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## **Men Looking at Art: Aesthetic Voyeurism in Two Novels by Emile Zola**

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oles arrivent,"<sup>18</sup> puisqu'il a comme objectif, dans ce livre, de r sa propre vie. On a l'impression qu'entre la toile et "son sujet," guère plus de différences qu'entre la trame narrative sur laquelle tre-romancier s'agite, et les êtres qui interviennent selon leur ument.

ssue fatale du parcours de son personnage-clé, par ailleurs, : que l'auteur pourrait ainsi témoigner d'un désir inconscient de nchir des artistes novateurs engagés sur la voie de sionnisme, afin de demeurer le "chef [incontesté] de l'école ste."<sup>19</sup> Manet disparu, le romancier, à son insu peut-être, définit a suprématie de la littérature sur la peinture.

## Men Looking at Art: Aesthetic Voyeurism in Two Novels by Émile Zola

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Her body is arranged the way it is, to display it to the man looking at the picture. The picture is made to appeal to *his* sexuality. I has nothing to do with her sexuality... Women are there to feed an appetite, not to have any of their own.  
John Berger, *Ways of Seeing*

Representing creativity as masculine and Woman as the beautiful image for the desiring masculine gaze, High Culture systematically denies knowledge of women as producers of culture and meanings.  
Griselda Pollock, *Vision and Difference*

Recently, feminist criticism has shown an acute interest in the role played by the gaze in the creation of male erotic fantasies. By associating vision with the masculine perversion of voyeurism, feminist criticism, particularly in the study of cinema and art history, has demonstrated a renewed interest in the psychoanalytic notion of femininity as a visual representation of male sexual desire.<sup>1</sup> The

<sup>1</sup> Although we are not convinced that only men are voyeurs, most psychologists and feminist critics conceive of voyeurism as primarily a masculine perversion. Freud does not describe it as specifically male, but problems related to it, such as castration fear and fetishism (see his article "Fetishism"), do primarily manifest themselves in male patients. Freud assigns the central dynamic role in the development of fetishism to the boy's castration anxiety, an anxiety that depends on the "sight" of his mother's genital "lack." The boy initially views the absence of a penis in the woman as evidence that castration is possible, and that he, himself, may be castrated. To avoid the anxiety this generates, he rejects his own perception by attributing the role of the penis to some other body part or object. Voyeurism and fetishism are thus related in that both entail pleasure obtained through primarily male ways of seeing. For feminists such as Laura Mulvey and Luce Irigaray, the predominance of the visual in Western societies has resulted in a privileging of voyeuristic and fetishistic structurings of visual form—structurings that delineate an active male "looker"/passive female "looked at" dichotomy. As Irigaray writes in *This Sex which is not one*: "...the predominance of the visual, and of the discrimination and individualization of form, is particularly foreign to female eroticism. Woman takes pleasure more from touching than from looking, and her entry into a dominant scopic economy signifies, again, her consignment to passivity: she is to be the beautiful

ady 15 (notes 8, 9, 10, en bas de page, tirées de A. Lanoux, *Bonjour Monsieur* aris: Hachette, 1962] 67, 76, 95).

la dans une série d'articles sur le Salon de 1880, publié dans *Le Voltaire* du 19 au , affirme que "l'homme de génie n'est pas né" qui puisse appliquer la formule e. Tous les impressionnistes ne sont que "des précurseurs." (Voir Hemmings et 42-44).

nineteenth-century male esthete did not have erotic movies at his disposal, but he is often depicted as spending considerable time gazing at art objects such as paintings and statues. In Eugène Fromentin's *Dominique*, for instance, the protagonist gazes upon a painting of his beloved during a period in which she has forbidden him to see her. For the duration of the art exhibition, therefore, the painting serves as a replacement for his absent loved one. In Gautier's *Mademoiselle de Maupin*, the esthete d'Albert frequently gazes upon art objects, while his goal in love is to find a woman who is as beautiful as a work of art. Indeed, the number of male artists and artlovers in nineteenth-century French literature is striking. Women are generally portrayed as the muse, model or object of art (or some combination of the three), but rarely as those who actively look at or produce art. An examination of two different protagonists' encounters with paintings, statues and engravings, in light of Laura Mulvey's seminal essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,"<sup>2</sup> will serve to explore Zola's depictions of the esthete/art object relationship. By studying two novelistic examples, I hope to gain some insights into the male gaze and the power relationships it implies.

