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Les Trois Visionnaires: The Narrative of Balzac, Flaubert, and Zola

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Les Trois Visionnaires:
The Narrative of Balzac, Flaubert, and Zola

*A Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Liberal Studies*

By

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'Tis hard to say, if greater Want of Skill
 Appear in Writing or in Judging ill,
 But, of the two, less dang'rous is th' Offence,
 To tire our Patience, than mis-lead our Sense
 Some few in that, but Numbers err in this,
 Ten Censure wrong for one who Writes amiss;
 A Fool might once himself alone expose,
 Now One in Verse makes many more in Prose.
 —Alexander Pope, *An Essay on Criticism*, 1711

Preface

The focus of this study concerns the critical analysis and interpretation of three nineteenth-century French novels: *La Cousine Bette* by Honoré de Balzac, one of the pair of *Les Parents Pauvres* novels and last of the *La Comédie Humaine*; *Madame Bovary* by Gustave Flaubert, his first complete and successful novel; and, *Nana*, Émile Zola's ninth novel in the *Rougon-Macquart* series. The voice of the authors is of particular interest to this study—how they, as writers, manipulate their creations through effective narrative to convey action to the character, suspense in a scene, and conflicts in plot. It is through the authors' controlled voice that they are able to represent the tensions surrounding the stories within the turmoil of nineteenth-century France. Furthermore, by comparing and contrasting characteristics of each work, this study illustrates what their contributions were to the evolution of narrative style that has become the mainstay of the modern novel of today.

The three novels' settings span three quarters of the nineteenth century from the Bourbon Restoration of Louis XVIII, Charles X, and final reign of the “bourgeois King,” Louis-Phillip, to

the peak and plummet of the Second Empire under Napoleon III. The moral and social tenets of these authors are expressed in their works as each defines the vagaries of modern French society. This study will show how each man developed unique literary tools to define and craft his contemporary characters¹ that support his quilted plots. In the primary protagonists, each author invents prototypical and allegorical victims and villainesses of the social mosaic under free market capitalism. First, Valerie Marneffe, is a courtesan whose lust for wealth destroys men, families, and fortunes, and whom Balzac uses to expose the tragic illusions of this period with the aid of Lisbeth Fischer, the embittered old maid who holds the title of *La Cousine Bette*. Second, Emma Bovary is the much-studied and maligned adulteress portrayed by Gustave Flaubert, whose novel won great fame but also the vengeance of the censors of the hegemonic conservatives. Lastly, Nana Coupeau, Zola's street urchin turned *demimondaine* and *femme fatale* of Paris, who brings down fortunes, friendships, and disenfranchised aristocrats of the Second Empire down to a level of shameful humiliation and pathetic degradation of such a perverse degree that censoring was inevitable.

It is the contention and the thesis of this comparative study that a faithful and legitimate analysis of the subject texts cannot be confined to the limitations of one or two literary critical schools of interpretation. On the contrary, the theoretical perspective requires a broader scope of interpretation that includes the synthesis of salient analyses illustrated primarily by those members of the Chicago School that include Simon O. Lesser, James Phelan, and Wayne C. Booth. In particular, Booth's *Rhetoric of Fiction*, was consulted regularly to help reveal the methods, motives, and social observations that drove the narrative. Some of the key intrinsic

¹ Events in each novel are 10 to 20 years prior to their release providing the advantage to the writers, a factual sub-structure to base each story that for the adult reader takes place in the known past.

textual complexities found within each novel are subsequently revealed to show how and why each author and his works remain on the classics' shelves and continue to be studied so intently by scholars.

In concert, the Marxist approach to literary analysis synergistically complements concepts forwarded by rhetorical principles and analysis set forth by Booth, and others, by “recognizing the interrelatedness of all human activity”² as expressed in the narratives of each novel. Socialist Realism, as Georg Lukács proposes, demonstrates that a literary work is a “reflection [of a] reconstructed past on the basis of historical evidence.”³

In understanding the extrinsic influence upon each author concerning the political, social, and economic maelstrom that France had witnessed in the nineteenth century, this study will correlate historical events with each author's biography and the influences surrounding the story's plot formation, character development, and complex subtext. In fact, the three authors in this study are the favorite of the Marxist critics, not the least of which is Georg Lukács, the renowned Hungarian philosopher, considered “the finest Marxist since Marx,”⁴ Frederic Jameson⁵, and Terry Eagleton, whose recent contributions offer currency to the prevailing opinions in Marxist literary criticism that have accumulated over the last fifty years. The elucidated trap and trappings of the changing economic system in nineteenth-century France run

² Charles E. Bressler, *Literary Criticism* (Upper Saddle River, Prentice-Hall, 1999), 220.

³ J. A. Cuddon, *Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*, rev. ed. C. E. Preston, (New York: Penquin Books, 1999), “Marxists Criticism,” 493.

⁴ The citation is from a citation in the introduction by Alfred Kazin, page v of Lukács' *Studies in European Realism*, q.v. and references Gyula Borbandi, *East Europe*, November, 1962.

⁵ Jameson was the understudy of the renowned philologist, Erich Auerbach in the 1960s at Yale University whose Doctoral Dissertation on Jean-Paul Sartre won him acclaim as a Marxist Literary Theorist and a post at Harvard.

parallel in all three novels, addressing the evolving cash nexus and confounding class conflicts, as one dominant class is usurped by the other.

The Marxists' note that the Catholic Church, estranged for so long during the Revolutionary period, returns to French culture to play both a unifying social role as the universal martyr bent on leading the "moral majority" to a conformist spirit, and as the Pontificate censor, creating organizations like the *Société des Bons Livres* (1824). As David Coward observes, "[Censorship] rose as *colportage* fell,"⁶ creating control that was intended to manage available reading material, suppressing what was seen as offensive, objectionable, pornographic, or subversive, and releasing only approved materials to the anticipating public. Censorship plagued the novels during serialization and flagged particular portions, such as Flaubert's republican anticlerical tendencies, which were cleverly and humorously projected in the characters of *Madame Bovary*.⁷

Integrating biographical and psychoanalytic critical theory into the interpretation of the authors' "psychobiography," the characters' behavior and motivations, the audience appeal, and texts' language and symbolism, I will show how it significantly demonstrates the collective motivations and deep desires of each author to change the moral landscape. In a fictive sense, the authors are "showing by example" how the human condition is simply flawed. They spare no one particular group and expose anyone in a position of authority who takes advantage of another

⁶ David Coward, "Popular fiction in the nineteenth century", in *The French Novel*, ed. Timothy Unwin, (New York, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 86. The *colportage* is a pun alteration of the term *comporter* and refers to the distribution of propagandist literature, pamphlets, novellas, etc.

⁷ Monsieur Homais, for instance, the satirical irreligious town pharmacist contrasted against the bumbling myopic clergyman represented by Father Bournisien, whose comical scene at Emma's deathbed, sums up Flaubert's sarcastic view of the Church and its management, which supports suggestions by conservative Marxist critics of Flaubert's opinion of a pervasive religious interference in society.

whether that position is of strength, intelligence, age, gender, or rank. They exemplified those individuals characterized with enough personal integrity to fend off the constant barrage of hedonistic temptations that the three authors' tales so keenly and expertly portray. Critics, such as Jacques Lacan, Robb Graham, William Stowe, Henri Mitterand, Fredrick Brown, Herbert Lottman, and Francis Steegmuller, have contributed much to the understanding and appreciation of the three authors, their biographies, and the psychoanalysis of their narrative, characterizations, and audience (perceived and literal).

While it is important to acknowledge the work of the structuralists, Roland Barthes, Ferdinand de Saussure, Gerard Genette, Michel Foucault, et al., the intertextual specificity that these literary technicians address is, I believe, too confining to expound upon for this treatment and will only be referred to on occasion where syntax, word choice, or other matters of semiotic linguistic analysis can support observation. That said, it is equally important to acknowledge the observations concerning literary component schematic relationship, as the research of Barthes, Genette, and others has presented.⁸ Although the graphic representation of narrative tends toward the austere, this theory merits attention as it reveals certain characteristics that would otherwise be missed.

Lastly, the aestheticists, René Wellek, Austin Warren, Cleanth Brooks, Robert Penn Warren, Erich Auerbach, and Harold Bloom, have started a resurgence of a form of criticism that dates back to the nineteenth-century with Immanuel Kant, and leans toward a philosophical view of literature that they believe combines all aesthetic aspects of a text with an understanding and

⁸ Roland Barthes, "Death of the Author" *Aspen Magazine*, no. 5-6. Barthes rocked the foundation of literary criticism, which, in summary, he stated that once an author releases the work he forfeits all claim to it and the interpretations of the text by others is purely of the linguistic rhetoric of the novel.

appreciation of truth and beauty.⁹ They propose that art should convey no other message or intention. By measuring denotation and connotation to “resolve ambiguities of purpose,” aestheticists propose that a work of art is autonomous and bears no association to any political, didactic, or moral link. The observer (reader) takes full custodianship while in possession of the art. To this understanding, this study incorporates aspects of this critical method. While study is tempted to rest solely on aesthetics for interpretations, the thesis will maintain a tacit stewardship for each novel and at the same time incorporate other critical theories to make the overall analysis more robust.

By examining both the extrinsic influences and intrinsic texture, this study shows the power of the respective genius of each novelist. Wellek and Warren explain “many studies of the novel are not content to consider it merely in terms of its relations to the social structure, but try to analyze its artistic methods—its point of view, its narrative technique.”¹⁰ To avoid treating the novel as a dichotomy of simply “content and form,” I intend to show the analysis of art as an organic synthesis of both the aesthetic entity and the pragmatic structural whole, composed of layered components—one superimposed upon the other, therein, revealing an evolution of narrative techniques from Balzac to Zola.

This dynamic approach to analysis and interpretation of Zola, Flaubert, and Balzac provides for a more thorough examination of the fictional worlds these authors have portrayed, offering the readers a chance to step into the various situations presented, wearing both the mask of yesterday and the mask of today to understand, sympathize with, pass judgment upon, and feel

⁹*Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*. (New York: Penquin Books, 1999), 11-12.

¹⁰ Rene Wellek and Austin Warren, *Theory of Literature*, 3rd ed., (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1984), 139.

some identity with the fictional worlds to which these *trois visionnaires* have led the reader. They can be judged and gauged in their own “modern” environment while concurrently judged and gauged against our own norms and value system. The social, economic, and political consciousness (or unconsciousness) of the times sets the tone and camber of each novel. Although over one hundred-forty years have passed since our writers have put pen to paper, the timber and pitch of the plots and respective outcomes continue to resonate an all-too-familiar chord today in the twenty-first-century. The moral and ethical standards are not as divergent as one might think. The differences are few and the similarities many.

Therefore, in summary, this analysis will encompass the extrinsic influences to include that of the social, religious, biographical, psychological, economic, and philosophic disciplines that helped to shape the man, the implied author, the characters, the settings, and the *Zeitgeist* that made up the *Weltanschauung* of the day.¹¹ Most importantly, this analysis explores the intrinsic influences of the narrative authority, examining the rhetoric in storytelling to include the point of view, subtle narrative shift, the style, image, metaphor, allegory, and myth that make up the balanced prose of each writer and his art work. Accordingly, this thesis delves into how the extrinsic influences the intrinsic to make the noble art, in particular the genius of Honoré de Balzac, Gustave Flaubert, and Émile Zola.

¹¹ *Zeitgeist* and *Weltanschauung* are the “spirit of the times” and “worldview”, respectively.

“Narrative, in other words, is a basic human strategy for coming to terms with time, process, and change—a strategy that contrasts with, but is in no way inferior to, “scientific” modes of explanation that characterize phenomena as instances of general covering laws. Science explains how in general water freezes when its temperature reaches zero degrees centigrade; but it takes a story to convey what it was like to lose one’s footing on slippery ice on a late afternoon in December 2004, under a steel-grey-sky. Yet just as it is possible to construct a narrative about the development of science, to tell a story about who made what discoveries and under what circumstances, it is possible to use the tools of science—definition, analysis, classification, comparison, etc.—to work toward a principled account of what makes a text, discourse, film, or other artifact [a] *narrative*.”¹²

—David Herman

Introduction

The critical and analytical study in this thesis concerns three nineteenth-century French novelists who wrote *polemic fiction*. That is to say, they wrote about their time and place, using actual locations and historical events, with real life-like characters to populate their novels. The novels are framed around a French society they all believed was diseased due to the deleterious effects of the new ruling power after the Revolution of 1789: money.

Products of the literary arts, such as the subject novels of Honoré de Balzac’s, *La Cousine Bette* (1847), Gustave Flaubert’s *Madame Bovary* (1858), and Émile Zola’s *Nana* (1880), are creations of the imagination of the author. As such, the developmental process is heavily influenced by external environmental factors that encompass its imaginative invention. That is not to say this study is an attempt to reduce the novel to its origins, but rather, it is to examine the works of art in light of multiple considerations to account for the authors influences when developing his narrative. In short, this critical analysis will review the history during the period when each novel was created and include aspects of the biography of the author, the social context that comprises its settings, and the commercial and political changes that occurred

¹²David Herman, introduction to *Narrative*, ed. David Herman, (Cambridge: Cambridge Press, 2008), 3.

surrounding the novel's settings to help explain the shape and texture of the final product, as well as its success as a work of literary art. Consequently, it is the narrative of each novelist that is the subject of this study: its influences and its expression.

Following are eight chapters, divided equally into two parts. The first, "The Extrinsic," deals with the social, political, economic, religious, psychological, and biographical influences that provided the edification, motivation, and material to develop the second part. "The Intrinsic" aspects of the novelist's mimetic representation are presented to show what makes their fiction, not just enjoyable but functional, readable, fascinating, captivating, intriguing, shocking, and overall, entertaining, which compels the reader to read more or even, read again and again.

Multiple translations of the three novels were referred to while preparing this thesis. I learned that each translation carries with it a vernacular subject to its publication date and translator. As an example: the translations of *Madame Bovary* of Aveling, Wall, Crawford, and Bair are significantly different to each other to warrant attention. In addition, the introductions by the editor or translator to each novel represent distinctly different points of view and, in themselves, proved to be valuable resources for study.

PART 1: The Extrinsic

“[The] lack of education is the mother of all crime.”¹³

—Implied Author of Honoré de Balzac in *La Cousine Bette*

“Though the “extrinsic” study may merely attempt to interpret literature in light of its social context and its antecedents, in most cases it becomes a ‘casual’ explanation, professing to account for literature, to explain it, and finally to reduce it to its origins . . . much light has been thrown on literature by a proper knowledge of the conditions under which it has been produced; the exegetical value of such a study seems indubitable.”¹⁴

—Rene Wellek and Austin Warren

Chapter I

Significant Aspects of Publishing in the Nineteenth-Century

The success of the subject authors is credited to a variety of circumstances, not the least of which is their talent to write tenable and captivating stories. They also shared the edifying ability to bring what they observed in French society as exploitation, corruption, and greed, so predominant during the nineteenth century, within the understanding of their collective readership, the value of which is presented in titillating drama in their novels. But it was not this alone that worked in their favor. The rewards they sought from success were ostensibly wealth, fame, and social prominence. Toward that end, two concurrent developments were facilitating their success: “public” education and advances in publishing.

A vehicle of distribution and an audience sophisticated enough to understand the text were quickly shaping up while a viable and hungry market began demanding more. It is crucial to appreciate how the historical parallel developments of education and publishing were essential

¹³ Honoré de Balzac, *Cousin Bette*, tr. Marion Ayton Crawford (New York: Penguin Books, 1977), 429.

¹⁴ Wellek and Warren, *Theory of Literature*, 73.

in promulgating the novel and creating a readership in nineteenth-century France. These writers owe their success to this period that supported immense socioeconomic growth in a country emerging from feudalism. As leisure time became a part of the daily routine, reading became a pastime, and material quickly became inexpensive, compelling, and readily available. As David Coward reminds us, "Popular literature is valued because it gives direct access to the collective heartbeat."¹⁵ That heartbeat will be explored throughout this thesis through the primary protagonists of these novels to include the three women of questionable virtue, who, because of circumstances of environment, often beyond their control, become a product of their surroundings. A masochistic relationship floats beneath the surface of their persona as each woman battles with lust, of her own making or others. The pleasure principle presented in psychoanalytic studies pits reality against illusion. Each woman exploited her situation, and each was exploited by others. Such is Zola's Nana Coupeau, the young, beautiful, and vulnerable child of the streets whose fate seemed written in stone as her environment deteriorated at the death of her parents in *L'Assommoir*, Zola's seventh novel and prelude to *Nana*. The street urchin learned by observation what it was to be deceived, and, by using her survival instincts, quickly learned what the advantages were by being the deceiver. The deceived and deceiver become one, capturing the imaginations of Zola's readers, many of whom could confidently identify with the situations, personalities, and inequities revealed in the novel.

It was during the nineteenth century that French literature produced an abundance of exceptional novelists who were instrumental in advancing the fictional narrative to its current standard and who supplied the booksellers' and lenders' shelves with volume after volume of

¹⁵ David Coward, "Popular Fiction in the Nineteenth Century: From 1800 to the Present," in *The French Novel*, ed. Timothy Unwin, (New York, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 73.

entertainment. France could support this new burst in media because of the rapid rise in literacy during the period. In 1800, the illiteracy rate was just under 50%; by 1850, the rate dropped to around 15%, and by 1900 was close to 8%.¹⁶ The publishing industry was to emerge into the new century after the Revolution as a significant force in the economy of France. In 1812, nearly five thousand titles were going to print, and by 1855, the numbers nearly tripled. Historical records show that in 1850, a manual laborer earned three francs a day.¹⁷ The avid reader could purchase a book for as little as one franc by 1855, one third of his daily income.

The periodicals, to include pamphlets like the *Bibliothèque Bleue*¹⁸ and *Le Figaro*, and multiple daily newspapers grew at an even more alarming rate. In 1824, over 60,000 periodicals were in circulation, and this number, too, tripled by 1848. Technology then begins to intersect with demand, “In 1865, using the new rotary press, *Le Petit Journal*, priced at 1 sou [65 centimes], had a print run of 256,000 and by 1886, it reached a healthy annual distribution of 1 million copies. In 1914, Parisians were buying 5 million newspapers every day.”¹⁹ This is an astounding rate and can only be appreciated by realizing Paris as the cultural capital of the world for the better part of the nineteenth century. All of France, in the countryside, as well as in the city, could boast a comparatively low illiteracy rate and a phenomenal growth rate. Paris alone had a population of a half million people in 1801; by 1851, the population doubled to 1 million and 2.7 million by 1901.

¹⁶ Heffernan. "Literacy and Geographical mobility in Nineteenth Century Provincial France." *Local Population Studies*, (Local Population Studies Society Spring 1989), 32-42. See also, David Coward, Popular Fiction in the Nineteenth Century: From 1800 to the Present," in *The French Novel*, 73-92.

¹⁷ Datafiles of Historical Prices and Wages,. <http://www.iisg.nl/hpw/data.php#france> (Accessed April 29, 2011).

¹⁸ The primary Chapbook of the 18th century to be eclipsed by the development of the modern novel.

¹⁹ David Coward, “Popular Fiction in the Nineteenth Century: From 1800 to the Present 1997,” in *The French Novel*, 74.

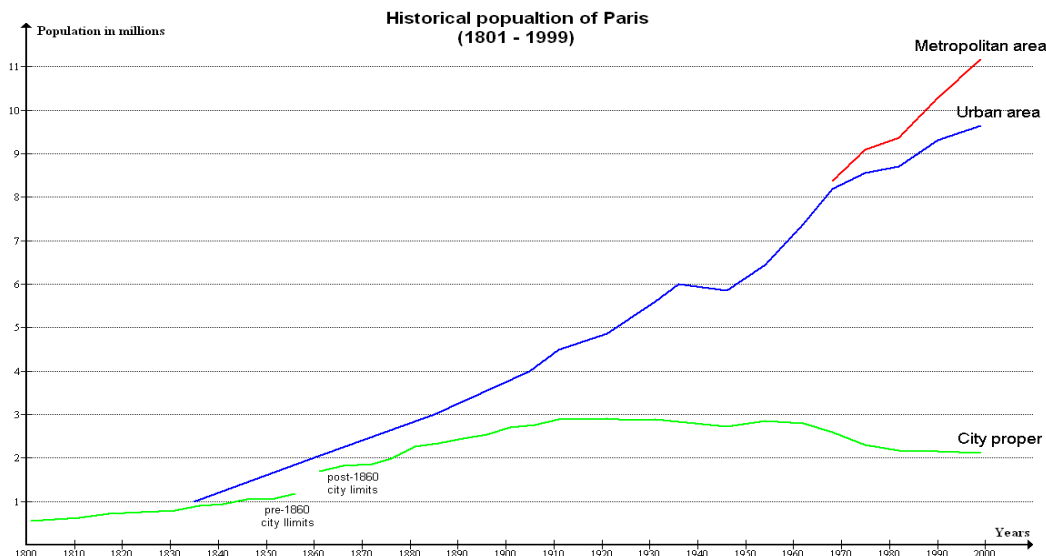


Fig. 1. Historical Population of Paris ²⁰

The consumption of reading materials can be attributed to a drastic increase in the population accompanied concurrently with the climb in literacy.^{21 22} However, writers such as Balzac, Stendhal, Sue, Flaubert, Dumas *père*, Maupassant, and Zola along with many others, collectively provided France and the Western World with thousands of titles.

In 1804, Napoleon passed into legislation the *Code civil des Français*, disallowing privilege of birth, clearly stating that jobs would go to the most qualified, not the most well connected, and, most interestingly, allowed for the freedom of religion. Preceding the *Code Napoléon*, as it was referred to, Napoleon signed the Concordat of 1801, a document established between Pope Pius VIII and Napoleon mandating Catholicism as the “religion of the great

²⁰ Institut National de la Statistique et des Études Économiques, Official records reconstructed by Ph. Julien of INSEE), http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/en/3/3c/Paris_historical_population_2.png (Accessed April 29, 2011)

²¹ Jan Lahmeyer, *Historical Demographical Data of France*. "populstat" site, (1999/2003), <http://www.populstat.info/Europe/francec.htm> (accessed April 26, 2010).

²² Wendall Cox, Consultancy, *Demographia*, The Public Purpose, (2003) <http://www.demographia.com/dm-par90.htm> (accessed October 24, 2010). Demographics cross referenced.

majority of Frenchmen,” in addition to granting a release of confiscated church property held in state possession since the Revolution. The bridges between government and church were repaired, and a new effort was introduced establishing the Catholic Church as the publicly funded educator of France, later on to be legislated into the education system by the Falloux Laws of 1850-1851, establishing Alfred de Falloux as the Minister of Education. Although education wasn't mandatory until the establishment of the Republican school of 1880 by Jules Ferry, it became “a given” in French culture that children would attend school at some level. Regardless, education was free, respected, and encouraged. Balzac was keen to recognize the need for education at all levels of society and even directs narration in *La Cousine Bette* to further this cause, “[The] lack of education is the mother of all crime.”²³ He was referring, of course, to “blue collar” crime: crimes of violence, thievery, and ignorance apart from the crimes he wrote about in *La Cousine Bette*, which were committed by Baron Hulot; the crimes of adultery, extortion, and perjury.

Naturally, reading was the way to keep abreast of contemporary issues. During the century, the “public library” *Bibliothèque nationale de France*²⁴ grew after the revolutions to over 300,000 volumes, many of which came from private libraries of aristocrats and clergy confiscated during the war of 1789. Somewhat more accessible to the common citizen were the commercial libraries that “rented” books for as little as ten centimes per volume. Circulation of easily accessible reading materials was also the way to promote new products that were being developed during the industrial revolution, not to mention providing a method to disseminate administrative government policy that was frequently changing in light of the multiple régimes

²³ Honoré de Balzac, *Cousin Bette*, tr. Marion Ayton Crawford, (New York: Penguin Books, 1977), 429. This statement, directed to the reader as commentary and summation, is indicative of Balzac's use of narrative authority.

²⁴ At one time known as the Imperial National Library.

France had undergone during the century. Start-up companies were producing new printing machinery that made manufacturing faster and cheaper and products more available to the burgeoning consumers of France. The improved steam engine of James Watt completely revolutionized manufacturing, providing a source of cheap power to replace much of the manual labor previously required, allowing for mass production. The publishing industry benefited by this new technology, and even Balzac dabbled in publishing for a time, but being a poor businessman, failed to make it a profitable venture. Later in the century, however, one of Gustave Flaubert's best friends, Maxime Du Camp, would found his own publishing company, *Revue de Paris*, to which Flaubert's mistress, Louise Colet, and his closest friend, Louis Bouilhet, would frequently contribute.

In addition, the developing rail system played a key role in bringing people and products together, making travel and shipping easier, faster, and cheaper. It made travel safer and was always available when needed. The railroad brought the workers from the provinces into the city to handle the burgeoning demands placed on commerce both domestically and internationally. It was also instrumental in bringing the city to provincial life with all of its wonders, inventive creations, exciting lifestyles, and new products. In 1820, France ranked third in GDP Share.

Europe was in the midst of radical changes, and with it came technology. In the middle ages, Europe's growth was marked with overcrowding accompanied by pestilence and crime. By the nineteenth century, great improvements were made in living conditions. Aseptic technique, pasteurization, and penicillin would forever brand the century with life-saving scientific advances. Salmonella, typhus, cholera, syphilis, small pox, and botulism were losing ground as the predominant causes of death. The tuberculosis bacterium, discovered under a microscope in 1882 by Robert Koch, allowed epidemiologists to develop battle plans to manage this common

killer. Balzac used consumption to kill off Lisbeth Fisher, Marneffe, and mentions the child prostitute, Atala, and the impending malpresent cough of Daddy Vyder (Hulot), “I shall not have to wait long [until he dies]. If you only knew how Daddy Vyder²⁵ coughs and blows—Poof, poof.” Flaubert has Emma’s daughter Berthe, suffering from a persistent cough, “She made him anxious, however, for she coughed sometimes and had red spots on her cheeks.”²⁶ In *Nana*, Zola characterizes Louiset, Nana’s anemic son, with a white scrofulous face, who seems near death at the end of Chapter VII.²⁷

By 1836, fiction was being serialized in the form of the *roman feuilleton* in newspapers and magazines. Eugene Sue (1804-1857), Balzac’s biggest competitor, took advantage of this emerging form with the serial publication of his book *Les Mystères de Paris* in *La Presse*, a publishing company, founded by Émile de Gradin, whose daily publication was printed as one of the first low-cost papers that reduced subscription prices by half and effectively increased the number of subscribers—doubling the subscription rate, as a matter of fact, in the first year. The increase in circulation allowed raising the price of advertising as well as increasing the amount of advertisements.²⁸ Advertising agencies began to spring up out of the immediately successful venture, giving birth to a new secondary industry. Public opinion now becomes a growing influence, as the press become propagandist, “The economic and political power of the press increased immensely. A shift in the balance of political forces was inaugurated as public opinion,

²⁵ Vyder is the anagram of D’Evry, Hulot’s adopted title to distinguish him from his brother. In full, the protagonist’s name is Monsieur le Baron Hector Hulot d’Evry.

