutionary action, so that the violence for being implied rather than shown is no less overpowering. Political warfare is by nature a form of revolt calling for assassination, and Hyacinth is conscious of his obligation, which he "supremely, immutably recognise[s]", as he states in his letter to the Princess, even though he admits that he no longer understands to what end. This obligation is one he has voluntarily undertaken after being chosen by Hoffendahl to be the instrument of assassination, and as he realises that he is now inextricably involved in a choice between betrayals, a feeling of horror is brought home to the reader, which is possibly greater than the direct violence depicted by Zola.

There is a sense of fatality akin to Greek tragedy where Hyacinth is the helpless victim, marked by the ambiguity of his birth and of the blood of a dissolute father mixed with the passionate French blood of his mother, and further tainted in youth by the heredity of murder. He will not live a traitor but when the call comes, it is, inevitably, it seems, on himself that he turns the gun.

Finally, the concentration on two forms of revolt, anarchism which, as well as alcoholism, represents the ultimate negation of self, consolidates the overall impact of both novels. Each writer selected a different but related controlling metaphor, perfectly adapted to the existing social situation in the two cities under scrutiny, to express the common human need of

escape from an intolerable condition. In the end, each form of rebellion culminated into violence against the individual, be it the swift action of a firearm, or a slow, degrading death through alcoholism; both course of actions being further dictated by the heredity of the characters.

Differences are but of detail, Zola being more concerned with the influence of environment:

J'ai voulu peindre la déchéance fatale
d'une famille ouvrière dans le milieu
empesté de nos faubourgs. ³⁵

while James searched more deeply into the psychological make up of his characters:

The whole thing comes to depend thus on the quality of bewilderment characteristic of one's creature, the quality involved in the given case or supplied by one's data. ³⁶

Having both determinedly set out to obtain as much accurate documentation as they could, the two writers used it in order to explain the unsatisfactory state of contemporary society, highlighting the dramatic changes that were taking place and their consequences upon the more disadvantaged members of the urban proletariat, and showing as vividly as possible the threats which these changes posed to society as a whole, unless reforms were put underway as a matter of urgency.

Their ultimate aim was therefore identical. Both had their sympathies fully engaged, and far from recoiling from the shabbiness, the vulgarity or the misery, they forced their reading public to become involved, take stock and act, out of pity or out of fear. They certainly described the everyday reality of working life in Paris or in London with thorough

objectivity, nevertheless expressing their view of life, and showing true compassion, watching but not judging, they played their part in stirring the moral conscience of the age.

NOTES TO CHAPTER V

- ¹The Academy, 13th November, 1869.
- ²Henri Bergson, La Pensée et le Mouvant, p. 230.
- ³Introduction to F.W.J. Hemmings, Culture and Society in France, 1848-1898, pp. 2-3.
- ⁴F.W.J. Hemmings, op. cit., p. 3.
- ⁵Susanna Barrow, Distorting Mirrors: Visions of the Crowd in late Nineteenth Century France, p. 93.
- ⁶L'Assommoir, pp. 22-23.
- ⁷Ibid., p. 501.
- ⁸Ibid., p. 309.
- ⁹The Princess Casamassima, p. 7.
- ¹⁰Daniel Lerner, "The Influence of Turgenev on Henry James", in Slavonic and East European Review, XX, December 1941, pp. 28 and foll.
- ¹¹Virginia Harlow, Thomas Sargeant Perry, 18th April, 1887.
- ¹²F.R. Leavis, The Great Tradition, p. 199.
- ¹³S. Gorley Putt, "A Henry James Jubilee", Cornhill, No. 96, Winter 1946, p. 193.
- ¹⁴"Henry James and the Almighty Dollar", in Hound and Horn, vii, April-June 1934, pp 434-43.
- ¹⁵Nellie Van de Grift Sanchez, The Life of Mrs. Robert Louis Stevenson, p. 121.
- ¹⁶Henry James, A Little Tour in France, pp. 238-39.
- ¹⁷Virginia Harlow, op. cit., p. 304.

- ¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 314.
- ¹⁹ Henry James, A Little Tour in France, p. 151.
- ²⁰ Henry James, Letters I, p. 119, to J.R. Lowell, 29th May, 1855.
- ²¹ R.B. Perry, The Thought and Character of William James, p. 329. Letter of 22nd September, 1872.
- ²² Letters I, pp. 113-14. Letter to Grace Norton, 24th January, 1885.
- ²³ Letters I, p. 124.
- ²⁴ Yvor Winters, Maule's Curse, p. 205.
- ²⁵ The Princess Casamassima, Preface, p. xvii.
- ²⁶ The Times, 17th March, 1881, p. 12.
- ²⁷ *Ibid.*, 8th May, 1882, p. 7.
- ²⁸ The Princess Casamassima, p. 291.
- ²⁹ The Times, 23rd December, 1884, p. 3.
- ³⁰ The Princess Casamassima, p. 520.
- ³¹ The Times, 23rd December, 1884, p. 3.
- ³² Lewis Kamm, The Object in Zola Rougon-Macquart, p. 102.
- ³³ The Princess Casamassima, p. 254.
- ³⁴ L'Assommoir, p. 406.
- ³⁵ *Ibid.*, Preface, p. 17.
- ³⁶ The Princess Casamassima, p. 13.

CONCLUSION

The whole field of investigation concerning the literary relationship between Henry James and Emile Zola is fraught with pitfalls, as the initial steps of the present research demonstrated. Critics certainly did not agree in their assessment, and this left room for reappraisal, using different original documents from the large variety of theoretical writings produced by both writers.

For instance, three contemporary critics of Henry James, Sergio Perosa, Philip Grover and Lyall H. Powers, agree that James went through a "Naturalist phase" when he was writing The Princess Casamassima; yet another eminent authority on Naturalism, Charles R. Anderson, did, in James and Zola: The Question of Naturalism, argue very cogently against this view.

The part played by Naturalism and the direct influence of Zola's own novels on James's fiction, other than The Princess Casamassima is a problem which future researchers would do well to take as a starting point, and one which would amply reward further comparative investigation of these two authors.

On a more complex level, the issues raised by Susanna Barrows in Distorting Mirrors, have a profound significance for both psychological and feminist interpretations of literature. Why the Nineteenth Century feared the reactions of crowds is quite easy to understand, but what is less clear is the actual terror engendered by the presence of women in that crowd.

There are certainly instances of women taking up arms and proving extremely brave, that is to say dangerous for their

enemies, such as Joan of Arc, or La Grande Mademoiselle during the Fronde, but this appears different in essence; it cannot even be likened to Delacroix's famous painting of La Liberté guidant le Peuple, which provokes a feeling of joy and hope rather than of fear.

This is more akin to evil, as were the dreadful women who sat in front of the guillotine, knitting, in A Tale of Two Cities by Charles Dickens, or those depicted in Germinie Lacerteux, or again the howling harpies who massacre and emasculate Maigrat in Germinal. Gervaise, and even the Princess Casamassima herself, are shown as so many de-stabilising forces and it seems clear that insufficient research has been carried out so far to discover why predominantly male writers have polarised on women to show the threat posed by crowds.

The role of alcohol in literature is another area which could be considered further. Certainly, in this connection, it seems that it all started with L'Assommoir, but in fact there are earlier nineteenth-century texts worth analysing; there are also parallel novels in English, such as George Moore's A Mummer's Wife (1885) which describes the degradation of an actor's wife through drink. Then, by the beginning of the twentieth century, literature became inundated both with descriptions of alcohol's destructive role, and with examples of authors who themselves succumbed to its lure.

Frank Norris produced an American version of L'Assommoir with McTeague; Malcolm Lowry, F. Scott Fitzgerald and Ernest Hemingway were authors who described the effects of alcohol

and themselves suffered from alcoholism. As a socially - accepted drug, it would be interesting to note to what extent the growth of its consumption is related to the instability of the period, singling out for special studies the gin-parlours of eighteenth century England, or the last three decades of the nineteenth century in France.

The present thesis has expressed the view that alcoholism and anarchism can be considered, so to speak, as both sides of the same coin, that growth in the incidence of the one suggests a similar pattern in the spread of the other, and that both can be related to the onset of a disaffected and unstable society. It would be worthwhile to try and find out whether further research bears this out, and whether such factors have relevance for our own society today.

Finally, arguments have been put forward here, to show the distinctive and essential role played by the city in the creation of an entirely 'modern' outlook in literature, and it is in this connection that Zola and James have been shown to be very closely linked. This point had not previously been made, and the acceptance now that James took a much greater conscious care to be factually accurate than had generally been recognised, and that Zola gave a far more deeply poetic and impressionistic representation of the city than his 'scientific' approach suggested, should lead further. It would appear that a study of the Victorian city, for instance, as depicted in fiction, with its symbols of authority and wealth, like cathedrals or railway stations, and its solid facades masking a

cruel reality of poverty, suffering and moral degradation,
presents an almost inexhaustible mine for further investigations.

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