

ZOLA'S THÉRÈSE: NINETEENTH-CENTURY MORAL CODES AND L'AUTRE IN
BOURGEOIS SOCIETY

by

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DEDICATION

This is dedicated to my father, Gerald, who has always supported me in all my academic and personal endeavors.

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ABSTRACT

ZOLA'S THÉRÈSE: NINETEENTH-CENTURY MORAL CODES AND L'AUTRE IN BOURGEOIS SOCIETY

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This thesis describes the portrayal of the female protagonist in Émile Zola's 1867 novel *Thérèse Raquin*. Zola, a Naturalist author, communicates a critique of nineteenth-century bourgeois Parisian society and explores gender relations through a description of an affair and a murder. Thérèse is examined as an "Other," demonstrating Orientalist attitudes and representing a binary image of woman as an embodiment of virtue and vice. With her portrayal as a *femme fatale*, this analysis of the "exotic" Thérèse will present attitudes towards adultery/marriage and towards female criminality when the novel was published, connecting these to social changes that were beginning to take place. This study will also explore two cinematic adaptations of *Thérèse Raquin*, and how her Otherness and sexuality is translated in film representations. To close, this thesis will connect Zola's foundational portrayal of Thérèse with two later female characters from his *oeuvre*: Gervaise Macquart of *L'Assommoir* and Anna Coupeau of *Nana*. The author will discuss

and demonstrate the complexity of Zola's early work in relation to his social and temporal context. In the process of researching and writing this thesis, the author conducted a literature search and reviewed Zola's works.

INTRODUCTION

The nineteenth century in France was one of transformation and progress in the domains of literature, science, medicine, architecture, and social and political change. As an author, journalist, and social critic, Émile Zola exemplifies the second half of the nineteenth century in many ways. Born in 1840 in Paris, Zola spent much of his childhood in Aix-en-Provence. Like several of the characters he would create later on, Zola lost his father at a young age, and was raised by his mother and maternal grandparents. Subsequent to his family's return to the French capital, Zola found himself disillusioned with the Paris of the Second Empire, where extreme poverty was starkly juxtaposed with the *haute aristocratie* and the new *grands boulevards* and buildings of Baron Georges Haussmann (Knapp 4-9 passim).

In 1862, Zola began writing and working in publishing; his first work, a collection of short stories, was published in 1864 (Knapp vii). He became very interested in science and began to create his own literary style, combining the influence of Darwin's and Taine's scientific theories with the realist style of Balzac's and Flaubert's novels (Knapp 22). With the composition of his novel *Thérèse Raquin* (1867), Zola began developing a new type of realist literary perspective: Naturalism. Zola's Naturalism, "une grande enquête sur l'homme, sur toutes les variétés, toutes les situations, toutes les floraisons,

toutes les dégénérescences de la nature humaine” showed evidence of Taine’s influence,¹ and promoted a more scientific view of literature (Taine, qtd. in Hatzfeld 697). The importance of truth, reality, and observation was paramount in Naturalism, which proposed a realistic portrait of its human subjects, including both the beautiful and ugly aspects of life; sociology, a developing discipline at the time, and observation were thus necessarily integrated into Naturalist writing. Brian Nelson writes that Zola’s work in fact “represented a form of practical sociology, completing the work of the scientist, whose hope it was to change the world not by judging it, but by understanding it” (“Zola and the Nineteenth Century” 3).

Two crucial aspects of Zola’s Naturalism are *hérédité* and milieu, combining both biological/ hereditary influences on a person’s character with the influences of his/ her environment and social setting. Although these aspects would be illustrated in much greater depth in Zola’s famous *série des Rougon-Macquart*, one can see in all the principal characters of *Thérèse Raquin* the importance of milieu and temperament,² and in Thérèse’s French-Algerian identity, the influence of *hérédité*. The *milieu de vie* of a *zolian* character is a determinant of his/ her life, and that character can never escape it; this can be seen in Zola’s early novels as well as in the *série des Rougon-Macquart*

¹ Hippolyte Adolphe Taine was a French critic/historian and an exponent of positivism. Taine created the foundation for studying human nature and history through scientific methods, and developed a determinist esthetic according to which “l’oeuvre d’art derive de trois facteurs, la race (facteur individuel), le milieu (facteur géographique), le moment (facteur historique)” (“Hippolyte Adolphe Taine,” “Taine, Hippolyte Adolphe”).

² The theory of the temperaments is founded on Hippocrates’ distinction of the bilious (or choleric), nervous (or melancholic), sanguine, and lymphatic (or phlegmatic) humors. Thérèse represents the nervous temperament, Laurent the sanguine, and Camille the lymphatic; the novel “raconte donc la confrontation de ces tempéraments” (Reffait 232).

(Mitterand 82). In *Thérèse Raquin*, heavy emphasis is also placed on the characters' temperaments: Camille is lymphatic; Thérèse is nervous; and Laurent is sanguine. These temperaments³ determine each character's individual personalities, penchants, behaviors, and appetites, forming a visible connection between physiology⁴ and psychology (Ménard 155).

Zola's Naturalism, as stated in the preface of *Thérèse Raquin*, thus proposes that the readers observe/consider the human experiment shown in the novel with a scientific and clinical perspective (Singer 9). Despite the declared objectivity of Naturalism, however, Zola does not escape the influences of his own late nineteenth-century milieu in his characterizations, and his novel exposes dominant social attitudes of his society, demonstrating multiple social realities and critiques (Bowlby 14). Published in 1867, three years before the end of the Second Empire under Napoléon III, *Thérèse Raquin* presents its readers with social commentary for which an understanding of social context, and of gender roles in particular, is warranted.

Many of Zola's contemporaries observed and commented on the climate of hypocrisy and voyeurism in the Paris of the Second Empire; there was a great

³ King and Rabil Jr. explicate the temperaments as follows: "These psychological polarities derived from the theory that the universe consisted of four elements (earth, fire, air, and water), expressed in human bodies as four 'humors,' (black bile, yellow bile, blood, and phlegm) considered respectively dry, hot, damp, and cold and corresponding to mental states ('melancholic,' 'choleric,' 'sanguine,' 'phlegmatic')" (ix).

⁴ Honoré de Balzac (1799-1850), who preceded Zola in French literature, was also quite interested in physiology. In his *Comédie Humaine*, doctors play a great role, and Balzac "had given much attention to physiology and pathology.... He generally gives a clinical history of his characters, and as Taine says, 'wherever there is a deformity or a sore there is Balzac playing his part as a physiologist accustomed to the dissecting room'" ("Literary Notes" 1661).

contradiction between the puritanistic public moral code and the luxuriously indulgent private lives of Paris's upper class. Furthermore, the massive construction projects of Baron Haussmann displaced many of the city's poor population and exacerbated the existent class disparity. As for the bourgeoisie, Naturalist authors tended to demonstrate a fiercely critical perspective; Hatzfeld writes that hatred of the bourgeois "dirige le naturalisme vers la critique de la civilisation" (726). Common values attributed to the nineteenth-century bourgeoisie include "a materialist preoccupation with money and commerce, a concern with appearances and respectability, greed, cupidity, egoism, social pretentiousness, hypocrisy (especially in matters of sex), a narrow puritanism of morals and religion, competitive energy, individual enterprise and self-help, an ideal of moderation,⁵ worship of property, thrift and hard work" (*Zola and the Bourgeoisie* 3). Embedded in this critical portrait is the idea of superiority and authority, particularly male authority, both in the public world of French society and in the private familial sphere; Nelson confirms that "the monopoly of command – in his house, in his business, in his factory – was crucial to his [the bourgeois male's] self-definition" (*Zola and the Bourgeoisie* 3). Nineteenth-century bourgeois men and women were each assigned their respective social spaces, and the husband ruled while the wife, strictly limited to the roles of spouse and mother, was compelled to submit to a patriarchal social structure. This dynamic will be further discussed in Chapter One.

The present study, which aims to examine Thérèse as an Other both in terms of her gender/sex and her hybrid French-Algerian identity, necessitates a brief explanation

⁵ One can also use the term "exchange value," a Marxian economic term that indicates the quantitative aspect of value, to describe these tendencies.

of the relationship between Algeria and France under the Second Empire. *Thérèse Raquin* was published thirty-seven years after France invaded Algeria, under the orders of the *Restauration* (Restoration) monarch Charles X in 1830. Initial motivations for the invasion of Algiers included the “elimination of Algerian piracy” and tributes paid by France, imperial competition in Europe (Napoléon Bonaparte’s loss of Egypt in 1801 fresh in the national memory), a desire to restore national prestige and glory, and to distract citizens from discontent at home, “employing foreign policy as a strategy of national unification” (Silverstein 41-3). France annexed Algeria in 1834, and evidenced an imperial assimilationist ideology. With annexation, Algeria’s Muslim population, approximately four million, became French “subjects” under French sovereignty, but “governed under a *régime d’exception*” and excluded from “full French citizenship and political equality” (Dunwoodie 68). Napoléon III’s policy of indirect rule continued this exclusion from full citizenship and other civic duties, with the exception of subjects who “abandoned their religious ‘personal status’ (*statut personnel*) and accepted the French civil code concerning marriage and property” (Silverstein 43). Continued debate on the legal status of both French colonists and the native Algerian population influenced the instability and uncertainty of France and Algeria’s relationship, much as the relationships among Thérèse, Camille, and Laurent were unstable and uncertain in Zola’s novel.

France’s violent history of colonialism in Algeria and the French perception of Algerian “Otherness” form a crucial backdrop for my exploration of Thérèse. The relationship between France and Algeria was one of power, and France’s annexation of Algeria in 1834 provided the threshold for a colonial rhetoric of control and Orientalist

identity construction. The fact that Zola made his title character half-Algerian and half-French conveyed nineteenth-century Orientalist attitudes while, at the same time, allowed him to present a social critique of the bourgeoisie from an “outsider’s” perspective, using the Naturalist lens to present his novel as “scientific.” The Orientalist perspective will be explored in detail in Chapter Two.

How should one interpret Zola’s complex portrait of Thérèse? This thesis endeavors to explore Zola’s portrait and critique of the bourgeoisie in *Thérèse Raquin*, weighing them against his confirmation of nineteenth-century moral codes and Orientalist views of Woman as Other. Zola presents a stereotypically Orientalist image of Thérèse, but simultaneously uses her as a mouthpiece of social critique, especially in her disgust of the Thursday night bourgeois gatherings at the Raquin household. Furthermore, despite his support of defined gender roles in marriage, Zola appears to recognize (and at times sympathize with) marital ennui and the too often powerless position of the wife. His fear of *volupté*, particularly female sexuality, confirms nineteenth-century binary views of women as embodiments of virtue or vice, while also illustrating views and stereotypes of female criminality, explored further in Chapter Three. After exploring Thérèse’s identity, the fourth chapter of this study will examine the translation of these complex themes in cinematic adaptations of the novel, focusing on Marcel Carné’s 1953 film *Thérèse Raquin* and on Charlie Stratton’s 2014 film *In Secret*; the final chapter will discuss *Thérèse Raquin* in the larger context of Zola’s *oeuvre*, primarily considering two of his other works from the *Rougon-Macquart*: *L’Assommoir* (1877) and *Nana* (1880).