²⁶ Honoré de Balzac, *Cousin Betty*, pdf, ed. Penn State Electronic Classics Series, tr. James Waring. (Hazelton: Pennsylvania State Universtiy, 2002), 295, 298.

²⁷ Ibid 234, 400.

²⁸ Peter Brooks, *Reading for the Plot*, (London: Harvard University Press, 1984), 146.

aroused by the mass-circulation newspaper, became a potent fourth estate.”²⁹ The news journal became a propagandist machine whose contributors would be able to influence the public, *en masse*. Modern merchandizing was born, and the publishing companies created “publicists” to market their products. Émile Zola started his career working for Louis Hachette, the publisher, first as a simple salesman and later as the firm’s senior publicist. Zola quickly became adept at learning the trade. He learned what sorts of fiction sold, what the public wanted, and what his readership responded most to during serialization.

Advances in technology allowed for the development of a new binding process that accomplished three things; first, it made fiction available “on the cheap,” allowing the lower classes, who were being taught to read and write through “public”³⁰ and (later) mandatory education, to have access to entertainment on a weekly or daily basis; secondly, the serialization added the drama of anticipation to each addition. The “cliffhanger” was born, predecessor to the modern soap opera and crowds would gather at the doors of the publishing houses on release day to be the first to receive the next edition. Peter Brooks captures the essence of this new literary genre, as he comments,

The successful *feuilletonistes* not only learned to live exclusively by the products of their pens, they were paid by the line and learned to shape their plots to the exigencies of serialization. Each installment had to fit the space allotted, of course, and to move the story forward to a new moment of suspense and expectation so that the terminal tag, “*la*

²⁹ Ibid 147.

³⁰ The Catholic Church became something like the titular head of education disseminating course work to the masses. A likely, logical, and effective measure, the church was in every province and town in one form or another, had the manpower to implement and manage the plan, and had the support of the public and government. Education carries with it a certain entitlement of power that knowledge provides, and anyone in France with a modicum of ambition wanted it.

suite à demain” (the nineteenth century’s “tune in tomorrow” slogan), could take its full toll on the reader.³¹

To further extract every drop of opportunity, these entrepreneurs would have the plots reach a critical point, dire moment, or urgent crisis just when the quarterly subscriptions became due, encouraging renewals. Writers like Balzac, Dumas *père*, and Eugene Sue were production writers of a fashion. They were notable contributors to the new genre of literature dubbed “Industrial Literature” by the contemporary critic Charles Augustin Sainte-Beuve (1804-1869).³² Each Monday, the critic would select a literary topic and publish it in the *Constitutionnel* as “Causeries du Lundi” (Monday Chats).³³

Thirdly, the storylines, plots, and character relationships of many of these novels enraged some of the conservative moral right and drew others into a controversy that only helped market the stories. Flaubert and Zola spent days with their publishers and lawyers defending their art, all the time the publishers pushed public sentiment toward a more liberal outcome.

Lastly, in all three novels, a bright light was cast on the inequities resulting from a rapidly changing society, exposing corruption, immorality, physical and sexual abuse, with poverty and greed affecting all levels. Balzac, Zola, and Flaubert exposed the vagaries of “convulsive

³¹ Brooks, *Reading for the Plot*, 147. See also, Coward, “Popular Fiction in the Nineteenth Century: From 1800 to the Present”, *The French Novel*, 73-92.

³² Ibid, 143. Brooks references Sainte-Beuve in his chapter “The Mark of the Beast: Prostitution, Serialization and Narrative commenting that much of the “industrial literature” was targeting the sexual fantasies of the reading public. In his words, “a reflection largely devoted to the vicissitudes and destinies of the erotic body in a context of commercialized literature, specifically in a prime example of the popular serialized novel. . .”

³³ The introduction to William Mathews *Monday-Chats*, offers a delightful biography of Sainte-Beuve explaining his career and contributions to literary criticism in such journals and papers as *Revue de Paris*, *the Globe*, *Revue des Deux Mondes*, the latter of which he contributed for 37 years. Sainte-Beuve was an intellectual tending to prefer the works of Victor Hugo (intimate friend), Coleridge, Wordsworth, Goethe, etc., and it seems logical that he would be more critical of the less “heady,” more “pulp-fiction” types of “leisure reading, written by the likes of Balzac, Dumas, and Eugene Sue.” He was devoted to his craft and worked hard on the essays as he, himself, writes, “I descend on Tuesday into a well, from which I emerge only on Sunday,” hence, his releases on Monday. In particular see pp xli, xlvi, xxi.

egotism, [and] the exaltation of ungoverned individualism,”³⁴ of their era that they witnessed and reported as contributing to the neurosis of the *zeitgeist* of nineteenth-century France.

³⁴ Brooks, *Realist Vision*, 22.

“Heroes make themselves forces equal to the force of the society they resist and seek to transform.”³⁵
—Alfred Kazin

“Now see the sad fruits of faults produced,/Feel the blows you have yourselves induced.”
—Racine

Chapter II

Social Realism and Literary Reformists

Balzac, Flaubert, and Zola were witness and catalogers to the volatile years spanning the nineteenth century, outlining in narrative fiction what they saw as the corruptive nature of bourgeois aesthetics. They purported, through their novels, what they believed negatively influenced the *Weltanschauung* of Western civilization and poisoned French society with disproportionate social burdens. They saw themselves as champions of the oppressed while they attempted to identify, through fiction, the root causes that caused their beloved France to fall into such chaos. Balzac referred to himself as the “Doctor of the Faculty of Social Medicine, a veterinary surgeon for incurable maladies.”³⁶ whose pessimistic outlook was shared in the developing school of Realists and included Flaubert, Stendhal, Maupassant, Zola, and Proust. They all wrote of the prodigal generations who replaced their heroes of the *ancien régime* and multiple revolutions that followed. They became the literary spokespersons of social reform.

³⁵ Alfred Kazin, introduction to *Studies in European Realism* by Georg Lukács, (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1964), xi.

³⁶ Honoré de Balzac, *Cousin Betty*, pdf, tr. Waring, 4. See dedication to Don Michele Angelo Cajetani, Prince of Teano.

Amidst the turmoil of war, the French Revolution broke down feudal barriers long established by hundreds of years of aristocratic rule, allowing capitalism to flood the dry fields the oligarchy forfeited in their retreat. France's economy floundered during the war years and they fought to recover during the subsequent régimes. In the latter years of the eighteenth century, France avoided bankruptcy by confiscating all ecclesiastical property, and during the early restoration, the country found itself scrambling for economic stability to avoid further international alienation and border vulnerability. The government knew it needed to modernize the economic infrastructure, rapidly.³⁷

The change to the new market economy did not bode well for the newly disenfranchised, and conflicts scarred French history for the remainder of the nineteenth century. Critics argue that embracing the new ideology of capitalism led to social fragmentation and alienation of individuals. While many of the conservative proponents from the deposed aristocracy understood the need to change, they were nonetheless reluctant to give up their privileged status.³⁸ A constitutional despotism prevailed in France. Censorship dogged the political and social spheres at every level. After the *coup d'état* in 1851, any opposition to the constitutional government met with serious charges of sedition, levied as part of the "political purge." The censors deterred mail. In the literary sphere, both Balzac and Flaubert were sympathizers to the exiled Victor Hugo, who was forced to leave France because of his defiant outspoken protests.

Despite the fact the war suspended France's industrial growth for a period and Britain and Prussia had taken the lead, manufacturing companies were continuing to build factories—

³⁷ Wharton, Group. *Discover France*. (2011) (accessed April 24, 2011). http://www.discoverfrance.net/France/History/DF_revolution.shtml Website and resource center for historical facts and travel information.

³⁸ Disenfranchised aristocracy contributed to the destabilization of France during all régimes after the 1789 Revolution.

powered by the improved steam engine—as quickly as money, labor, and materials could be found. As the economy recovered, the new emerging France had to deal with an increasing urban crush of the provincial peasant class that was relocating in the cities, in support of demands of hungry industrialism. Entrepreneurs were commonplace, and capital became readily available through the growing number of banks and private investors while business models were presented to speculators eager to turn a quick profit. Many fortunes were quickly made but were often weakly supported by casual speculation or under capitalization. While some institutions still survive today³⁹, many were just as quick to bankrupt, leaving debtors and creditors at constant odds.⁴⁰ Balzac was well aware of the pitfalls of business failures, as he tried his hand at speculative ventures, most of which were utter failures; such as the recovery of Roman slag in Italy, the absurd idea of shipping Russian timber into France, and founding a publishing company in 1837, which proved to be a complete flop.

The new liberal market economy thrived and fueled the changing landscape, literally, with new railroads, glass, textile, and assembly factories; forges, foundries, and shipping companies; high density urban development, and deep infrastructural advances in transportation systems and city planning.⁴¹ The massive growth strained sustainable resources in urban centers from the population surges of transplanted labor. Property ownership and commercial privatization of merchant business changed the entire complexion of Europe's economy, not just

³⁹ News, US and World, *Facts on File: World News Digest*, (accessed October 24, 2010). http://www.2facts.com.ezproxy.rollins.edu:2048/wnd_story.aspx?PIN=xfr070820a#xfr070800a_4 See also, Wikipedia. *Crédit Lyonnais*. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cr%C3%A9dit_Lyonnais (accessed October 15, 2010). Banks include, *Banque de France* (1800), *Crédit Lyonnais* (1863), *Bourse de Paris* (1808).

⁴⁰ Mark Kesselman, Joel Krieger, Christopher Allan, and Joel Krieger *European Politics in Transition*, ed. Suzanne Jeans. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2009) 120.

⁴¹ Georges-Eugène Haussmann, (27 March 1809 – 11 January 1891), was the principle architect of the renovation of Paris.

that of France. All of this contributed to the ebb and flow of disproportionate wealth within the population. Serious problems arose in the turmoil, resulting in exploitation of the working class, and purulent urban, as well as, rural poverty. The social matrix radically changed. The cash nexus, as seen by historians and economists and studied so intently by the Marxists, was the impetus and motivation of the class struggle that left Europe in the grips of anarchy. This is portrayed well in the novels of nineteenth-century literature evolving from France. So many of the fictional stories resonated with the affected citizenship, and well-written novels became sensational.

Honoré de Balzac, the most affected of the three subject writers, would chronicle “the [torments] transition to the capitalist system of production inflicted on every section of the people, [depicting] the profound moral and spiritual degradation which necessarily accompanied this transformation on every level of society.”⁴² He saw the new regime as an emblem of defilement of France’s glorious history of noble reign. To him, capitalism was a scourge, an effrontery to the ancient aristocracy and an annulment of France’s long-standing position of cultural and military leadership in the world. It was blatant contempt for the sovereign peoples.

A favorite of the Marxists critics as most representative of modern society in the period, Balzac’s *La Comédie Humaine* contains over 90 volumes of fiction concatenated with class struggle that clearly show the conflicts of society in the first half of the nineteenth century. In 1888, Frederic Engels wrote of Balzac’s vivid descriptions of the men, women, and children in French society; “... [he] had learned more from Balzac than from all the professional historians,

⁴² Lukács, *Studies in European Realism*, 12-13.

economists, and statisticians put together.”⁴³ Balzac knew precisely what sort of portrayal his novelistic art required to make it real and capture the attention of his readers who could immediately identify with the themes. He despised the constitutional government, the “abundance of materials, the impetuosity of movements,”⁴⁴ and longed for some compromise similar to the concessions of traditional British Tory politics. Balzac was staunch in his position and constructed novel after novel integrating his ideology into the characters and plots of the *La Comédie Humaine*. He could not do this by choosing any of the backdrops commonly used in Romantic adventure novels. His protagonists would never be D'Artagnan like or anything resembling Hugo's Esmeralda. They required a sense of tangibility, familiarity, and reality, expressing truths, not phantasmagorias of a long-lost age.

Nineteenth-century French Realism is diametrically in opposition to the idyllic conditions surrounding Romanticism. Realism, by its nature, often tends to focus on the bleak individualistic existence of life in society, on the moral crimes, and on injustices. Marx and Engels found this darker side of society consistent with corruptive nature of a Capitalist economy. According to Engels,

Balzac was politically a Legitimist; his great work is a constant elegy on the irretrievable decay of good society; his sympathies are all with the class doomed to extinction. But for all that his satire is never keener, his irony never bitterer than when he sets in motion the very men and women with whom he sympathizes most deeply—the nobles. And the only men, of whom he always speaks with undisguised admiration, are his bitterest political antagonists, the republican heroes of the Cloître Saint Merri [Méry]. The men who at that time (1830-36) were indeed the representatives of the popular masses. [sic]⁴⁵

⁴³ Unwin, *The French Novel*, (1997) 5. For corespondance and opinion, see F. Engels and K. Marx, *On Literature* (Moscow: Progress Publications, 1976).

⁴⁴ *Ibid.* Engels had commented extensively on Balzac.

⁴⁵ McCracken, Scott. "Cousin Bette: Balzac and the Historiography of Difference," in *Balzac: Bloom's Modern Critical Views*, (Broomall: Chelsea House Publishers, 2003) 137. See also, F. Engels and K. Marx, *On Literature* 1888, (Moscow: Progress Publications, 1976), 116.

While in agreement with Balzac, Marx and Engels typecast Realism as essentially pessimistic, yet Balzac leaves the back door open in *La Cousine Bette*. He creates the retired perfumer, Crevel, as the prototypical corrupt and tremendously successful bourgeois, contrasting and comparing him to the pathetic image of the decaying aristocrat, Hector Hulot. Scott McCracken notes, "Baron Hulot's heroic, masculine, and French identity disintegrates on impact with the market values embodied by Crevel, while his son, Victorin, displays an increasing authority in the new political economic climate. . . . Victorin, as attorney and parliamentarian, represents the new, considerably less charismatic hero of the age. He is able to negotiate the new state structures in order to extricate the family from the grip of this father's mistress. Mme Marneffe, and her accomplice, Cousin Bette."⁴⁶ Victorin is the calm, quiet, steadfast, and devoted civil servant who swims in the undercurrent of the story, never erring, never judging, always patient, who ultimately brings balance and some semblance of stability to the otherwise "fractured existence" of this dying family unit. George Lukács believes Balzac saw the transformation from feudalism as progressive:

This contradiction in his experience Balzac attempted to force into a system based on a Catholic Legitimism and tricked out with Utopian conceptions of English Toryism. But this system was contradicted all the time by the social realities of his day and the Balzacian vision which mirrored them. This contradiction itself clearly expressed, however, the real truth: Balzac's profound comprehension of the contradictorily progressive character of capitalist development.⁴⁷

Balzac, whom Marx and Engels admired "above all other modern writers" is a passion of Lukács, but he is also a curiously safe subject for a Communist critic to write about, since he was

⁴⁶ Scott McCracken, "Cousin Bette: Balzac and the Historiography of Difference," in *Balzac: Bloom's Modern Critical Views*, (Broomall: Chelsea House Publishers, 2003), 138.

⁴⁷ Lukács, *Studies in European Realism*, 12-13.

a royalist and Catholic who cannot be accused, as liberal and radical writers often are, of “betraying the cause that Communists believe is in their keeping.”⁴⁸

Balzac yearned for the return of a defined community while, at the same time, he knew that the three pillars of the *ancien régime*—the aristocracy, the clergy, and the monarchy, could not coexist any longer. As a conservative reactionary, Balzac understood that it was imperative to “reconfigure the old regime . . . to transform a tottering old [oligarchy] into a dynamic, ideologically coherent movement of the masses.”⁴⁹ It was, of course, his hope to retain much of what he held dear and discard what he detested about the “antique inequalities of a dilapidated estate.”⁵⁰ Unlike his friend Victor Hugo, Balzac would remain in France casting his politics out to his reading public through his fiction. It is easily argued that his novels could be classified as propagandist literature. Drawing upon Gottfried Keller’s⁵¹ expression, “Everything is politics,” Lukács writes, “[Keller] did not mean that everything was immediately tied up with politics; on the contrary, in his view—as in Balzac’s and Tolstoy’s—every action, thought, and emotion of human beings is inseparably bound up with the life and struggles of the community, i.e., politics. . .the true great realists not only realized [they] depicted this situation.”⁵²

⁴⁸ Alfred Kazin, “Introduction,” in *Studies in European Realism*, by Georg Lukács. (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1964), xii.

⁴⁹ Corey Robin, “The Party of Loss: Conservatism and Counterrevolution from Burke to Palin,” *Raritan*, (Summer 2010), 17-22.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.* 17-22. Corey Robin sums up the cause and effects of political and social changes in France.

⁵¹ Gottfried Keller (1819-1890) Swiss poet and novelist.

⁵² Lukács, *Studies in European Realism*, 9. See also, Frederic Jameson, “Realism and Desire: Balzac and the Problem of the Subject,” in *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Social Symbolic Act*, (New York: Routledge, 2002), p5, for a parallel reiteration of “Everything is “in the last analysis” political. The assertion of a political unconscious proposes that we undertake just such a final analysis and explore the multiple paths that lead to the unmasking of cultural artifacts as socially symbolic acts.”

Balzac, among many other of his contemporary French writers, used his talents as storyteller to map out the voluptuous, sumptuous, but vice-ridden France as the self-proclaimed “secretary of French society.” He wrote, “French society was going to the historian, I only had to be the secretary. By drawing up the inventory of vices and virtues, assembling the principle facts of the passions, painting the characters, choosing the principle events of society, composing types by putting together the traits of several homogenous personalities, I could perhaps succeed in writing the history forgotten by so many historians, the history of manners.”⁵³ Balzac firmly believed that the manners and etiquette integral to aristocratic life were rudely pushed aside, displaced by the bourgeoisie whose rude and brazen behavior was sheer impudent arrogance.

Of course, even as a political thinker, Balzac had never been a “commonplace, empty-headed legitimist; nor is his Utopia the fruit of any wish to return to the feudalism of the Middle Ages. On the contrary, what Balzac wanted was that French capitalist development should follow the English pattern, especially in the sphere of agriculture. His social ideal was that compromise between aristocratic landowner and bourgeois capitalist which was achieved in England (1688) . . . could be achieved in France.”⁵⁴ Balzac blamed the French aristocrats for contriving “petty intrigues against a great revolution instead of saving the monarchy by wise reforms.”⁵⁵ Balzac’s English Utopia was his muse, his mistress, which he constantly compared to the promiscuous courtesan of French greed and avarice. By accepting the interpretive role of the author to describe society, he writes, “everything was simplified by monarchical institutions: social types were clearly defined: a bourgeois was a merchant or an artisan, a nobleman was

⁵³ William W Stowe, *Balzac, James, and the Realistic Novel*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983) I, 11, 25.

⁵⁴ Lukács, *Studies in European Realism*, 22.

⁵⁵ *Ibid*, 23.

entirely free, a peasant was a slave. That's European society as it used to be. It didn't provide much material for novels...Equality is producing infinite nuances in France. At one time caste gave everyone a set of features (*une physionomie*) which took precedence over individual characteristics. Nowadays, the individual creates his own features (*physionomie*) on his own authority."⁵⁶ Balzac speaks of this as a condemnation of society yet provides good material for a writer seeing a chaotic society as "formless," desperately seeking order and finding little.

Shared Complaints: Generations Pass and Little Changes

Flaubert, too, expressed disgust and disenchantment with the politics after the revolutions. He longed for the return of aristocratic rule, fearing that the defeat of Napoleon III would bring France into "darker times." In a letter to his niece after the abdication, he revealed his depression, "We are about to enter into a time of darkness. People will no longer think of anything but the military arts."⁵⁷ In a letter to George Sand, he writes, "Our salvation now lies only with a legitimate aristocracy."⁵⁸ His method to express his disgust is to expose the "Fool." In an article in *Les Temps modernes*, Jean-Paul Sartre observes that Flaubert was contemptuous of incompetence or "commonplace stupidities" that he found everywhere in society and made mockery of in *Madame Bovary*.⁵⁹ The "fool he condemns irrevocably" by ridiculing the absurd behaviors of the "free-thinker" Pharmacist, Homais, whose anticlerical position, loud voice, and whose regional ambitions culminated in obtaining the cross of the Legion of Honor; and his

⁵⁶ William W Stowe, "Systematic Realism," in *Balzac*, edited by Harold Bloom, (Broomall, PA: Chelsea House Publishers, 2003), 24.

⁵⁷ Rosemary Lloyd, "Flaubert's correspondence," in *Flaubert*, ed. Timothy Unwin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 81-82.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ Jean-Paul Sartre, "Class Consciousness in Flaubert," ed. Helen Weaver, *Les Temps modernes*, reprinted in *Madame Bovary*, tr. Lowell Bair, (New York: Bantam Books, 1987), 402.

counterpart, Bournisien, the “materialistic, illiterate cleric. . . who was deliberately conceived to justify the diatribes of Homais. . . [who] ate and drank for four, knows nothing about souls, and whose stupidity drives him to intolerance.”⁶⁰ For Flaubert, Homais was the “final crystallization of the Garçon, of the sententious and absurd bourgeois with a little learning and a head full of *idées reçues*, and he painted him as “at once comic and disgusting, essentially and impersonally fetid.”⁶¹ His other fools included Charles, the bumbling second-rate physician and husband to Emma; Rodolphe Boulanger, the swank, debonair, want-to-be Aristocrat who had purchased a chateau and two farms in La Huchette near Yonville—Emma’s lover, who never had any intention of bailing her out of trouble when she came to him for help; and, of course, Emma herself, the beautiful romantic whose discontent with reality drove her mad. Although Emma was his central figure, she was also Flaubert’s framework to build his tragic comedy that so masterfully drew attention to his caricatures of French social and political life prior to the Second Empire.

If we could characterize Balzac as the nineteenth-century’s literary psychologist, Flaubert as the moralist, then, certainly, Zola should be considered French literature’s sociologist. Sandy Petrey observes, “Zola and the representation of society are less a coupling than an identity.”⁶² To be sure, Zola’s reputation as a literary force in the latter half of the nineteenth century brings focus to a sharp pinpoint as to the ills of French society under the Second Empire. Zola’s series is consistent, having four parallel thematic lines that run through the Rougon-Macquart cycle; first, an intricate and complicated plot involving characters and situations at all levels of the

⁶⁰ Ibid, 407.

⁶¹ Steegmuller, *Flaubert and Madame Bovary: a Double Portrait*, 300.

⁶² Sandy Petrey, "Zola and the representation of society," in *Émile Zola*, edited by Brian Nelson, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 39-52.

socioeconomic strata; second, intentional thematic attention to political and social injustice with a clear tie to historical conditions; third, a concentrated indictment of the Second Empire exposing the “kleptocracy of Louis Bonaparte;” and fourth, an underlying dependence on scientific method to help explain what Zola depicts as environmental causes, influences, etc. that drive the decision making of his characters through their physiological makeup.⁶³ Within the first parallel, there are sub-thematic elements, the first of which is the abusive decadence countered with ridiculous spoilage and, second, the sado-masochistic perversion that Nana’s relationships ultimately fall into, particularly with Muffat and La Faloise, but there are tendencies toward this with the prostitute, Satin. This plot diversion turns off to a lesbian relationship laced with complex cruelties and dark desires. The diversion serves as a further condemnation towards Nana’s perverse behaviors.

We can understand some of Zola’s method when he writes in the margins, “Show the milieu of the lower classes, and explain lower class through this milieu.”⁶⁴ The statement doesn’t reveal his purpose or motivation for making the planning note when writing *L’Assommoir*⁶⁵ but describes his method to which he will present much of the inequities he witnessed. And it is the inequities he highlights by contrasting wealth with poverty, excess with depravity, virtue with perdition. Keeping in mind the subtitle of the *Rougon-Macquart* cycle, *A Natural and Social History of a Family under the Second Empire*, one can see motivation in Zola’s methods and his

⁶³ Jack J. Woehr, "The Rougon-Macquart Novels of Emile Zola." *Well.com*, edited by Jack J. Woehr (2004-2009), <http://www.well.com/~jax/literature/Rougon-Macquart.html> (accessed October 20, 2010).

Paraphrased observation of a Zola scholar; Jack Woehr is a devoted enthusiast and avid reader of The Rougon-Macquart series and offers some excellent observations concerning Zola. Although not associated with a university, Woehr nonetheless has an excellent knowledge base of Zola and offers some salient observations.

⁶⁴ Petrey, "Zola and the representation of society," in *Émile Zola*, edited by Brian Nelson, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 39.

⁶⁵ *Ibid*, 41. Article titled Zola and the Representation of society is an excellent summation of Zola’s commitment to the psychological aspects of the milieu. In reference to Zola’s notes RM ii 1544. 1545 see p 41.

purpose for writing a polemic on class struggles during and before his time. It is the “social milieu” that Zola uses as an “active power and dynamic force” that underlie his stories. He avoids a static and “inert setting” and depicts society like a tidal entity. Zola, and Balzac alike, frame their novels in the “social milieu,” thus providing a fundamental structure to build upon and manipulate characters through.