Filmmaker Laura Mulvey's essay, which associates cinema with the masculine perversions of voyeurism (sexual pleasure gained through seeing alone, without active participation in the sexual act) and scopophilia (what Freud defined as taking other people as objects by subjecting them to a controlling and curious gaze)<sup>3</sup> has generated an enormous amount of discussion in the last decade on the distinct masculinity of the cinematic gaze. Using Freudian and Lacanian theory, Mulvey argued that visual pleasures in mainstream Hollywood cinema are based on voyeuristic and fetishistic ways of looking. The

object of contemplation" (Luce Irigaray, *This Sex which is not one*, trans. Catherine Porter [New York: Cornell University Press, 1985] 25-26).

<sup>2</sup> See Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," in Brian Wallis, ed., *Art After Modernism: Rethinking Representation* (New York: David R. Godine, 1984) 361-74.

<sup>3</sup> In his *Three Contributions to the Theory of Sex* (or *Three Essays on Sexuality*), Freud isolates scopophilia as one of the component instincts of sexuality that are drives independent of the erotogenic zones. The instinct exists as the erotic basis for pleasure in looking at another person as object. Freud's particular examples center on the voyeuristic activities of children, their desire to see and make sure of the private and forbidden and their curiosity about other people's genitals and bodily functions. At the extreme, scopophilia can become fixated into a perversion, producing obsessive voyeurs and Peeping Toms whose only sexual satisfaction can come from watching an objectified other. See Sigmund Freud, *Three Contributions to the Theory of Sex*, trans. A.A. Brill (New York: Nervous and Mental Disease Publishing Company, 1930).

major trope of the cinematic apparatus is the active, mastering male gaze which subjects the passive, fragmented, and silenced image of woman. Hence, visual pleasure derives from and reproduces a structure of male looking/female "to-be-looked-at-ness" which replicates the structure of unequal power relations between men and women. Because of the ways the looks are structured, the spectator necessarily identifies with the male protagonist in the narrative, and thus with the objectification of the female figure via the male gaze.<sup>4</sup> However, I hope to explore the notion that this "active/passive" dichotomy may not be so distinct as it seems.

Zola's novel, *La Faute de L'Abbé Mouret* (1875), explores the gaze in its relation to religious iconography. Appointed to the parish of a small southern village, Mouret is a young priest who has always been obsessed with the image of the Virgin. In his boyhood fantasy, she is a protective mother figure who gives him goodnight kisses: "Tout enfant... il se plaisait à penser qu'une belle dame le protégeait, que deux yeux bleus, très doux, avec un sourire, le suivaient partout. Souvent, la nuit, ayant senti un léger souffle lui passer sur les cheveux, il racontait que la Vierge était venue l'embrasser" (118-19).<sup>5</sup> He further underlines her image as a mother figure when, at seminary, he imagines himself nursing at her breast: "[...] buvant le lait d'amour infini qui tombait goutte à goutte de ce sein virginal" (121). Since the priest is an orphan and his love of Mary is unusually powerful, one could argue that Mary is, in a sense, a fetishistic replacement for his mother. For what most definitions of fetishism have in common is the notion of replacement or substitution—that is, the fetish serves as a replacement for the "normal" love object. As a boy, moreover, Mouret spends all his money collecting statuettes of Mary that portray