CHAPTER ONE: *LA FEMME DANS LE MILIEU MARITAL* – THÉRÈSE AND CAMILLE’S BOURGEOIS MARRIAGE

This initial chapter will explore gendered social roles and the bourgeoisie in the nineteenth century, and their portrayal in Zola’s *Thérèse Raquin*. One should commence with a discussion of bourgeois marriage in the context of nineteenth-century France. The most common type of marriage in the nineteenth century was the arranged marriage, otherwise described as the “marriage of convenience.” Familial interests were paramount in the organization of marriages, valued over individual interests during most of the nineteenth century. Money was a significant factor in marriage negotiations, which were often facilitated by the mother, and from the beginning, gender roles within the marriage context were starkly defined (Davidson 23-27 *passim*). The man would “obtain” the woman, who could only consider herself lucky to have been selected;⁶ Davidson explains that “this language, and the conception of marriage that it renders visible, was compatible with the legal system which defined women as subordinate to their husbands” (27).

Women were thus both legally and socially Other, subjected to man’s law,⁷ she and her

⁶ During the time that Zola was writing, in bourgeois society, “l’épouse fait partie de la propriété et l’homme s’approprié ses pouvoirs.... La femme serait ancrée dans le corps, dans la chair, et donc inférieure” (Hansen 110). Krakowski labels this situation “la féodalité... pour la femme” (50).

⁷ According to Ann-Louise Shapiro in her book *Breaking the Codes: Female Criminality in Fin-de-Siècle Paris*, “the legal disabilities of women [were] formalized in the Civil Code – especially the infamous Article 213 on the authority of the husband in marriage (*l’autorité maritale*), which stipulated that men owed their wives protection while women

children taking the husband's name (Hansen 144).

These nineteenth-century marriage norms can be observed in *Thérèse Raquin*, as the narrator explains Madame Raquin's intention to marry her niece Thérèse to her son Camille, as a necessary and logical union. Zola's views on the role of wife as caretaker, defined in part by her devotion to her husband, begin to come to light in Madame Raquin's calculations: "elle tremblait lorsqu'elle venait à songer qu'elle mourrait un jour et qu'elle le laisserait seul et souffrant. Alors elle comptait sur Thérèse, elle se disait que la jeune fille serait *une garde vigilante* auprès de Camille... elle voulait *la donner à son fils comme un ange gardien*. Ce mariage était un dénouement prévu, arrêté" (*Thérèse Raquin* 33, emphasis mine). The marriage is painted as a natural step, determined by the Raquins' familial milieu and interests, specifically of Madame Raquin: "On parlait de cette union, dans la famille, comme d'une chose nécessaire, fatale" (*Thérèse Raquin* 33).

One observes, in the planning of Camille and Thérèse's marriage, the maternal figure acting as matchmaker and the priority of familial interests over individual desires. Camille, for his part, is described as less than a man, as essentially asexual due to his numerous physically weakening illnesses: "Camille, dont la maladie avait appauvri le sang, ignorait les âpres désirs de l'adolescence" (33); however, he does demonstrate the typical dominant attitudes of a husband in his interactions with Thérèse and with his mother, as when he decides that the family will move to Paris (34). Thérèse, too passive to protest the marriage or the move, powerless in the role of woman and wife,

pledged obedience. Promulgated under Napoleon in 1804, the code effectively placed married women under the tutelary supervision of their husbands: a husband had control of all his wife's assets and property... women could not initiate paternity suits, nor did they have equal rights to prosecute their spouses for adultery" (183).

demonstrates only an “obéissance passive” (35); and when the marriage is discussed, “Thérèse devenait grave, se contentait d’approuver de la tête tout ce que disait Mme Raquin” (34). Warren Johnson adds that Thérèse, in her marriage to Camille, lacks desire, “and throughout the novel her predilection for passivity and immobility are emphasized” (297).

Thérèse, trained from an early age to suppress her “true nature” and conform to her aunt’s and cousin’s expectations, is a double Other in her milieu; early on in the novel, her Otherness is illustrated in the narrator’s brief explanation of her origins. Abandoned by her French father, a military captain, at her aunt’s home, the young Thérèse is described as having the “wild” nature of her Algerian mother. This functions as a Naturalist connection emphasizing the importance of *hérédité* while also demonstrating Orientalist⁸ attitudes:⁹ “elle tenait soigneusement cachées, au fond d’elle, toutes *les fougues de sa nature*. Elle possédait un sang-froid suprême, une apparente tranquillité qui cachait des *emportements terribles*... une envie *sauvage* de courir et de crier”¹⁰ (*Thérèse Raquin* 32, emphasis mine). The limitations that Thérèse experiences as a double Other exemplify typical depictions of women in nineteenth-century novels, who were frequently “deprived of the minimal attribute of subjecthood,” the freedom of

⁸ Orientalism, as defined by Edward Said, will be discussed in Chapter Two.

⁹ Ann-Louise Shapiro writes that “The perceived Otherness of women has, historically, allowed the metaphoric woman to stand in for a wide and contradictory array of qualities, values, and meanings – has endowed femaleness with a special symbolic resonance” (4). In the case of Thérèse, her Otherness lies both in her gender and her Orientalist symbolism (see Chapter Two).

¹⁰ Zola’s portrayal of Thérèse as a beast is degrading and dehumanizing; this is a step beyond the Aristotelian view of women as holding a “defective status” and demonstrating “degenerate rationality” (Karbowski 329).

movement and agency (*Breaking the Chain* 135). Odile R. Hansen confirms that Zola subjects his female characters to male dominance in his novels without hope of escape; he submits or integrates them “totalement à l’ordre social masculin... Il la veut prisonnière de la tribu organisée sous le totem mâle, sous son totem.... [Zola] refuse aux femmes leur individualité” (xiii, 20).

Thérèse’s conscious suppression of her true nature exhibits a common nineteenth-century practice, training girls and women to conform:

[Females were trained] from an early age to bow their *volonté* to that of others, first their parents and then their husbands. Making sure they married while still very young helped to ensure their flexibility, their willingness to learn to be the kind of wife their husband wanted them to become.... A form of democratic totalitarianism[,] it is much more efficient to have women, or any subaltern,¹¹ voluntarily participate in their own subjugation than to force them to do so. (Davidson 30)

Husbands and wives existed in two very different spheres: the husband in the sphere of public life where he exercised power, and the wife in the sphere of private life where she

¹¹ Gayatri Spivak has designated as “subaltern” those people who are outside the hegemonic power structure in a colonialist context, the people who “represent *the demographic difference between the total Indian population and all those whom we have described as the ‘elite’*” (79, emphasis in original). Women also constitute a subaltern group, and Spivak indicates that “both as object of colonialist historiography and as subject of insurgency, the ideological construction of gender keeps the male dominant. If, in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow.... Between patriarchy and imperialism, subject-constitution and object-formation, the figure of the woman disappears... into a violent shuttling which is the displaced figuration of the ‘third-world woman’ caught between tradition and modernization” (82-83, 102).

was limited to two primary roles: spouse and mother/child-bearer.

The bourgeois society that serves as the social context for *Thérèse Raquin* correlates with women's condition of servitude in marriage through its capitalistic values, hypocrisy, and notions of property. Bram Dijkstra argues that the very conception of monogamous marriage between a man and a woman was naturally "an expression of the masculine will to individual power," a private sphere where "the male learned once and for all how to govern and subject" (*Evil Sisters* 40). The wife, in the marital context, was seen as an important piece of working capital, "thus capitalism and monogamy would stand or fall together as the greatest achievements of the masculine will to individual mastery" (*Evil Sisters* 40). As France realized industrial and scientific progress in the nineteenth century, man's struggle to control nature was manifested in a struggle to control women, particularly women's "dangerous" sexuality; indeed, as Naomi Schor writes, "a certain stage of capitalism is founded on the domestication of female sexuality" ("Mother's Day: Zola's Women" 11-12). This desire to control female sexuality raises the subject of nineteenth-century bourgeois society's values and hypocrisy; in an environment of publicly advocated puritanism and morality, a preoccupation with sex permeated the bourgeoisie, evidenced in part by a massive increase in prostitution, both state-regulated and clandestine (Cheney 202-03). In her article "Visual Rape," Deborah Cheney forms a connection between the bourgeoisie's acquisitive values and its hypocritical moral code; she states that prostitutes "were seen to embody the commodity character of social relations... they were thought to make visible both the hypocrisy of the ideology of bourgeois lifestyle, by complicity in an unpalatable social activity, and

ideologies constraining women” (201). In nineteenth-century France, one could thus observe women subjugated through sexual commodification and through their legal status in marriage as their husband’s personal property. With the bourgeois context established, at this juncture a closer examination of Thérèse’s marriage is warranted.

Zola’s portrait of Thérèse and Camille’s *ménage* reveals many of the implicit gender-relative complexities previously discussed, as well as an indirect social critique. From the opening of the novel, Thérèse is marginalized and reified, with the narrator introducing her as a facial profile, a mere physical presence: “on distinguait... un profil pâle et grave de jeune femme. Ce profil sortait vaguement des ténèbres qui régnaient dans la boutique.... [L]e profil seul apparaissait, d’une blancheur mate, troué d’un oeil noir largement ouvert, et comme écrasé sous une épaisse chevelure sombre. Il était là, pendant des heures, immobile et paisible” (28). This metonymic description of Thérèse as a disembodied face both expresses her passive detachment from her surroundings, “dans une indifférence dédaigneuse” and reifies her as Other.¹² Later on in the novel, succeeding the murder of Camille, Laurent takes possession of his object, Thérèse: “Il allait vivre tranquille, en attendant de pouvoir prendre *possession* de Thérèse [...] Et il était resté comme écrasé pendant trois semaines, ne se rappelant pas qu’il avait tout fait pour *posséder* Thérèse, et ne pouvant la toucher sans accroître ses souffrances,

¹² In her article “The Natural and the Supernatural in Zola’s *Theresa Raquin* [sic],” Elizabeth M. Knutson points out that Thérèse’s presence as a reified body is present both at the opening and at the closing of the novel and introduces the fantasmagoric elements of the story: “While the description of Thérèse as a body rather than a person in the first chapter is consistent with the naturalist, scientific interest in the physical, at the same time it introduces the supernatural paradigm of corpses, ghosts, and cadavers... The scene of her corpse at the end of the novel reiterates the paradigm; *Thérèse is a body from beginning to end*” (151, emphasis mine).

maintenant qu'il la *possédait*" (*Thérèse Raquin* 28-144 passim, emphasis mine).

Shortly following the beginning of the novel, after setting the scene and explaining the Raquin family's history (including Thérèse's "exotic" heritage), the repetition and ennui of their daily existence is conveyed:

Pendant trois ans, les jours se suivirent et se ressemblèrent. Camille ne s'absenta pas une seule fois de son bureau; sa mère et sa femme sortirent à peine de la boutique. Thérèse, vivant dans une ombre humide, dans un silence morne et écrasant, voyait la vie s'étendre devant elle, toute nue, amenant chaque soir la même couche froide, et chaque matin la même journée vide. (*Thérèse Raquin* 39)

Images of Thérèse's apathy¹³ and lack of agency appear throughout the novel, seemingly a sign of Zola's recognition and critique of the ennui of the bourgeois *ménage*; similarly, Suzanne, the typical bourgeois wife of one of the Raquins' weekly guests, is described in a sympathetic tone as a "pauvre créature toute dissoute." All of the female characters in the novel have extremely limited freedom of action, and the agency of men is both necessary and desired. One can consider, for example, the Raquins' friend Michaud counseling Madame Raquin that the widowed Thérèse *needs* a husband, for her own good health: "Votre nièce s'ennuie, parce qu'elle est seule, le soir, dans sa chambre, depuis bientôt deux ans. Elle a besoin d'un mari; cela se voit dans ses yeux... Mariez-la au plus tôt... si vous ne voulez pas la voir se dessécher entièrement" (*Thérèse Raquin* 115-50 passim).