Nana Coupeau, the little street beggar, becomes obscenely wealthy as a young woman.⁶⁶ She learned to use her looks and guile to work her way from the lower class into bourgeois society. Nana is quite different than Balzac’s Valarie Marneffe, who was denied her father’s fortune as a young woman. Brushing with poverty, she pulls herself out of the grip using her natural beauty, her sensuality, feminine wit, intuitive timing, and seductive wiles to control and taunt her dependent lovers. Valerie is simply an opportunist. Nana is not quite so clever. She is not as calculating, nor is she smart enough to strategize for her long-term well-being. Her goals are confined to immediate gratification, a self-indulgence driven by retribution and fueled by the lust of her lovers. Unlike Valerie, Nana has an unconscious vendetta to settle with society and in particular with men. It is the misandrist of Nana, which parasitizes and consumes her host, like a pathogen—to make men the object of her obsession—to control and destroy her benefactors is her unconscious objective. V. Minogue refers to Nana as “the vengeful goddess-whore”⁶⁷ who seems to know the inevitability of her fate and is not willing to be dragged to hell alone. Instead, she wallows in the sexual bondage she holds over her lovers. Zola ingeniously interjects, in Chapter VII, a metaphorical portrayal of Nana in the article, “The Golden Fly,” written by the journalist, Fauchery in *Le Figaro*. Nana’s hairdresser brings her the paper, presumably to warn

⁶⁶ Nana is the daughter of Gervaise, the central protagonist and alcoholic mother in *L’Assommoir*.

⁶⁷ Valerie Minogue, “Nana: The World, the Flesh and the Devil,” in *Émile Zola*, edited by Brian Nelson, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 122.

her of Fauchery's depiction of her. Nana, in her self-absorption, is too stupid to realize the slanderous connection. In a following scene, she stares at her image in the mirror in her boudoir, mesmerized, admiring her flowing blond hair over her nude breasts while Muffat silently reads the article. He realizes the connection immediately and is shocked and appalled as the article describes,

the life of a harlot descended from four or five generations of drunkards and tainted in her blood by a cumulative inheritance of misery and drink, which in her case has taken the form of a nervous exaggeration of the sexual instinct. She has shot up to womanhood in the slums and on the pavements of Paris, and tall, handsome and as superbly grown as a dunghill plant, she avenges the beggars and outcasts of whom she is the ultimate product. With her the rottenness that is allowed to ferment among the populace is carried upward and rots the aristocracy. She becomes a blind power of nature, a leaven of destruction, and unwittingly she corrupts and disorganizes all Paris, churning it between her snow-white thighs as milk is monthly churned by housewives. And it was at the end of this article that the comparison with a fly occurred, a fly of sunny hue which has flown up out of the dung, a fly which sucks in death on the carrion tolerated by the roadside and then buzzing, dancing and glittering like a precious stone enters the windows of palaces and poisons the men within by merely settling on them in her flight.⁶⁸

At this pivotal point in the book, Zola takes sharp departure from the sort of Realism depicted by Balzac and Flaubert. This depiction by Fauchery is brutal and venomous while disturbingly accurate. Zola spares nothing in this condemnation of the "ultimate product of beggars and outcasts."⁶⁹ To Zola, the Naturalist, this is accuracy without insinuation. It's not suggestion nor accusation but a "scarlet letter," an exact indictment of Second Empire moral degeneration. A description of Nana through the point of view of the implied author, who sees through a clear lens without color or curvature. This paragraph is a prime example of what distinguishes Zola's form of Naturalism from the Realism of his contemporaries that incorporates environmental cause and effect.

⁶⁸ Émile Zola, *Nana*, tr. Douglas Parmée, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009) 181.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

During the latter part of the century, literature was being heavily influenced by concepts driven by scientific determinism. According to Brian Nelson, Zola intended to fuse “two interconnected aims: to use fiction to demonstrate a number of ‘scientific’ notions about the ways in which human behavior is determined by heredity and environment; and to use the symbolic possibilities of a family whose heredity is tainted to represent a diseased society—the immoral and corrupt, yet dynamic and vital, France of the Second Empire.”⁷⁰ It is at these very junctures that Zola brings the interplay of heredity and environment of the “social milieu” that separate his Naturalistic style from the Realism of his predecessors. Balzac and Flaubert don’t make this connection, at least not overtly, by stating through their prose that the fate of humanity, allegorically, is woven in the fabric of individuals like original sin. Influenced by Hippolyte Taine, the positivist philosopher, Charles Darwin, and the physiologist, Claude Bernard, Zola developed his personal ideologies. Social Theory was a hot topic in the latter part of the century, and Zola played his contributing role for reform by writing fictional portrayals of the “diseased” social milieu. It was his “hope to change the world not by judging it but by understanding it.”⁷¹

It’s easy to imagine that one could draw the conclusion that the nineteenth-century novel was, in its form, a tragic medium, a vehicle of propaganda against an aesthetic that was stained with blood and contorted by corruption and avarice. Anybody would admit that the subject authors paint a dismal picture of both a poisoned society and a pathologically disturbed public, whose relentless pursuit of pleasure seems dumbfounding but strangely understandable within the realm of psycho-motivations. There was, indeed, a malignant presence associated with the

⁷⁰ Nelson, "Zola and the nineteenth century," in *Émile Zola*, ed. Brian Nelson, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 200), 3.

⁷¹ Ibid.

new economy that, for some, caused enslavement. Additionally, there was considerable ambiguity concerning civil rights that contributed to the chaos of disproportionate estates.

From a literary perspective, it is imperative to understand that the revolution was not a “fall from grace” for the monarchy, as could be construed if the nineteenth-century novel is considered a “tragic medium.” It is as much an evolution or “changing of the guard,” whose liberal ideology strove for human rights and a constitutional distribution of power, as it is an elimination of obsolete ideals. Many in Balzac’s generation believed that France could never recover from the war, and this sentiment is echoed by Flaubert and Zola. Peter Brooks observes that France could never get past the killing of the “father-monarch; the regicide of 1793.”⁷² During the restoration, the survivors tended to believe that France suffered from “malade de son père [sic].” The old patriarchs, who fondly remembered the ancient regime, would often repeat that to have lived during those times, “was indeed to have known *la douceur de vivre*.”⁷³ The pragmatic recognized the inequities of the new third estate and the corruption of power within the troubled régimes as being ruinous and a death knell for France. Within the genteel strata, whose members, we must concede, include Balzac and Flaubert, most understood that the new concessions were critical to the pursuit of harmony in France, while the populous sought solid ground. For one in the literary realm, Balzac wrote as a reactionary, a “doctor of social

⁷² Brooks, *Realist Vision*, 39.

⁷³ Harry Levin, *The Gates of Horn: A Study of Five French Realists*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), 446.

medicine” as he referred to himself,⁷⁴ who intended to administer treatment to his wounded France through the didactic pages of his novels.

On the other hand, to be seduced by the promises of Socialism was to ignore the lessons of the Revolution, the history of France’s world dominance, and the real promises toward human rights. But the sustainable fear of socialism was then, and still is, the belief that the individual would be swallowed up in the current of the collective and whatever was gained by the war in terms of civil rights would be lost in the manifesto of social welfare. The values of the *ancien régime* were obsolete, and the trouble caused by the transition from despotism to republic gave Balzac, Flaubert, and Zola plenty of material to write about under the claim of equality.

⁷⁴ Honoré de Balzac, *Cousin Bette*, tr. Marion Ayton Crawford, (New York: Penguin Books, 1977). See the dedication to Prince of Teano, Don Michele Angelo Cajetani, front matter.

“Flaubert, disagreeing so mordantly with the cultural establishment of his day, finds substantial agreement with Baudelaire and other artists who will have their day in culture. In political terms, our novelists are oppositionists, as in scientific terms they are experimentalists, and artistically they compose an advance guard.”⁷⁵ —Harry Levin

“In its grasp of contemporary reality French literature is far ahead of the literature of other European countries in the nineteenth century.”⁷⁶ —Erich Auerbach

Chapter III

Realism and its Imitation of Reality

As a reaction against the idealization of life found in the artistic works of the Romanticists and Neoclassicists, the nineteenth-century artist community in France revolted by drawing closer attention to the portrayal of a realistic life in art. It brought to the forefront all the suffering, pretenses, and social consequences stemming from the inequities of an asymmetrical society. The change in the literary community was not abrupt. It evolved over a period of many years of dissention. The prolific Romanticist, Alexander Dumas *père*, was publishing a substantial volume of fiction of the type of prose Balzac found frivolous and Flaubert contemptuous, both objecting to the false images of life as escapist pulp. Although Dumas *père* was no swashbuckler himself, he nevertheless created wonderful fictional adventures with characters framed in patriotism, courageous intrigue, exotic travels, redemption, and, above all, justice. These stories captivated a public hungry for some sense of equality and fairness in every aspect of life after the turmoil of civil war. Yet the stories were poor representations of what life was truly like, as it was always depicting the picturesque. The reading public consumed the

⁷⁵ Levin, *The Gates of Horn: A Study of Five French Realists*, 446.

⁷⁶ Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, tr. Willard R. Trask, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 516.

novel with delight while they were seeking to escape the conditions of their own reality through the positive, and often, unrealistic resolutions offered in these novels. For instance, Victor Hugo's Jean Valjean, of *Les Misérables* sought justice for a variety of characters in the novel through dramatic and heroic self-sacrifice. The novel is full of Hugo's subjective digressions and excessive romantic sentimentality, which was offensive to those Realists, like Flaubert and Zola, who strove to depict day-to-day reality. However, mixing facts with fiction as an imitation of reality begins much earlier with the *La Comédie Humaine*.

Honoré de Balzac was an idealist, a social revolutionary bent on earning a living educating the reading public on the urgent need to recognize that the “new” society was deeply troubled. Disenchanted with law studies as a young man, he sought a career writing fictitious stories themed in contemporary times about realistic people in realistic situations with realistic resolutions. All his novels in the *La Comédie Humaine* series are about the ills of society and the delusions of a burgeoning French bourgeoisie populace. Oscar Wilde was to have said of Balzac that he “invented the nineteenth-century.”⁷⁷ True it was. Balzac presented candid, true-to-life descriptions of common life. Being credited as one of the founding members of Realism, he and other members of the Realist movement embraced the notion that life must be viewed and characterized clearly and accurately based on a scientific rationalization.⁷⁸ He portrayed his era as it appeared to him, in all its truth, expressing no euphemistic visions of reality. It's this “non-beautiful world” that they [Realists] want to bring attention to, says Peter Brooks. He observes, “The discovery of the ugly is part of the process of disillusioning in which Realism deals, but then beyond the loss of illusions something else seems to loom: something we find in [Lucian]

⁷⁷ Brooks, *Realist Vision*, 21. As quoted by Oscar Wilde, “The nineteenth century, as we know it, is largely an invention of Balzac's.”

⁷⁸ Ironically, all three authors objected to being included as part of a movement, any movement, seeing themselves as non-conformists, an image of independence rather than membership in a group.

Freud's paintings, or in Flaubert's latter works—the fascination of the banal and ugly.”⁷⁹ Brooks states, “by giving form to its [nineteenth century] emerging urban agglomerations, its nascent capitalist dynamics, its rampant cult of the individual personality,”⁸⁰ Balzac and his contemporaries (in all the arts that embraced Realism) were able to show the stark truth to what was occurring around them and how it was potentially going to affect them and/or those concerning them. Balzac was begging his readership not to be blind to the inequities, injustices, and flagrant abuses going on in the streets of Paris. Primarily due to the radical changes in the socio-economy of France, Balzac wanted his readers to take stock of the terrible conditions in France.

The initial break from previous methods of fiction writing involved changing the stories' setting, by getting away from the castles, stoic acts of bravery, desperate rescues, and heroic sacrifice of times “long, long ago.” Balzac introduced a different technique. He began with a temporal shift in style.⁸¹ He reduced the gap of time, most notably, between the “moment of writing (and reading) and the moment represented” in the story. The time shift offers relevancy and immediacy to the story that would otherwise rest in some literary ether, continuing and maintaining a sense of unreality, as in fantasy or Romance. In contrast, the settings were decades

⁷⁹ Peter Brooks, *Realist Vision*, (Yale University Press, New York 2005), 8-9, Fig. 2. To make his point, Brooks draws from the Realist painting of twentieth-century artist, Lucian Freud, whose work, *Naked Portrait*, (1972-73, oil on canvas, Tate Gallery, London) shows a preoccupied nude woman on a bed in a half fetal position without any glamorization displaying the pathetic figure in a state of naked depression. Brooks includes the painting is “about individualization, particularization, as opposed to the generalizing and idealizing tradition of the nude.”

⁸⁰ *Ibid*, 22.

⁸¹ James Wood, *How Fiction Works*, (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux), 42-44.

in difference to the readers, not centuries as in Alexander Dumas *père* *Les Trois Mousquetaires* or *Le Comte de Monte-Cristo*.⁸²

Balzac considered himself the “secretary of society” proudly wearing the moniker as a social “reporter.” His point in writing the *La Comédie Humaine* was to align, in some fashion, the work with Dante’s *Divine Comedy*. Although Dante wrote of Gothic Fantasy, his use of the vulgar language rather than Latin and the immediacy imparted to the story by inclusion of his contemporary characters gave a distinct relevancy to the reader. Engels wrote of Balzac in 1888, in a letter to Margaret Harkness (1854-1923), the English novelist and political Socialist, a veritable treatise of Balzac’s contributions to social awareness. Due to the remarkable and invaluable and salient content, the comments of Engels are worth including in their entirety:

Balzac, whom I consider a far greater master of Realism than all the Zolas *passés, présents et à venir* [past, present and future], in “*La Comédie Humaine*” gives us a most wonderfully realistic history of French ‘society,’ especially of *le monde parisien* [the Parisian social world], describing, chronicle-fashion, almost year by year from 1816 to 1848 the progressive inroads of the rising bourgeoisie upon the society of nobles, that reconstituted itself after 1815 and that set up again, as far as it could, the standard of *la vieille politesse française* [French refinement]. He describes how the last remnants of this, to him, model society gradually succumbed before the intrusion of the vulgar monied upstart, or were corrupted by him; how the grand dame whose conjugal infidelities were but a mode of asserting herself in perfect accordance with the way she had been disposed of in marriage, gave way to the bourgeoisie, who horned her husband for cash or cashmere; and around this central picture he groups a complete history of French Society from which, even in economic details (for instance the rearrangement of real and personal property after the Revolution) I have learned more than from all the professed historians, economists, and statisticians of the period together. Well, Balzac was politically a Legitimist; his great work is a constant elegy on the inevitable decay of good society, his sympathies are all with the class doomed to extinction. But for all that his satire is never keener, his irony never bitterer, than when he sets in motion the very men and women with whom he sympathizes most deeply—the nobles. And the only men

⁸² David Coward, "The King of Romance," *Guardian*, (April 16, 2003), 1. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2003/apr/16/alexandredumaspere> (accessed October 11, 2010). Dumas *père* was the epitome of success as a novelist, who’s writing volume is staggering (est. 650 novels) when placed in context with what contemporary literature was generating during the time. In 1893, twenty years after his death, six hundred of his books were re-serialized, “nearly three million volumes had been sold, and eighty million installments have been issued as weekly parts.”

of whom he always speaks with undisguised admiration, are his bitterest political antagonists, the republican heroes of the Cloître Saint-Méry, the men, who at that time (1830-6) were indeed the representatives of the popular masses. That Balzac thus was compelled to go against his own class sympathies and political prejudices, that he saw the necessity of the downfall of his favourite nobles, and described them as people deserving no better fate; and that he saw the real men of the future where, for the time being, they alone were to be found - that I consider one of the greatest triumphs of Realism, and one of the grandest features in old Balzac. [sic]⁸³

Although popular fiction leaned heavily toward the Romanticists in the nineteenth century, Realism was making inroads. Petri Liukkonen notes, “According to Auerbach, Stendhal and Balzac broke the rigid separation of stylistic levels, dating from classical antiquity, in which the low, comic mode was reserved for the description of ordinary, everyday reality, and [the] tragic, the problematic, the serious within everyday life was depicted in the high style.”⁸⁴ But before these French writers, who did not separate the serious and the realistic, the unification of styles was seen in Dante's *Commedia*⁸⁵ . . . Modern realistic view of the world was fully developed in the character of Julien Sorel from Stendhal's novel *The Red and the Black* (1830). Sorel's tragic life is deeply connected with the historical, social, and political conditions of the period.”⁸⁶ It is also, grimly portrayed in the psychology of characters, whose real life counterparts are familiar at some level or another, to all readers, past and present, as in the following scene from *Nana*, who is undergoing physical abuse by her temporary lover, Fontan:

⁸³Frederick Engels, "Letters: Marx-Engels Correspondence, 1888 Engels to Margaret Harkness." *Marx and Engels On Literature and Art transcripts*, edited by Lee Baxandall and Stefan Morawski. Andy Blunden, 1976. <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/subject/art/index.htm> (accessed 2010). The associations that Engels makes in this letter regarding Balzac as the premier chronicler of modern society under the restoration, is only one of many that single him out.

⁸⁴ Presumably the “high style” refers to the formality associated with Classicism and Romanticism.

⁸⁵ Petri Liukkonen, and Ari Pesonen, *Creative Commons: Erich Auerbach*, (2008) 2-3). <http://www.kirjasto.sci.fi/auerb.htm> (accessed October 19, 2010). Online biography of Auerbach.

⁸⁶ *Ibid*, 3.

She was dreadfully wounded. All that evening he kept chaffing her, calling her Mlle Mars. But the harder he hit the more bravely she suffered, for she derived a certain bitter satisfaction from this heroic devotion of hers, which rendered her very great and very loving in her own eyes. Ever since she had gone with other men in order to supply his wants her love for him had increased, and the fatigues and disgusts encountered outside only added to the flame. He was fast becoming a sort of pet vice for which she paid, a necessity of existence it was impossible to do without, seeing that blows only stimulated her desires.⁸⁷

The scene is unpleasant yet starkly realistic. We feel Nana's bruises and almost empathize with her masochism as "boxes" are doled out by her "pet vice." There is a pathological self-punishment we understand her to go through, and while we may wish for some hero to walk in and rescue her from Fontan's abuses, it does not happen. It doesn't happen in this story nor does it happen in real life.

While Flaubert used a more satirical approach with *Madame Bovary*, he shares the literary mantra of the Realists, "Be aware and accountable." This was their outcry, the message they hoped to get across, by showing the darker truths of life rather than the idealistic views that dreamy eyed readers, like Emma, were losing themselves in by reading only the escapist Romantic novels. "*Vive le laid, le laid seul est aimable* [Long live ugliness! Only the ugly is lovable]", the Realist's critic Champfleury was to have shouted, in relief.⁸⁸ It was the ugly side of life that the Realists were celebrating by writing about the ugly truth of life. Even Emma Bovary had options or alternate solutions to her dilemma, and Flaubert could simply have had her take responsibility for her behavior, accept the punishment, whatever it might be, and "live happily, ever after" with her husband and daughter. We readers might have sighed a relief and

⁸⁷ Émile Zola, *Nana*, pdf, ed. Jim Manis, (Hazelton, PA: Pennsylvania State University, Electronic Classics Series, 2000), 233.

⁸⁸ Brooks, *Realist Vision* (2005), 8. See also, Michel Lévy, *le Réalisme: Champfleury sur M. Corbet Lettre A Madame George Sand*, Orthographe de cette édition. (Paris: La ressource éphémère Sommaire L'antre littéraire, 1857), 276. Champfleury comments in a letter to George Sand in 1857, concerning Gustave Courbet's, *Burial at Ornans*, whose bold attempts in a new style were mocked by critics at the Salons.

congratulated her for her courage and honesty. However, of course, that's not what happened, in Emma's case, or in Delphine and Eugene Delamare's case, the husband and wife who Flaubert patterned *Madame Bovary* after.⁸⁹ It was a double suicide and a dramatic one, at that. The story was real, modeled after the incident in Croisset while he and Maxime Du Camp were in Egypt. Flaubert fictionalized the characters, which fit perfectly in his scheme to expose bourgeois aesthetics. Flaubert kept loyal to the subject, while denying any connection with the Delamares. Whether we can imagine real people involved in the story or just accept the fictional version, our moral identity and our values are challenged by the delusional characters. This type of prose distances itself from Romanticism by depiction. The Romantic version would have had a happy ending, and this is what Flaubert, Balzac, and Zola fought to keep out of their novels.

⁸⁹ Herbert Lottman, *Flaubert: A Biography*, (New York: Fromm International Publishing Corporation, 1990), 96. See also, Steegmuller, *Madame Bovary: A Double Portrait*, 218-220.

“Literature is a social institution, using as its medium language, a social creation. Such traditional literary devices as symbolism and metre are social in their very nature.”⁹⁰ —Rene Wellek

“From the vantage point of one family, Zola examined the political, moral, and above all, sexual landscape of the late nineteenth-century, in a way that scandalized the grossly materialistic and hypocritical bourgeois society of France both before and after the disaster of the Franco-Prussian War.”⁹¹ —Brian Nelson

"Look here, M. Zola, you are earning eight pounds a month with us, which is ridiculous for a man of your talent. Why don't you go into literature altogether? It will bring you wealth and glory."⁹²
—Member of Hachette publishing firm

Chapter IV

Zola's Literary Development in the Light of Social Reform

Émile Zola was the most recognized of the three subject authors for his positions on social reform; he, more than Balzac and Flaubert, publically and aggressively challenged bourgeois ethics. Just after the success of his first novel, Zola left the employ of *Librarie Hachette* to work for the “scandal-mongering” *L'Événement*, a popular newspaper that Zola would use to launch his campaign against the elitist aristocracy of the Paris Salons. The competitive Salons, held every two years, would judge which artists were granted entry. The applicants were not always judged by talent or composition but by popular taste and political affiliation. Artists who were refused exhibition were, at one time, allowed to show in a public

⁹⁰ Wellek and Warren, *Theory of Literature*, 94.

⁹¹ Brian Nelson, introduction to *Pot Luck*, by Émile Zola, tr. Brian Nelson, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), vii. *Pot Luck* is Zola's tenth novel.

⁹² Edward Vizetelly Surbiton, preface to *Therese Raquin* by Émile Zola, tr. Edward Vizetelly Surbiton (New York: Feedbooks, Project Gutenberg Ebook, 1901). <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/6626/6626-h/6626-h.htm> Wonderful and insightful introduction written December 1, 1901, less than a year before Zola's death on September 29, 1902.

gallery of the *Salon des Refusés*. It was not part of the prestigious *Prix de Rome*, but permitted the excluded artists to exhibit outside of competition. All during the early 1860s complaints were registered with the *Académie of France* and the Superintendent of Fine Arts for the bias the judges imposed.⁹³

As an offshoot of *Le Figaro*, *L'Événement* was only a few months old, and Zola had made this new paper “a forum for [selections] debate” or a column of what was to become known as “The Jury of the Assassins.” Zola became the self-appointed chief defender of the artistic minority and was able to muster up a considerable force to help eliminate the bias so prevalent in the Spring exhibitions. The Paris Salon, known as “The Exhibition of Living Artists” was a six-week exhibition that would have over a million visitors at an average of 23,000 per day. This was an enormous opportunity for exposure for an artist, and Zola wasn't about to let the “excluded” be bullied by rejections. A young artist who had been denied entry to the 1866 exhibition, after being accepted for over a decade, could not accept the rejection and took his life. As King explains, “Exclusion spelled professional death, underscored by the red ‘R’ (‘rejected’) stamped on the back of canvases that did not make the cut.”⁹⁴ The suicide note left by Jules Holtzapffel was published openly. Zola's new forum was instantly popular; due to this and his previous successes, he entered the ranks of the *avant garde* .

In 1867, Zola wrote another novel that stirred up controversy, *Thérèse Raquin*, but this novel took a different bent from his previous work. Presumably, Zola wanted to change his image. He made it into literary life as a successful novelist but only as a pulp fiction writer who

⁹³ Ross King, *The Judgement of Paris: The Revolutionary Decade that Gave the World Impressionism*, (New York: Walker and Company, 2006), 94-100.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

tended toward write about subjects he knew was appealing to the masses; sex and money. As he got his foothold in the market place he began to gravitate to the intellectuals. He preferred to associate himself with the artist's community who resided in Paris at the time and felt he needed to be recognized by them as a writer. His move in this direction was well calculated and planned. He appeared to transition from the pulp fiction sensationalist to the concerned socialist and humanist of France via the controversy surrounding the new release. *Thérèse Raquin* is the story of an adulterous affair of working-class woman. She and her lover kill her inconvenient husband but are afterwards consumed by guilt. Before the book was printed, Zola told his publisher that the book would enjoy a *succès d'horreur*, knowing the public and critics would once again put him in the spotlight. But, Zola had a double motive. The critics denounced the pages as "putrid literature" in *Le Figaro*. In January 1868, a critic wrote, "In the past several years there has grown up a monstrous school of novelists which pretends to replace carnal eloquence with eloquence of the charnel house, which invokes the strangest medical anomalies, which musters plague victims so that we can admire their blotchy skin...and which makes pus squirt out of the conscience."⁹⁵ These words and many others were music to Zola who, in his publicist role, would capitalize on the notoriety. Louis Ulbach, the critic with *Le Figaro*, was a friend of Zola's. This friendship leaves little doubt that the articles were crafted by both of them for the best effect. When his first book came out in 1864, he personally sent out favorable reviews to the various newspapers with the full intention of using the positive press to offset the censor's accusations of pornography and sensationalism.⁹⁶ The book sold out in a matter of only four months. In the preface of the second edition, we see the master spin-doctor come to life.

⁹⁵ King, *The Judgement of Paris: The Revolutionary Decade that Gave the World Impressionism*, (2006), 223.

⁹⁶ *Ibid*, endnotes.

Zola defended against the claims that his book was “a cesspit of blood and filth” by presenting the story as a scientific experiment in which the psychological and sociological aspects of a couple are exposed and presented to the reader for examination. “His efforts, he suggested, resembled those of a chemist with his test tubes or an anatomist with his scalpel and his corpse—or, better still, a painter with his paintbrush and a need[ing] model.”⁹⁷ He, in effect, claims to do a public service by writing the book. This tantalizing, tawdry, cliffhanging plot, according to Zola, has imbedded within it some of the truths about humanity and human behavior.⁹⁸ It is at this point that he identifies himself firmly with Naturalism, a literary position in complete concert with the Realist movement. This style is also found in painting and in happy alignment with his friends who had recently been tagged with the name of “Impressionists.”

