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## Introduction (Excavatio, vol. 32)

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## Introduction

The AIZEN editorial team is very proud to present Volume XXXII (2021) of *Excavatio*, the *International Review for Multidisciplinary Approaches and Comparative Studies Related to Émile Zola and Naturalism Around the World*, which comprises eight articles from distinguished contributors from the United States, Canada, France, Hungary, and New Zealand. It is the first volume to be published under the leadership of the new AIZEN President and Editor-in-Chief of *Excavatio*, Juliana Starr, and also the first volume to be published since the advent of the Covid-19 pandemic. Offering a wide variety of critical approaches to Émile Zola and naturalism – historical, scientific, feminist, and aesthetic – the volume celebrates the ongoing relevance of naturalism in our world today, underlining our indebtedness to the movement on a broad range of pertinent topics including the role of science in treating trauma, the harmfulness of rape culture, the plight of impoverished children, the importance of physical fitness, the function and meaning of technical objects, the interrelationships between the arts, the significance of new resources for research, and the relationships between humans and animals.

The first three articles, treating Zola and his works in chronological order (*Thérèse Raquin*, *La Curée*, *Germinal*), share *trauma* as a common thread. First, in her essay titled “Le naturalisme de la passion névrotique dans la fiction zolienne,” Caroline Doua-Oulaï shows how Zola’s rejection of idealism involved an embrace of the new scientific ideas on heredity, neurosis, hysteria, and passion of the second half of the nineteenth century, ideas that he used to create a new “naturalist” novel whose mission was the truthful depiction of the inner workings of human society and human behavior. Central to this mission was the creation of stories portraying fictional characters – like Thérèse Raquin, Adélaïde Fouque, Marthe Mouret et Pascal Rougon – suffering from various forms of neuroses and the depiction of the evolution of their illness. Doua-Oulaï demonstrates how Zola, influenced by thinkers like Charles Fourier, paints a fictional world in which the harnessing of passions can offer a remedy to neurosis and trauma.

Juliana Starr’s article “‘Ce viol brutal...la fit ensuite se mépriser’: Rape Culture in *La Curée*” marks the year 2021 as the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the publication of Zola’s second *Rougon-Macquart* novel, in 1871, with an emphasis on the remarkable timeliness of the work. In our age of the #Me Too movement, an epidemic of rape in India, and multiple sexual assault scandals on American college campuses, Starr’s piece makes Zola’s work relevant to today’s university students by revealing the text’s portrayal of the attitudes and mechanisms that create, sustain, and perpetuate rape culture – such as victim blaming, defending the reputation of rapists, the ostracizing of survivors of sexual assault, and the telling of jokes at the expense of rape victims. She also demonstrates how the protagonist Renée Béraud du Châtel offers a contemporary example of a survivor of sexual assault, with many of the symptoms of rape trauma now identified by experts.

Jean-Philippe Vauchel’s article, “La trahison de Jeanlin ou la complexité d’un personnage au carrefour de l’archétype romantique et du modèle naturaliste,” breaks fresh ground in the study of depictions of children in naturalism. By drawing the parallel between Hugo’s Gavroche of *Les Misérables* (1850) and Zola’s Jeanlin of *Germinal* (1885), Vauchel shows how the child of naturalistic novels inherits a status radically different from romantic and realistic narratives. For Vauchel, Zola’s singular portrait of Jeanlin enriches the textual representation of childhood through the embodiment of the harsh realities of a violent and traumatized century, thereby

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disrupting the reader's expectations, forcing him out of his passivity, and forming a dramatic call for social change.

The topic of trauma's effect on emotional and mental health must be put in relationship with the keen interest in physical wellness as a new nineteenth-century trend. Indeed, as the century progressed, activities like gymnastics, working out, and spa treatments became fashionable as more and more people realized that a healthy mind goes hand in hand with a healthy body. Hence in the second part of this volume, we look at *trends* and *inventions*. In her article, "*Mens sana in corpore sano*: Eugène Paz, Paul Féval (père) Émile Zola, and an Entire Generation 'au gymnase,'" Carmen Mayer shows how Zola's interest in the trend of physical fitness began to preoccupy him as early as 1865, well before the late utopias, *Travail* (1901) and *Vérité* (1903), where he theorized the practical benefits of healthy people for the prosperous democracy and sketched out his vision for state-supported wellness. For Mayer, the efforts of little-known authors like Paul Féval (père) and Eugène Paz, the latter being instrumental in establishing and popularizing the *Grand Gymnase*, bringing physical education to public schools, and launching the nineteenth-century fitness revolution, helped shape Zola's thinking about French society after the Second Empire. Féval's and Paz's early works thus serve as theoretical points of departure and allow us to reconsider *Travail* and *Vérité* in their turn-of-the-century context, as French society gradually redefined itself through wellness and embraced the movement begun by Pierre de Coubertin to reestablish the international Jeux Olympiques.