¹³ One could interpret this apathy as a form of revolt, or a refusal to "buy into" bourgeois life and values.

The repression (in her marriage, of her “true” nature, of any real liberty) that Thérèse experiences parallels the repressive setting of the novel.¹⁴ As in many of Zola’s later novels, the physical space of the gloomy Paris arcade plays its own crucial role in the narrative.¹⁵ At the time that *Thérèse Raquin* was published, Paris’s arcades, or *passages couverts*,¹⁶ were already in decline, due to the rise of the department store, to “widened sidewalks, electric light... [and the] culture of the open air” (Benjamin 5, 88). Zola opens the novel with a somber and bleak physical description of the tomblike *passage*:

[O]n trouve le passage du Pont-Neuf, une sorte de corridor étroit et sombre qui va de la rue Mazarine à la rue de Seine... [I]l est pavé de dalles jaunâtres, usées, descellées, suant toujours une humidité âcre; le vitrage qui le couvre, coupé à angle droit, est noir de crasse. Par les beaux jours d’été, quand un lourd soleil brûle les rues, une clarté blanchâtre tombe des vitres sales et traîne misérablement dans le passage. Par les vilains jours d’hiver, par les matinées de brouillard, les vitres ne jettent que de la nuit sur les dalles gluantes, de la nuit salie et ignoble... Le passage prend l’aspect sinistre d’un véritable coupe-gorge; de grandes

¹⁴ This technique, connecting the tone and mood of the setting with those of the novel, is one that will reappear in Zola’s later works.

¹⁵ Henri Mitterand’s interpretation of self-contained spaces in the Rougon-Macquart can be applied to the Passage du Pont-Neuf in *Thérèse Raquin* to explain its functionality: “[Zola tire] son espace de représentation du côté d’une forme close, épurée, abstraite, coupée du monde, regardant dans son centre plus que vers l’extérieur: telle qu’un espace de jeu, ou bien un espace de manoeuvre, au sens guerrier du terme” (85).

¹⁶ Most of Paris’s *passages couverts* were built between 1822 and 1834 to house *magasins de nouveautés* and sell luxury goods (Benjamin 3).

ombres s'allongent sur les dalles, des souffles humides viennent de la rue; on dirait une galerie souterraine vaguement éclairée par trois lampes funéraires. (*Thérèse Raquin* 25-26)

This foreboding description of the *passage* sets the tone for the novel and foretells death and specters,¹⁷ a common metaphorical device in fantasmagoric and in Gothic literature (Knutson 141). Moreover, the stifling environment of the Pont-Neuf arcade, in which Thérèse feels that she has been buried alive, symbolizes her repression and her powerlessness in her marriages to both Camille and Laurent:

Le passage humide, ignoble, traversé par un peuple de pauvres diables mouillés... lui semblait l'allée d'un mauvais lieu, une sorte de corridor sale et sinistre où personne ne viendrait la chercher et la troubler. Par moments, en voyant les lueurs terreuses qui traînaient autour d'elle, en sentant l'odeur âcre de l'humidité, elle s'imaginait qu'elle venait d'être enterrée vive; elle croyait se trouver dans la terre, au fond d'une fosse commune où grouillaient des morts. (*Thérèse Raquin* 149-50)

Most of the action of the novel, with the exception of Camille's murder, takes place in similarly confined settings (the arcade, the boutique, Laurent's tiny lodging) with feelings of suffocation and imprisonment¹⁸ (Bertrand-Jennings 23-24). Zola's descriptions of the

¹⁷ Elliott M. Grant indicates that "[t]he dim daylight in the Passage du Pont-Neuf and the shadowy effects there at night under the gaslights create a sort of devitalized space where gloom and horror can easily reign" (37).

¹⁸ Zola's description of the *mercerie* at the beginning of the novel includes Thérèse's name on the boutique; Benjamin comments that these signs "recall the plaques on the railings of cages at the zoo, put there to indicate... the name and origin of the *captive animals*" (827, emphasis mine).

dark and desolate *passage* and the old *mercerie* thus complement his portrait of Thérèse's stifled and unhappy marriage.

The Raquin family, settling into their monotonous existence in the *Passage du Pont-Neuf*, exemplifies the *petite bourgeoisie* and adopts a set of typical bourgeois friends: *les invités du jeudi*, including members of the police and the railroad administration. From the perspective of the protagonist, Thérèse, positioned as a double Other in terms of her gender and her half-Algerian heritage, Zola presents a social critique of the bourgeoisie without the appearance of a direct attack through his portrayal of *les invités*. The principal qualities of *les invités du jeudi*, and also of Camille Raquin, include repetitive monotony, selfishness, *arrivisme*, ignorance, and hypocrisy. The repeated Thursday night gatherings at the Raquin household are met with disgust by Thérèse, who regards the guests as puppets:

Toutes ces têtes-là l'exaspéraient. Elle allait de l'une à l'autre avec des dégoûts profonds, des irritations sourdes. Le vieux Michaud étalait une face blafarde... une de ces faces mortes de vieillard tombé en enfance; Grivet avait le masque étroit... d'un crétin; Olivier... portait gravement sur un corps ridicule une tête roide et insignifiante.... Et Thérèse ne trouvait pas un homme, pas un être vivant parmi ces créatures grotesques et sinistres avec lesquelles elle était enfermée; parfois des hallucinations la prenaient, elle se croyait enfouie au fond d'un caveau, en compagnie de cadavres mécaniques, remuant la tête, agitant les jambes et les bras lorsqu'on tirait les ficelles. L'air épais de la salle à manger l'étouffait; le

silence frissonnant, les lueurs jaunâtres de la lampe la pénétraient d'un vague effroi, d'une angoisse inexprimable. (41)

Already having learned to repress her "true nature," Thérèse attends the Thursday night gatherings full of the same repetitive "joies bourgeoises, [et] affaissements souriants" with silent indifference, until Laurent joins the group; even Laurent, himself a member of the bourgeoisie, "s'ennuyait à mourir" and associates primarily with the two members of the group who "lui paraissaient d'une bêtise moins assommante" (*Thérèse Raquin* 60-61).

A critique of the selfishness, or *égoïsme*, and the *arrivisme*¹⁹ of the *petite bourgeoisie* can be observed through the character of Camille, who, with "une ambition bête" dreams of and takes pride in being "l'humble rouage d'une grosse machine," working for the railroad (*Thérèse Raquin* 35, 43). Camille takes pleasure in his repetitious, humdrum life in Paris,²⁰ and despite his being too self-involved to love his wife, he does enjoy showing her off on weekly promenades, like a decorative object (*Thérèse Raquin* 70). Subsequent to Camille's death and to Madame Raquin's paralysis, one observes *l'égoïsme bourgeois* in the Thursday night guests, who endeavor to put those unpleasant occurrences behind them and continue with their habits, displaying

¹⁹ Alicja Helman indicates that Laurent also functions as a materialist character; Laurent kills Camille to achieve the goal of "a good and wealthy middle-class life where he could quit his job, soak up the passion of a chosen woman and lose himself in life's small pleasures... [H]e cannot... forgo all the material rewards. Because of poverty and lack of personal prospects, his actions are governed by cynical calculation" (121).

²⁰ Zola emphasizes Camille's *égoïsme* in the novel, and makes of his character a bourgeois stereotype. Camille's employment at the railroad administration is "[s]on rêve... exaucé," and his repetitious *flânerie* en route to and from his job demonstrates his satisfaction with routine and mediocrity (*Thérèse Raquin* 37-38). With the opposing characters of Camille and Laurent, Zola presents an interesting portrait of "typical" masculinity.

superficial sentiments:

Tous les visages avaient un air de béatitude égoïste... n'ayant plus dans le coeur le moindre souvenir vivant de Camille [...] [I]ls n'éprouvaient qu'un chagrin médiocre [quant à la paralysie de Madame Raquin], et ils se demandaient dans quelle juste mesure il était convenable de s'attrister.... Michaud et Grivet s'applaudirent de leur excellente tenue. En agissant ainsi, ils croyaient faire preuve de politesse; ils s'évitaient, en outre, l'ennui des condoléances d'usage. (*Thérèse Raquin* 95, 163)

Essentially, according to Thérèse, the development of her own hypocritical mask emerges from the stifling and tedious bourgeois environment in which she exists.

Evincing Zola's Naturalism, Thérèse blames her hypocrisy on her bourgeois family and environment while lamenting to Laurent after the commencement of their illicit affair:

“Ils ont fait de moi une hypocrite et une menteuse.... Ils m'ont étouffée dans leur douceur bourgeoise.... J'ai baissé les yeux, j'ai eu comme eux un visage morne et imbécile, j'ai mené leur vie morte” (*Thérèse Raquin* 54). This scene highlights Thérèse's attempt at revolt and escape²¹ through adultery, and attests further to her complexity as an Other character – she both allows Zola to express social critique while also demonstrating the early development of his position on women.

²¹ Thérèse's revolt could be considered a further transgression in social terms in its “masculine” nature; it is also possible that Thérèse's military father's “bloodline” could be related to her attempted escape through the physical action of adultery.

CHAPTER TWO: AN ORIENTALIST ADULTERESS – PORTRAIT OF THÉRÈSE AND THE DANGERS OF *VOLUPTÉ*

In spite of Zola's critique of the ennui of the bourgeois *ménage*, Chapter Two will investigate how he portrays Thérèse as Other and how he condemns Thérèse's affair with Laurent, beginning with a contextual investigation of adultery, views of female sexuality, and Orientalism. Subsequent to the previous explication of women's limited roles in society, particularly in marriage, a brief consideration of nineteenth-century views on adultery is germane here. At the time of *Thérèse Raquin*'s publication in 1867, divorce²² was illegal in France, and infidelity (particularly female infidelity) was viewed as a dangerous threat²³ to the nascent bourgeois social order founded upon "stable, patriarchal families" (Davidson 24). Unyielding fidelity was expected of wives, "[e]ven if unhappy and unfulfilled," while men's²⁴ sexual needs and desires, "if not indulged, were at least

²² Divorce had been legal briefly, following the Revolution, between 1792 and 1816. It was not reestablished until 1884 under the Third Republic (Davidson 28).

²³ Revolutionary and Napoleonic drives to control women's sexuality and keep them domesticated were reactions to the widespread female adultery of the *Ancien Régime*.