The maneuvers and manipulations were highly effective for Zola, when, in 1868, he presented his brain child, *Les Rougon-Macquart*, to a new publisher, *Lacroix*, who consumed the concept with applause, granting the writer full and free passage to work on this Herculean project. Zola had invented an ingenious plan to create a series of stories within a twenty-volume effort, about two families who are plagued by the troubles of their heredity and environment. The first of the series of novels traces the family’s origins of the healthy “haves,” (the Rougons), and filial “have-not” misfits, (the Macquarts). The subject alone had within it a fathomless source of material to write about, let alone to have it taking place during the Second Empire (near real time) with all its socioeconomic twists and turns as it tried to find solid ground. For Zola, history unfolds before his eyes with the collapse of the Empire and the shame and violence of the *Commune*, providing yet pages and pages of material to include and incorporate.

⁹⁷ Ibid, 223.

⁹⁸ Émile Zola, *Germinal*, tr. Roger Pearson (New York: Penguin Books, 2004) also reference, Émile Zola, *Germinal*, tr. Havelock Ellis, pdf, ebook download, (manybooks.net, 1885).

To add to the genius of marketing, the thirteenth novel, *Germinal*, would be brought out in serial form in the newspaper *Le Gil Blas*. There would be eighty-nine installments. Each installment would itself have a momentum that would carry the one installment forward to the next. Paris had the highest literacy rate in Europe, and the public was insatiable. The criticisms only added to the excitement for the next issue, and the public praise was continuous. Zola had quickly become an icon in Paris and throughout Europe. *Germinal* was “considered by André Gide to be one of the ten greatest novels in the French language.”⁹⁹

Zola had carefully laid out his characters, conflicts, crises, and resolutions in a manner that shows his deliberate use of an intelligent style.¹⁰⁰ A good story will follow an arc, not identified, per se, in Zola’s time, but known to be a critical component in a story. In *Nana*, Zola followed this arc at multiple levels within the general plot of the corruption and deviance, within the given scene, within the mind of the character, and in the interaction of events that are bigger than the surrounding the scene. His language is rich and full where it is needed, stark and void when the situation calls for it. Zola had “a completely genuine belief in determinism as a precipitating factor in human behavior, that task of creating a family, a task which he was denied in real life until very late...developed a faculty which had so far lain dormant.”¹⁰¹ This observation by Schehr, in *Figures of Alterity*, may be an answer to why he was able to portray his characters and scenes so beautifully and simply adorned or so starkly vacant of attachment, emotion, or compassion.

Zola probably inherited his parents’ sense of responsibility and organization, perhaps

⁹⁹ Roger Pearson, introduction to *Germinal* by Émile Zola, xiii. Introduction contains citation about André Gide, (1869-1951). French critic and author. Recipient of the Nobel Prize in literature in 1947.

¹⁰⁰ Janet Burroway, *Writing Fiction: A Guide to Narrative Craft*, 6th ed. (New York: Longman Press, 2003), 30-46.

¹⁰¹ Lawrence Schehr, *Figures of Alterity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 152.

from this engineer father more than his mother. Regardless, his attentions to accuracy and detail are noteworthy: “More impressive in human terms is the sight of Zola taking his notebook down a mine to write *Germinal*... And although these activities may reveal him as a writer who had served his apprenticeship as a journalist they were to have surprising results, because when Zola came up from the mine, or away from the goods-yard, he was so engrossed in conditions of labor, in matters of social justice, that the man of letters began to give way to the practical philanthropist.”¹⁰²

In 1886, he wrote another volume in the *Rougon-Macquart* cycle, *L'Œuvre*, that explored and revealed the life of a painter, “drawing on the friendships” with many of the leading Parisian painters to characterize the story. In particular, Zola portrays the character modeled after his closest friend, Paul Cézanne, as lazy and disinterested, which caused a rift between the two that would never heal. Zola worked extremely hard at his craft and could not understand why the painters did not have the same sense of responsibility and devotion. Perhaps his pragmatic work ethic and linear thinking prevented Zola from understanding the mind of the painter, assuming his own ideals were universal. Where it took tremendous effort for Zola to produce something, it took little effort for those with artistic talent to produce beauty. For instance, Ernest Meissonier was known to have had a “mania” for drawing and sketching at all times of the day and in all places. His friend, Philippe Burty, a frequent guest at the *Grande Maison*, observed how Meissonier “sometimes amused himself by tracing large, rather audacious drawings on the wall of the stairway and corridors leading to his studio.”¹⁰³ It must have been perplexing for Zola to have to deal with the artist whose talents came so freely, and they gave every appearance of a carefree existence.

¹⁰² Schehr, *Figures in Alternity*, 152-153.

¹⁰³ King, *The Judgement of Paris: The Revolutionary Decade that Gave the World Impressionism*, 92.

Perhaps Zola didn't expect he would be "engrossed" in human suffering and social justice as much as he bargained for when he began the project. As Anita Brookner suggests in her Chapter, "Romanticism and Its Discontents," of her book, *The Genius of the Future*,

It was a form of socialism which had led him to demand equal representation for the Impressionists in the Salon of 1866, and a form of paternalism which made him believe that, given the right circumstances, creative spirits could contribute to the life of their times in terms of strength and clear sightedness. Conversely—and this was a growing conviction—artists had obligations to their community, obligations which they seemed reluctant to acknowledge.¹⁰⁴

It is this conviction that would cause a shift of friendships and a division of ideals between Zola and his Impressionist friends.

Marxist critics consider Zola one of France's greatest champions of social reform, and as a novelist, his approving readership found his descriptive prose an accurate "reflection" of a diseased French Society under an ambiguous leadership. However, Georg Lukács believes Zola missed the mark when he writes,

Perhaps no one has painted more colorfully and suggestively the outer trappings of modern life; but only the outer trappings. They form a gigantic backdrop in front of which tiny, haphazard people move to and fro and live their haphazard lives. Zola could never achieve what the truly great realists Balzac, Tolstoy, or Dickens accomplished: to present social institutions as human relationships and social objects as the vehicles of such relationships. Man and his surrounding are always sharply divided in all Zola's works.¹⁰⁵

But Zola wrote in a different vein than Balzac, and Lukács' judgment is a bit harsh.

Zola's intent was not solely to draw attention to the social milieu. His form of Realism incorporated what he considered the physiological component missing from Balzac's depiction

¹⁰⁴ Anita Brookner, *The Genius of the Future: Diderot, Stendhal, Baudelaire, Zola, The brothers Goncourt, Huysmans*, (London and New York: Paidon, 1971), 91-117. The first few pages from Chapter 1, "Romanticism and its Discontents," offers a thorough definition of Romaniticism since Voltaire.

¹⁰⁵ Lukács, *Studies in European Realism*, 85.
Georg Lukács offers an excellent analysis of Zola in his Chapter "The Zola Centenary."

of life. Zola's claims added scientific basis, the empirical discoveries of which impressed the physical world upon the psychological behaviors of humanity. His Nana was a ruthless prostitute shown in a light that favored her looks and played to her demonic pleasures, while her counterpart, Baron Muffat, was a vice-ridden, pathetic slave to his sexual obsession of women. Zola's interests were to exemplify this counterbalance of the physical and psychological within the confines of human relationships. But while not merging social institutions, he nonetheless, defines them as the vehicle that supports the relationship. His depiction of the *demimonde* left little for the mind to conjure, as Proust, Marx, and Engels identified.

Lukács characterized the Realist movement as “philosophical pessimism”¹⁰⁶ while the relativist's ideology adopted by Zola and his Victorian contemporaries, whose axioms hung on the walls of scientific discovery, was in step with the changing political, economic, social, and religious guard. Harmony was unattainable in the nineteenth century, and forward visions were steeped in pessimism while not being fatalistic was somewhat defeatist. Hope was not elusive, as Zola sees it, if general acknowledgement of the problems exists coupled with responsibility, whether on a political, social, or even genetic level. This movement away from idealism toward individualist subjective values was an eighteenth-century phenomenon manifested in nineteenth-century reformism, as Luckás insists. Zola was a pragmatic realist and had neither Utopian leanings, like Balzac, nor progressive interests outside of his realm of understanding. Zola's social reformism is a progressive movement in response to his witness to nineteenth-century Hedonism.

¹⁰⁶ Lukács, *Studies in European Realism*, 1. As noted in the preface.

PART 2: The Intrinsic

“One of the most obviously artificial devices of the storyteller is the trick of going beneath the surface of the action to obtain a reliable view of a character’s mind and heart.”¹⁰⁷

—Wayne C. Booth

“*Mme. Bovary, c’est moi! D’après moi!*”¹⁰⁸

—Gustave Flaubert

Chapter V

The Evolving Narrator

Henry James’ observation in 1914 that *Madame Bovary* has a perfection that not only stamps it, but that makes it stand almost alone; it holds itself with such a supreme unapproachable assurance as both excites and defies judgment”¹⁰⁹ may seem somewhat extraordinary in light of the fact that *Madame Bovary* was written in the middle of the nineteenth century, some fifty-seven years prior to his statement. However, few, I believe, would challenge the fact that this bold observation is just as relevant today as when James made the declaration. Flaubert *was* a master of a craft that was second nature to him. He recognized that to involve a reader, “absolutely,” Flaubert has to make a pact with the implied narrator and the character so that the reader becomes so intimately integrated with the narration that any boundaries that once existed begin to fade to the point that the reader no longer is conscious of the narrator. James Wood writes,

¹⁰⁷ Wayne C. Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, 2nd ed. (Chicago, Illinois: The University of Chicago Press, (1983), 3.

¹⁰⁸ Flaubert shouts out of frustration, “Madame Bovary is me! It is me!” when asked who was the model for the book. His intent was to detract attention from, or any association with the Delamares.

¹⁰⁹ James, Henry, *Notes on Novelists*, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1914), 80.

Novelists should thank Flaubert the way poets thank spring; it all begins again with him. There really is a time before Flaubert and a time after him. Flaubert established, for good or ill, what most readers think of as modern realist narration, and his influence is almost too familiar to be visible. We hardly remark of good prose that it favors the telling and brilliant detail; that it privileges a high degree of visual noticing; that it maintains an unsentimental composure and knows how to withdraw, like a good valet, from superfluous commentary; that it judges good and bad neutrally; that it seeks out the truth, even as the cost of repelling us; and that the author's fingerprints on all this are, paradoxically, traceable but not visible. You can find some of this in Defoe or Austen or Balzac, but not all of it until Flaubert.¹¹⁰

This casual and seamless transition, with “unsentimental composure,” developed by Flaubert, marks a consistent narrative progress well beyond what most preceding and contemporary novelists were even conscious of. Flaubert writes a description of Emma's growing despondence, “Her life was a cold as an attic facing north, and boredom, like a silent spider, was weaving its web in the shadows, in every corner of her heart.”¹¹¹ These brief words succinctly “show” us Emma's developing depression. Even Zola, who considered Flaubert his mentor, cannot be placed in the same category as Flaubert as his colorful, but often excessive, descriptions subtract from its narrative authority, “At nine o'clock the auditorium of the Varieties was still deserted. The gas-jets of the chandelier were turned down and in the half-light a mere handful of people sat waiting in the rows of dusky red-plush seats of the stalls and dress circle. The large red patch of curtain was in shadow, the stage completely silent, the floodlights were unlit, the orchestra desks unoccupied.”¹¹² These opening lines of *Nana* are blatantly “telling” us what we are seeing, leaving little to imagine. We are “told” the theater is nearly vacant as the “usherette bustles in with tickets in her hand, propelling a man and woman in front of her.”¹¹³

¹¹⁰Wood, *How Fiction Works*, 29.

¹¹¹ Flaubert, *Madame Bovary*, tr. Bair, 38.

¹¹² Zola, *Nana*, tr. Parmée, 1.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

Since Cervantes, the novel and narrative technique has, nevertheless, seen some significant growth. When compared to the rhetorical methods employed in modern literature to the literature written after Balzac, and in particular, with Flaubert, the differences are striking—not because pre-nineteenth-century prose were necessarily crude attempts at storytelling, but simply unsophisticated by today’s standards. The recognized classics were then, and remain today, as the *tour de force* of their time. Mark Harris characterizes this unifying moment of “showing” not “telling” in the words of a young novelist when asked about his art,

I shall not tell you anything. I shall allow you to eavesdrop on my people, and sometimes they will tell you the truth and sometimes they will lie, and you must determine for yourself when they are doing which. You do this every day. Your butcher says, ‘This is the best,’ and you reply, ‘That’s you saying it.’ Shall my people be less the captive of their desires than your butcher? I can show you much, but show only. You will no more expect the novelist to tell you precisely how something is said than you will expect him to stand by your chair and hold your book.¹¹⁴

This progression has become a recognized fact among scholars and acknowledged in creative writing classes today.¹¹⁵ In introducing Lisbeth Fisher (Cousin Bette) in the opening pages of the novel, Balzac writes,

“The old maid wore a puce merino dress whose cut and narrow ribbon trimmings suggested Restoration fashion, an embroidered collar that had cost perhaps three francs, and a stitched straw hat with blue satin rosettes edged with straw, of the kind seen on the heads of old-clothes women in the market.”¹¹⁶

Balzac aptly describes the woman, and we get a sense of her lack of fashion sense, her stingy character, and her social station. Yet Balzac is “telling” us she is of the ilk found with “old-clothes women in the market.”

¹¹⁴ Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (1983), 8. The passage is part of a quote from “Easy Does It Not,” in *The Living Novel*, ed. Granville Hicks (New York, 1957), 62.

¹¹⁵ Burroway, *Writing Fiction*, 74-88.

¹¹⁶ Balzac, *Cousin Bette*, tr. Crawford, 13.

Balzac, however, made some other groundbreaking contributions in style when writing *La Comédie Humaine* by limiting the omniscient narrator's dependence on subjectivism, an inherent problem when the author is overtly present in the story through personal commentary. Only on the occasion when he feels the reader must have direction does he reveal himself as the authorial "I" or as "we," acknowledging, or better yet, establishing a relationship between the reader, narrator, and author—a common practice of storytellers, *dans le passé*, who attempt to maintain omniscience but seem to be unable to keep from interjecting opinion and summary. In *La Cousine Bette*, Balzac writes,

While the whole family with one consent tried to persuade the Marshal to marry, and while Lisbeth was making her way home to the Rue Vanneau, one of those incidents occurred which, in such women as Madame Marneffe, are a stimulus to vice by compelling them to exert their energy and every resource of depravity. One fact, at any rate, must however be acknowledged: life in Paris is too full for vicious persons to do wrong instinctively and unprovoked; vice is only a weapon of defense against aggressors—that is all.¹¹⁷

This paragraph "tells" the reader what to think about Valerie Marneffe and her recourse to vice, stating emphatically, "—that is all," removing from the reader any other possible explanation for her behavior. In a similar passage, he gives warning to the "innocent souls" or the more naive reader and summarizes exactly what, he, the author, wants us to know: "This sketch gives innocent souls some faint idea of the various havocs that the Madame Marneffes of this world may wreak in families and by what means they can strike at poor virtuous wives, apparently so far beyond their reach."¹¹⁸ The intrusion is unnecessary, "clunky," and unwanted. I give Balzac license only because of his historical significance in narrative. If a modern writer of today did this, I may never finish the first chapter of his or her novel.

¹¹⁷ Balzac, *Cousin Bette*, tr. Waring, 155.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid*, 236.

While Balzac, the author, may have had separation issues with his writing, he was able to keep some impartiality, reserving authorial judgment and dramatic direction for those occasions he felt he absolutely needed to pave a path for the reader. One could view this as condescension, but it was the norm in writing up to his period.¹¹⁹ Balzac did try to keep “neutral,” to some extent, and allows the narrator to drive the story with a certain amount of objectivity, leaving the author’s opinion out and the reader to draw his own conclusions—to a degree. Although he is not consistent, he makes a clear attempt, at least, to limit the narrator’s role. There is much to be said of a “sideways glance,” a “Freudian slip,” or a “lingering touch.” As Wayne Booth has observed, “the author and reader may meet, like Voltaire and God, but they do not speak;” rather, it is incumbent upon the skillful author to portray his story without overtly driving his readership like a shepherd drives sheep to slaughter. It is, in point of fact, condescending. The jump from Rabelais to Voltaire to Balzac, while not linear, does show an evolutionary process, or at least progress away from direct address. Typically, this isn’t found in fiction of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century, the exception being for “comic relief” as can be found, occasionally, in film.¹²⁰ By comparing the three subject authors’ techniques, one can observe how Balzac sees into the character’s mind, sharing intimate thoughts and tipping the scale toward a central consciousness, a method mastered by Flaubert and later perfected by

¹¹⁹ Voltaire, *Candide*, tr. Philip Littell, (New York: Boni and Liveright, Inc, 1918). Voltaire titled each of the Chapters in *Candide* as a guide to the reader, “How Candide was Brought Up in a Magnificent Castle, and How He was Expelled Thence, Chapter 1” Each chapter assumes the reader’s inability to draw his or her own conclusions that only the author can elucidate by directive headings.

Francois Rabelais, *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, ed. Jim Manis, tr. Sir Thomas Urquhart and Peter Antony Motteux, Book I, (Hazelton, PA: Penn State University, 2006). Rabelais in *Gargantua and Pantagruel* doesn’t waste a minute to identify himself as the author/narrator, addressing the reader directly, “I must refer you to the great chronicle of Pantagruel for the knowledge of that genealogy and antiquity of race by which Gargantua is come unto us. In it you may understand more at large how the giants were born in his world and how from them by a direct line issued Gargantua, the father of Pantagruel: and do not take it ill, if for this time I pass by it, although...”

¹²⁰ Film, particularly in the early to mid 20th century, often used a voice-over narrator in direct address to the viewer, giving captions, summary, and direction in a “tongue-in-cheek” manner. See Warner Brothers, 1953 film *By the Light of the Silvery Moon* with Doris Day and Gordon MacRae.

Henry James. Balzac writes of the Baroness, as he casually slips into her mind, narrowing the distance between character and narrator: “She was speaking only as a mother at that moment, and the wife’s voice was silenced, for she could see Hortense, with her Cousin Bette, laughing the unrestrained laughter of reckless youth, and she knew that such nervous outbursts of mirth were a symptom as much to be feared as the tearful reveries of her solitary rambles in the garden.”¹²¹ Balzac clearly defines this character as a woman of virtue and sacrifice, a mother, whose unspoken concern for her child shall not be overshadowed by her responsibility as a wife.

In this passage, the narrator shares with the reader the innermost thoughts of a tormented and protective mother while Balzac, the author, tries his best to keep his distance from his narrator, avoiding “superfluous” commentary, letting the reader feel the anguish of the mother. By quelling the “wife’s voice” Balzac focuses attention on the suffering mother, eliciting empathy and shifting the reader toward a moral determination that is, ostensibly, already part of his or her own moral standard. Anyone reading this novel, particularly a mother, would naturally and effortlessly identify with the Baroness. It is here, in passages like this, that the novel takes a turn toward what we consider today as accomplished storytelling, where the narrator is “showing” the reader what is taking place rather than simply reporting it.¹²² It is, or at least should be, the intention of the author to convey a story that is compelling, interesting, and pleasing to his readers and, above all, believable. An even slightly sophisticated reader should not have to stretch his own system of norms and values to accept what is happening in the story. The suspension of disbelief should be without notice, if the author did his job, and Balzac does

¹²¹ Balzac, *Cousin Bette*, tr. Waring, 28. The Baroness is reflecting on the incredulity of her situation and how her husband has put the entire happiness of the family at risk because of his alliances and affairs. It is time for the daughter to marry, and the Baroness is plagued with foreboding.

¹²² Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, 3-20. Booth’s position is reiterated by James Wood on his Chapter on Narration. See Wood, *How Fiction Works*, 3-38.

so in many places throughout *La Cousine Bette*, but consistency will never be his strength. Whereas for Flaubert, governing the distance between the character's thoughts and the narrator's was intuitive.

It is, presumably, the intention of all novelists, wishing for a compelling story to be told, heard, or read, to shape it and charge it with enough characterization, tension, and mysterious plot to keep the target audience fully engaged. So engaged, in point of fact, that the reader totally surrenders to the prose, giving up any resistance that would prevent “binding the reader absolutely to the duration of events” with captivating suspense unfolding at every page by turning page, blending the narrator, character, and reader into union.¹²³ As Wayne Booth suggests, “The success of an author's rhetoric does not depend on whether he thought about his readers as he wrote; if ‘mere calculation’ cannot ensure success, it is equally true that even the most unconscious and Dionysian of writers succeeds only if he makes us join the dance.”¹²⁴ As he illustrates the “tacit contract” the reader and author have entered into, he paraphrases Jean-Louis Curtis; “In all successful reading of fiction . . . the reader spontaneously draws together whenever the novelist presents scene, gesture, dramatized comment, omniscient judgment, into a single synthesis. . . .When Balzac bellows into my ears that Vautrin is a *colosse de ruse*, by agreement, I have granted Balzac an almost unlimited credit.”¹²⁵ Trust becomes the backbone of the “tacit contract” as we readers put our faith in the author for providing fictional truths.

¹²³ Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, (1983), 30. This is a reference to Ford Maddox Ford's comments on “the common aim of good modern novelists.”

¹²⁴ *Ibid*, 96.

¹²⁵ *Ibid*, 53. Booth is quoting a reply of Jean-Louis Curtis to Jean-Paul Sartre, “Sartre et le roman,” *Haute École* (Paris, 1950), 181.

A narrative evolution is taking place at this point, which started in England with Jane Austen and continued with the novelists of the first half of the nineteenth century such as Stendhal, Dumas, and Balzac. They are the innovators, the “Axolotl” of literature, the “walking catfish” emerging from the fictive ocean to walk on land. One of the first to recognize this improved development is Flaubert, and, in *Madame Bovary*, he gives Emma a consciousness and expresses it through interior monologue,

In the evening *Madame Bovary* did not go to her neighbor’s, and when Charles had left and she felt herself alone, the comparison re-began with the clearness of a sensation almost actual, and with that lengthening of perspective which memory gives to things. Looking from her bed at the clean fire that was burning, she still saw, as she had down there, Leon standing up with one hand behind his cane, and with the other holding Athalie, who was quietly sucking a piece of ice. She thought him charming; she could not tear herself away from him; she recalled his other attitudes on other days, the words he had spoken, the sound of his voice, his whole person; and she repeated, pouting out her lips as if for a kiss—

“Yes, charming! charming! Is he not in love?” she asked herself; “but with whom? With me?”¹²⁶

With passages such as this, Flaubert merges the narrative of the author and the thoughts of the character into one, a “synthesis,” and, we as readers are “bound” to Emma and the “duration of events,” forgetting the presence of the author/narrator by being completely absorbed—sympathetic to the character—joining in the “dance.” Flaubert removes the annoying fits and starts of authorial intrusion that can be so cumbersome and that break the “contract” and the concentration of a scene. By this sole elimination, literary prose steps out of the intrusive interruptions of the past into Modernity, making a quantum leap forward in narrative writing.

¹²⁶ Flaubert, *Madame Bovary*, pdf, tr. Aveling, 89.

Collusion Between Narrator and Author

Although the popular reception of *Madame Bovary* was a *succès de scandale*, the real success of the novel was seen by Flaubert's contemporaries as boldly breaking through the barrier of long-entrenched Romanticism and Neoclassicism. In a conversation with Émile Zola in 1881, Flaubert, who was sixty at the time, astounded Zola with his comments of his literary contribution. Zola writes, "[Flaubert commented that he] wanted to show them that it was possible to be at the same time an accurate portrayer of the modern world and a great stylist. And this was said so straightforwardly that you found yourself wondering whether he had been aware of his achievement, whether he had foreseen the evolution it [*Madame Bovary*] was going to produce in literature."¹²⁷ Zola continues that he argued with Flaubert, "that writers do not appear as isolated phenomena; they influence each other, they form a chain which brings about certain developments, according to the climate of the times."¹²⁸ This quote identifies Zola as being aware of an evolutionary process that writers share with one another toward the improvement of their craft.

It was through Flaubert's keen stylistic sense that he chose to use a voice to tell the story that was, at once, objective, impersonal, and impartial, to describe the lives of his dismal *petit bourgeois* characters. To accomplish this, Flaubert invents a "new style, weaving together the erotic, the sentimental and the ironic, in a perpetual tension,"¹²⁹ to describe the moral decay of its

¹²⁷ Flaubert, *Madame Bovary*, tr. Bair, 333.

¹²⁸ Émile Zola, "Les Romanciers naturalistes," tr. by Helen Weaver, (1881), as referenced in *Madame Bovary*, tr. Bair, (1987), 333. It is ironic that Zola didn't follow, consistently, the narrative example set by Flaubert in *Madame Bovary*, as previously mentioned.

¹²⁹ Geoffrey Wall, introduction to *Madame Bovary: Provincial Lives*, by Gustave Flaubert, tr. Geoffrey Wall, (Penguin Books, 1992), xix.

heroine. According to Émile Zola, Flaubert “dealt Romanticism its final blow,”¹³⁰ by telling a compelling story of irony in the style of Realism and by furnishing his story with unique and effective literary devices, not the least of which was his creative use of narration.

“Point of view is the most complex element of fiction,” says Janet Burroway of Florida State University, and “the narrator requires consistency,” whereby a trust is established with the reader. A contract is agreed to, that gives the reader a point of view from which the story is told. “Making changes to the point of view disrupts the rhythm of the story,”¹³¹ according to Burroway and other scholars. Typical storytelling, regardless of its place in time, is dependent on this contract, but Flaubert was able to circumvent convention and carefully manipulate the attention of the reader through an unsuspecting “collusion”¹³² known as *discours indirect libre* or free-indirect speech that effectively persuades the reader to agree to certain judgments in the text.