<sup>4</sup> Mulvey's theories have enjoyed influence not only in cinema studies, but also in other areas. Jill Dolan's work, *The Feminist Spectator as Critic* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1988) and Dorothy Kelly's book, *Telling Glances: Voyeurism in the French Novel* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1992), are only two of the many recent works of literary criticism that are indebted, in varying degrees, to Mulvey's notion of "the gaze." In addition, art critics such as John Berger (*Ways of Seeing* [London: Penguin, 1972]), Patricia Mathews ("Returning the Gaze: Diverse Representations of the Nude in the Art of Suzanne Valdon," *The Art Bulletin* LXXIII [1991]: 415-30), Linda Nochlin (*Women, Art, and Power and Other Essays* [New York: Harper and Row, 1988]) and Griselda Pollock (*Vision and Difference: Femininity, Feminism and the Histories of Art* [New York: Routledge, 1988]) have explicitly underlined the value of Mulvey's notions, particularly in the domain of the traditionally male-dominated genre of the nude.

<sup>5</sup> Quotations are taken from Emile Zola, *La Faute de L'Abbé Mouret* (Paris: Garnier Flammarion, 1972).

her in different poses and situations—Mary carrying her son, Mary crowned with roses, Mary between a lily and a distaff, and the like. As he grows up, his obsession continues, and Mary grows up with him. She becomes, not only a mother substitute, but a more general love object—one he describes as a playmate and friend, then in more love-oriented and sexual terms, such as “ma chère maîtresse” and “un frôlement de jupe divine” (117–19). He underlines her power as an object of male desire when he sews her image onto his bed sheets, in order to enjoy “la chaleur à son dos et à sa poitrine, contre sa peau nue, avec des tressaillements de bonheur” (122). Some of his fellow seminarists criticize his love as excessive, for it takes away from the devotion he owes Jesus and the Father, but he continues to collect Mary memorabilia. Books on Mary, for instance, speak to him in a “langue d’amour” and the time he spends with them each night is the “heure de volupté divine” (120). A colored engraving of her, a “Sacré-Cœur de Marie,” which he keeps on the wall in his cell, is the object of his gaze every morning and evening during his five years at seminary.

The engraving’s combination of religious iconography and sexual imagery provides a seemingly endless amount of visual enjoyment for the priest. The work pictures a smiling Virgin who has opened her bodice to reveal a red hole in her chest—a hole in which one may perceive her burning heart pierced by a sword crowned with white roses. Feminist critics such as Luce Irigaray have emphasized the reductive portrayal of women in patriarchal societies as men who “lack” the male organ.<sup>6</sup> Defined in terms of male parameters, women’s sexual organs, Irigaray states, are too often seen as a sort of handicap—a gaping wound that marks women’s sexual lack. Likewise, Mary’s wound, that she has generously unveiled for the abbot by opening her blouse (“La Vierge [...] écartait son corsage [...]”) (124), may be interpreted as the “lack” of her genitalia. The sword’s shape, combined with the image of its penetration into Mary’s wound, underlines its power as a phallic image. The priest emphasizes the erotic meaning of the sword, in fact, when he expresses his own desire to penetrate Mary’s wound in order to embrace her heart: “C’était comme un affolement de tout son être, un besoin de baiser le cœur, de se fondre avec lui, de se coucher avec lui au fond de cette poitrine ouverte” (124). Mouret further expresses his desire to inhabit her body when he imagines himself inside her “secret garden”: “lui [...] se promenait dans ce jardin, à l’ombre [...] sous l’enchantement des verdure [...] lui [...] habitait le bel intérieur de

<sup>6</sup> See Irigaray, especially 23–33.

Marie, s’y appuyant, s’y cachant, s’y perdant sans réserve [...]” (121). This association of her genitals with a garden finds expression in the white roses, which crown the sword. In this sense, the sword is an androgynous symbol, since it contains both the phallus and the flowers signifying the female organs. Such fantasies of inhabiting her body are charged with meaning, for they underline Mary’s function as both mother and love object—that is, they imply not only unconscious sexual desires, but also the desire to return to the mother’s womb.