²⁴ In their introduction to a translation of Cesare Lombroso's *La donna delinquente* (originally published in 1893), Nicole Hahn Rafter and Mary Gibson provide some insight on this disparity in expectations in the nineteenth century. Lombroso, known as the founder of criminal anthropology, offered "modern scientific underpinnings for traditional condemnations of nonmarital sexuality. Consistent with the bourgeois ideology of separate spheres for men and women, he points to the movement of sperm and the immobility of the egg to justify male public activity and female domestic passivity" (Rafter and Gibson 21). Although Lombroso's work was published after *Thérèse Raquin*, the perspectives expressed in *La donna delinquente* were rampant

tolerated” (H. Thompson 60). Accordingly, one could consider female adultery as a revolt against prescribed social roles or as an attempt at escape from an unhappy marriage.²⁵ Anna Krakowski, in the context of an analysis of Zola’s later works, summarizes the motivations and causes of bourgeois adultery: “[Il y a] la femme qui se laisse aller à l’adultère pour remplir le vide de son existence et celle qui n’en attend que le profit matériel [...] Outre la convoitise, l’adultère bourgeois a pour causes l’inertie, la bêtise, et le déséquilibre moral” (92, 185). Thérèse, in her affair with Laurent, evidences an attempt to escape an empty existence and her association with a nervous temperament testifies to moral disequilibrium, but the portrait of the affair cannot be reduced to that simple explanation.²⁶

Intrinsic to Zola’s and his contemporaries’ views²⁷ on adultery is the male fear of feminine sexuality,²⁸ often translated as a general fear of *volupté*. Feminine sexuality,

throughout the late nineteenth century; both Lombroso and Zola demonstrate themselves to have been men of their times.

²⁵ Interestingly, during the nineteenth century, men could be legally excused for the murder of a wife caught in adultery: “Married men quite simply claimed the right to defend their honor, a right specifically identified in Article 324 of the penal code.... In so doing, they represented themselves as defenders of the integrity of the family, of the proper upbringing of children, of the purity of *moeurs*” (Shapiro 140). This further evidences the double standards and inequities of gender relations.

²⁶ Zola himself defined the causes of adultery in the bourgeoisie in a newspaper article in 1881: “nervous instability, a result of upbringing and surroundings; the mentality nurtured by a misguided education by parents obsessed with social status; and stupidity, that is, a profound ignorance of life, also nurtured by a cloistered education” (qtd. in *Zola and the Bourgeoisie*).

²⁷ This all too common male fear continued into the twentieth century and continues to exist today.

²⁸ This fear can be traced back to Aristotelian gender dualism. In the various dualities (such as form, superior over matter), Aristotle “associated the male principle with the superior quality and the female with the inferior.... Female psychology was... affected by her dominant organ, the uterus (womb), *hystera* in Greek. The passions generated by

seen as powerful not just in its reproductive capacity but also in its power to control or transgress the social rules of the patriarchy, was widely considered as something to be vanquished and contained.²⁹ In her study of women in Zola's works, *La Chute de la femme*, Hansen expounds that "la sexualité incontrôlée des femmes est associée à la nature sauvage, l'ennemie de l'ordre social établi"; it was the family's role to protect women against "une sensualité dangereuse" (145, 149). Zola criticized the power of the flesh, *la volupté*,³⁰ which also posed the danger of reducing its victims in a blind passion to animality; in *l'amour passionné*, woman "perd sa personnalité.... [E]lle n'apporte qu'une tendance destructive et maléfique" (Krakowski 69, 91).

Influenced by the Victorian era and the Judeo-Christian heritage, both of which were critical of sexuality, Zola included in most of his early novels what Bertrand-Jennings labels "une vision infernale de la sexualité" (9). This anxiety towards sexuality manifests a common binary view of women as embodiments of either vice or virtue. Women were generally painted or written about as either temptresses or saints, adulteresses or loyal housewives, mistresses or mothers. Nineteenth-century female characters' experiences are thus essentially limited to the familial (virtue) and the erotic (vice) (*Breaking the Chain* 135). Bram Dijkstra provides some qualities of the "good"

the womb made women lustful, deceitful, talkative, irrational, ... hysterical" (King and Rabil Jr. viii-ix).

²⁹ In her study of female criminality in nineteenth-century Paris, Ann-Louise Shapiro writes that "sexual anxieties [account] for the symbolic resonance of the figures of the nymphomaniac (the insatiable woman), the hysteric (whose sexuality is out of control), and the lesbian (who disdains men) – figures who proliferated in medical and prescriptive literature, masking (or perhaps revealing) male feelings of inadequacy" (202).

³⁰ The motif of Camille's cadaver separating Thérèse and Laurent after they marry provides evidence of Zola's evocation of "the fear and horror that sex can undoubtedly give rise to" (Lapp 104)

woman and the “bad” woman in his work *Evil Sisters*; the “good” woman is subservient, monogamous, governed, evolved, the “child-wom[a]n of modern society,” and demonstrates “passivity and subservience to the masculine will” (42). Contrarily, the “bad” woman is independent, “lewd and provocative,” prone to “erotic excess,” and exhibits a “bestial need for the male’s vital essence” and “primitive polygandrist [sic] promiscuity” (*Evil Sisters* 42).

The image of the “bad” woman, or woman as vice, is integral to the popular *type* of the *femme fatale*³¹ or *femme maléfique*.³² Bertrand-Jennings connects this image to the guilt and feelings of sin associated with sexuality internal to the Judeo-Christian tradition (87). In the works that preceded his later messianic novels, Zola certainly demonstrates a pessimism in regard to sexuality, confirming the prevalent Christian “mythe³³ de la chute”; the *zolienn*e woman is simultaneously “objet du désir, mais aussi instrument du péché... le lieu de jonction de tous les interdits sexuels. Aussi est-elle considérée chez Zola comme un principe essentiellement maléfique” (Bertrand-Jennings 25, 37).

The nineteenth-century Orientalist stereotypes of the “exotic” woman are concomitant with the binary views of women discussed above, particularly with the image of the *femme fatale* or temptress. The analysis of the “exotic” woman and of the appearance of this image in *Thérèse Raquin* first necessitates an understanding of

³¹ Bertrand-Jennings defines the *femme fatale* as the “dévotrice des mâles, projection fantasmagorique et exorciste de l’inconscient masculin” (87).

³² “[L]a femme est inévitablement liée au mal et à la mort, considérée comme le principe maléfique par excellence” (Bertrand-Jennings 127).

³³ In Zola’s *Rougon-Macquart*, one can view Adélaïde Fouque as an Eve who commits “le péché original, cette fêlure dont vont hériter tous ses descendants” (Bertrand-Jennings 26).

Orientalism and its cultural context. In his introduction to *Orientalism*, Edward Said explains how, throughout history, the Orient has functioned as one of Europe's "deepest and most recurring images of the Other"; Europe, or the West, has repeatedly used the Orient to define itself through their differences (1). The most important definition of Orientalism that Said provides relates to Western hegemony over the Orient:

Taking the late eighteenth century as a very roughly defined starting point Orientalism can be discussed and analyzed as the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient – dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it: in short, Orientalism as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient.... [B]ecause of Orientalism the Orient was not (and is not) a free subject of thought or action.... European culture gained in strength and identity by setting itself off against the Orient as a sort of surrogate and even underground self [...] Orientalism was ultimately a political vision of reality whose structure promoted the difference between the familiar (Europe, the West, 'us') and the strange (the Orient, the East, 'them'). (3, 43)

The element of domination and power is key in analyzing the West's relationship with the Orient, particularly (for this study) France's relationship with Algeria.

From its invasion in 1830 until the Algerian War of Independence from 1954 to 1962, France was Algeria's colonial ruler (Silverstein 3). In a century where the ability to conquer and control foreign territories became a fundamental element of European

identity, Algeria functioned “as a well-defined Other against which French identity was constructed, asserted, and maintained” (V. Thompson 20). Employing the techniques of enumeration and categorization,³⁴ French colonists defined the inhabitants of their colony in terms of racialized difference that reified and generalized tribal, national, and religious differences of the population; the label of “North African” (“*Maghrébin*” or “*Arabe*”) subsequently emerged (Silverstein 9, 39, 45). The categorization of difference highlighted by the exoticism of Algeria fulfilled various functions for France: a justification of French conquest,³⁵ an “exercise in self-validation,” an explication of a “perceived loss of traditional values in European society,” and an explanation of the French traveler’s “loss of bearings” (V. Thompson 20). Said’s definition of Orientalism (cited previously) is clearly evidenced in Franco-Algerian relations, especially distinguished by a framework of violence³⁶ that affected both the conquerors and the

³⁴ These techniques were used “to consolidate rule and centralize authority,” and resulted in the reification of “the distinctiveness of the groups they studied, establishing their various origins in time and space, and in so doing, fixing their proximity to or distance from French norms” (Silverstein 9).

³⁵ Silverstein expounds that “the techniques of enumeration and categorization employed to consolidate rule and centralize authority throughout the French empire contributed to the production of hierarchical schemas along which various populations encountered in Algeria were slotted....Building on the philosophical models posed by... Herbert Spencer and... Arthur de Gobineau... [the French] catalogued... the conquered peoples along a continuum of progress from savagery to civilization” (45-46). The colonial project aimed to simultaneously classify and assimilate ethnological differences (Silverstein 58).

³⁶ Patricia M.E. Lorcin writes that “The violence of the colonial period, whether of conquest, settlement, or expropriation, forcibly reshaped collective and individual identities, and in the process memory and nostalgia assumed historical significance. Violence became part of the ‘system’ and was incorporated into the social structure of colonial society in racist discourses and repressive practices. The colony’s population, therefore, was marked by this presence” (xxii).

conquered.³⁷

The intrinsic violence of the France-Algeria relationship is brought to light in the frequent descriptions of colonial conquest as rape: “In accounts that used this bodily metaphor to describe the imperialist endeavor, the European was gendered male and the native territory female. This gendering served to emphasize hierarchical distinctions between colonizer and colonized” (V. Thompson 25-26). In *Thérèse Raquin*, Captain Degans, Thérèse’s French father, can be interpreted as a physical manifestation of this metaphor; little detail is given about Thérèse’s deceased Algerian mother, “une femme indigène d’une grande beauté,” but given the historical context and the presentation of Degans as a military man, one could speculate that Thérèse’s mother was raped³⁸ (*Thérèse Raquin* 31). Although Degans abandons his daughter in Vernon, he legally recognizes the child before leaving, bestowing his name upon Thérèse; this could be interpreted as another mark of the French colonizer on the colonized (*Thérèse Raquin* 31).

In her marriage to Camille, her affair with Laurent, and her violent marriage to Laurent, Thérèse suffers continued colonization at the hands of white French men; Schor indicates that representations of woman often constrained her “within a chain of

³⁷ Said explains the Western domination of the Other: “There are Westerners, and there are Orientals. The former dominate; the latter must be dominated, which usually means having their land occupied, their internal affairs rigidly controlled, their blood and treasure put at the disposal of one or another Western power” (36).

³⁸ Silverstein explores what he labels France’s “cultural rape” of its Algerian colony: “This sexualized link between colonial knowledge and power in the ‘penetration’ and ‘un-veiling’ of Algerian society through its women would be continually re-enacted throughout the colonial period.... Not merely a sexual act, the ethnological unveiling of indigenous society as described and prescribed by Tocqueville consisted of a rape, a ravaging of the native’s culture as well as its land” (46-47).

equivalences which, in the Victorian era, links women, the lower classes, the body, and the colonies. All these share a common fate: oppression, repression, or colonization at the hands of bourgeois white males” (“Mother’s Day: Zola’s Women” 11). This aspect reveals the complexity of the affair; Thérèse begins the affair as an attempted escape/revolt, but ends up being “colonized” by her lover, trapped in a second marriage subsequent to Camille’s death. Thérèse operates not only as a symbol of the colonized, but also as a personification of the struggle between the influences of her stereotypically Orientalist *hérédité* and of her bourgeois milieu:³⁹ “elle resta l’enfant élevée dans le lit d’un malade; mais elle vécut intérieurement d’une existence brûlante et emportée” (32). One could also interpret the Naturalist conflict between *hérédité* and milieu as a conflict between dominant and subordinate cultures from the perspective of Franco-Algerian relations; Algerian culture was devalorized in favor of conformity to the dominant French culture, leading to what Edouard Glissant referred to as “néantisation mimétique,” the identificatory [sic] void generated when the individual can only ever reproduce the dominant culture.... For most, the outcome was a fluctuating, double alienation, following a double rejection, articulated in a feuding, always incomplete, and hence unstable persona: *from/within* both an indigenous culture and the acquired European culture” (Dunwoodie 78, emphasis in original). Thérèse struggles between her “indigenous” nature (what Zola labels *hérédité*) and the nature imposed upon her by the

³⁹ Knutson points out that Zola emphasizes “the oppressive nature of Thérèse’s upbringing, the repression of her appetites, and her fierce enjoyment of life” (143).

dominant culture⁴⁰ in which she lives⁴¹ (milieu).