Flaubert chooses to use the first-person voice of a classmate of Charles Bovary to introduce the story, “We were in study hall, when the headmaster walked in, followed by a new boy not wearing a school uniform, and by a janitor carrying a large desk.”¹³³ The tone of the speaker is flat, matter of fact, and tends toward impartiality, despite the relationship of being classmates. The narrator tells the story objectively, as a reporter of information. After Chapter One, however, Flaubert shifts gears and changes narration to include Charles’ own thoughts and eventually to third-person omniscience, removing the narrator as a character and replacing him

¹³⁰ Flaubert, *Madame Bovary*, tr. Bair, 333.

¹³¹ Burroway, *Writing Fiction*, 256-257.

¹³² Victor Brombert, *The Novels of Flaubert: A Study of Themes and Techniques*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966). Literary critic, Victor Brombert, explains his perception of collusion as it relates to anticipatory devices used by Flaubert. See reprint in *Madame Bovary*, tr. Bair, 382.

¹³³ Flaubert, *Madame Bovary*, tr. Bair, 2.

with the universal and impersonal point of view of the third person, “Instead of coming back to Les Bertaux three days later, as he had promised, he returned the very next day, and from then on he came twice a week regularly, not counting the unexpected calls he made from time to time, as if by chance.”¹³⁴ The change to the omniscient is nearly imperceptible; the sentence has no outward appearance of being other than a standard report of information, with the exception of a little “flip of the tail” at the end. The author has carefully and surgically inserted an editorial comment, “...as if by chance,” sharing with the reader a flippant remark and introduces a subliminal “bump” toward bias. After all, Flaubert’s ambitions were grand,¹³⁵ and, ostensibly, didactic; he expected to impress upon the reader his concerns for provincial French society and his disgust for bourgeois mediocrity. *Madame Bovary* is the platform of his efforts. The narrator is the vehicle and continues its opinionating process, “Thinking that, after all, it would do no harm to try, Charles promised himself he would ask the question at the next opportunity; but each time an opportunity presented itself the fear of not finding the right words sealed his lips.”¹³⁶ A bridge has been built within the paragraph. Is it Charles who complains about his impotence or the narrator/author’s interjection?

The narration vacillates between the impersonal and personal and continues this subliminal treatment in order to guise his efforts and opinion, as in this interior dialog of Emma when he allows the narrator to get into the mind of the character while he prepares the reader for another switch: “Then her mind would gradually focus; sitting on the grass and poking at it with

¹³⁴ Ibid, 14.

¹³⁵ Ibid, Correspondence with Louise Colet, 313-337.

¹³⁶ Ibid, 20.

the tip of her parasol, she would ask herself over and over, “Oh, why did I ever get married?”¹³⁷

This passage follows the accepted norm for direct speech in a point of view. The vacillations become a shell game, and the reader is buried in the continuous rising crisis of the plot and is too occupied to notice the changes.

Tension remains high throughout the story, and the reader soon becomes comfortable with this narrative. The classmate from Chapter One is long gone from the mind of the reader, and trust and faith are contracted by the narrator and his audience. This editorial omniscience, or free indirect speech,¹³⁸ is now firmly seated and commonly used throughout the novel. A switch occurs from impersonal to personal and, in the following passage, a tone of condemnation is presented, as these wandering thoughts of Emma’s become castigation, “...Her husband might have been handsome, witty, distinguished and attractive. Her former schoolmates had no doubt married men like that. What were they doing now? In cities, with their animated streets, buzzing theaters and glittering ballrooms, they were leading lives, which allowed them to give free rein to their emotions and develop their senses. But here, life was as cold as an attic facing north, and boredom, like a silent spider, was weaving its web in the shadows, in every corner of her heart.”¹³⁹ The last sentence prepares the reader for what to expect of Emma.

These manipulative transitions are subtle and subversive and meant to gently persuade the reader toward an opinion. Flaubert spent five years writing *Madame Bovary* and meticulously crafted each paragraph and reviewed every word of it with Louis Bouilhet. The two of them would meet weekly and read the progress from the previous week. In a letter to Louise

¹³⁷ Ibid, 38.

¹³⁸ Flaubert is noted for his literary contribution towards the use of *discours indirect libre* or free indirect speech, which was frequently used by Jane Austen and James Joyce.

¹³⁹ Flaubert, *Madame Bovary*, tr. Bair, 40.

Colet, he writes, “The day before yesterday I went to bed at five o’clock in the morning and yesterday at three. Since last Monday I have put aside everything else, and have spent the whole week slaving away at my *Bovary* and annoyed with myself for not getting on with it. . . Since you saw me, I have done twenty-five pages all told (twenty-five pages in six weeks). They were hard going. I shall read them to Bouilhet tomorrow.”¹⁴⁰ Although *Madame Bovary* was patterned after the real life characters of the Delamares, the novel only uses them as a framework to carry out his real mission, to expose the artificial felicity and false sense of security adopted by readers who seek to create a reality from the romantic “dramas of fiction amid the banality of everyday life.” He targeted a spoiled young woman who seemed to find life insufficient and who tried to rationalize a better existence through

novels of adultery about sentimental women at once guilty and virtuous; romantic idylls and tragedies in exotic, colonial settings; archaeologically accurate depictions of the pomp of bygone eras that frame young noblemen surprisingly modern in the mediocrity; realist panoramas of unscrupulous social climbing; politicized sentimental novels calling for an end to the oppression of workers, women, and other dominated social groups; and lurid images of the capital as a city of pleasure, mystery and crime. . . [Emma] seeks to realize the plots of the novels she has read, first in her own marriage[to Charles] . . . then with lovers who help her discover ‘in adultery all the platitudes of marriage.’¹⁴¹

As Charles Bressler points out using the psychoanalytic observations of Sigmund Freud in critical analysis, we can draw an inference to Emma,

The pleasure principle craves only pleasures and it desires instantaneous satisfaction of instinctual drives, ignoring moral and sexual boundaries established by society. Immediate relief from all pain or suffering is its goal. The pleasure principle is held in check by the reality principle, that part of the psyche that recognizes the need for societal standards and regulations on pleasure.¹⁴²

¹⁴⁰ Ibid, 303. Correspondence to Louise Colet, Saturday night [Croisset, April 24, 1852]

¹⁴¹ Ibid, Introduction, ix. Introduction by Margaret Cohen offers a superb collection of correspondence within Flaubert’s circle and specifically concerning *Madame Bovary* in multiple aspects.

¹⁴² Charles E Bressler, *Literary Criticism: An Introduction to Theory and Practice*, (Upper Saddle River: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1999), 150.

Indeed, the pleasure and reality principles are in play in all three of the subject novels, whether we speak of Emma Bovary or Hulot or Muffat or Nana. Their sense of reality, and therefore, our sense of it, as reader/witness, is put to the test and *we* experience a need to evaluate the disconnection from our perspective; to appreciate the irony; to intellectualize the pathology of it; and, above all else, avoid any sense of sympathy.

To effectively accomplish the close association of the omniscient narrator and his relationship to his characters, the implied author must first distance himself from the story. The narrator must avoid making subjective judgments of or with the characters. The narrator has to relay the descriptions, dialogue, and situations with an “unmoved or unimpassioned feeling toward the characters and events of one’s story.”¹⁴³ This is what Flaubert referred to as *impassibilité*. In allowing the story to unfold without intruding commentary, or unnecessary subjective direction, the author allows the reader to develop a more intimate relationship with the characters and events. The reader becomes, by nature, omniscient in every part of the story, feeling what the characters feel or passing their own judgment on what they believe the character should feel. The reader becomes as much a part of the story as any of its characters. In the following passage, the reader feels time slow to an “unbearable” crawl, trudging insensibly along, while Emma tolerates what she perceives as mundane torture.

But it was above all the meal-times that were unbearable to her, in this small room on the ground floor, with its smoking stove, its creaking door, the walls that sweated, the damp flags; all the bitterness in life seemed served up on her plate, and with smoke of the boiled beef there rose from her secret soul whiffs of sickliness. Charles was a slow eater; she played with a few nuts, or, leaning on her elbow, amused herself with drawing lines along the oilcloth table cover with the point of her knife¹⁴⁴.

¹⁴³ Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, 81.

¹⁴⁴ Flaubert, *Madame Bovary*, pdf, tr. Aveling, 58.

Flaubert has us experience the inescapable boredom, the “bitterness of life served up on her plate.” We watch Charles in periphery, masticating each mouthful of meat, chewing endlessly, while we wait impatiently for him to swallow. We, too, play with the nuts on the table, feel the cool steel of the knife as the stove smokes and the walls sweat and her existence claustrophobically narrows. Flaubert has us deep inside the psyche of Emma without once revealing his presence as a narrator. We, as readers, experience what Emma experiences.

Henry James is correct, *Madame Bovary* has a “perfection that stamps it.” Up to this point, no other author before Flaubert creates such an intimate bridge between the reader and the text. He seamlessly weaves the narrative by maintaining an objective distance between the narrator and character. This impersonality is what distinguishes Realism from earlier literary styles and coupled with controlled interior dialogue, “stamps” it for Modernity.

“There should be the illusion that it’s the character’s point of view, when in fact it isn’t, it’s really the narrator who is there but who doesn’t make herself known . . . known in that role . . . What I really want is that intimacy in which the reader is under the impression that he isn’t really reading this; that he is participating in it as he goes along.”¹⁴⁵ —Toni Morrison

“Our present problem is [defining] the intricate relationship of the so called real author with his various official versions of himself.”¹⁴⁶ —Wayne Booth

Chapter VI

Narrative Authority

As mentioned in the previous chapter, literature prior to Flaubert was commonly written with a narrator “telling” a story to an “audience,” either as a character within the story or as an omniscient third person. From Homer to Virgil, Rabelais, and Voltaire, to Stendhal and Balzac, the “old” method of storytelling, whether in poetry or prose, involves the narrator making contact directly with the reader, offering instructional and subjective observations about the characterizations and unfolding events. These intrusions tend to break the concentration of the reader. What we consider as annoying “asides” today were seen as necessary to the old literary patriarchs in order to lead the reader into *scénarios* that the author believed required direction. In *La Cousine Bette*, for instance, Balzac frequently uses these intrusions, like the chorus in a Greek play, providing moral judgment, political opinion, stage direction, and historical summary, as the following illustrates:

The grandees of the Empire were a match in their follies for the great nobles of the last century. Under the Restoration the nobility cannot forget that it has been beaten and robbed, and so, with two or three exceptions, it has become thrifty, prudent, and stay-at-home, in short, bourgeois and penurious. Since then, 1830 has crowned the work of 1793.

¹⁴⁵ Burroway, *Writing Fiction*, 259.

¹⁴⁶ Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, 71.

In France, henceforth, there will be great names, but no great houses, unless there should be political changes which we can hardly foresee. Everything takes the stamp of individuality. The wisest invest in annuities. Family pride is destroyed.¹⁴⁷

Ian Watt observes, “Few readers would like to be without the prefatory chapters, or . . . diverting asides, but they undoubtedly derogate from the reality of the narrative, such authorial intrusion, of course, tends to diminish the authenticity of the narrative.”¹⁴⁸ Moreover, in fact, this is the case with much literature prior to Flaubert, which relies on summary and direct dialogue, mixing with it, opinion as authorial intrusion. Balzac was guilty of these intrusions but took little notice. Consider the following:

“‘Monsieur Henri, Madame!’ the manservant announced discreetly to Valerie.

“‘Leave me, Lisbeth. I’ll explain everything tomorrow.’”

But, as will be seen, Valerie was soon to be in no condition to explain anything to anyone.”¹⁴⁹

At this brief passage, Balzac believes it important to give the reader a “heads up” in dramatic irony that big news will follow. The fact that the servant made the announcement “discreetly” should suffice as notice that something was “afoot.” While Balzac, as the reliable narrator, may have created a certain amount of suspense, the intrusion “diminishes the authenticity of the narrative.”¹⁵⁰ So, for this suspended moment, readers must wait for the “other shoe to drop,” while the story continues until it comes to the moment where Valerie’s condition

¹⁴⁷Balzac, *Cousin Bette*, tr. Waring, 98.

¹⁴⁸ Ian Watt and W.B. Carnochan. *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding*, 2nd Ed., (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 285.

¹⁴⁹ Balzac, *Cousin Bette*, tr. Crawford, 415.

¹⁵⁰ Watt and Carnochan, *The Rise of the Novel*, 285. The discussion on authorial intrusion by Ian Watts is well-covered by Wayne Booth in *Rhetoric of Fiction*, q.v., in the section “Intensity of Realistic Illusion.” See Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, 40.

is revealed. Oddly enough, the reader need not wait long, as this particular scene takes place on page 415 of the novel with only 28 pages until the end when Valerie, the Brazilian (Monsieur Montes de Montejanos), Lisbeth, Crevel, and the Countess all die. The reader can simply deduce the situation from the dialog. Balzac's need to provide an alert is not necessary. The tension was established in two strokes; when the servant, presumably, whispered into Valerie's ear, and when she abruptly told Lisbeth to leave. The suspense comes when she announces that she will explain things the next day. And thus we wait, hyper alert to any forthcoming news.

Controlling Distance

While *discours indirect libre* is in its embryonic stages and Balzac is filling his ink well, Flaubert sees the advantage of the technique, and it becomes a matter of focus by the time he begins writing *Madame Bovary*.¹⁵¹ “What happens, though, when a writer wants to open a very small gap between character and author? What happens when a novelist wants us to inhabit a character's confusion, but will not “correct” that confusion, refuses to make clear what state of non-confusion would look like?” To answer these questions raised by James Wood, we can walk in a straight line from Balzac to Gustave Flaubert.¹⁵² Just prior to Emma's suicide scene, she runs to Rodolphe to escape her fate and, forthwith, summarily, she is rejected. The scene is raging with tension; there is no need for any intrusion by the author/narrator. A bond between Emma, the narrator, and reader is secured by the intensity of the scene, by the knowledge of her desperation, and by the impending cataclysm of her universe. At this point, the reader, absolutely

¹⁵¹ The *discours indirect libre* technique in narrative was explored earlier. See Chapter V, “The Evolving Narrator.”

¹⁵² Wood, *How Fiction Works*, 13-14. The concept and the term, “walk in a straight line”, are paraphrased from Wood in his discussion of the unconscious narrator.

sympathetic with Emma's collapse, concurs with her decision, knowing, at least for Emma, that there was only one way out of her nightmare.

Night was falling, crows were flying about. Suddenly it seemed to her that fiery spheres were exploding in the air like fulminating balls when they strike, and were whirling, whirling, to melt at last upon the snow between the branches of the trees. In the midst of each of them appeared the face of Rodolphe. They multiplied and drew near her, penetrating, her. It all disappeared; she recognized the lights of the houses that shone through the fog.¹⁵³

Her despair and panic are palpable; she is no longer capable of seeing reality. Her world collides with doom as she and the reader desperately seek a solution. To heighten the significance of the scene, Flaubert shifts the temporal scale, introducing differing elements that tend to pause events in still motion; the relatable events of "crows . . . flying about," "fiery spheres . . . exploding in the air," the "melting snow between the branches," cause the reader to shift between reality and unreality. Again, when Emma runs to the wet nurse's, even before she leaves for Rodolphe's, Flaubert intensifies the crisis she sees herself in by mixing insignificant images, temporal signatures that belong to another moment in her reality, but are acutely suggestive of her perceptions of deteriorating romance.¹⁵⁴

She had been driven there by a kind of terror, which made it impossible for her to go home.

Lying motionless on her back, she stared at the things around her, but she was able to see them only vaguely, despite the idiotic persistence with which she focused her attention on them. . . .the flaking plaster on the wall, two logs smoking end to end in the fireplace, and a slender spider crawling along a crack in the beam over her head. Finally, she began to collect her thoughts, she remembered. . . .The sun had been shining on the river, the air had been filled with the fragrance of clematis. . . .Then swept along in her memories as in a seething torrent, she soon came to a recollection of the day before.

¹⁵³ Flaubert, *Madame Bovary*, pdf, tr. Aveling, 267-268.

¹⁵⁴ Wood, *How Fiction Works*, 42-44. Interrelating time signatures during crisis has the effect, as does the foreshortening of time, to create intensity. This device is particularly useful in film direction.

Flaubert contrasts her crisis with unrelated images of normality causing the scene to build in crescendo toward a peak of the reader's anticipation and her inevitable dementia. The "fragrance of clematis" and "seething torrent" are terms sharing the same paragraph. "Now her situation, like an abyss, rose up before her. She was panting as if her heart would burst."¹⁵⁵ The narrator and character have merged into a common action, relating events in a single empathetic movement. Emma has gone completely mad and lost all sense of reason. At this point, the reader has also fused with Emma and the narrator, feeling her desperation and confusion and anticipating that the next scene will surely be tragic. "The key turned in the lock, and she went straight to the third shelf, so well did her memory guide her, seized the blue jar, tore out the cork, plunged in her hand, and withdrawing it full of a white powder, she began eating it."¹⁵⁶ Flaubert drives the plot like a chariot into battle and reaches its expected climax where the reader, after pausing in shock, can finally take a breath.

G rard Genette observes, "Flaubert was the first to challenge profoundly, although mutely, the narrative function which until then was essential to the novel. A tremor that was almost imperceptible, but decisive."¹⁵⁷ Flaubert's break away from authorial intrusion *was profound* in itself, and marks a pivotal point in literary history. His great contribution is the authorial irony, just described, where the narration and character's thoughts collapse into a single voice.

¹⁵⁵ Flaubert, *Madame Bovary*, pdf, tr. Aveling, 268.

¹⁵⁶ Balzac, *Cousin Bette*, tr. Waring, 267-268.

¹⁵⁷ G rard Genette, "Les Silences de Flaubert," tr. Helen Weaver, in *Madame Bovary*, tr. Bair, 419.

The Implied Author of Balzac and Flaubert

Objectivity in narrative, as Anton Chekov suggests, must be understood by a writer to be a complete detachment from the story,

The artist should be, not the judge of his characters and their conversations, but only an unbiased witness. . . . I am not a liberal, not a conservative, not a believer in gradual progress, not a monk, not an indifferentist. . . . I have no preference either for gendarmes or for butchers, or for scientists, or for writers.¹⁵⁸

His imperative states that, “A writer must be as objective as a chemist; he must abandon the subjective line; he must show that dung-heaps play a very respectable part in a landscape, and that evil passions are as inherent in life as good ones.”¹⁵⁹ In doing so, the writer gives authority to the narrative, and this bond between the reader and narrator is assured. The objectivity the author requires of the narrator may be in conflict with what the author, as himself, might prefer. The implied author may have a completely different disposition towards his work than the author as himself. As the result, the implied author hopes to tell a story beyond the prejudices of the writer.

Georg Luckás writes,

What makes Balzac a great man is the inexorable veracity with which he depicted reality even if that reality ran counter to his own personal opinions, hopes and wishes. Had he succeeded in deceiving himself, had he been able to take his own Utopian fantasies for facts, had he presented as reality what was merely his own wishful thinking , he would now be of interest to none and

¹⁵⁸ Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, 68.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid , 68-69. Booth uses quotes obtained in *Letters on the Short Story, the Drama and other Literary Topics*, ed. Louis S, Friedland (London, 1924), 63.

would be as deservedly forgotten as the innumerable legitimist pamphleteers and glorifiers of feudalism who had been his contemporaries.¹⁶⁰

Luckás is referring to what he sees in Balzac's writings, yet his argument is not consistent with observations in *La Cousine Bette*. Toward the end of the book, Balzac takes the opportunity to challenge society and suggest what he believes is the root cause of the failure in French Society during the Restoration, despite Lukács' claim. However, Balzac relates his own image of cause and effect through his characters, not through direct intrusions.

During a scene toward the end of the novel, the ill and rapidly declining Countess shares a conversation with her caretaker, Dr. Bianchon. In this scene, as in several others, Balzac uses his characters to carry his intentional summary of French corruption:

“One-half of society spends its life in watching the other half. A very old friend of mine is an attorney, now retired, who told me that for fifteen years past notaries and lawyers have distrusted their clients quite as much as their adversaries. Your son is a pleader; has he never found himself compromised by the client for whom he held a brief?”

“And what is the cause of this deep-seated evil?” asked the Baroness.

“The decay of religion,” said Bianchon, “and the pre-eminence of finance, which is simply solidified selfishness. Money used not to be everything; there were some kinds of superiority that ranked above it —nobility, genius, service done to the State. But nowadays the law takes wealth as the universal standard, and regards it as the measure of public capacity. Certain magistrates are ineligible to the Chamber; Jean- Jacques Rousseau would be ineligible! The perpetual subdivision of estate compels every man to take care of himself from the age of twenty.”¹⁶¹

While not consistent, Balzac nevertheless uses his characters quite often, rather than the narrator to carry summary. Balzac uses the opportunity of his dying symbol of virtue to have another character explain that the failing of society is due to the “decay of religion,” that money has

¹⁶⁰ Lukács, *Studies in European Realism*, 22. Luckacs offers an excellent analysis of Balzac's work and politics in the chapter concerning Balzac's novel, *The Peasants*.

¹⁶¹ Balzac, *Cousin Bette*, pdf, tr. Waring, 367.

replaced morality, that the wisdom of France's heroes is "ineligible", and "that trust among men has fallen into ruin," as, Dr Bianchon prophesizes and reflects.¹⁶²

Perhaps Lukács and Chekov are a little harsh in their characterization of an effective author, perhaps the author, in an attempt to project images, must provide some summary that may covertly include their opinion while at the same time being objective in its "showing." This is precisely what Janet Burroway suggests, "The objective author is not omniscient but impersonal. As an objective author, you restrict your knowledge to the external facts that might be observed by a human witness."¹⁶³ In summary, and broad or general commentary, the writer reports the facts as they occur to move a story's action forward and, often, to foreshorten time so that the tension remains high enough to maintain suspense and the attention of the reader, or extend time to span episodes.

Flaubert's Contributions

Wayne Booth identifies Gustave Flaubert as one of the first successful writers "who claims that even the artist who recognizes the demand to be a 'triple-thinker,' even the artist who recognizes the need for ideas in abundance, 'must have neither religion, nor country, nor social conviction.' [sic]." However, Booth points out, that to simplify the notion of objectivity is to "understate the importance of the authors' individuality. As he writes, he creates not simply an ideal, impersonal "man in general" but an implied version of him that is different from the implied authors we meet in other men's works . . . As Jessamyn West says, it is sometimes "only by writing the story that the novelist can discover—not his story—but its writer, the official

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ Burroway, *Writing Fiction*, 259.

scribe, so to speak, for that narrative.”¹⁶⁴ Further in a footnote, he expounds on an observation by Kathleen Tillotson, who in 1957, wrote, “Writing is a way of playing parts, of trying on masks, of assuming roles, not for fun but out of desperate need, not for the self’s sake but for the writing’s sake.”¹⁶⁵

To recognize the distinction of author and narrator is to understand the implied author as virtual, separating out the extrinsic influences of the “individual writer,” his personality, his biases, his morals. Booth explains, “The implied author may be more or less distant from the reader. The distance may be intellectual, moral, or aesthetic. From the author’s view point, a successful reading of his book must eliminate all distance between the essential norms of his implied author and the norms of the postulated reader.”¹⁶⁶ To help understand this, consider the sociopathic norms of the Marquis de Sade that must be adopted by the “postulated reader” of *Justine ou Les Malheurs de la vertu* (1791) (*Justine, or the Misfortunes of Virtue*) in order for the work to be accepted intellectually. One must disobey his or her core beliefs, both morally and intellectually, to be able to reduce or eliminate this distance between the implied author and the Marquis.

For example, while Emma Bovary, the *femme incomprise* may be repugnant to a reader, most of the norms shared by Flaubert and any fundamentally well-adjusted reader usually are the similar, or close enough to empathize with her condition. We understand and accept Emma’s fate while, conversely, we find it impossible to accept the sadomasochism of the debaucherous monks who rape and torture Justine. Even science fiction is considered completely out of the

¹⁶⁴ Wayne C Booth, *A Rhetoric of Irony*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1975), 71.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, 156.

realm of acceptance by many people who find the suspension of disbelief impossible, while others find no trouble in narrowing the distance between the norms of reader/author. One need only to look at the success of Jules Verne who was writing during the same period as Balzac, Flaubert, and Zola.¹⁶⁷ A bad book, Booth continues, “is often most clearly recognizable because the implied author asks that we judge according to norms that we cannot accept.”¹⁶⁸ We know there are Nanas’ and Valerie Marneffes’ in this world; we know there are idiots who squander fortunes on “passionate intensities,” as W. B. Yeats so eloquently wrote, we know there are “hopeless romantics.” While we may have knowledge of such people, we nonetheless understand what they’ve done while we don’t, necessarily, condone the behaviors.¹⁶⁹

The narrator, too, may be separated by distance from the author, characters, and reader’s own norms. The distance can be physical (*La Belle et la Bête*) or temporal (*Les Trois Mousquetaires*). The pitfall in ineffective writing would be alienation. While attempting to increase intimacy between the implied author and the reader, the effect is distancing themselves from the very object they desire. Accordingly, Booth observes, the advent of the unreliable narrator who can shift characteristics during the course of their narration, can present a challenging third person reflector. Booth continues, “But it was not until authors had discovered the full uses of the third person reflector that they could effectively show a narrator changing as he narrates.”¹⁷⁰ None of the three subject authors have been able to accomplish this in a single novel, but they all have shifted their objectivity during their novelistic series, i.e. *La Comedie*

¹⁶⁷ Jules Verne, author of fifty-four novels in his series *Voyages Extraordinaires*.

¹⁶⁸ Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, 157. Booth lists multiple characteristics of the implied author, this notation concerns number 4.

¹⁶⁹ This concept of accepting norms is further explored in Chapter VIII Reconciling Behaviors; Accepting the Author’s Judgments.

¹⁷⁰ Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, 155.