Mulvey’s understanding of castration fear as it relates to visual pleasure may offer some insights into Mouret’s fascination with the work. She argues that the male gaze employs two common strategies in order to overcome the threat of woman’s lack. The first strategy, fetishistic scopophilia, (or denial-driven looking, in simpler terms) involves disavowal of castration by making the entire feminine image into a fetish and/or lending it a fetishized object. Clearly, as an unobtainable object that embodies moral and physical perfection, the Virgin functions more as an icon for the priest than as an individual. In this sense, since she is not a “real” woman that the priest could actually possess, she is fetishized and is thus reassuring rather than dangerous. In addition, the sword is a fetish in the Freudian sense that it substitutes for the male genitals. Indeed, in his article “Fetishism,” Freud insists on the fetish’s specific function as a replacement for the penis.<sup>7</sup> As such, he writes, the fetish “remains a token of triumph over the threat of castration and a protection against it.”<sup>8</sup>

Mulvey’s second strategy for combating castration fear—the one involving sadism and punishment of the anxiety-causing object—is readily perceptible in the Mouret’s gaze. The sword, that causes Mary pain by piercing her heart, can be interpreted as a visual expression of the abbot’s sadistic impulses. In addition, an understanding of sadism in relation to masochism may offer some insights. For Freud, sadism and masochism are like two sides of the same coin, for they both involve punishment. Sadism is more “active,” since it involves inflicting pain on someone else, whereas masochism is more “passive” because it involves self-punishment. However, these active and passive forms are usually encountered in the same person: “A sadist is also a masochist, though either the active or passive side of the

<sup>7</sup> Freud, “Fetishism,” in *Three Contributions* 152. In this early work he emphasizes the fetish’s function as a replacement of or substitution for the “normal” sex object. However, his later article “Fetishism” contains the more specific assertion that the fetish stands for the missing penis of the woman.

<sup>8</sup> Freud, “Fetishism” 154.

perversion may be more strongly developed [...].”<sup>9</sup> The priest’s constant enjoyment of physical pain combined with his description of himself as Mary’s “slave” suggests that his relationship to the engraving derives much of its pleasure from its sadomasochistic character: “Il jeûnait, il se mortifiait, pour lui faire l’offrande de sa chair meurtrie...Plus tard, il avait pris la chaînette afin de montrer son esclavage d’amour” (122). Certainly, the spectacle of Mary’s masochistic suffering is very pleasurable to him. For in his fantasy, her bloody pain is a sort of sacrificial gift, a proof of her love. He imagines that her wound exists for him personally: “[...] il ne garda que le cœur couronné et flambant, arraché à demi de cette chair exquise pour s’offrir à lui. Ce fut alors qu’il se sentit aimé. Marie lui donnait son cœur, son cœur vivant, tel qu’il battait dans son sein, avec l’engouttement rose de son sang” (124). Thus, in a sense, the priest’s relationship to the painting involves a sort of mutual masochism: Mary displays the spectacle of her pain and sacrifice, and he, in gazing at the work, subjects himself to a whole series of ascetic and masochistic rituals, including fasting, losing sleep and remaining on his knees until they ache and turn numb from the hard floor.

After completing his seminary studies, Mouret begins a new life in a village parish and becomes fascinated with new fetishes—the altar of the Virgin in his church and a large statuette of her that he keeps on the dresser in his bedroom. Every evening, he anxiously awaits nightfall and the opportunity to linger alone in the dark church. Again, Mulvey’s understanding of visual enjoyment is pertinent to his gaze. For Mulvey, voyeuristic pleasure is enhanced in the movie theater by the extreme contrast of light and dark provided by the auditorium versus the screen. The use of light and dark creates an atmosphere in which the spectator is not only pleurably separated from the screen images, but also from the other spectators. Such conditions of screening tend to repress the spectators’ exhibitionism (since they are in the dark) and in turn facilitate the projection of their repressed desires onto the performers.<sup>10</sup> Likewise, the priest’s strategic manipulation of artificial light creates a sort of cinematic atmosphere that maximizes Mary’s power as an icon. He creates an interesting play of light and shadows by keeping the church illuminated with a single light, focused on the altar of the Virgin: “Eclairée d’une seule lampe, brûlant sur l’autel de la Vierge [...] l’église s’emplissait, aux deux bouts, de grandes ombres flottantes” (117). Such lighting, since it focuses completely on the image of Mary, allows for the full,