The stereotypical Orientalist images of Algeria and North Africa parallel the frequently employed metaphor of rape; the inhabitants of the region were associated with sensuality/sexuality and depravity. Said explains that the stereotypical “Oriental” was (like a woman/Other) “irrational, depraved (fallen), childlike, ‘different’; thus the European is rational, virtuous, mature, ‘normal’” (40). The Orient, regarded as a place of “despotism, Oriental splendor, cruelty, [and] sensuality,” became a space of fantasy for the European male (Said 4). For example, In *Salammbô* (1862), Gustave Flaubert⁴² created from his experiences in Egypt a model of the stereotypical Oriental woman: “she never spoke of herself, she never represented her emotions, presence, or history. He spoke for and represented her [...] [she is] a disturbing symbol of fecundity,⁴³ peculiarly Oriental in her luxuriant and seemingly unbounded sexuality” (Said 6, 187).

Indeed, Thérèse does not speak for herself and has no real agency in Zola’s novel,

⁴⁰ Peter Dunwoodie writes that France effectively turned “the cultural difference of the non-European Other into an ontological barrier to integration, while proclaiming that ‘Frenchness,’ grounded in conformity and homogenization, could be acquired only by abandoning other cultures and values” (70).

⁴¹ Susan Harrow contests that “[t]he body is the site criss-crossed by the tensions between culture (social norms, family expectations) and instinct (the ‘natural’ self). Zola’s complex study of Thérèse reveals this conflict and the resulting split persona: her outward appearance signals docility whilst her inner self is ardent and eruptive” (110).

⁴² Said points out that “[i]n all of his novels, Flaubert associates the Orient with the escapism of sexual fantasy.... [T]he association is clearly made between the Orient and the freedom of licentious sex.... [T]he Orient was a place where one could look for sexual experience unattainable in Europe” (190).

⁴³ The stereotypical exotic woman painted by Flaubert is, although a symbol of sexuality and fecundity, “doomed to remain barren, corrupting, without issue” (Said 187). Similarly, Thérèse demonstrates an “aggressive sexuality” that Zola “implicitly show[s] to be incompatible with maternity; she terminates her own pregnancy by provoking Laurent into assaulting her” (Knutson 147).

and she is painted by the male third-person narrator.⁴⁴ She does not have a true voice; Zola describes her repeatedly as “muette” or “silencieuse” (*Thérèse Raquin* 32-150 passim). Her portrayal exposes the Orientalist influences on Zola and makes evident many of the prevalent stereotypes of the time. Her “exotic” origins are described with reference to the physical, specifically to her “indigène” mother’s beauty (*Thérèse Raquin* 31). Using Naturalist description, Zola incorporates the Orientalist stereotypes of savagery and animality into his portrait of Thérèse, emphasizing physical aspects and passion; Thérèse must hide these elements of her “nature” from her aunt. Zola characterizes her as follows in the second chapter:

[O]n sentait en elle des *souplesses félines*, des *muscles courts et puissants*, *toute une énergie*, *toute une passion* qui dormaient dans sa chair assoupie.... [E]lle tenait soigneusement cachées, au fond d’elle, toutes *les fougues de sa nature*. Elle possédait un sang-froid suprême, une apparente tranquillité qui cachait des *emportements terribles... une envie sauvage de courir et de crier*.... [E]lle vécut intérieurement *d’une existence brûlante et emportée*. Quand elle était seule, dans l’herbe, au bord de l’eau, elle se couchait à plat ventre *comme une bête*, les yeux noirs et agrandis, le corps tordu, près de bondir. (*Thérèse Raquin* 32, emphasis mine)

Zola thus constructs, from the beginning of the novel, associations of Thérèse with

⁴⁴ “‘Regarder l’autre,’ écrit Barthes, ‘c’est le désorganiser, puis le fixer dans le désordre, c’est-à-dire le maintenir dans l’être même de sa nullité’” (Barthes, qtd. in Becker 63).

animalistic qualities⁴⁵ and with images of savagery and burning/heat, and shows her suppressing a wild nature through cold hypocrisy. Thérèse is physically stronger than her sickly cousin Camille, which frightens him: “la jeune fille se releva d’un bond, avec *une sauvagerie de bête*, et, la face ardente, les yeux rouges, elle se précipita sur lui, les deux bras levés. Camille se laissa glisser à terre. Il avait peur” (*Thérèse Raquin* 34, emphasis mine). Furthermore, Thérèse’s passivity as an Other in the novel evidences the Orientalist stereotype of laziness (Said 50); Camille interprets Thérèse’s apathy toward his books as evidence of her ignorance, as she “préférerait demeurer *oisive*, les yeux fixes, la pensée flottante et perdue... toute sa volonté tendait à faire de son être *un instrument passif, d’une complaisance et d’une abnégation suprêmes*” (*Thérèse Raquin* 39, emphasis mine). Thérèse thus, in herself, manifests a binary image⁴⁶ of woman/Other, demonstrating “wild” animality and passivity; at the beginning of the novel, she is the passive and powerless wife, but with her affair she becomes the dangerous temptress.⁴⁷

When Thérèse first sees Laurent, who will become her lover, her sensual curiosity is piqued; Laurent is the physical opposite⁴⁸ of the weak and scrawny Camille. Zola

⁴⁵ Thérèse is presented as cat-like more than once: “Thérèse plaisantait comme un enfant, elle mimait le chat, elle allongeait les mains en façon de griffes, elle donnait à ses épaules des ondulations félines”; and “sa maîtresse [Thérèse], avec ses souplesses de chatte, ses flexibilités nerveuses, s’était glissée peu à peu dans chacune des fibres de son corps” (*Thérèse Raquin* 57, 62).

⁴⁶ Thérèse’s inherent duality may be part of the reason that Zola has her implode and commit suicide at the novel’s close.

⁴⁷ Bertrand-Jennings characterizes Thérèse’s sexual awakening and negative effects on her lover as follows: “Ces infâmes nymphomanes ont sur les hommes la plus pernicieuse influence.... De la jeune fille apparemment indifférente qu’était Thérèse s’est dégagée, après l’initiation sexuelle par Laurent, une Messaline insatiable” (61-62).

⁴⁸ Knapp writes that “Each chapter focuses on a psychological problem or situation: a sexually dissatisfied woman and a powerful male” (21).

describes the awakening of Thérèse's sexuality in Naturalist terms, through physical reactions:

Elle n'avait jamais vu un homme. Laurent, grand, fort, le visage frais, l'étonnait. Elle contemplait [Laurent] avec une sorte d'admiration.... Et Thérèse l'examinait avec curiosité, allant de ses poings à sa face, éprouvant de petits frissons lorsque ses yeux rencontraient son cou de taureau.... Sous ce regard droit [de Laurent], qui semblait pénétrer en elle, la jeune femme éprouva une sorte de malaise... Elle souffrait. (*Thérèse Raquin* 43-44)

Following Laurent's decision to take Thérèse as his lover, one can observe a lexical field relating to heat, fever, fire/burning, and blood throughout the rest of the novel. The affair transforms⁴⁹ Thérèse, awakening "une beauté *étrange*, toute d'empirement. On eût dit que sa figure venait de *s'éclairer* en dedans, que des *flammes* s'échappaient de sa chair. Et, autour d'elle, *son sang qui brûlait*, ses nerfs qui se tendaient, jetaient ainsi des effluves *chauds*" (*Thérèse Raquin* 52, emphasis mine). Thérèse, defined by her Otherness and passivity up until this point, embraces her new role as mistress and, true to Orientalist stereotypes, cultivates her "natural" predilection for *volupté*.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Lapp explains that "[t]he sexual gratification of Thérèse appears as a gradual emergence into light, as the disembodied spectral head dimly glimpsed in the shop window acquires the fullness of physical existence.... The sallow-faced creature with the dull gaze has become a shining goddess of love" (91).

⁵⁰ Lombroso wrote about female sexuality and adultery with a primitivist lens, illustrating some of the common views of the later nineteenth century: "Claiming that an unbridled and masculine sex drive characterizes 'primitive' women, he champions monogamy as one of the treasures of civilization produced by evolution... Lombroso condemns sex outside marriage as a sign of arrested evolution for women" (Rafter and Gibson 21).

Au premier baiser, elle se révéla *courtisane*. Son corps inassouvi se jeta éperdument dans la *volupté*. Elle s'éveillait comme d'un songe, elle naissait à la *passion*.... Tous *ses instincts de femme nerveuse* éclatèrent avec une *violence* inouïe; le *sang* de sa mère, *ce sang africain qui brûlait* ses veines, se mit à couler, à battre furieusement... [E]lle s'offrait avec une *impudeur* souveraine.... [Ses] baisers lui donnaient la *fièvre*. (*Thérèse Raquin* 52)

Zola repeatedly uses the adjective “*brûlant*,” or scorching/burning, to characterize Thérèse and Laurent’s affair: the “*couche brûlante*,” “*les brûlures de son sang*,” Thérèse’s or Laurent’s burning hands or “*membres, encore brûlants*,” “*la peau brûlante*,” “[l]a proposition brûlante de Laurent,” “*chair brûlante*,” “*brûlée par les caresses*,” “*elle se brûla les lèvres*.” The image of fever (*la fièvre*) also appears throughout the novel: Camille’s sickly fevers, Thérèse’s suppression of her “natural” fevers, “*la fièvre des amours*” of Thérèse and Laurent, Thérèse’s “*fièvre*” caused by her heredity, her “*décision fiévreuse*” and “*membres... rouges de fièvre*,” “*les fièvres voluptueuses de leur chair*,” nights of fever, and “*la fièvre*” caused by the murder. The use of “*brûlant*” and “*la fièvre*” both gives a Naturalist perspective to his description of the affair, as it allows an observation of a physical reaction, and also supports the stereotypical image of the burning sun of the Orient and the “Oriental” woman’s burning/feverish sexuality⁵¹ (*Thérèse Raquin* 29-145 passim).

At the commencement of Thérèse and Laurent’s affair, the narrator reminds the

⁵¹ One can also link this lexical field to descriptions of hell, remembering the image of the *femme maléfique*.

readers of Thérèse's inherent Otherness in her reflections on her mother, exhibiting stereotypes of the Orient's "strangeness, its difference, its exotic sensuousness," and "its exotic spatial configurations, its hopelessly strange languages, its seemingly perverse morality" (Said 72, 166). One observes a colonized Thérèse, as she laments to Laurent that her family stole her freedom and suppressed her true, "wild" nature (Zola 53). She evinces a "savage" instinct and an affinity for her "exotic" identity, as well as a desire for liberation from her unhappy marriage:

J'avais des besoins cuisants de grand air; toute petite, je rêvais de courir les chemins, les pieds nus dans la poussière, demandant l'aumône, vivant en bohémienne. On m'a dit que ma mère était fille d'un chef de tribu⁵² en Afrique; j'ai souvent songé à elle, j'ai compris que je lui appartenais par le sang et les instincts, j'aurais voulu ne la quitter jamais et traverser les sables, pendue à son dos... J'ai encore des dégoûts et des révoltes... Puis on m'a enterrée toute vive dans cette ignoble boutique. (*Thérèse Raquin* 53-54).