In his novel *Les Vingt et un jours d'un neurasthénique* (1901), Octave Mirbeau emphasizes the "cure thermale" (spa treatment) as a new nineteenth-century wellness trend for treating neurasthenia. Ágnès Élthes deals with another novel by Mirbeau, *La 628-8* (1907), which also shows a new nineteenth-century phenomenon or invention: the automobile. In the first of two articles bringing together works by Zola and Octave Mirbeau, Élthes' piece, "Valeurs connotatives des termes techniques dans un registre littéraire: *La Bête humaine* de Zola et *La 628-E8* de Mirbeau," proposes a poetic approach for technical terms describing inventions in two literary works written by these authors. Élthes shows how denotative technical terms occurring in different dramatic situations in a literary register can bring about various degrees of connotation. She demonstrates, moreover, how certain poetized technical terms enriched with connotative colorations due to a variety of stylistic devices, allow us to differentiate Zola's and Mirbeau's technical objects (a train and an automobile) and to distinguish between each man's aesthetic vision and diegetic orientation, the locomotive being the symbol of Jacques Lantier and foreshadowing his determined destiny; the car on the contrary being a means of deconstructing the classical narrative of the novel.

The last part of volume XXXII of *Excavatio*, continues this comparative approach while emphasizing *reception* as shown by John McDowell and Carolyn Snipes-Hoyt's essay "Octave Mirbeau between Émile Zola and Vincent van Gogh: A New Aesthetics?" which studies the interrelationships among reading, painting, and writing offered by the unique grouping of these artists. They demonstrate how the different art forms represented by each interconnect to cross-fertilize each other and enable new lines of thinking to develop. For the authors, the word "fertilize" is of the utmost importance, since the act of sowing seeds and encouraging their germination, present in the works of van Gogh and Zola, becomes an important trope in Mirbeau's writing for the role that the arts play in the lives of those who create or consume them as well as for change to occur in aesthetic approaches and their reception.

Barbara Stone's piece, "Confronting the Zola Conundrum. New Zealand Newspapers Respond to the Death of Émile Zola" proves that reception is not just a matter of critical and public opinion, but it is also carefully documented in the media. She examines the obituaries attached to the cable reports of Zola's death and fourteen significant pieces of editorial material about Zola in a range of New Zealand newspapers from October 1902. The ratio of words allocated to each of the three broad areas of biography, literature, and the Dreyfus Affair, forms the basis of an analysis of how New Zealand newspapers attempted to resolve the Zola conundrum or, in other words, how to reconcile the admirable defender of Dreyfus with the infamous author of scandalous novels. The National Library of New Zealand's recent digitizing of early New Zealand newspapers for its Papers Past website (<https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz>) has created a very useful resource making this distinctive essay possible.

Literary translation involves a different type of reception, an especially complex one, because it is both cross-linguistic and cross-cultural in nature. While French language and culture is the main representative of naturalism in the nineteenth century, under the leadership of Émile Zola, Jack London is one of its main figures in twentieth-century America, and this fact presents a host of issues related to translation and reception. Servanne Woodward's piece "Problèmes de traduction à propos de 'To Build a Fire' (1908)" shows how London's version of naturalism ushers in the twentieth century by posing new problems and by anticipating the new area of animal studies. She claims that London's originality lies in his attention to the thought processes and emotions of domestic animals, as well as the company these animals provide for humans trying to survive in the frozen lands of the North American continent. She demonstrates how human words are too generic to take into account local variations for the realities from one continent to another, and thus how translations from English to French (earlier ones and more recent versions) underscore the insight that automatic linguistic operations, imbued with stereotypes to describe the relations between animals and nature, reveal the difficulty of evaluating the human condition through language.

I would like to give special thanks to the Honorary President of the AIZEN, Anna Gural-Migdal, for her invaluable efforts in helping to produce this volume. Special thanks go also to my wonderful Associate Editors, Carolyn Snipes-Hoyt and Marie-Sophie Armstrong, and my Co-Editor-in-Chief and Vice President of the AIZEN, Carmen Mayer. A big thank you to Lisa Ng and Philip Hoyt for their technical assistance. Without any one of you this project would not have been possible. My sincere thanks also go to all the authors who have contributed to this volume of *Excavatio* to ensure its richness and highly international content.

Juliana Starr, President of the AIZEN  
Co-Editor-in-Chief of *Excavatio*