undivided expression of Mouret’s love. In fact, in such a controlled and dramatic atmosphere, the priest is free to imagine that Mary offers herself to him in a way akin to the sexual act: “Il la voyait venir à lui, du fond de sa niche verte [...] seul en face de la grande Vierge dorée, il s’hallucinait jusqu’à la voir se pencher pour lui donner des bandeaux à baiser [...]” (118). The radiant vision of Mary, who seems to be descending from the heavens, contributes to an over-all magical atmosphere: “Toute la lumière, adoucie..dormait sur la grande Vierge dorée, qui semblait descendre d’un air royal...des rayons d’astres coulaient [...] pareils à cette pluie laiteuse qui pénètre les buissons, par les nuits claires” (117). Finally, after leaving her in the church and retiring to his bedroom, the priest prolongs his voyeuristic fantasy. In his dark room, he again arranges the lighting so as to highlight the Virgin icon: “L’abbé Mouret posa la lampe devant la Vierge, au bord de la commode” (129). As such, the statuette of Mary is the last image he sees before falling asleep.

One evening, however, Mouret is strangely troubled by Mary’s image. He can no longer concentrate on her with the singleness of mind he once had and begins to confuse her traits with those of another woman. Little by little, as he gazes at her, he realizes that he has fallen in love with Albine, the niece of one of the villagers. Duly mortified by such erotic thoughts and, more particularly, by the possibility of breaking his vow of chastity, he takes extreme measures. He begs the statuette of the Virgin to castrate him so that he may remain forever united with her as a little boy, untroubled by an awakening libido: “[...] Vierge bonne, Vierge puissante [...] Faites que j’aie cinq ans. Prenez mes sens, prenez ma virilité [...] châtez en moi l’humanité, faites-moi eunuqué parmi les hommes, afin de me livrer sans peur le trésor de votre virginité!” (146–48). The priest’s wish to be castrated by the Virgin is not only the ultimate masochistic fantasy, since he wants her violently and definitively to take his manhood, but it also expresses his desire to remain a little boy united with his “mother” Mary. Here, Mulvey’s appropriation of Lacanian theory as it relates to visual pleasure is pertinent to Zola’s novel. She suggests that the mainstream cinematic apparatus mimics the identification processes that inform the male child’s progress away from the Imaginary realm, where he believes himself united as one with his mother, toward the father and into the Symbolic, the male realm of desire and language. That is, by objectifying the woman in the narrative as the passive object of his own active desire, the hero/spectator reenacts the realization of his mother’s sexual lack and proceeds from the Imaginary into the Symbolic register of language: “In contrast to woman as icon, the active male figure (the ego ideal of

<sup>9</sup> Freud, *Three Contributions* 23.

<sup>10</sup> Mulvey 363.

the identification process) demands a three-dimensional space corresponding to that of the mirror recognition in which the alienated subject internalized his own representation of his imaginary existence [...]. The male protagonist is free to command the stage, a stage of spatial illusion in which he articulates the look and creates the action."<sup>11</sup> The woman is left behind in the Imaginary, as a negative value expressed only by her lack. Such Lacanian observations are readily applicable to *Mouret*: By objectifying Mary as the passive object of his own active desire, he reenacts the realization of his mother's sexual lack. His desire for another woman suggests that he has entered the Symbolic realm in which he breaks from his mother (Mary) in order to pursue a new love object (Albine). However, societal constraints that ban sexual relations on the part of priests cause him to hope for castration—to remain in the Imaginary realm where he is at one with his mother, unhindered by desire. To avoid the temptation of Mary's image that now causes him to think of Albine, he replaces all of his Mary fetishes with crucifixes—that is, with images of the Father. The conflict between the priest's erotic needs and the necessity for abstinence in sexual matters is resolved only with the convenient death of Albine. With her death, he is less tempted to break his vow of chastity and more likely to obey societal constraints, if not altogether free of desirous thoughts.