The only (very limited) agency that Thérèse exercises in the novel is in her new role as mistress – this role both serves as her vengeance against her aunt and cousin-husband, and as an escape (*Thérèse Raquin* 54). Lapp illustrates how Thérèse enjoys playing the mistress and becomes quite audacious, taking pleasure from the risk of

⁵² One should consider that, if Thérèse's maternal grandfather was a chief, she might have had more power and agency in Algeria, perhaps she might even have reigned; whereas, in her present life in France, she is essentially a servant to her husband. It is even possible to perpend that her defiance and revolt against her situation could be related to her chiefly ancestry.

discovery: “An important part of Thérèse’s pleasure derives sadistically from the proximity of those she deceives; her audacity depends on the juxtaposition of bedroom, stairway, and store.... The sight of her lover peacefully chatting with her husband and mother-in-law gives her a sense of power... pleasure of the senses” (93, 108). Thérèse becomes fearless as the mistress, “semblait se plaire à l’audace et à l’impudence. Elle n’avait pas une hésitation, pas une peur. Elle se jetait dans l’adultère avec une sorte de franchise énergique, bravant le péril, mettant une sorte de vanité à le braver” (*Thérèse Raquin* 55). This may be understood as an attempt by Thérèse to exhibit her (forbidden) independence in a male-dominated society.

Notwithstanding Zola’s portrayal of Thérèse’s unhappy marriage and desire for escape,⁵³ one can see that in *Thérèse Raquin* he is developing a theme that would become common in his later novels, “the disruptive nature of a sexuality seen as an irresistible fatality” (*Zola and the Bourgeoisie* 96). The affair illustrates “the narrative erosion of solid family structures,” and Thérèse’s power over Laurent could be labeled as diabolical influence (White 21, Knapp 146). Despite Zola’s claim in his preface that the novel has nothing to do with morality, there is evidence in the novel of his judgment of the affair, and of *volupté/adultery*⁵⁴ in general; a proponent of monogamy and marriage, he strongly condemned adultery in favor of conjugal fidelity (Krakowski 117-18). When Thérèse

⁵³ Thérèse confesses to Laurent, “À deux reprises, j’ai voulu fuir, aller devant moi, au soleil; le courage m’a manqué, ils avaient fait de moi une brute docile avec leur bienveillance molle et leur tendresse écoeurante” (*Thérèse Raquin* 54)

⁵⁴ Nelson points out the procreative preferences of Zola, for whom “the only legitimate end of sexuality is procreation; adultery (that is, pleasure pursued with no social purpose) and the bourgeois practice of birth-control are condemned, while total abstinence is also wrong” (*Zola and the Bourgeoisie* 192).

speaks as if the cat could reveal their affair, she mentions that “leurs amours *criminelles* me *dégoûtent*, je vous prie de les faire *mettre en prison* tous les deux” (57, emphasis mine). Shortly thereafter, Thérèse considers that her affair is a violation of her marital duty (and as such, is morally wrong), but takes pleasure in this thought as a sort of revolt: “elle n’était pas, comme Laurent, affaissée dans le contentement épais de ses désirs, inconsciente du devoir; elle savait qu’elle faisait le mal, et il lui prenait des envies féroces de se lever de table et d’embrasser Laurent à pleine bouche, pour montrer à son mari et à sa tante qu’elle n’était pas une bête et qu’elle avait un amant” (*Thérèse Raquin* 59).

Later in the novel, during Thérèse and Laurent’s wedding night, their *volupté* is obstructed by the vision of the murdered husband’s cadaver⁵⁵ (146); this image of death separating the lovers can be interpreted as a revelation of “Zola’s deep-seated repugnance at the idea of sexuality and particularly the feminine libido” (Johnson 296). Schor describes female sexuality in Zola’s novels as “the madwoman in the house” (*Breaking the Chain* 39); indeed, Zola seems to indicate that Thérèse’s sexuality and the powers⁵⁶ it gives her over her lover are what lead to the even greater crime, the murder⁵⁷ of Camille (discussed in Chapter Three). Zola establishes a semantic connection between the crime and *volupté* in Laurent’s reflections following the murder: “Laurent, tranquille désormais, se jeta avec *volupté* dans l’oubli de son crime et des scènes fâcheuses et pénibles qui

⁵⁵ Bertrand-Jennings interprets the image of Camille’s cadaver as “la matérialisation de leur ‘faute’; la conscience qu’ils ont pris de leur chair qu’ils répudient en se précipitant dans l’impuissance et la frigidité” (18).

⁵⁶ The female character, as an Other, “constitue une menace au Moi – toujours masculin... - et verra s’exercer contre lui la méfiance ainsi que la volonté de puissance viriles. Une fonction... de cette Autre est de signifier le sexe” (Bertrand-Jennings 9).

⁵⁷ In Zola’s novels, passion is often the motor for a variety of evils (Bertrand-Jennings 11-12).

avaient suivi le meurtre” (*Thérèse Raquin* 92, emphasis mine). Zola’s judgment of conjugal infidelity is also manifested in the gaze of Madame Raquin after she becomes paralyzed subsequent to Laurent and Thérèse’s marriage. When she realizes what the couple has done, she suffers silently: “Le voile qui se déchirait lui montrait, au-delà des amours et des amitiés qu’elle avait cru voir, *un spectacle effroyable de sang et de honte*” (*Thérèse Raquin* 166, emphasis mine). Thérèse and Laurent’s desire meets its final destruction “by the probing, paralysed [sic] stare⁵⁸ of Madame Raquin, who becomes the avenging representative of her dead son” (Harrow 109).

Further evidence of Zola’s judgment of the affair lies in his description of the events following Camille’s murder. Both Thérèse and Laurent’s sexual desires are diminished from guilt: “Le meurtre avait comme apaisé pour un moment les fièvres voluptueuses de leur chair.... Le crime leur semblait une jouissance aiguë qui les *écoeurait* et les *dégoûtait* de leurs embrassements” (*Thérèse Raquin* 97, emphasis mine). Laurent’s dreams turn from his sensuous mistress to his drowned victim (*Thérèse Raquin* 107-08). Once married, the two lovers find no solace, having lost their “violents appétits de volupté” (*Thérèse Raquin* 125), and suffer the irony of being unable to enjoy the prize of Camille’s murder: “ils s’appartenaient, ils avaient tué un homme et joué une atroce comédie pour pouvoir se vautrer avec impudence dans un assouvissement de toutes les heures, et ils se tenaient là, aux deux coins d’une cheminée, roides, épuisés, l’esprit

⁵⁸ The last scene of the novel includes Madame Raquin gazing on the bodies of Thérèse and Laurent: “Les cadavres restèrent toute la nuit... tordus, vautrés, éclairés de leurs jaunâtres par les clartés de la lampe.... Et, pendant près de douze heures, jusqu’au lendemain vers midi, Madame Raquin, roide et muette, les contempla à ses pieds, ne pouvant se rassasier les yeux, les écrasant de regards lourds” (*Thérèse Raquin* 205).

troublé, la chair morte” (*Thérèse Raquin* 129). Their marriage becomes “un enfer” (*Thérèse Raquin* 187), as they become increasingly haunted⁵⁹ by their crime and paranoid of one another; living in an “atmosphère infernale,” Thérèse and Laurent “vivent leur ‘amour’ dans les tortures intolérables d’un enfer grossièrement symbolique” (Bertrand-Jennings 12). All attempts by the couple to escape this *enfer* fail, and in the end their deaths represent the ultimate punishment for their *faute*. Bettina L. Knapp, in her study *Emile Zola*, affirms that Zola included a moral element in *Thérèse Raquin*, that “[h]e underlined the morality of his work: the evildoers are punished.... Thérèse and Laurent are hounded by their own consciences. The guilty couple end their own lives: unable to face the horror of their deed, they look upon themselves as monstrously depraved entities, products of their environment and heredity” (20). Ultimately, in his portrayal of Thérèse and Laurent’s affair, Zola shows himself a social critic while still maintaining his moral code and exemplifying some stereotypical Orientalist views of his day; while seeming to recognize and, at times, sympathize with the lot of the bourgeois woman, his judgment of Thérèse and Laurent’s adulterous relationship exhibits the inequitable expectation of woman’s absolute fidelity in marriage and his condemnation of adultery.

⁵⁹ According to Bertrand-Jennings, “la faute sexuelle s’accompagne toujours de prise de conscience morale et de sentiment de culpabilité” (27).

CHAPTER THREE: *LA FEMME DANGEREUSE* – FEMALE CRIMINALITY

Adultery in the nineteenth century was regarded as both a moral and a social crime, especially for women. Hansen indicates that in Zola's novels, women, always inferior to men, were presented in a mythical or mysterious way and shown to "fall" or sin and be judged; Zola was both fearful of and fascinated by *la femme* (xi, xii). The fear of *volupté*, discussed previously, was concomitant to the male fear of female sexuality, which needed to be controlled because it possessed "une vitalité dangereuse qui contraste avec la stabilité de l'ordre masculin" (Hansen 142). This potentially destructive female power, a notable element in *Thérèse Raquin*, threatened male authority, and prompts in the present study an examination of female criminality in the nineteenth century.

In medical studies, popular culture, and the press, female criminality was associated with sexuality; Dijkstra explains the conventional nineteenth-century view that "[a]ctive enjoyment of sex awakened an inherent criminal instinct in women which was nothing short of disastrous" (*Idols of Perversity* 158-59). The dangers of uncontrolled female sexuality included the emergence of "disordered" female deviants; female criminal *types* such as the unmarried mother, the thief, and the prostitute drew attention to growing urban social issues⁶⁰ (Shapiro 125, 20). Accordingly, as the preoccupation of the

⁶⁰ Ann-Louise Shapiro explains that female criminality highlighted "the unresolved social problems of the urban agglomeration: social anarchy, unregulated sexuality, poverty, class envy [...]. By the 1880s... there was a well-established pattern of representing

general public with crime stories increased,⁶¹ female criminality was most often painted in the press and in medical studies in terms of “crimes of passion,” which Shapiro defines as “acts of violence fueled by jealousy, vengeance, or madness and provoked by betrayal or disappointment in love” (136). The *crimes passionnels* reported in French newspapers asseverated the correlation between women and the dangers of passion, linking female disorder and the passionate violence;⁶² women’s violence was regularly defined in terms of the “vengeance and/or suicide formula” (Shapiro 150, 153).

In the medical domain, nineteenth-century doctors reductively analyzed women’s lives as the phases before, during, and after reproduction/reproductive capacity, and regarded her as “in a permanent state of physical, mental, and spiritual disequilibrium in which she fluctuated between reason and unreason”; words such as “attacks” and “crises”

social and political disturbance by images of dangerous women... a specifically feminized problem of disorder.... She, like the other images of disorderly and dangerous women, was both real and imagined. And like other unruly women, she pointed to all that was wrong with modern urban society” (20, 23).