Humane and *Les Rougon-Macquart*. Zola begins *L'Assommoir* as an impassionate narrator describing the gradual degradation of Gervaise while we stand by and watch her daughter witness abject depravity, knowing as we do that nothing good can come from the layers of abuses the child endured. Zola grew more and more descriptive of the vagaries of human nature in *Nana*, as he tore away all the pretense and dignity that Count Muffat, and Nana's other men, could possibly harbor. As the following example illustrates:

Accordingly she now declared herself very firm and quite proof against sudden infatuations, but thoughts of vengeance took no hold of her volatile brain. What did maintain a hold on it in the hours when she was not indignant was an ever-wakeful lust of expenditure, added to a natural contempt for the man who paid and to a perpetual passion for consumption and waste, which took pride in the ruin of her lovers.¹⁷¹

This implied author sharpens his axe on the wheel of human weakness as Nana delivers her contemptuous blows to La Faloise,

One day when he was playing bear she pushed him so roughly that he fell against a piece of furniture, and when she saw the lump on his forehead she burst into involuntary laughter. After that her experiments on La Faloise having whetted her appetite, she treated him like an animal, threshing him and chasing him to an accompaniment of kicks.

“Gee up! Gee up! You're a horse. Hoi! Gee up! Won't you hurry up, you dirty screw?”

At other times, he was a dog. She would throw her scented handkerchief to the far end of the room, and he had to run and pick it up with his teeth, dragging himself along on hands and knees.

“Fetch it, Caesar! Look here, I'll give you what for if you don't look sharp! Well done, Caesar! Good dog! Nice old fellow! Now behave pretty!”

And he loved his abasement and delighted in being a brute beast. He longed to sink still further and would cry: “Hit harder. On, on! I'm wild! Hit away!”¹⁷²

¹⁷¹ Zola, *Nana*, pdf, Penn State, 263.

¹⁷² *Ibid*, 375.

Zola is not drawing on sentimentality to capture the sympathies of the reader. On the contrary, he is showing his prowess as a practitioner of human psychology, challenging the reader's sense of morality, and sane judgment as he describes the sick relationship of punishment.

In the final analysis, the implied author encompasses the traits familiar to us as tone, style, and technique. As Booth describes, it is the implied author who “chooses, consciously or unconsciously, what we read; we infer him as an ideal, literary, created version of the real man; he is the sum of his own choices.”¹⁷³ The implied author of the Flaubert who wrote *Salambo* and the *Temptations of St. Anthony* is completely different, exotic, and unique to that of the Flaubert who wrote *Madame Bovary*. James recognized the stylistic differences in Flaubert's *L'Education sentimentale* and found it “strange, an indescribable work, about which there would be many more things to say than I have space for, and all of them of the deepest interest.”¹⁷⁴ Similarly, the implied author of Émile Zola, who narrates *Germinal* in its documentary style, is significantly different from the implied author of *Nana* or *L'Assommoir*. For *Germinal*, Zola required a clear distance of a “chemist's objectivity,” of strict impersonality, and what Flaubert referred to as *impassibilité*. *Germinal's* documentary style significantly added to the tension of the coal mine atmosphere. Wayne Booth writes, the author's objectivity becomes, “an unmoved or unimpassioned feeling toward the characters and events of one's story.”¹⁷⁵ Flaubert was not able to consistently maintain pure objectivity in *Madame Bovary* any more than Zola could in *Nana*. The implied author adds no sense of emotion to the narrative. It is, matter of fact, without sympathy, completely void of partiality. It is what makes the plot and characters work, in a

¹⁷³ Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, 74-75.

¹⁷⁴ Flaubert, *Madame Bovary*, tr. Bair, 344. Comments of Zola taken from *Notes on Novelists, With Some Other Notes*, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1914).

¹⁷⁵ Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, 81.

setting that is so cold and stark that the reader can feel the chill in his bones and feel the desperation of the characters, as the following opening lines of *Germinal* illustrate:

Over the open plain, beneath a starless sky as dark and thick as ink, a man walked alone along the highway from Marchiennes to Montsou, a straight paved road ten kilometers in length, intersecting the beetroot-fields. He could not even see the black soil before him, and only felt the immense flat horizon by the gusts of March wind, squalls as strong as on the sea, and frozen from sweeping leagues of marsh and naked earth.¹⁷⁶

Authorial intention unconsciously spills over in the explicit expression of the implied author. Zola could not have emotion infiltrate the narrative of *Germinal*, or it would diminish narrative authority. The implied author of *Germinal* required a delivery that would not compromise the effect, while his clear moral position is tacitly present throughout *Nana*, *L'Assomoir*, *Therese Raquin*, *The Belly of Paris*, and *La Terre*. As the reader, you cannot chose to separate yourself from emotional involvement, and Zola is aware of this, while his implied author carefully distances himself away from any attachment to a character and their fate. Although Wayne Booth suggests a certain independence for the impartial self, the Zola who chooses his tone, technique, and style is driven by the extrinsic creation of the man Zola and his overt choices. The same is true of Flaubert's exotic delivery of *Salambo*, which is in stark contrast to the prose of *Madame Bovary*. And, in turn, Balzac chooses his characters to carry the plot as he chose to write in the third person, to expand on a simple biblical story of lust. Lisbeth Fisher, the bitter old maid whose desire for vengeance usurped her rationality fades away in the descending arc of the story. Balzac was finished with the character. She performed her function well. She dies of consumption, no longer needed to carry on the action of the plot, as if this were her punishment for her cruel manipulations.

¹⁷⁶ Émile Zola, *Germinal*, pdf, tr. Havelock Ellis, 1885 (Publisher unknown), 3. See also, Émile Zola, *Germinal*, tr. Roger Pearson, (New York: Penguin Books, 2004), 5.

“To make a work of art, is to make, or rather to unmake and remake one’s self.”¹⁷⁷

—Elizabeth Sewell

“I have said enough to show what I mean by Flaubert’s having in this picture expressed something of his intimate self, given his heroine something of his own imagination.”¹⁷⁸

—Henry James

“The “views of man” of Faulkner and E.M. Forster, as they go about making their Stockholm address or writing their essays, are indeed of only peripheral value to me as I read their novels.”¹⁷⁹

—Wayne Booth

Chapter VII

Beneath the Surface: Allegory of the Goddess Whore and *Femme Incomprise*

Two of the three women in this study easily earn the label goddess-whore, the designation dubbed by V. Minoque.¹⁸⁰ Both Balzac’s Valerie Marneffe and Zola’s Nana Coupeau use their beauty and seductive charm to ensnare and enslave their lust-seeking obsessors. Through the controlled voices of Balzac and Zola, we follow them as they drain fortunes and destroy families in pursuit of an elusive contentment. And, there is Emma Bovary, the *femme incomprise*, whose constant disappointment with life drove her to adultery, deception, and ultimately, suicide. The surface descriptions of these texts define the characters and the

¹⁷⁷ Booth, *A Rhetoric of Irony*, 71. See footnote on “The Slave Cast Out”, in *The Living Novel*, ed. Granville Hicks (New York: Macmillian, 1957), 202.

¹⁷⁸ Henry James, *Notes on Novelists: With Some Other Notes*, (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1914), reprinted from Flaubert, *Madame Bovary*, tr. Bair, 345.

¹⁷⁹ Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, 137.

¹⁸⁰ Valerie Minogue, “Nana: The World, the Flesh and the Devil,” in *Emile Zola*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 122.

various situations within the stories, to help us understand and accept what each author puts before us and expects us to follow without question. We are entering, after all, into a world that most of us are aware of but unfamiliar with. Becoming entangled in the story is easy, in the strange ephemeral existence of the demimonde or in the illusionary world of the hopeless romantic, and we must rely on the narrator-guide to tell us truths so we can fall into sympathetic step as developments occur.

Once we grasp the overt intentions of the author, we are then free to look beyond surface interpretations and consider alternative meanings. The character ascriptions, plots, and subplots, all allegorically parallel alternate personifications. By analyzing these novels from a different point of view, the observer can look into the subtext, the shadows and crevices of a story that may reveal something hidden, sometimes in plain view, interpretations concealed by the pace of life of the reader or of the overt drama of the novel.

At face value, all three novels bring to light relevant social issues that were observed and often ignored during their times by many in the privileged class. While social reform was part of all the three régimes, putting legislation in practice was an effort. Advocates of social justice promote and encourage public recognition and participation by the citizenry in general. But, perhaps because of the “dog eat dog” environment, particularly in the early years of the restoration, or simply because of the sheer dynamics of the chaotic nineteenth-century culture, socioeconomic imbalance was prevalent throughout France, particularly in the highly populated urban areas. The more fortunate shielded themselves from the less fortunate. If we are to believe the depictions presented by the three novelists, even those in the lower class fought among themselves, while they scabble to manage a decent living. Balzac, Flaubert, and Zola, witnesses to this, sought to expose those who refused to accept responsibility, individually or collectively,

by portraying the conditions that supported their general anti-bourgeois thesis. Despite the efforts of the state to attend to social welfare, survival was a day-to-day battle for some, as survivalist instincts come to the surface when life and lifestyle are threatened. The depravity illustrated by Balzac and Zola and the neurosis of Emma Bovary are enough to understand how things were. Vivid images illustrate the dark environs of seedy neighborhoods, the dilapidated estates, and the shady characters, whose unscrupulous behavior has no class boundary, as long as avarice is satisfied.

Jameson's Balzac

Frederic Jameson identifies Balzac's writing as "allegorical Realism" and observes that, Balzac thought of *La Cousine Bette* "rather naively as an object lesson."¹⁸¹ His overt desire or intent is to warn his readers that the "kept mistress" dangerously threatened the legitimate family, something he honored. Based on his extant letters and notes, Balzac believes his subtext clearly highlights the responsibility of the nineteenth-century wife, who should know and understand her "supreme" duty is to be both wife and mistress, at once; supremely virtuous, expressing chastity, temperance, charity, diligence, patience, kindness, and humility at every opportunity. In this sense, Jameson feels Madame Hulot becomes the embodiment of virtue and the framework of the novel. All conflict within the novel originates at a point central to her and terminates after her death. Balzac presents her, or her quintessence, as the object target of evil.

¹⁸¹ Frederic Jameson, "La Cousine Bette and Allegorical Realism." *PMLA* (Modern Language Association) 86, no. 2 (March 1971): 241-254. In reference to his comment on page 242, "And if [Madame Hulot] is seen as the representative of "virtue" in the work, the anticipation of symmetry is immediately thwarted by the presence, of not one, but of two forms of vice, in the persons of Hulot and Bette."

Moreover, this evil, according to Jameson, is personified not just by one entity, but two, in the form of Hulot and Bette.¹⁸² They are personifications of pride, lust, and wrath.

There are, of course, other players Balzac wants the reader to recognize as metaphorical sin, not the least of which is Valerie Marneffe. She represents the incarnation of lust, greed, vanity, gluttony, *and* envy.¹⁸³ However, while she plays a central role, Jameson is correct in limiting the key antagonists to Hulot and Lisbeth; Valerie is simply their instrument and evil energy that Balzac sees as the catalyst and motive force of Hulot's incorrigibility.

All seven sins are accounted for but the sin of sloth. The characteristics of sloth include infirmity of purpose, dullness of conscious, affectation, ignorance, and moral cowardice. Two of Balzac's characters share this personification and are tangled in the plot as signifiers that all sins are covered. Valerie's husband, M. Marneffe, and the sculptor, Wenceslas, share the inability to participate as contributing members of their tiny community and are content in picking up the crumbs of their dominating female counterparts. Now the sins are complete. Balzac has covered all of the moral diseases of humanity that directly caused Hulot's fall to perdition, but he has done so in a way that gives the appearance of imbalance or the lack of symmetry that Jameson objected to. He believes that Balzac stacked the deck too heavily on the side of evil.

La Cousine Bette is charged with heavy, fixed obsessions and ironic contrasts surrounding possession, materialism, and the prices gained and lost in pursuit of those possessions. As Jameson points out, "the novelistic creation of Balzac rests in general on the premise that human existence is at all times motivated by *appetency*, that is, by a clear desire that

¹⁸² Ibid, 284.

¹⁸³ By gluttony, I mean from a decadence level, materialistic to a fault.

always poses a precise object before itself.”¹⁸⁴ Balzac displays the “prize(s)” that provide the motive forces behind his characters in flashing color and bright lights, with vivid descriptions and plausible resolution. Those artifices, those objects of insanity, are the objects of destruction he bitterly complained of and central to his tome of social awareness. Jameson believes,

“the individual consciousness in Balzac is at all moments impelled by the desire to have something: a woman, a certain kind of house or situation; and when the appetency in its upper reaches ceases to be so particularized, . . . it never ceases to be a quantitative matter: money in that sense is supremely emblematic of it.[sic]”¹⁸⁵

Whether the fictional character is giving or receiving, and whether the materials are jewels, horses, servants, sex, or annuities, the object never leaves the sight of the pursuer; whose desires obliterate all reason and blur reality by going beyond acceptable moral standards, beyond even human compassion, and common sense. Balzac portrays these lofty principles and begs his readers to accept what he has created as the “object lesson.” *La Cousine Bette* is a complicated work. It is filled with subtext, metaphor, and symbolism that was implicitly familiar to his contemporary reader as it is familiar to today’s readers, and because of the familiarity, we accept the judgments the author projects.

As most novelists will quickly admit, they construct their story by following a model, something imagined or from real experiences, something they have witnessed or heard on which to build and mold their story. In some cases, new stories are built around existing stories, changed enough to add intrigue or relevancy thereby turning, say, a fairytale into a tragedy or a moral lesson into a comedy. This is the case, it can be argued, in which Balzac’s *La Cousine*

¹⁸⁴ Jameson, “*La Cousine Bette* and Allegorical Realsim,” 244.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid. Jameson goes into some detail on the conscious driving forces of money as a form of desire, in itself. For further analysis see, Frederic Jameson, *Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Social Symbolic Act* (London: Routledge, 2002) see Chapter 3, “Balzac and the Problem of the Subject,” 137-160.

Bette has its origins.¹⁸⁶ The contrasting images that he pits against one another in *La Cousine Bette* can be found in the Bible, in the second book of Samuel, as the story of David and Bathsheba. The key characters in *La Cousine Bette* have their biblical counterparts: Baron Hulot as David, Valerie as Bathsheba, Cousine Bette as the messenger, Uriah as the inconvenient husband, and Nathan as the aging Marshall.

David is guilty of breaking the sixth, seventh, ninth, and tenth commandments¹⁸⁷ while lusting after Bathsheba; Hulot breaks the same moral codes. The Bible's representation of immoral behavior is clear. However, when we carry the character representations a step further, we can perceive Balzac putting a twist on this moral tale that correlates to what is going on in France in the first half of the nineteenth-century. He intends the characters as metaphor. By perceiving it thus, the story is understood in yet another dimension. By using Valerie to represent the corruption and salacious temptations of capitalism, Balzac finds his perfect victim in Baron Hector Hulot, a symbol of the old society, deposed autocracy of the Napoleonic Empire, and the *ancien regime* that Balzac, the legitimist, yearned to return to. Hulot becomes obsessed with Valerie—a spectacle and mockery to his class—just as society becomes the hedonist and slave to materialism, to the point of masochistic ruin. The evil and ugly Lisbeth waits in the shadows in disguise and plots to deliver her revenge to the family that subjugated her. She delivers her revenge through the character of Valerie Marneffe. When Lisbeth feeds Hulot with rumor and

¹⁸⁶David Bellos, introduction to *Cousin Bette*, by Honoré de Balzac, tr. Sylvia Raphael, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), xv-xvii. In Sylvia Raphael's translation, David Bellos posits that Balzac framed his story around the Bible's Prodigal Son and Golden Calf (Luke 15 and Exodus 32) of which there is little doubt, however, this study suggests a parallel to David and Bathsheba as it more closely resembles the characters and basic plot in *La Cousine Bette*.

¹⁸⁷ The broken commandments from Exodus 20:2-17/Deuteronomy 5: 6-21
 6th-Thou shall not commit Adultery;
 7th-Thou shall not steal;
 9th-Thou shall not covet thy neighbor's wife;
 10th-Thou shall not covet thy neighbor's goods.
 It can also be argued that David committed the 5th: Thou shall not kill [murder].

provides opportunity for further encounters, he succumbs to her treachery, thinking he has a confederate. All the intrigue only heightens his maddening desire to devour what he can't possibly fully possess and completely consume. Lisbeth, knowing the outcome is complete annihilation of this family, plots still further to destroy Hortense and Wenceslas, driving her treachery deeper and supporting Valerie in her cruel dominations. The narrator comments, "Women of that stamp have a pride of their own; they insist that men shall kiss the devil's hoof; they have no forgiveness for the virtue that does not quail before their dominion, or that even holds its own against them."¹⁸⁸ The correlation of Valerie to her personifications give Balzac a vehicle to display the temptations of a vulnerable society in a capitalist economy that has the power to enslave and destroy anyone who worships money.

The catalyst of her cousin's destruction, Lisbeth represents the engine of capitalism. Balzac has her despise the feudal stasis that keeps her in her lower social status. She fosters the parasitic relationships Valerie manipulates crystal clear to the reader, who witnesses the "fall" of the Hulot dynasty through the obsessions of sex and money. In contrast to her cousin, the beautiful and dutiful wife, Baroness Adeline Hulot, is conjoined in the character of Valerie Marneffe. Valerie embodies the spoiled fruit of the Revolution, a product of the restoration; she becomes the hedonistic temptress of materialism, the lust of status, the *femme fatale* and "goddess whore" of capitalism. Her counterpart remains loyal, patient—sacrificing her dignity and, ultimately, her health, to become the martyr of her class, her marriage, and her gender.

However, it was the real genius of Balzac to create Crevel, who is the embodiment of the ill-mannered *nouveaux riches*, who audaciously issue into the Tuileries Gardens as freely as gentility, defacing with their presence what Balzac cherished of the old regime but realized could

¹⁸⁸ Balzac, *Cousin Bette*, tr. Waring, 216.

never exist again. Crevel is the personification of the bourgeois aesthetic. Balzac introduces him as a former perfumer and describes him as a man bent on obtaining wealth and power. As a literary tool, Balzac has Crevel open the story, providing necessary background that allows the plot to expand. Crevel is not yet openly guilty of adultery, as is his counterpart, Hulot. The two are initially great friends, having in common two mistresses from the theater. Josepha, Crevel's "love of his life," since his wife died, is his creation. She had been his mistress since her childhood and became a famous Opera singer due to Crevel's "patient upbringing." However, Hulot, who steals her from Crevel, seduces her, and the friendship crumbles. Out of revenge, Crevel makes a beeline to the Hulot estate, dilapidated due to the Baron's excesses. He goes there to take Hulot's wife, the symbol of virtue and essential to what Balzac saw as the backbone of the family. Adeline, in her grace, refuses his demands, and remains chaste well into the plot. This all occurs within the first chapter. Balzac makes sure there is no doubt in the reader that this story is about the temptations created by obsession of wealth and desire and the dysfunction that it causes.

Balzac intends for his readers to see the new society as diseased and to expose the mechanism responsible—the vectors of lust, greed, and materialism as implacable foe. The force line of the story "is at all times motivated by *appetency*," as Jameson identifies.¹⁸⁹ Balzac uses beauty as the one of the key components in lust. Yet, he is careful not to condemn "beauty" as an instrument of perpetration but to exemplify beauty as duplicit and complicit in neutering self-control, luring its victims into obedient submission, while at the same time portraying beauty as benevolent, venerable, and the ideal of perfection approaching divine engenderment. Beauty shares what Materialism offers—pleasure with a price tag. The author has vice and virtue pulling

¹⁸⁹ Jameson, "*La Cousine Bette* and Allegorical Realism," 241.

and tugging at each other for domination. The conjoining to the two spirits of beauty, in Balzac's characters, adds depth and intrigue, and he expertly shows the conflict they act out both on the "surface interpretations," as well as within the deeper allegorical understanding. "Everything has two sides, even virtue," as Balzac reminds us in his dedication to *La Cousine Bette*.¹⁹⁰

For many in the nineteenth-century the appeal, the draw, the enticement of capitalism was seen as pernicious eroticism, mesmerizing and indenturing its captives into an economic slavery; a germ subordinating its host like an endoparasite, feeding, but not killing. In the case of the incorrigible Hulot, he is finally separated from Valerie, first by his virtuous wife, then by the strange priest who sent the "incarnation of the criminal side of Paris," the "redeemer," Madame de Saint-Estève/Madame Nourrisson, who performs a convenient exorcism with an exotic disease. She is the equalizer in Paris, who conducts her trade underneath the nose of the Police who secretly sanction her actions. "'The Devil has a sister,' said Victorin, rising."¹⁹¹ The dynamics of this scene are wonderful. The phrase itself, "Victorin, rising," speaks volumes about the new incoming breed of politicians. Balzac creates Victorin as the ultimate hero of the story, who circulates within the France of Louis-Phillipe. He is the understated symbol of political salvation, stability, and reason, "rising" to take control and be done with the impetuous predation of the sycophants. Victorin takes desperate measures for a desperate need by condoning, ordering, and compensating the old woman for the murder of Valerie and her Brazilian lover.¹⁹² He uses a Priest and a woman in the ironic casting to set the scene. The assassin, Madame de Saint-Estève, who is also Madame Nourrisson, purveyor of women, says, when introduced, "I

¹⁹⁰ Balzac, *Cousin Bette*, tr. Waring, 4.

¹⁹¹ Balzac, *Cousin Bette*, tr. Waring, 328.

¹⁹² David Bellos, introduction to *Cousin Bette*, tr. Sylvia Raphael, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), xix. David Bellos mentions the character Victorin uses honest means to defeat the evil and restores the fortune of his family, when, in fact, he sanctions murder to eradicate the family embarrassment.

have assumed one of my business names.” Balzac’s implied author describes the seventy-five-year-old woman as, “a living embodiment of the Reign of Terror.”¹⁹³

Still, Hulot, supposedly penitent, quietly drifts off to Isigny with a scullery maid. So much for contrition, as Balzac implies, there is no solution for lust in man. In comparative alignment, he was aware that the old regime needed to be curtailed and ultimately retired to allow a new world order to take its place in history, as distasteful as it must have been to him. There was no other option. What Balzac believed was that the common sense and insightfulness of the “new breed” must prevail; to him, the only solution was to rid society of the poison ilk by whatever means was required. For Balzac, ironically, the end justified the means, so harmony can be restored.

Even Balzac’s choice of names for Hulot’s son, Victorin, implies everything one would expect of a suitable resolution. He carries it still further by casting “Victory(in)” as a man, instead of the traditional heroic woman.¹⁹⁴

Parallel Plots - Zola’s *Demimondaine*

Pretence, a predominant theme in all three novels, is no better shown in this light, than in the following scene in Zola’s *Nana*, where the Marquis de Chouard and the Count Muffat use charity as a vehicle, a ruse, to gain introduction. While the two men size up their situation, Nana, in turn, recognizes the plot and the value of the players she uses to her advantage later on. She even makes a petty sacrifice to the charade, a donation from her recent illicit income to secure her pretensions. All three characters begin their deceptions as deceived. The scene opens as Nana

¹⁹³ Balzac, *Cousin Bette*, tr. Waring, 327.

¹⁹⁴ *Nike*, Winged Victory of Samothrace.

returns from a “trick,” set up by Madame Tricon. Her chambermaid, Zoe, quickly helps her change clothes to play the new part.

“Madame, you will pardon our insistence,” said the Count Muffat gravely. “We come on a quest. Monsieur and I are members of the Benevolent Organization of the district.”

The Marquis de Chouard hastened gallantly to add:

“When we learned that a great artiste lived in this house we promised ourselves that we would put the claims of our poor people before her in a very special manner. Talent is never without a heart.”

Nana pretended to be modest. She answered them with little assenting movements of her head, making rapid reflections at the same time. It must be the old man that had brought the other one: he had such wicked eyes. And yet the other was not to be trusted either: the veins near his temples were so queerly puffed up. He might quite well have come by himself. Ah, now that she thought of it, it was this way: the porter had given them her name, and they had egged one another on, each with his own ends in view.¹⁹⁵

It is those “ends,” of course, that capture the real objects of desire, wealth, and lust. Lies pass back and forth like cannon volley, all in the name of the “Benevolent Organization of the district.” Zola lays out his characters as chess pieces so the reader’s eyes virtually watch the pieces moving back and forth in various forms of vulnerability and exploitation. The place, the titles, the times are all familiar to the nineteenth-century readers, who have a full understanding of the extrinsic influences at play, supporting the novels situations. They, too, are witness to these unspoken crimes in real life. While they may believe, for instance, that prostitution is a toleration of society, Zola makes it clear through his characters, that it is not victimless. The hunter and the hunted are one in the same, chimaeras that are ultimately consumed by their own obsessions.

Zola’s depiction of this *demimondaine* of Paris is a near copy of Balzac’s Valerie Marneffe and the metaphorical parallel to French society but under the Second Empire rather

¹⁹⁵ Balzac, *Cousin Bette*, tr. Waring, 45.

than the Restoration. He used similar characters and concluding moral judgments to write Nana, but he put a further twist on it. Zola's signature style of Naturalism takes a turn in Realism that, in his case, colors earlier images black with vulgarity and represents complete condemnation of the crippled government under Napoleon III, by leaving no question as to the cause of the deterioration of morality in French society. Nana Coupeau, who lacks all moral fiber, is as vile as a viper in her misandry, eclipses Balzac's Valerie Marneff as a demoness. She is bent on the utter, emotionless humiliation of her pathetic *prisonniers consacrés*. Zola has created the ultimate predator-whore, whose determination to get "even" in life is despicable to everyone but her den of fools. Zola shows how the contemptuous Count Muffat obeyed her so submissively, "as became a man no longer afraid of being seen. His one care now was to avoid vexing her."¹⁹⁶

Zola's indictment runs parallel to Balzac's and the corruptive rule of a tainted oligarchy. There is no pretense in Zola's images, nothing euphemistic, sympathetic, or forgiving. His images are utter debasement of the weaknesses of man and the human condition, ironically typecast in Marxist's terms as "the evils of materialism." *Nana* was a *succès de scandale*, as his descriptions offended even the strongest of temperaments. Both *Nana* and *La Cousine Bette* are intimately related to one another, like parent and child as they tell the same story. But *Nana* weaves a more sinister web, one spun on Zola's intention to expose the psychological nature of man.