In Zola's novel *L'Œuvre* (1886), the protagonist Claude Lantier is a modern painter who falls in love with and eventually marries his muse and model, Christine. Claude makes significant progress on his painting when he plays the role of voyeur and sneaks a look at a young woman (Christine) who seeks refuge with him for the night. She has arrived in Paris, has been harassed and abused, and has nowhere to turn. He gives her his bed in his apartment/studio, and when he wakes in the morning, he directs his voyeuristic gaze at her as she sleeps. Her bedclothes have fallen off, and he can study her naked body in secret to learn the truths it usually hides. The fact that she is asleep signifies her presence as an object and absence as subject.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, he forgets her subjectivity as he begins to do a sketch of her: "Déjà, il avait oublié la jeune fille, il était dans le ravissement de la neige des seins" (75).<sup>13</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Mulvey 367–68.

<sup>12</sup> Dorothy Kelly, *Telling Glances: Voyeurism in the French Novel* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1992) 124–27.

<sup>13</sup> Quotations from Emile Zola, *L'Œuvre* (Paris: Garnier Flammarion, 1974). Zola's novel replays the scenario of an earlier Goncourt brothers' tale (*Manette Salomon* [1867]) of the artist's dominating gaze at the woman. The difference is that, while the Goncourts do not allow the model to speak at all about her predicament, Zola does

Claude believes that the nude as painted in the traditional way is clothed in convention and ideology. And the woman who best shows him the "unveiled," "uncontaminated" female body that he wants to paint is Christine, that helpless, homeless woman who wanders onto his doorstep. Because of his gaze at Christine, he is able to finish his first major work, entitled "Plein Air" in honor of the new school of open air painting. In this picture, Claude believes that he has stripped the woman of painterly conventions to show her naked to the public.<sup>14</sup> The work shows a clothed man gazing upon three nude young women in a forest clearing. Thus, the similarity to the artist/model relationship is evident in the work in which naked feminine beauty is displayed for the enjoyment of the clothed male spectator. The central figure, lying in the grass, is Christine, the two other women are at play among some trees. Of the male spectator we see only, in a corner of the painting, a part of his back, the back of his head and his arm propping him up in the grass. Therefore, this work offers an interesting variation on the spectator relationship. Often there is a meeting of looks between the spectator of the painting and the spectator within the painting. Here, we see only the back of the man as he gazes upon the women.

Although the figures are placed differently, Claude's painting carries an obvious intertextual reference to Manet's *Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe* which, like Claude's painting, was first exhibited at the Salon des Refusés of 1863. Just as Manet's painting was the scandal of the exhibition, so is Claude's and for much the same reasons. Certainly, the ridicule that both artists met with cannot be explained by their choice of subject matter. The nude is an ancient genre and, for centuries, public and critics were used to seeing paintings which pictured clothed men gazing upon nude women. However, the nude females are placed in proximity to clothed males in what was considered by many an indecent manner. Moreover, Manet and Claude clothe their men in modern attire and do not idealize the women as much as they have been in the past. The figures do not display the conventions of classical art in that they are placed right in the middle of Parisian society. Finally, the realistic rendering of daylight contributes to making the figures' nudity seem, for many, glaring and crude. The outrage both painters experienced implies that they struck a nerve at the foundations of the genre. The implication is that male spectation, when couched in the complacencies and idealizations of the Academic tradition was, for many, acceptable and

grant Christine a voice and subjectivity. The tragedy portrayed in this work is that Christine's artist husband cannot see or accept this subjectivity.