⁶¹ The mix of “pleasure and danger” strongly appealed to nineteenth-century readers, and criminal stories became enormously popular; Parisians enjoyed “the voyeuristic, transgressive pleasures of the criminal story. In fin-de-siècle Paris, crime had become an imaginative obsession” (Shapiro 11).

⁶² During the nineteenth century, many Parisians were fascinated by *les classes dangereuses*, which embodied the idea of the Other within French society. The public both feared and were interested in criminals, particularly, as “[m]edical and legal experts began to think of crime as a mirror held up to society, exposing the tendencies of the day writ large” (Shapiro 2). The fear and fascination with criminals in general marked “a crisis in modern urban society.... [P]olitical and social stability in the final three decades of the nineteenth century appeared to be profoundly threatened by... urban problems: an organized working class espousing ideologies of resistance; the persistence of poverty and the unsettling presence of people who could not become bourgeois and did not revere bourgeois values; a mass society, apparently endangered from above by the decadence of the wealthy and from below by the pathology of unruly crowds” (Shapiro 12). The national disease of *dégénérescence* was regarded as one of modernity’s conditions, “manifest in persistent social divisions, the irrational behavior of crowds, urban crime, and insanity” (Shapiro 16).

were used to describe normal physical events in a woman's life, emphasizing the perceived connection between femininity and disorder⁶³ (Shapiro 101). Hysteria⁶⁴ and menstruation were frequently associated together in medical texts "that grounded women's behavior definitively in their bodies" (Shapiro 109, 104). Indeed, the hysteric was an all too common female type, seen as uncivilized, mad, and "erratic, [with an] overexcited constitution, often driven by biology"; hysteria was also connected to female criminality (Shapiro 133). The popular image of hysteria⁶⁵ is akin to that of female *névrose* as a source of mental defects and potentially of criminal behavior (Krakowski 75). Many of Zola's "types féminins négatifs sont soit des névropathes, soit des victimes d'une mauvaise éducation" (Krakowski 241); Thérèse Raquin exemplifies both of these.

In his demonstration of Hippocrates' *humeurs*⁶⁶ (*le sanguin, le nerveux, le lymphatique et le bilieux*), Zola declares in his preface his intention to study the

⁶³ The connection between femininity and disorder endures from Aristotle, who believed that "the psychological deficiency... in females could be explained in terms of the soul's imperfect mastery of the body. This... is why the highest, or deliberative, part of the soul lacks sovereignty in women" (Smith 477).

⁶⁴ The designation "hysteria" comes from the Greek word *hysteria*, meaning "uterus": "The ancient Greeks accounted for the instability and mobility of physical symptoms and of attacks of emotional disturbance in women... by a theory that the womb somehow became transplanted to different positions. This 'wandering of the uterus' theory gave the name *hysteria* to disease phenomena characterized by highly emotional behavior. During the Middle Ages hysteria was attributed to demonic possession and to witchcraft, which led to persecution" ("Hysteria").

⁶⁵ Hysteria was widely viewed as a "syndrome of femininity that underlined women's disequilibrium, grounded in their biological sex, in an age that based its hope and its future on moderation and balance, *le juste milieu*" (Shapiro 133).

⁶⁶ Hippocrates recognized four different humors in humans, determined by the relative presence of different liquids in the human body (blood, phlegm, yellow bile, and black bile). The presence of these liquids produced a person's temperament, dependent on which liquid was dominant; the temperaments, as previously mentioned, are the bilious, the sanguine, the nervous, and the lymphatic ("Hippocrate").

interactions and reactions of characters “souverainement dominés par leurs nerfs et leur sang,” but his portrait of Thérèse as a *femme nerveuse et exotique* is associated with *violence* and *folie*. Following the murder of Camille (discussed later in this chapter), Thérèse has a “crise de nerfs,” and her *névrose* winds up influencing and dominating Laurent’s sanguine nature. Thérèse has a physical effect on Laurent’s nerves,⁶⁷ and consequently on his mental state. After Camille’s murder, Laurent expresses an uneasy fear of his mistress’ disordering influence: “il craignait de *risquer l’équilibre* de sa vie en se liant à *une femme nerveuse dont la passion l’avait déjà rendu fou*” (101-02). Soon afterwards, Laurent’s nature is transformed under Thérèse’s influence, and he suffers an “existence nerveuse” (*Thérèse Raquin* 20-138 passim, emphasis mine). Zola describes the negative effects that Thérèse has on her lover:

[I]l s’abandonna éperdument à ces *crises* d’ivresse.... [L]es *nerfs* se développèrent, l’emportèrent sur l’élément sanguin, et ce fait seul modifia sa nature. Il perdit son calme, sa lourdeur, il ne vécut plus une vie endormie.... [L]es *nerfs* dominèrent, et il tomba dans *les angoisses qui secouent les corps et les esprits détraqués*.... Toutes les circonstances, *les caresses fauves de Thérèse, la fièvre du meurtre, l’attente épouvantée de la volupté*, l’avaient rendu comme *fou*.... Il subissait ainsi des *crises* périodiques... *d’une effrayante maladie, d’une sorte d’hystérie* du meurtre.... [L]a *passion* de Thérèse lui avait communiqué *un mal effroyable*. (*Thérèse Raquin* 138-39, emphasis mine)

⁶⁷ “Les senteurs âpres de la terre, les parfums légers de Thérèse se mêlaient et le pénétraient, en allumant son sang, en irritant ses nerfs” (*Thérèse Raquin* 73).

In fact, Laurent's artist friend is shocked when he discovers Laurent's new "feminine" attributes,⁶⁸ including a softer voice, a sense of elegance, and the development of "des nerfs de femme, des sensations aiguës et délicates" (*Thérèse Raquin* 157).

The mental disequilibrium suffered by Laurent is shared by Thérèse, who turns to romantic novels as a temporary mental solace. One can observe at this point in *Thérèse Raquin* the nineteenth-century stereotype of the dangers of novels for women;⁶⁹ this type of reading was believed to lead to dangerous reveries, "la tête détraquée," and an aggravation of "toute névrose innée" (Krakowski 159, 180). Thérèse's reading of romantic *contes* exaggerates her nervous sensibility and disordering, and she acknowledges guilt in her husband's murder as she considers that "elle eut conscience de la bonté et de la douceur, elle comprit le visage mou et l'attitude morte de la femme d'Olivier, elle sut qu'on pouvait ne pas tuer son mari et être heureuse" (*Thérèse Raquin* 99).

It is not surprising that women in the nineteenth century were regarded as more susceptible to disorder and disequilibrium than men. Lombroso and Ferrero's *La Donna delinquente*, an influential work published fourteen years after Zola's *Thérèse Raquin*, outlines some common viewpoints and attitudes towards women in general and female criminals in particular that were prevalently mainstream during the second half of the

⁶⁸ Shapiro describes the "love disorder" for men, revealing that "a man who was 'détraqué en amour,' disordered by love, was understood either to be a hysteric – to have his equilibrium so shattered seemed patently a form of illness – or as a *déséquilibré* who might present an ongoing social danger" (148).

⁶⁹ Women were perceived as more susceptible to the influence of the *roman feuilleton* crime stories (Shapiro 34). One can consider Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* (1856), which was considered "dangerous reading," for nineteenth-century women.

nineteenth century. In their introduction to a translation of this work, Nicole Hahn Rafter and Mary Gibson summarize Lombroso's undertaking, labeling *La Donna delinquente* as "perhaps the most extended proof of women's inferiority ever attempted" (32).

Analogously to previous scholars, Lombroso equated female sexuality with female deviance,⁷⁰ arguing that all women are "inherently deviant"; he also viewed female criminals as "less evolved than both male criminals and law-abiding women... [and] reinforced infantilizing disciplinary modalities for women offenders" (Rafter and Gibson 28-29). The racial and gendered hierarchy described in *La Donna delinquente* demonstrates echoes of social Darwinist theories branching off from Darwin's *The Origin of Species*⁷¹ (published in 1859) and connects to this study's earlier discussion of Orientalism; Lombroso "posited a racial hierarchy stretching from African blacks at the bottom of the evolutionary ladder to European whites at the top" (Rafter and Gibson 17). According to Lombroso, the women of "lower races" exhibited masculine traits such as intelligence, strength, and promiscuity, stereotypes that can be observed in Thérèse's

⁷⁰ Bram Dijkstra writes that, in the nineteenth century, "it was impossible to take the animal out of the woman.... No matter how she struggled against the hegemony of the sexual instinct over her being, sooner or later she would have to succumb to its tyranny" (*Idols of Perversity* 283).

⁷¹ After Darwin's publication, philosophers such as Herbert Spencer expanded Darwin's ideas to humans through "social Darwinism." One can define social Darwinism as did Mike Hawkins, "as a set of five presuppositions: (1) biological laws govern all living organisms, including humans; (2) population pressure produces a struggle for existence among organisms, including humans; (3) advantageous physical and mental traits spread since their possessors would survive and reproduce more than others; (4) selection and inheritance produce new species and eliminate others; (5) the laws of evolution (including the struggle for existence) apply not only to changes of physical traits, but also to human society, morality, and even religion" (Weikart 21). In the later nineteenth century, focus in social Darwinist study was primarily on "racial or national competition" (Weikart 21).

“natural” adoption of the role of mistress. Sophie Ménard also discusses the perceived connection between “primitivism” and violence, writing that “la violence des actions et des paroles irréfléchies ramène... le primitif. Elle souligne l’éclipse des facultés intellectuelles et la primauté de la pulsion” (323). Another stereotype analyzed in Lombroso’s work is that of female deception – he believed, like many of his contemporaries,⁷² that “[l]ying is habitual and almost psychological in women’.... Women lie because of their weakness, and because of menstruation and pregnancy” (Rafter and Gibson 10, 24). Zola exhibits this common belief in *Thérèse Raquin*, with frequent references to Thérèse as a hypocrite throughout the novel: “une hypocrite et une menteuse,” “la femme, nerveuse et hypocrite,” “diablement habile et hypocrite” (54, 59, 182).

Furthermore, nineteenth-century authors, especially Naturalist authors like Zola, had an adamant interest in studies of heredity and the idea of biological predisposition/determinism. Lombroso includes biological/social determinism in his study of criminal women, adding “degeneration” (in Zola, *la dégénérescence*) “[t]o his catalogue of hereditary conditions leading to born criminality,” expounding that “[u]nlike atavism (an inborn tendency to revert back to a primitive state), degeneration was thought to result from outside influences such as tuberculosis, syphilis, and alcoholism. Social in

⁷² In his 1833 novel, *Ferragus, chef des Dévorants*, Honoré de Balzac includes a passage critiquing women’s perceived predilection for dishonesty: “*Toute femme ment. Mensonge officieux, mensonge véniel, mensonge sublime, mensonge horrible; mais obligation de mentir.... Le mensonge devient donc pour elles le fond de la langue, et la vérité n’est plus qu’une exception.... [E]lles finissent souvent par se mentir à elles-mêmes.... Chez elles, rien d’emprunté: la tromperie coule alors comme la neige tombe du ciel*” (49-50, emphasis in original).

origin, degeneration nevertheless caused a gradual and hereditary weakening of individuals and their offspring” (Rafter and Gibson 19-20). *La dégénérescence* appears in Zola’s *série des Rougon-Macquart* more than in his early novels, but the hereditary aspect is present in *Thérèse Raquin* through the heroine’s exotic origin, and one could say that Thérèse suffers degeneration as her social environment influences the development of her hypocrisy. Indeed, Thérèse’s “wild” heritage can be regarded as an underlying factor leading to her complicity in Camille’s violent murder; Shapiro mentions hereditary susceptibility to crime, explaining that “[t]hose with particular vulnerabilities to the ‘solicitation to imitation’ [of published crimes] were individuals ‘predisposed’ to suggestion by either a *hereditary* or acquired susceptibility, ‘a particular *semimorbid* [sic] *impressionability*’ in people with *weakened capacities of resistance*,” such as women (32, emphasis mine).