Dangerous Liaisons in Rouen-Flaubert's Emma

Unlike *Nana* and *Valerie*, *Emma Bovary* was no whore. She was a misguided, selfish young wife, who buried herself in escapist romantic novels and out of complete desperation

¹⁹⁶ Zola, *Nana*, tr. Parmée, 180.

prostituted herself in a pathetic attempt to find a solution to her predicament. Flaubert modeled his story, at the advice of his friend, Louis Bouilhet, after the 1848 double suicide of Madame Delamare and her husband Eugène of Normandy. The Bovarys were exact copies of the Delamares, down to their provocations, avocations, and vocations. Eugène was an “impecunious and mediocre medical student” and studied under Flaubert’s father at the Rouen Hospital; Delphine Delamare was Eugène’s second wife, a bored provincial who deluded herself in romantic novels. According to Francis Steegmuller, Louis Bouilhet convinced Flaubert that this was a perfect story to fictionalize, “What was Eugène Delamare but the incarnation of all that was dullest in the bourgeois? What was the wife but a bourgeois victim of Romanticism? And what better categories of humanity were better suited to Flaubert’s pen than those?”¹⁹⁷ Flaubert would have the opportunity to write about his passions:

There was no need for Flaubert to concern himself, as Balzac had chiefly concerned himself, with bourgeois money matters. Young Madame Delamare had run into debt, but precisely because she had had no thought of money. A novel on non-material bourgeois themes, written with style, would unquestionably be something new. And now that Balzac was dead, and there were no novelists of any power or originality writing in France, such a book might very easily be the thunderclap...¹⁹⁸

The genius behind Madame Bovary is the use of metaphor in a style so well thought out that it forever changed the way narrative was to be written. In a scene where Emma secretly meets her lover Léon, Harry Levin observes that Flaubert is careful not to expend too much eroticism and lose the moment. Léon pushes Emma into a curtained carriage and tells the driver to roam around town. Yet we do not enter the cab with them and follow their thoughts. We remain outside, following them from one point to another until we finally come to a “metaphorical climax.” Flaubert didn’t need the reader to go with Emma and Leon into the

¹⁹⁷ Steegmuller, *Madame Bovary: A Double Portrait*, 220.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid*, 221.

privacy of the love chamber. He accomplished much more by letting the reader remain at a “tactful distance” while “projecting a rapid sequence of long-range shots.”¹⁹⁹

During another tryst in Rouen, Emma rides into town in a Hironnelle coach, early in the morning, seeing the landscape open up as the morning light grows; she finds the countryside monotonous, until she begins to see the city. She hears the silence broken by the roar of foundries, full of smoke stacks billowing white clouds. Her excitement and fascination grows: “For Emma, there was something intoxicating in the sight of that vast concentration of life, and her heart swelled as thought the hundred and twenty thousand souls palpitating there had all sent her a breath of the passions she attributed to them.”²⁰⁰

One the way home, she had a different experience. Her apprehension grows, as she “walked through the streets [to the coach] and squeezed herself into her seat among the impatient passengers. . . She would kneel on the cushions and let her eyes wander over the bright glow [of the city retreating]. She would sob, call out to Léon and send him sweet words and kisses that were lost in the wind.”²⁰¹ The coach overtakes the blind man, who would later prove to be the embodiment of her fear, her regret, and finally her death. He laughs condescendingly, taunting and mocking her, as Flaubert uses him for prophesizes her fate.

His voice, low and wailing at first, would grow shrill and linger in the darkness like the indistinct lamentations of some vague distress; and as Emma heard it through the jingling of the bells, the murmur of the trees and the hollow rumble of the coach, it had a faraway

¹⁹⁹ Flaubert, *Madame Bovary*, pdf, tr. Aveling, 209-210. See also, reprinted article from *Madame Bovary*, tr. Bair, 356, by Harry Levin, “*Madame Bovary: The Cathedral and the Hospital*,” *Essays in Criticism*, January, 1952.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid*, 225.

²⁰¹ *Ibid*, 228.

sound that troubled her deeply. It descended into the depths of her soul like a whirlwind in an abyss, and swept her into realms of boundless melancholy.²⁰²

Emma becomes “intoxicated with sadness.” Flaubert writes all this within six pages space.²⁰³

The rich metaphorical language he uses provides the reader with wonderful contrasting images.

Emma is intoxicated” first by the excitement and anticipation of the affair with Léon, then “intoxicated” by the sadness of returning to Charles and the life she can’t manage. Her trip to Rouen is full of sexual images, while the trip back presents images of disease, death, and foul portents of doom. The blind man, whose face “revealed two bloody, gaping sockets” and whose “flesh was falling away in crimson shreds, and from it oozed liquids which hardened into green scabs down to the nose, whose black nostrils were always sniffing convulsively.”²⁰⁴

Flaubert’s carefully chosen words paint images that set the readers expectations by mere suggestion. Always, the ambiance of the moment, the smells of the region or the people, the sounds, and the movements make the scene powerfully erotic or powerfully foreboding. His cinema graphic insights into the mind has set Flaubert far apart from his contemporaries, elevating him to the level of greatness.

Wonderfully descriptive and sexually suggestive words like” chimneys,” “roaring factories,” “rolling,” “up,” “down,” “emerging from the gates,” then, ...“a gentle trot” while the driver wipes his brow and Léon yells out “go straight!” or “don’t stop!” These physical correlatives, as Scholes, Phelan, and Kellogg explain, “stem from [Flaubert’s] recognition of the inadequacy of speech as a conveyor of emotions...[and] solves for him the problem of presenting

²⁰² Ibid, 229.

²⁰³ Ibid, 226-231. It is worth reading these six pages to see how carefully Flaubert sets the moods from Emma’s boredom, to erotic anticipation and to foreboding anxiety.

²⁰⁴ Ibid, 229.

Emma realistically without heightening the language of her thoughts and consequently violating his conception of her character, which is based on coupling her extraordinary capacity of emotion with a profoundly ordinary intellect.”²⁰⁵ The terrific interplay of words is so much more satisfying than vulgar pornographic description. The metaphorical interchanges can just as quickly turn the mood to south into the morose.

The character counterparts are often obvious; the parallels of human emotion and physical correlatives are in plain sight. In the final analysis, we do not find one solution to the interpretation of *La Cousine Bette*, *Madame Bovary*, and *Nana*. We see these novels from different dimensional levels. Viewing the situations and character profiles in both the Marxist and psychoanalytic perspective, we can correlate characters and the extrinsic influences affecting the authors, society, and the economy, allegorically and metaphorically. Pitting the intrinsic metaphors of vice against virtue, flagging elements in the characters personae with characteristics found within the text, or associated with, offers alternate meaning beyond what we may initially understand.

²⁰⁵ Robert Scholes, James Phelan, and Robert Kellogg, *The Nature of Narrative*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 196. See Chapter V, “Character in Narrative.”

“If Freud was able to enunciate *his* pleasure principle without even having to worry about indicating what distinguishes it from the function of pleasure in traditional ethics—without risking that it be understood, by echoing a bias uncontested for two thousand years, as reminiscent of the attractive notion that a creature is preordained for its good and of the psychology inscribed in different myths of benevolence—we can only credit this to the insinuating rise in the nineteenth-century of the theme of ‘delight in evil’ [*Bonheur dans le mal*].”²⁰⁶

—Jacques Lacan, *Écrits*

“Love does not delight in evil, but rejoices with the truth.”

—1 Corinthians 13:6

Chapter VIII

Reconciling Behaviors: Accepting the Author’s Judgments

Some readers may consider the content in the three novels in this study objectionable, even detestable. Many of the characters are so morally contemptible that they offend even the strongest temperaments. Yet, the situations presented by the three subject authors and the characters within them are quite believable and well within the understanding of most readers, either today or back in the nineteenth century. Passing judgment on abhorrent behaviors of a novel’s characters, by definition, requires that certain norms or conventions between the reader and the implied author be pre-established and coincide so that the suspension of disbelief is not broken, a fine line when norms are being defined. This rhetoric of persuasions may be subtle and occur over a paragraph, a chapter, or the entire book, or it may be immediate and propagandist. Take, for instance, the sympathy that Flaubert is cautious to reserve for Emma Bovary in her affair with Rodolphe Boulanger. As we casually eavesdrop into his thoughts, we learn quickly his intents and opinions. The contrast in sincerity between Emma and Rodolphe, the very nature

²⁰⁶ Jacques Lacan, *Écrits*, tr. Bruce Fink, (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2006), 645.

of their relationship, “is a refined and restrained projection of the sensibility of Gustave Flaubert, and, in that limited sense, is autobiographical.”²⁰⁷ This we see from the careful language used by the implied author, when Rodolphe’s interior monologue reveals his true nature, as he justifies his actions and prepares a trap to ensnare a hopeless romantic, like Emma.

I think he is very stupid [Charles]. She is tired of him, no doubt. He has dirty nails, and hasn’t shaved for three days. While he is trotting after his patients, she sits there botching socks. And she gets bored! She would like to live in town and dance polkas every evening. Poor little woman! She is gaping after love like a carp after water on a kitchen-table. With three words of gallantry she’d adore one, I’m sure of it. She’d be tender, charming. Yes; but how to get rid of her afterwards?²⁰⁸

Flaubert makes certain the reader understands the implications of Rodolphe’s calculations by depicting him as a cad, a ruthless misogynist bent on having his way with this beautiful woman.

“Oh, I will have her,” he cried, striking a blow with his stick at a clod in front of him.

And he at once began to consider the political part of the enterprise. He asked himself—

“Where shall we meet? By what means?”²⁰⁹

In contrast, Flaubert presents Emma like a gullible, innocent, naïve young woman, yet still inescapably culpable in this cat and mouse game.

Her profile was so calm that one could guess nothing from it. It stood out in the light from the oval of her bonnet, with pale ribbons on it like the leaves of weeds. Her eyes with their long curved lashes looked straight before her, and though wide open, they seemed slightly puckered by the cheek-bones, because of the blood pulsing gently under the delicate skin. A pink line ran along the partition between her nostrils. Her head was bent upon her shoulder, and the pearl tips of her white teeth were seen between her lips.²¹⁰

²⁰⁷ Scholes, Phelan and Kellogg, *The Nature of Narrative*, 196.

²⁰⁸ Flaubert, *Madame Bovary*, pdf, tr. Aveling, 113.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid*, 114.

²¹⁰ *Ibid*, 118.

Through Flaubert's careful rhetoric, we learn of Emma's intentions, but not before Flaubert interjects the scene with happenings apart from the impending tryst. The action pauses while we readers impatiently wait for the proverbial passersby to cross the street. Flaubert puts nothing out of kilter. Everything is as it should be in the hubbub of the Agricultural Fair.

The meadow began to fill, and the housewives hustled you with their great umbrellas, their baskets, and their babies. One had often to get out of the way of a long file of country folk, servant-maids with blue stockings, flat shoes, silver rings, and who smelt of milk, when one passed close to them. They walked along holding one another by the hand, and thus they spread over the whole field from the row of open trees to the banquet tent.²¹¹

He has charged the upcoming scene very sweetly, sensually, erotically, with temporal shifts and physical correlatives that paint images and create anticipation, carefully prodding the reader to accept, if not expect, what the author presents.

The beasts were there, their noses towards the cord, and making a confused line with their unequal rumps. Drowsy pigs were burrowing in the earth with their snouts, calves were bleating, lambs baaing; the cows, on knees folded in, were stretching their bellies on the grass, slowly chewing the cud, and blinking their heavy eyelids at the gnats that buzzed round them. Plough-men with bare arms were holding by the halter prancing stallions that neighed with dilated nostrils looking towards the mares.²¹²

Flaubert's word choice is powerful and direct and sexually charged, bringing into it Emma's romantic idealism, as she quickly falls prey to Rodolphe's seduction.

"Yet—yet—" objected Madame Bovary.

"No, no! Why cry out against the passions? Are they not the one beautiful thing on the earth, the source of heroism, of enthusiasm, of poetry, music, the arts, of everything, in a word?"

"But one must," said Emma, "to some extent bow to the opinion of the world and accept its moral code." . . .²¹³

²¹¹ Ibid, 118.

²¹² Ibid, 119.

²¹³ Ibid, 125.

This sweetness of sensation pierced through her old desires, and these, like grains of sand under a gust of wind, eddied to and fro in the subtle breath of the perfume which suffused her soul. She opened wide her nostrils several times to drink in the freshness of the ivy round the capitals. She took off her gloves, she wiped her hands, then fanned her face with her handkerchief, while athwart the throbbing of her temples she heard the murmur of the crowd and the voice of the councilor intoning his phrases.²¹⁴

The speech by the Agricultural Commissioner, Monsieur Lieuvain, is presented in double entendre, like a rationality laden with sensual language encouraging the attendant listener toward the ideals of nationalism, perfectionism, determinism, and above all toward following your bliss. The paragraph, in fact, the pages surrounding it, are full of suggestive phrases, physical correlatives, and persuasive rhetoric. The speech, itself, creates a pause in time, a temporal signature that at once complements the moment of tension between the two soon-to-be lovers and slows down the cadence of the prose:

“Continue, **persevere; listen neither to the suggestions of routine**, nor to the over-hasty councils of a **rash** empiricism. **Apply yourselves**, above all, to the **amelioration** of the soil, to **good** manures, to the development of the equine, bovine, ovine, and porcine races. Let these shows be to you **pacific arenas**, where the victor in leaving it will hold forth a hand to the vanquished, and will **fraternize** with him in the hope of better **success**. And you, aged servants, humble domestics, whose hard labor no Government up to this day has taken into consideration, **come hither to receive the reward of your silent virtues**, and be assured that the state henceforward has its **eye upon you**; that it **encourages you**, protects you; that it will **accede to your just demands**, and **alleviate** as much as in it lies the burden of your **painful sacrifices**.”²¹⁵

Emma Bovary has done nothing at this point but allow herself to be seduced by an artist whose sole objective is calculating the when and where of his place of conquest. Flaubert makes certain, we the reader do not lose our sympathy for Emma, quite yet. While she may not be encouraging his advances, Flaubert doesn't let her off the hook as she, nonetheless, allows it to continue.

²¹⁴ Ibid, 125.

²¹⁵ Ibid, 128. Phrasing highlighted to emphasize and illustrate the physical and figurative correlatives to the sexual tension in the scene.

While Flaubert subtly manipulates our bias toward the characters, he in turn, is helping readers to reconcile Emma's poor judgment. On the other end of the spectrum, Émile Zola takes a much more abrupt approach in driving home the intended bias by hammering home his idea of the character's sense of morality, seeking concurrence with the postulated reader's norms. Of this, he is quite sure.

If the implied author, drawing from his reservoir of choices, requires that his readers judge the character, scene, or motives based on his own norms and his delivery in narrative, he must carefully persuade the reader to agree with his assessments and assertions. He must skillfully present his position without overtly dramatizing and revealing himself. Melodramatic tirade is as quick to burn the bridge of the relationship of author, character, narrator, and audience, as is direct address. There is an implicit set of rules that a reader must adopt for comparison between himself and the unfolding text so alignment is achieved and judgments are reasonable. The "rules" may never have been tested by the reader. A scene or situation may involve something that the reader has no experience in, or even knowledge of, and the measure between the reader's understanding and the implied author's intention or desired effect may exceed the reader's willingness to believe its "implicit truth." The skill required of a good author, in order for an agreement to occur with the reader, must include a certain complicity or concurrence in opinion. The reader is silent witness to certain events and, while able to judge, is unable to act, and can only accept or reject the actions but cannot participate in the outcomes. The implied author's success depends on his rhetorical skill, "The kind and amount of rhetoric required depends on the precise relation between the detail of action or character to be judged

and the nature of the whole in which it occurs,” as Booth observes.²¹⁶ In this highly charged scene from *Nana* between her and her lover, Fontan, Zola tests this relationship:

It added to that other bitterness, the lesson Fontan had given her, a shameful lesson for which she held all men responsible. Accordingly, she now declared herself very firm and quite proof against sudden infatuations, but thoughts of vengeance took no hold of her volatile brain. What did maintain a hold on it in the hours when she was not indignant was an ever wakeful lust of expenditure, added to a natural contempt for the man who paid and to a perpetual passion for consumption and waste, which she took pride in the ruin of her lovers.²¹⁷

The more naïve, inexperienced, uninformed readers may balk at the language and action of violence but they know this sort of thing occurs; there are people in the world who behave in unacceptable ways. Do we as readers seek or even demand punishment for poor behavior? Do we seek retribution based on our own idea of fairness? While we may have no tolerance for such behavior, we nonetheless must accept it as a sort of truth of the human condition and are compelled to read on, making judgments at each paragraph, waiting to see if a resolution is about to occur that is in agreement with our norms. If authors cannot convince us to suspend our disbelief, than they have failed, and we never get past the block it creates. However, if they do push us nearly to the edge, we become intrigued, entranced, humored, and very often, fascinated. Balzac, Flaubert, and Zola have accomplished this with finesse.

Even the sadomasochism in *Nana* takes some disturbing twists that require the reader to accept what the implied author writes despite the norms of “society” that are imposed on all of us. The behavior of a bully and the submissive responses of Nana are animal like, basic to a pack of jackals, which may be hard to accept in human terms, but they are believable, even disturbingly logical in light of the conditions Zola has created.

²¹⁶ Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, 183.

²¹⁷ Zola, *Nana*, pdf, tr. Waring, 263.

Nana yields to his subordinate power. But he did not stop to discuss matters further, for he dealt her a random box on the ear across the table, remarking as he did so:

“Let’s have that again!”

He was out of breath and was going to bed, in his turn . . . Nana, who was crying and gasping, thereupon held her breath. When he was in bed she choked with emotion and threw herself upon his breast with a wild burst of sobs. Their scuffles always ended thus, for she trembled at the thought of losing him and, like a coward, wanted always to feel that he belonged entirely to her, despite everything. Twice he pushed her magnificently away, but the warm embrace of this woman who was begging for mercy with great, tearful eyes, as some faithful brute might do, finally aroused desire.²¹⁸

We may find this behavior repulsive, despite our disgust for Nana, and feel a need for retribution while we are appalled and shift our aggression toward Fontan and sympathize with Nana’s predicament.

One evening he found Nana in tears. She took off her dressing jacket in order to show him her back and her arms, which were black and blue. He looked at her skin without being tempted to abuse the opportunity, as that ass of a Prulliere would have been. Then, sententiously: But she gazed at him with her loving eyes and hugged him in such utter self-surrender that he pocketed the money again with that little convulsive twitch.²¹⁹

The persuasiveness of Zola to relate these events has been accomplished with careful aplomb as threat of melodrama lurks in the shadows. Booth adds, “the implied author of each novel is someone with whose beliefs on all subjects I must largely agree if I am to enjoy his work.”²²⁰ To enjoy this work is to understand and accept this portrayal of mankind’s darker image, as Zola brings the scene to full circle.

And her anger began dwindling down as though the blow had calmed her. She began to feel respect toward him and accordingly squeezed herself against the wall in order to leave him as much room as possible. She even ended by going to sleep, her cheek tingling, her eyes full of tears and feeling so deliciously depressed and wearied and submissive that she no longer noticed the crumbs. When she woke up in the morning she

²¹⁸ Zola, *Nana*, pdf, tr. Waring, 219.

²¹⁹ *Ibid*, 218-223.

²²⁰ Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, 137.

was holding Fontan in her naked arms and pressing him tightly against her breast. He would never begin it again, eh? Never again? She loved him too dearly. Why, it was even nice to be beaten if he struck the blow!²²¹

Zola, may not allow us the satisfaction of retribution against Fontan, but he gives us good reason to understand the perverse behavior of them both—the cause and effect of their relationship—as he prepares the reader for this ill treatment, redefining Nana by slowly revealing her underlying tendencies: “Every conversation led up to one subject—the beastliness of the men.”²²²

The perversity of Nana’s existence, in the company of her subjugated suitors, plays out as Nana’s latent desires are realized by everyone surrounding her. Her salacious behavior at the following dinner party only portends what is to come, as Nana and Satin eventually return to the streets of Paris. The poverty of her origin; the deplorable living conditions she grew up in; the pathetic death of her mother; the cruel treatment by Fontan; the dog-like behavior of her men seeking a bitch in heat; and the excesses lavished on Nana all contribute to her poor regard of men and her lesbian tendencies.

“Yes, certainly,” he murmured with a slow nod of approval. He no longer protested now. And so amid that company of gentlemen with the great names and the old, upright traditions, the two women sat face to face, exchanging tender glances, conquering, reigning, in tranquil defiance of the laws of sex, in open contempt for the male portion of the community. The gentlemen burst into applause.²²³

Zola pushes the reader’s values and moral understandings, not to shock or excite a reader, necessarily, but to make a didactic point. As Booth cautions, this is not about literary experience and sensitivities or about the satisfaction to hear “one’s prejudices echoed.” The question

²²¹ Ibid, 208.

²²² Ibid, 210.

²²³ Ibid, 286.

remains, is the “enjoyment we seek in literature as literature, and not as propaganda, inevitably involving our beliefs.”²²⁴ Reconciling our beliefs with that of the implied author put our convictions to the test. Our intellectual response to *Nana* requires “critical thinking” based, not on an artificial scale—a pretentious scale at that—but on no scale at all. This is what Zola was putting forward by altering the writing style of the Realists to his form of Naturalism. He exposes the often horrible truths of human nature and hammers in the last nail in Romanticism’s coffin.

Frederic Jameson draws a similar comparison of the implied author and the reader’s norms in *La Cousine Bette*’s characterizations,

The universe of Balzac, although difficult for its characters, is never problematical. Frequently they fail to reach the objects of their desire, and then they retreat into its dialectical opposite, into a mortification of the will, into solitude, or the convent, but they never at any moment question the nature of desire itself, they are never led to accuse the acquisitive process, or to conceive a satisfaction of a different type that which attaches to worldly objects and aims.²²⁵

Balzac’s characters are as real as he perceives them to be, and he wants, or needs, the reader to share this common perception with its system of norms. He never crosses the line of shared beliefs, and so we as readers have no difficulty accepting “the Valerie Marneffes of the world.” Jameson continues, “If we insist on this as a convention rather than a theme or idea in Balzac, we do so in order to forestall any judgment as to the truth or falsity of this psychology.”²²⁶ We believe that Valerie, the vile “goddess-whore”, deserves the worst possible punishment; we also accept that Hulot is seriously flawed, for his neurotic compulsion toward sexual satisfaction is no

²²⁴ Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, 139.

²²⁵ Jameson, “La Cousine Bette and Allegorical Realism”, 244.

²²⁶ Ibid.

different from that of Zola's Muffat. They are as much to be condemned to perdition as Valerie and Nana. What is most fascinating is the comparison to these two characters.

The Prodigal Fathers

Baron Hector Hulot, as we discussed in Chapter VII, is Balzac's metaphorical representation of French society and its weakness to the material temptations of commercialism in free market capitalism. His degenerate character is incorrigible, loathsome, and masochistic, yet understandable, in light of its metaphorical representation. Hulot is the quintessential consumer in Balzac's view and nothing can be done to stop the man; neither the loss of his lifestyle, the shame he projects on his family name, the path to poverty he allows his family to follow in his wake, nor the constant humiliation to which Valerie Marneffe subjects him. There seems to be nothing that will discourage him or satisfy his obsessions. Balzac chose his character well and displayed Hulot's faults in vivid contrast to his model of virtue. If Adeline Hulot provides Balzac with a symbol of integrity, modesty, and virtuous morality, then he needs to emphasize his contrast as a black object against a stark white background, and indeed, this is precisely what he does. Balzac gives us a vivid sense of Hulot's character, with all its weakness, its shame, its inability to self-correct, and its lack of humility. But, the narrative discloses little, if anything, about the individual. Balzac is careful not to let us into the mind of Hulot. He maintains his distance with his characters, as much as possible, and intimacy is reserved primarily for those on the side of virtue. He does not want the reader's sympathy to fall on anyone but Adeline and Victorin—not even Hortense, who is neither strong nor morally upright, but the weak spineless product of her parents and pampering by her father. She is not innocent as much as ignorant, by design and by her own choices. In the end, the two pillars of strength and morality either die or sell out; when Adeline dies of shock and Victorin, Balzac's symbol of

promise, bows to compromise when he sanctions murder. But not just murder. This is no ordinary assassination. It is an eradication of vice in society, a covert operation and murder by decree, all in the name of “family,” Balzac’s primary thesis. A secret contract is placed on the heads of vice issued by “recommendation” from, of all places, the Chief of Police, whose aunt happens to be a sort of societal benefactor; a social mobster whose methods are conveniently discreet. I say this with tongue-in-cheek, as it is not difficult to see this ploy of Balzac’s as rather convenient for him, as an author. However, its melodrama pushes this reader’s suspension of disbelief to its brink! Not to end it there, Balzac writes that the reward for the murders is to be collected by a priest, and not just any priest, but an ascetic. Forty thousand francs! Does he get to keep it for his order? Is it Madame Nourrisson under yet, another disguise? At this point, I have to ask: Is Balzac telling his readers that the end justifies the means? Is this crazy development here for comic relief? Were there or are there still, Madame Nourrissons roaming the streets of Paris cleaning up messes made by its “dignitaries?” My personal norms, my understanding of how the world works in good and bad situations, does not allow me to give credence to the notion that this can occur in a realistic setting. I find it absurd, yet disturbingly comical. Furthermore, I find this rather mediocre attempt at resolution unbecoming of a writer like Balzac. Disbelief must usher in, but humor fills the void that plausibility left behind. So, it is okay this one time, that the author makes a modest attempt at comic relief to drive the action forward and clear the air of societal contagions like the Marneffes et al. However, I take exception to murder. It sends a message to the reader that murder is justifiable, in certain circumstances.

While Balzac “tells” us about the debauchery in *La Cousine Bette*, Émile Zola “shows” it to us in *Nana*. Zola’s Count Muffat eclipses Balzac’s Hulot, just as Nana eclipses Valerie

Marneffe, as abominable counterparts of one another. What is most interesting is the one-to-one comparisons we can make of these two characters and their relationships (see Figure 2).