<sup>14</sup> Kelly 126.

even commendable. However, when portrayed as an event in the modern world, it appears vulgar and ridiculous. Claude, like Manet, uses the conventions of the nude to make new statements, to make evident its problematic bases by taking it out of the realm of icon and idealization and, in so doing, to call into question the very foundations of the genre.

Although Claude is relatively happy with the principle nude figure in "Plein Air," he is never again satisfied with the other nude women that he paints. Claude fails in his project of representing "reality," because he paints, not what he sees, but himself. His paintings are the representations of his own desires and he prefers the women in them to his wife: "Sa passion de la chair s'était reportée dans son œuvre, sur les amantes peintes qu'il se donnait. Elles faisaient seules battre son sang, celles dont chaque membre naissait d'un de ses efforts" (302). Indeed, Christine is but a mirror for man's self-reflection; Claude even describes her as "uni comme un clair miroir" (75). Unfortunately, Claude does not receive the critical and public encouragement that he deserves, and his existence spirals downward into increased debauchery, depression, and artistic mediocrity. While "Plein Air" was painted in the prime of his youth, when he was displaying real promise and falling in love with Christine, the enormous painting that he considers his masterpiece is painted some twenty years later, after he has married and had a child, but is no longer in love.<sup>15</sup> In the last years of their marriage, he has come to objectify Christine more and more, considering her as but a means to his end of art. When she poses for him, reluctantly, she ceases to be a person and becomes a mere series of fetishes—a body, a foot, or an arm, an object in a still life: "Il l'employait pour tout, la faisait se déshabiller à chaque minute, pour un bras, pour un pied, pour le moindre détail dont il avait besoin. C'était un métier où il la ravalait, un emploi de mannequin vivant qu'il plantait là et qu'il copiait, comme il aurait copié la cruche ou le chaudron d'une nature morte" (298–99). He subjects her to increasingly long and uncomfortable posing sessions in order to perfect the central nude figure of his "masterpiece," and tells her repeatedly that it is unfortunate for his painting that she has aged and no longer has the body she did when

<sup>15</sup> Again, the Goncourt's *Manette Salomon* presents distinct similarities with Zola's novel in its depiction of a romantic relationship between a painter, Coriolis, and his model, Manette. Their relationship also becomes increasingly adversarial when they have a child. For Coriolis, Manette the mother ceases to be Manette the erotic object and model. In giving birth, he says, "le modèle avait été tué soudainement" (Edmond et Jules de Goncourt, *Manette Salomon* [1867; Paris: Charpentier, 1906] 327).

she was sixteen. In addition, he no longer sleeps with her, for fear that lovemaking will sap him of the energy that he devotes to his art.

Claude's last painting, his "masterpiece," is a panoramic view of Paris, a glimpse of La Cité, Notre Dame, and a bridge over the Seine. In the middle of the river is a boat on which three women, including one central nude, are placed in various poses. Thus, these women are displayed as spectacle for all of Paris. The look does not identify with any particular figure in the painting, but with the population of Paris in general. In Claude's painting, dock workers and pedestrians people the banks of the river, but no comment is made about their attitude toward these women. The women are met with seemingly complete indifference and are so objectified that they have literally become a part of the Parisian landscape. Claude is not bothered by the "invraisemblance" of the scene. He does not think of the discomfort, not to mention the embarrassment of any person who would actually have to pose nude on a boat in the middle of the Seine. His increasing objectification of his wife is mirrored in his obsession with these women displayed on a boat.

Again, Mulvey's concept of punishment-driven looking is applicable to Zola's novel. As was the case with *Coriolis*, the protagonist of the Goncourt brothers' *Manette Salomon* twenty years earlier, Claude is given to venting his rage against the painted female figures in his works. It is significant that on two occasions, he directs his violence against the head and neck of the women, leaving the image of their castrated bodies: "[...] il avait pris un couteau à palette [...] et, d'un seul coup, [...] il gratta la tête et la gorge de la femme. Ce fut un meurtre véritable [...]" (112), and "[...] aveuglé de rage, d'un coup terrible, il creva la toile [...]. Le point avait tapé en plein dans la gorge de l'autre, un trou béant se creusait là" (304–05). Hence, much of the tragedy of Claude's artistic project lies in the fact that it finds its meaning in the image of the castrated woman. That is, in order to paint her, he must mutilate and kill her by decapitation, thus projecting his own fear of castration onto her. Claude's stubborn quest for purity in representing the female body eventually leads him to commit suicide. He hangs himself before the problematic female nude of his "masterpiece." This novel shows us, as Dorothy Kelly has eloquently remarked, "what happens when one believes that the representation of woman is linked to the revelation of 'truth and light.' It is a tragedy that victimizes the woman and kills the man."<sup>16</sup>

Clearly, Mulvey's view of the cinematic apparatus as characterized by the fixing of the female body as the quintessential and deeply

<sup>16</sup> Kelly 131.

problematic object of sight applies not only to many of Zola's texts, but also to much of the art and literature of his time. When Fromentin's Dominique is unable to make love to a woman and finds himself aroused only when he gazes upon a painting of her, he is enacting just such a visual fixing. When Huysmans' Des Esseintes discovers he is impotent and henceforth gazes upon the Salome paintings to meet his erotic needs, the same applies.<sup>17</sup> In a sense, these protagonists are failed voyeurs to the extent that their gaze never fully succeeds in gaining the control and mastery they so persistently seek. Lacan would perhaps argue that this lack of control is not surprising. Indeed, in *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, he writes of the way visual experience is never fully organised by a centralised ego; there is always an excess of vision over and beyond what the subject can master in sight. Clearly, the art objects in these stories unfold in exactly this area of insufficient control where, instead of passively obeying the subject's sovereign gaze, they slip out beyond it and usurp the visual field, taking on a life of their own.<sup>18</sup> Thus, Mulvey's concepts, though very insightful, perhaps do not adequately take into account the capacity of art to actually return the gaze of the viewer.

Finally, the seemingly opposing scientific and artistic discourses of the nineteenth century converged in at least one important way: both trends purported to have achieved a purely objective unideological and disinterested way of looking at the world—the scientific trend through the supposed perfection of the empirical method, the artistic trend through Kantian and German Romantic notions of the true artist's "disinterestedness." However, what I hope I have shown to some extent, in the context of nineteenth-century France, is that the female body is particularly rich in ideological meanings and that one cannot paint, cannot see without already being contaminated by these meanings. Hence, movements such as impressionism and naturalism, while striving to achieve an unbiased outlook, were often demeaning to women, in that they tended to allow them a place in the world only to the extent that their visual attractiveness could be used to serve the

<sup>17</sup> If one considers Doctor Charcot's famous clinic, which Charles Bernheimer has called it a "brothel for voyeurs" (*Figures of Ill Repute: Representing Prostitution in Nineteenth-Century France* [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989] 251), where male doctors, artists, and writers gathered to watch "hysterical" women "perform" in various stages of undress, one realizes that this kind of portrayal of women as spectacle for the male gaze was prevalent not only in literary and artistic discourse, but in medical and psychiatric discourse as well.

<sup>18</sup> Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Norton, 1978) 42–122.

gaze of the male consumer. An understanding of the visual constructs of the male gaze is necessary before one can offer more meaningful portrayals of women as producers of art and explore relatively new areas such as the female gaze.<sup>19</sup> What is needed, as Mulvey has eloquently pointed out, is the daring to "break with normal pleasurable expectations in order to conceive of a new language of desire."<sup>20</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Recent critical works such as Lorrain Gamman and Margaret Marshment's *The Female Gaze* (Seattle: the Real Comet Press, 1989) and Wheeler Winston Dixon's *It Looks at You: The Returned Gaze of Cinema* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), have been pioneering in these domains.

<sup>20</sup> Mulvey 363.