Both men hold government positions awarded to them based on their lineage and loyalties during previous revolutions. Neither was posted on the front lines during conflicts; rather, they both held administrative commissions. Both men used their positions to gain favor, advantage, privilege, and personal financial gain. Both lost this position due to their greed and uncontrollable obsessions over the women they lusted for. Both men were guilty of moral, political, and legal crimes to the state, their families, and the people they supposedly represented.

Ironically, each man's wife represents virtue in some aspect; sacrificial martyrs for their husbands; women of "religious chastity";²²⁷ devoted mothers. Balzac's Madame Hulot maintained her dignity up to the point of her death. Whereas, Zola's Countess Muffat, on the other hand, held up with dignity until neglect and humiliation took hold of her, and she retaliated with "what's good for the goose, is good for the gander" when she entered into an affair with Monsieur Fauchery, her husband's constant reminder of his forfeit to keep his mistress and cuckold position he holds among his acquaintances.

²²⁷ Zola, *Nana*, pdf, Penn State, 56. Zola uses this term to describe the Countess Sabine.

<u>Balzac's Characters</u>	<u>Zola's Characters</u>
Monsieur le Baron Hulot d'Ervy Commissary General under the Republic	Count Muffat de Beuville Chamberlain to the Empress
Baroness Adeline Fisher Hulot Devoted wife till death	Countess Sabine Muffat Devoted wife until her affair with Fauchery
Valerie Marneffe Courtesan, dies of Jungle Fever	Nana Courtesan, dies of small pox
Hortense Daughter married to Wenceslas	Estelle Daughter married to Fauchery
Victorin Son, who saves the family from ruin	

Fig. 2. Protagonist Character Comparison in Balzac's *Cousine Bette* and Zola's *Nana*.

Most interestingly, the children of both men are duped into believing their father is a national hero, a man of irreproachable dignity, and the epitome of honor, this being projected on the children by the protective, dutiful, subservient, and martyr of a wife. Balzac makes Hulot's two children, Hortense and Victorin, central to the plots and subplots in *La Cousine Bette*. Zola's Count Muffat, conversely, has only one child, a teenage daughter named Estelle, an insignificant character were it not for her marrying an irritating nemesis of Muffat's. This competitive annoyance hounds Hulot as the young lad ultimately becomes his son-in-law in order to collect a substantial dowry. The young and bold Daguenet, is first introduced in the story as Nana's "Dandy."²²⁸

²²⁸ It is during the wedding breakfast with Estelle, and with Hulot presumably at the table as father-of-the-bride, that Daguenet slips off to give Nana her "Commission."

The mistresses of each “Prodigal Father” are, oddly enough, distinct from one another. Balzac’s Valerie Marneffe is nothing short of a powerfully seductive sycophant, who is smart enough to plan and plot to her short- and long-term advantage. Balzac makes certain this character remains in control of her fate, unshaken by her avarice and resultant damages left in her wake. She becomes so well-established that Balzac has to have her murdered to make his point of metaphorical power over society.²²⁹ Zola’s Count Muffat has another situation, all together, with Nana. This is the street urchin who grew up abused, learning to hate men, and uses sex and their wealth to punish them. The correlation between the two *femme fatales* is difficult due to the psychological implications of Nana’s dominatrix-like behavior. Zola, in his prototypical Naturalist style, creates the ultimate villainess, the goddess-whore who devours men, fortunes, and families with nary a blink.

Zola obviously followed Balzac’s story. While the similarities are evident in the characters, their roles are significantly different. This is true of the plots, the resolutions, and the social messages delivered. It was one of Balzac’s last books, and it surely made the headlines and remained on the shelves, so to speak, for some time after his death, allowing Zola access and vision to see the opportunity to carry the story forward, in his style. Zola’s naturalistic stamp on Nana significantly changes direction from what Balzac provided in *Cousine Bette*. As we illustrated in Chapter VII, Balzac wanted to get across the message that the core family values in his beloved France were threatened by the kept woman, a common sight in the nineteenth century. He wanted to get across to his readers that corruption was rampant throughout the government and that the broken back of the social and religious milieu was the direct result of the new economy and botched régimes. This, too, is Zola’s message. He despised the Second

²²⁹ See Chapter VII “Beneath the Surface: Allegory of the Goddess Whore and *Femme Incomprise*.”

Empire and wanted to show that the fabric of society was stained by the moral decay that was eating away at France's integrity. But his methods, his Naturalist style, was to exemplify the multifarious psychosocial matrix that made up the populous of *his* beloved France. Zola did not have the literary stylistic genius of his predecessors. He was never consistent in his narrative in Nana, following the lessons of his mentors. He never fully explored the deep interior of his characters, listening to their intimate thoughts, feeling their emotions. His style was to keep narration at a safe distance in order to maintain his form of objectivity. His genius was in his stupendous deftness in moving within and understanding the complexity of human behavior.

While these two novels are mirrored, they are only a partial facsimile of one another. Each novel tells a similar tale but each delivers a slightly different but profoundly significant message. Both are equally enjoyable, and both are equally revealing.

“Is the rule of money inherently incompatible with the rule of morality?”²³⁰

—David Bellos

“Narrative , in other words, is a basic human strategy for coming to terms with time, process, and change—a strategy that contrasts with, but is in no way inferior to, “scientific” modes of explanation that characterize phenomena as instances of general covering laws. Science explains how in general water freezes when (all other things being equal) its temperature reaches zero degrees centigrade; but it takes a story to convey what it was like to lose one’s footing on slippery ice one late afternoon in December 2004, under a steel-grey-sky. Yet just as it is possible to construct a narrative about the development of science, to tell a story about who made what discoveries and under what circumstances, it is possible to use the tools of science—definition, analysis, classification, comparison, etc.—to work toward a principled account of what makes a text, discourse, film, or other artifact [a] *narrative*.”²³¹ —David Herman

Conclusions

Throughout this thesis, a blend of analytic elements from several schools of critical theory have been used to help elucidate the influences on the authors as they developed their text. In this synthetic analysis, I have insisted that we are better prepared to understand intrinsic characteristics that are idiosyncratic of each of the three novel’s interior profiles involving narrative authority, authorial intrusion, suggestions of allegory, and rhetorical elements, to include: *discours indirect libre*, physical correlatives, and sympathy manipulation. In sum, the author’s extrinsic influences provide the impetus for the intrinsic texture of the narrative. This is universal for the arts in general, and cogent to the novels of Balzac, Flaubert, and Zola.

²³⁰ David Bellos, introduction to *Cousin Bette*, by Honoré de Balzac, tr. Raphael, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), xix. This commentary from David Bellos rings a loud bell in Marxist towers. It is and always has been the argument that the ready access of money, left unmonitored or unchecked, will ultimately shift a person’s ideologies, compromise their principles, making them dependent on materialistic standards.

²³¹ Herman, David, introduction to *Narrative*, ed. David Herman, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 3. Because David Herman has such a definitive and comprehensive understanding of narrative, I included his definition in both the Introduction and Conclusion of this thesis.

Historical fiction subject to critical analysis cannot avoid an extrinsic treatment.²³² By their nature, they must bow to the layout of timelines and events in the narrative. They are, in fact, dependent on history to guide the story, understand its characters and their behaviors, and support the plausibility of resolutions tied to the events in the text. Within this understanding, the three novels in this study lend themselves perfectly to an extrinsic examination of the history of France's politics, social reforms, economic influences, and author's biographies that drive the intrinsic texture of their art. These environmental influences, in short, control the central aspects of how text originates.²³³ This is academic to historical fiction and integral into understanding their rhetorical works.

The vital and vivacious *zeitgeist* of the century was countered by collateral social inequity that Balzac, Flaubert, and Zola complained so fervently about. As witness to the chaos of their times, they chose a form of literary rebellion that pushed away the popular prose of Romanticists, like Chateaubriand, who wrote only illusionary escapist fiction. Balzac, credited as one of the founders of the Realist movement, leads the literary reformers in indicting society for ignoring the suffering and social injustices occurring in France, at the time. The voice of the novelists was shaped by their observations. Their financial success as writers, on the other hand, was greatly supported by the changing economy, advances in technology, and corresponding improvements in social welfare. Unfortunately, social awareness sorely lagged behind France's growth rate. All three saw the obsequious and audacious Bourgeois as the unwelcome result of the introduction of capitalism to Europe.

²³² In context to the novels under study, *historical fiction* is meant to mean fictional novels that depend on actual events and real persons of historical relevance that support the story's fictional suppositions.

²³³ This is in complete defiance of the premise that "fallacy of origins" must be respected if analysis is to be supported by Structuralist, Deconstructionist, and Aesthestic theory who purport the view of "art for art's sake."

As was illustrated in Chapter I, the publishing and advertising industry was born out of the industrial revolution that ran in step with the rising literacy rate in France, who boasted the highest in western civilization. All three novelists benefited greatly by these progressive developments, especially Émile Zola, who began his career as a publicist well before he was a novelist. His experience in publishing brought the author much financial reward and propelled his career as a writer, while Balzac and Flaubert, not well versed in financial dealings, both struggled to maintain their lifestyle.

All three novelists are favorite subjects of the Marxist critics who relish the Realists' rich descriptions and accurate depictions of a disproportionate society in nineteenth-century France. Living conditions are portrayed so well in Balzac's *La Comédie Humaine* that Frederic Engels was to have said that he learned more from the literary proto-neosocialist than from all the "historians, economists, and statisticians put together."²³⁴ Balzac's self-proclaimed title of "doctor of social medicine" marks him as one of the first of the literary reformer of his time and place. All three novelists under study display this avocation in their personal attempt to expose exploitation and suffering. Flaubert's cynical treatment of political and religious authority in *Madame Bovary* is legendary, and critical studies by Marxist scholars is extensive.²³⁵ And, finally, Émile Zola is remembered almost as much for *J'Accuse* as he is for his novels of the *Rougon-Macquart* series.

²³⁴ Timothy Unwin, "On the Novel and Literary Writing," in *The French Novel*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 5. See also, Correspondence of F. Engels and K. Marx, *On Literature*, (Moscow: Progress Publications, 1976). See also, Chapter II Social Realism and Literary Reformists for an in-depth discussion on the Realist movement as it relates to Balzac, Flaubert, and Zola.

²³⁵ The first English translation of *Madame Bovary* was completed in 1880 by Eleanor Marx Aveling, youngest daughter to Karl Marx. Mrs. Aveling, ironically, committed suicide in a manner similar to Emma's demise.

It is doubtful that the authors would have considered their text morally propagandist or purely didactic, although it can be argued that all three of them are. Balzac's prosaic narrative, for instance, is more inclined to be subject to this sort of label because of his frequent authorial commentary and blatant political bias. Typecast as literary Realists, I believe the term "polemic realism" best describes the subject novels as a genre within the movement. We find the three subject novelists entrenched in the Conservative camp while expounding on liberalist views for the desperate need for reform. They saw to it that educating their readers to aspects of society, which they may not have been aware of, was the most effective method to achieve corrective action.

When Realism made its first inroads into French Literature during the first half of the century, writers like Balzac sought a narrative form to express their observations of a society experiencing a paradigmatic collapse of lifestyle. This was supported by an idealistic image of political impunity fostered by Bonaparte. The restoration, particularly after the July revolution of 1830, was not the universal fixer of broken dreams that supporters of the Monarchy were in hope of. On the contrary, political and economic control of France was going to the bourgeoisie, much to the disgust of the three authors. Loyalists, like Balzac and Flaubert, were more interested in reshaping government in their image, their ideal, and one that held the Monarchy together with the glue of a parliamentary state. They desperately wanted the management of a liberal form of feudalism, supporting an aristocracy, but without the brutal subordination of class restriction and built with a better distribution of wealth. While they detested the new régime, they both knew returning to the past was impossible; change was necessary and inevitable; reform was essential. As pragmatic realists, they believed in class division but with social fairness, public education, open employment, maintenance of high social standards, and support of industrial progress

spurred by technology, the antithesis of the Romanticists. Balzac's realism was contradicted by his idealistic desire of a Utopian society under the flag of his mirror image of an English Empire for France. His confusion was evident in his characters. Hector Hulot represents a vice-ridden present with a noble and honorable past. Hulot's son, Victorin, is Balzac's image of salvation and his approval of a new incoming breed of just legislators to fix the damage caused by the patriarch. Balzac, Flaubert, and Zola, while they detested the political leadership and resulting bourgeois mediocrity, were actually members of the bourgeoisie themselves; neither of them was willing to sacrifice their lifestyles in the name of reform. Zola may have been the most hypocritical of all three, fighting for equality while living in comparative luxury off his successes as an author of polemic realism.

It was Balzac's, Flaubert's, and Zola's goal in life to exemplify the effects of their image of society, which was fatally contaminated by a distorted aesthetics. They complained of mediocrity supplanting formal manner and wrote line after line and reams of correspondence complaining of a diseased society and its pernicious nature on their beloved France. In creating *La Cousine Bette*, Balzac develops his primary protagonist as a Bonapartist longing for the return of the Emperor. To Balzac, these old dinosaurs of the past supported ideals of professionalism and militarism that was elitist and obsolete. Louis-Phillipe provided the material and carried that concept forward that official qualification was based on favoritism and military laurels rather than practical ability. Balzac painted Monsieur le Baron Hulot d'Ervy, Commissary General under the Republic, purveyor of goods, with a Bonapartist brush, and then placed him squarely in an environment rich in Restoration's excesses, with full intentions that temptation would surmount Hulot's sense of reason, that vice would eclipse virtue, and the weak Hulot would succumb to enticement of his inherent obsessions. The proverbial "kid in the candy store" makes

for superb fiction and allows the author to make a wholesale indictment on France's tainted leadership through his characters.²³⁶ The Marxist critics found fertile ground with Balzac's novels having plenty of low-hanging fruit to base their analysis of French society corrupted by a exploitive leadership in a capitalist economy.

It would be a stretch to claim that Émile Zola ironically uses Balzac's story to make his own indictment on the Second Empire. I do not believe there is anything ironic about it. Balzac's mimicked biblical story suited Zola's need for the ideal vehicle to show the psychological implications of a corrupt and morally bankrupt public official in the clutches of a *femme fatale* circulating amongst social conditions that permitted vice to occupy virtue's seat in Paris during the reign of Louis-Napoleon.²³⁷ Zola's *Nana*, is the Naturalist's creation to personify evil. Just as Balzac molded his character to suit the Bathsheba model,²³⁸ so does Zola reshape Balzac's Valerie Marneffe to represent vice personified but with his signature twist. Zola wanted to depict truth, unpasteurized, without formal consideration, in the vernacular, in the vulgar, and in the colloquial sense of "a practical sociology, complementing the work of the scientist, whose hope was to change the world not by judging it but by understanding it."²³⁹ In reading Zola, we must never forget that each novel is part of his *Les Rougon-Macquart* series, subtitled "A Natural and

²³⁶ The reader should keep in mind that one year after the release of *Cousine Bette*, Louis-Napoleon was elected President of the Second Republic, later initiating the coup d'état in 1851, a year after Balzac's death and long-anticipated marriage to the Polish Countess Ewelina Hanska.

²³⁷ Oddly enough, Douglas Parmée, in his twenty-page introduction to his Oxford World's Classic translation of *Nana* makes no reference to the obvious parallels between *Nana* and *La Cousine Bette* brought to light in this thesis.

²³⁸ Note that this is in opposition to the premise suggested by David Bellos that Balzac patterned the story after the Bible's *Prodigal Son* (Luke 15: 11-32) and Balzac even alludes to it. But the only thing that's similar is the fact that Hulot is prodigal. He is not contrite but incorrigible. On the contrary, the story most resembles that of David and Bathsheba (2 Samuel 11), complete with character counterparts (see Chapter VII Beneath the Surface: Allegory of the Goddess Whore and *Femme Incomprise* and David Bellos, introduction to *Cousin Bette*, xvi).

²³⁹ Brian Nelson, "Zola and the nineteenth century," in *Émile Zola*, ed. Brian Nelson, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 3.

Social History of a Family under the Second Empire.” His representation of a diseased society, while complementing Balzac’s effort to parallel Dante’s *Divine Comedy*, is expressed as a tainted society emerging out of the restoration, crippled, burdened, still, by its own lineage, and destined for moral course correction. Zola’s admission of his own repressed sexuality supports a vicarious need to express the theme of Nana’s promiscuous rampage through Paris.²⁴⁰ The author leaves little to the imagination as he depicts the psychotic behaviors of the novel’s characters; Labordette, the parasitic syncophant homosexual; Satin, Nana’s lesbian lover; the Baroness Sabine Muffat, the sex-starved, bored housewife bent on satisfaction; Minot, the husband pimp who barter his wife to many of the characters that frequent Nana’s bed; Fauchery, who services Rose Minot as well as the Baroness; Georg Hugon, her “ZiZi”—the teenage boy who satisfied Nana’s lust for feminine tryst; and Dagueuet, Nana’s “Dandy” who marries Muffat’s young daughter for her dowry, to the grand humiliation of Muffat. These characters do not begin to complete the varied personalities that make up Zola’s cast. But, there is a significant twist that separates *Nana* from *La Cousine Bette*. Unlike Balzac, Zola’s representation of virtue, Countess Sabine, soon falls prey to the lust of sex, herself, leaving no one in the Muffat household to replace her as a source of unselfish moral fortitude, nor in the story itself, with the exception of the church. Ironically, Zola uses M. Venot, the little persistent deacon of the Church, who floats around the story as a *flâneur*, always present at the right place and the right time. He magically appears after Muffat humiliates himself, finding him in states of despair, offering the wretch redemption through honest contrition. A much different fate and ending than that of Balzac’s Hulot who runs off with the scullery maid! But this is the Naturalist signature of Zola; to remain loyal to his presuppositions, to represent the outcome most realistic and plausible to the

²⁴⁰ Douglas Parmée, introduction to *Nana*, tr. Douglas Parmée, by Émile Zola (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), xix.

characters, situations, and times, and be fully supportive of his attempt at psychological profiling. He did an outstanding job. *Nana* has missed the eye of the diligent and industrious modern bookseller, and it should be readily available among the classic's shelves today. The modern publisher's question might be raised, "Is it pornographic?" and my immediate answer would be, "absolutely not." Zola depicted life as realistically as it happens. To censor it would be to turn your back on truth.

While we can draw clear parallels to the characters in *Cousine Bette* with characters in the Bible and show metaphorical parallels with Balzac's idea of France's dependence on the new economy, we cannot show Zola's *Nana* as a direct comparison to *Cousine Bette*. Furthermore, we can see the obvious relational links to the characters and plots between the two novels, but the comparison must stop there. Zola intentions to portray the courtesan as a social pariah and parasite are to draw attention to her heritage, her childhood, and her need for survival in a sexually exploitive environment. *Nana* is a product of society and male protectors. Zola's intent to demystify the courtesan goes beyond Balzac's objectives. He wants to show her in her own world, not just as one of the demi-monde but the dysfunctional child prostitute whose morals and scruples are diseased. *Nana* is the product of alcoholics who was introduced as the love child of Gervaise in *L'Assommoir*. She becomes a ward of the streets and slums of Paris to arrive in Zola's ninth novel at the age of eighteen. She dies at twenty-one.

Flaubert began *Madame Bovary* just after his return from Egypt with Max Du Camp in anxious anticipation of the coup d'état of 1851. Like both Balzac and Zola, Flaubert wrote of his disgust with the times and leadership in France. However, his style and his grace of language far surpass that of the other two authors.

Flaubert borrowed a story from real events, and with the considerable help of Louis Bouilhet, Maxime Du Camp, and Louis Collette. His contribution to rhetorical technique in fiction remains unparalleled and his influence remains broad in the scope of evolutionary improvements in narrative. As Fredric Jameson so accurately points out, all of literature changed “the year Flaubert abolishes them [authorial intrusions] with a single stroke of his pen.”²⁴¹ His writing of *Madame Bovary* is generally recognized in critical and scholarly circles as pivotal in narrative development. Flaubert surely would have blushed with pride and embarrassment had he heard James Wood proclaim, “Novelists should thank Flaubert the way poets thank spring.”²⁴²

Balzac and Zola can be credited with wonderful, even uncanny, social vision, psychological insight, and linguistic eloquence. But, their intrinsic mimetic texture is significantly different from one another. Balzac’s style emerges out of eighteenth-century storytelling where the implied author and narrator are indistinguishable. The common practice of narration during and before his time included the burdened intrusions, which are intended to direct the reader toward conclusions, opinion, and sympathy. Émile Zola, also guilty of the occasional interjection of authorial opinion, reserves the tactic only to carry a scene or development to its designated end. Zola’s purpose is to strip all myth from his story that might shade the truth from reality. Flaubert, on the other hand, continues to remain the universal prophet of articulation and rhetorical economy. We have him to thank for firmly establishing *discours indirect libre*, the multidimensional fusion of the narrator’s voice as it quietly merges, undetectably, with the character’s thoughts. This seamless construct is as smooth as silk when

²⁴¹ Frederic Jameson, “Realism and Desire: Balzac and the Problem of the Subject,” *The Political Unconscious*, (New York: Cornell University Press, 2010), 141.

²⁴² Wood, *How Fiction Works*, 29.

passages, like the following, challenge the reader's own sense of narrative recognition. Who are we listening to in this passage? When is it the narrator, and when is it the thoughts of Emma?

She hoped for a son; he would be strong and dark; she would call him George; and this idea of having a male child was like an expected revenge for all her impotence in the past. A man, at least, is free; he may travel over passions and over countries, overcome obstacles, taste of the most far-away pleasures. But a woman is always hampered. At once inert and flexible, she has against her the weakness of the flesh and legal dependence. Her will, like the veil of her bonnet, held by a string, flutters in every wind; there is always some desire that draws her, some conventionality that restrains.

She was confined on a Sunday at about six o'clock, as the sun was rising.
"It is a girl!" said Charles. She turned her head away and fainted.²⁴³

Flaubert's linguistic finesse is what makes his novel a literary masterpiece and secures his fame as a consummate writer of prose. Nowhere in *Madame Bovary* do we find authorial intrusion. Nowhere do we feel, as readers, that we are being "told" a story. Rather, Flaubert is noted for his intuitive ability to "show" a story, as illustrated in Chapter V, The Evolving Narrator.

We have Flaubert to thank for removing the author from narrative commentary, which plagues Balzac's writing. Comparatively, the authority of impartiality and impersonality rests with Flaubert whose narration consistently works in disguise, hiding what Balzac is so guilty of. Flaubert, furthermore, introduces into fiction the *flâneur*, the quiet witness of events, the occasional gossip, the minor character, who is capable of discretely moving about the text forcing action forward when progress might otherwise be stalled or slowing it down to redirect it toward another intent.

Flaubert deserves our acclaim because of his artful use of physical correlatives, and time signature to represent the mood of his character and symbolize their mental states, or pause time to create tension in crises. And, we must thank Flaubert for careful and meticulous use of

²⁴³ Flaubert, *Madame Bovary*, pdf, tr. Aveling, 77.

reserving the reader's sympathies by artfully allowing the character's differences to expose relevant flaws and shortcomings or integrity, moral courage, or even fear and trepidation. Moreover, one of Flaubert's most valued contributions is his sheer consistency in writing, his recognition that his readers must be carefully, gently, and unknowingly guided toward empathy.

When this project began, I was certain that I could follow a straight path in narrative evolution, speaking chronologically and mimetically. But, I was mistaken. I made two very important observations: one, that an author's *voice* comprises much more than narration. His *voice* is imparted through all aspects of the novel from character personification to plot formation, from dialog to crisis resolution, and all development in between. Secondly, that *voice*, in the context of this study, incorporates a broader scope defined by the term, *narrative*, a more encompassing description that includes elements of the implied author, the narrator, and the psycho-biography of the writer and his postulated reader.²⁴⁴ Therefore, I discovered that you cannot draw a line from Balzac to Zola without a sharp curve upward to Flaubert. I tried to introduce Maupassant, Stendhal, and even Marcel Proust, but the curve remained a curve, resisting any sense of linearity. Much of the reason is owed to the politics of their time. By that I mean, personal politics, as expressed by George Lukács, in the sense that all motivation is driven by political need.²⁴⁵ Consequently, *voice* must include all aspects of *narrative*, whereby *voice* is the intrinsic expression of a manifestation originating from the extrinsic influences upon the author/writer. The *voice* of Balzac, the Sociologist, brought to the attention of the reader that society was broken. Similarly, with Flaubert, the *voice* of the Moralist expressed grave concerns that delusions of grandeur were a threat to everyone, not just Emma Bovary. Likewise, the *voice*

²⁴⁴ See Chapter VI "Narrative Authority."

²⁴⁵ See Chapter II "Social Realism and Literary Reformists."

of Zola, the Psychologist reveals truth in understanding personality profiles as associated with heredity and environment. Each of the authors shared similar aspirations toward community acknowledgement during their time. Life in France was dangerously flawed, and personal integrity, as seen by so many, was supported by the cash nexus, upward social mobility, materialism, and moral pretentiousness. All three authors believed that the France they loved and honored was in a state of social collapse.²⁴⁶ They expressed their concerns in the narratives of their novels. In their “show and tell” accounts, each author brought out literary techniques unique to them, formulated to engage the reader not just in the content of the story but in its delivery and presented in a context everyone could immediately identify with, all in the grand hope to have its message resonate with the reader’s understanding of right and wrong in nineteenth-century France.

²⁴⁶ I find it ironic, as they would if they were alive, that little seems to have changed. The Marxists continue to take potshots at capitalism, that cash is king, the Milord has been exchanged for the Mercedes, the Hollywood movie star replaces the theater star, and that merchandizing seems to control our lives, dictating our direction in the modern world. The pillars that support our way of life and sustain our worldview are weakened by a commercial hegemony, making the western world vulnerable and ineffectual. This is the same pessimistic view expressed by all three authors, and it is ironic that it should still persist today. Ironic, in the sense that society in the western world seems to have missed the point. These authors are well-known as literary social *reformers* whose intent in writing these novels is in the edification that problems, serious fundamental problems, existed in their societal sphere. Generations in many western countries have read these novels over the last one hundred-forty years, and it would seem that the message was lost; little has changed. While social welfare has improved significantly, it is irrefutable that cash remains king, bourgeois mediocrity continues to chip away at personal integrity, and consumerism controls our lives.

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