Zola regarded vice and evil as consequences of hereditary or contracted maladies (Krakowski⁷³ 55); the stereotypical image of non-Westerns as violent⁷⁴ elucidates the connection between Thérèse’s African heritage and her indirect proposal to kill Camille, as she suggests to Laurent that “[l]es gens meurent quelquefois.... Seulement, c’est dangereux pour ceux qui survivent... tous les moyens connus sont mauvais” (*Thérèse*

⁷³ Krakowski actually argues that the female binary of angel and demon are absent from Zola’s work, stating that he rejects the idea of woman’s natural malignity in favor of the Naturalist explanation mentioned here (55); however, Zola’s fear of feminine sexuality has already been discussed in the current study and there is more extensive evidence that Zola’s works do include the binary image of women, especially of the virtuous mother-figure and the temptress (see Schor and Knutson).

⁷⁴ Silverstein describes two opposing Orientalist views of the stereotypical Arab character: “on the one hand, their *bellicose, hostile nature*... on the other hand, their inveterate laziness, resulting from their reverent fatalism” (50, emphasis mine). Zola’s Thérèse exemplifies both of these.

Raquin 64-65). Indeed, although it is Laurent who commits the act of murder by throwing Camille into the Seine, the first suggestion comes from Thérèse, with her “nature sèche et violente,” who could be labeled as an early Naturalist *femme fatale* (*Thérèse Raquin* 179). Elizabeth M. Knutson subscribes to this perspective, attesting that Zola makes “repeated reference[s] to Thérèse’s seemingly supernatural power to infect him with her own passion and take possession of him.... [F]or many nineteenth-century artists and writers, especially [N]aturalists, woman represented primitive, animalistic forces and a destructive, malevolent side of nature. Thérèse represents ‘la femme fatale’⁷⁵... characterized as a rapacious attacker” (147, emphasis mine). The subtext of *Thérèse Raquin* demonstrates “a strong fear of the feminine,” despite Zola’s claims to scientific objectivity declared in his preface (Knutson 146). Zola appears to place the blame of criminal provocation on Thérèse, “apportant à Laurent l’idée du meurtre avec elle” (*Thérèse Raquin* 128); this can be viewed as a manifestation of the popular (Orientalist) belief of Arab-French contact (in this case, Thérèse and Laurent) leading to moral dissolution,⁷⁶ widely held in nineteenth-century France (V. Thompson 28).

The nineteenth-century fascination with crime stories included efforts to fix

⁷⁵ The image of the *femme fatale* relates also to the atavistic stereotypical image of the “African queen,” described by Dijkstra as “the ultimate temptress, the bestially beautiful, primitive African queen who made men lust after her against their better judgment” (*Evil Sisters* 146).

⁷⁶ Victoria Thompson alludes to Edouard Adolphe Duchesne, who studied Algerian prostitution, and wrote that “If one is forced to recognize the unhappy influence of our conquest on the already loose morals of the indigenous population, one must unfortunately also admit that the excessive lenience of Arab morals in such matters has somewhat affected the Europeans, whose level of morality has sensibly lowered on this point [sexuality] as on so many others’ (1853, 84). The French conquest thus led not to a clarification of sexual hierarchies, but rather to a troubling blurring of sexual mores, desires, and practices” (28).

sexual difference while gender roles were being challenged; when assessing the women's lower crime rates compared to men, for example, experts cited women's stereotypical "childlike"⁷⁷ qualities, "reduced intelligence, limited imagination, and more restricted access to opportunities for transgression" (Shapiro 15). Intrinsic to episodes of female criminality were the issues of gender hierarchies and social inequity; Shapiro explicates that "[i]n confronting *la femme criminelle*, the bourgeois society of the fin-de-siècle was forced to address the unsettling effects of shifting patterns of gender relations and the inability of traditional authorities to suppress or contain the cultural and ideological uncertainties of contemporary life" (9). Female criminality in general and Thérèse's crime of adultery/murder in particular can be analyzed as a double transgression – in refusing a submissive domestic role and resorting to violence, widely regarded as a man's forte, the female criminal violated both law and the social paradigm. The female criminal embodied "a dangerous gender ambiguity that threatened male authority" (Shapiro 9). In Zola's novel, Thérèse quickly becomes the dominant lover in her adulterous relationship, and this "masculine" dominance frightens Laurent: "Jamais Laurent n'avait connu une pareille femme. Il resta surpris, mal à l'aise.... Les sanglots, les crises de Thérèse l'épouvantèrent presque, tout en irritant ses curiosités voluptueuses.... Il voulait oublier, ne plus voir Thérèse dans sa nudité, dans ses caresses douces et brutales, et toujours elle était là, implacable, tendant les bras" (*Thérèse Raquin* 52-53). Thérèse's personality

⁷⁷ Dijkstra explains the connection between the childlike image of woman and her subjugation: "The equation of the intellectual capacities of woman was, of course, a simple continuation of the fetishized idealization of woman – equivalent, in her innocence, to the child – which had been... turned into a formula for denigration" (*Idols of Perversity* 167).

eventually overtakes and suppresses that of Laurent, and he becomes more “feminine” (*Thérèse Raquin* 157); the influence of Thérèse effectively “robs him [Laurent] of his force and even sexual identity” (Johnson 300). Further evidence of the gender ambiguity present in *Thérèse Raquin* is in the culminating murder scene; Thérèse’s weapon of choice is a violent one, a knife, while Laurent opts for poisoning,⁷⁸ which was popularly viewed in the time as “the female crime *par excellence*” (*Thérèse Raquin* 204, Shapiro 71). Thérèse embodies the nineteenth-century popular representations⁷⁹ of female criminals as masculine/virile, sadistic, and hysterical (Shapiro 90). Giving his heroine such characteristics confirms Zola’s fear of the feminine, and exemplifies the symbolism of female criminals as threats to male patriarchal authority in society,⁸⁰ criminal women were creating new domestic codes⁸¹ in attacking their husbands, rivals, and lovers (Shapiro 138). With this in mind, one can view *Thérèse Raquin* as a sort of cautionary tale, wherein two adulterers/murderers are punished, demonstrating “the perils of transgression of the social order” (Knutson 149).

⁷⁸ Shapiro writes that “poisoning became the crime of hypocrites and those capable of pretense” and that contemporaries linked “*l’empoisonneuse*” and the “archetypal denatured woman” (73, 76).

⁷⁹ Popular representations of female criminals were constructed around dichotomies: “feminine/virile; maternal/sadistic; hysterical/cunning; responsible/irresponsible” (Shapiro 90).

⁸⁰ One should recall that the Seneca Falls Convention took place in 1848; Dijkstra points out that women in the second half of the nineteenth century continued to question prescribed gender roles (*Idols of Perversity* 64). The increased attention to the female criminal and the emergence of the feminist indicated “the weakening of the ordered oppositions that had organized social life – male/female, public/private, autonomous/dependent – and challenged the hierarchies and privileges that had guaranteed that order” (Shapiro 213).

⁸¹ “[T]he story of female criminality was a story about the pain of social change [...] the malaise of modernity and the malady of the modern female converged” (Shapiro 10, 25).

CHAPTER FOUR: TRANSPOSITION OF THE OTHER AND THE SEXUALIZED HEROINE – CARNÉ’S AND STRATTON’S CINEMATIC ADAPTATIONS OF *THÉRÈSE RAQUIN*

With some of the underlying themes in Zola’s novel established and analyzed, this chapter will present a brief comparative analysis of two cinematic adaptations:⁸² Marcel Carné’s *Thérèse Raquin* (1953) and Charlie Stratton’s *In Secret* (2014). Marcel Carné and his co-screenwriter, Charles Spaak, aimed to *interpret* Zola’s story rather than follow it “à la lettre” (Dubois and Sonntag 255), and the opening credits indicate that the film was *inspired* by the novel. Carné transposes numerous elements of Zola’s novel and makes various adaptations; his film takes place in Lyon⁸³ in the early 1950s, subsequent to World War II,⁸⁴ becoming “a statement about psychic damage in the aftermath of the world wars” (Mayer-Rubin 162). There are several historical allusions in the film that

⁸² Zola’s novels especially lend themselves to film adaptation “because Zola is so obsessed with the nature of observation and the conflicting impulses of detachment and involvement. But most filmmakers do not go beyond a surface evocation of milieu and social character” (Braudy 83).

⁸³ At the time that Carné was filming his cinematic adaptation of Zola’s novel in 1953, the sixth arrondissement of Paris (where one could find Zola’s famous lugubrious Passage du Pont-Neuf) had been completely transformed by the construction projects of Baron Haussmann. The setting of the Passage du Pont-Neuf no longer resembled Zola’s somber descriptions in the novel, a factor that led Carné to set his film in Vieux Lyon, which resembled pre-Haussmann Paris. Dubois and Sonntag, in an article comparing the film and the novel, comment on the difficulty of showing “la vie étouffante de Thérèse et l’histoire sordide d’un meurtre dans un Paris pittoresque.... Le choix du vieux Lyon... était encore semblable à ce qu’elle était devenue au XIX^e siècle: un lieu assez sinistre” (258-59).

⁸⁴ The black-and-white film, in a similar style of films noirs, accentuates the somber tone of post-war French society.

situate the viewer in the post-war period, especially in the character of the navy man Riton,⁸⁵ who indirectly witnesses Camille's murder and later blackmails⁸⁶ Thérèse and Laurent.

The murder of Camille in the film is not premeditated, but rather happens as an accidental result of circumstance – Laurent throws Camille from a train in a flush of anger. Kate Griffeths discusses the changes in the story, expounding that “Zola's tale of corrupt lovers in Paris destroyed by their own repugnant natures and an act of premeditated violence becomes Carné's idealized depiction of helpless individuals driven to murder only by accident and crushed by external circumstance” (192). Zola's Naturalist *fatalité* becomes chance in Carné's film. While Zola's novel highlights Naturalist determinism and *fatalité*, Carné's adaptation translates these elements into a fatalistic chance⁸⁷ through several devices, including the portrayal of the murder, a crime of passion rather than a premeditated one. Most of the film's action turns around accident/chance and circumstance, which function as manifestations of determinism. Thérèse explains at the beginning that the circumstance of her parents' death brought her under the care of Madame Raquin, and that she became Camille's wife “sans changer

⁸⁵ Riton makes references to fighting in Japan and attributes his caution and vigilance to his experiences in war. He tells the couple, “Voilà la guerre... elle sert tout de même à quelque chose,” demonstrating a subtle critical tone on the director's part (Carné).

⁸⁶ The element of blackmail at the hands of a veteran can be regarded as a critique of moral decay in post-World-War-II France.

⁸⁷ Carné employs poetic realism, which “implied first of all fidelity to milieu: to the settings of everyday life... Within these authentic atmospheres, characters were driven by destinies larger than themselves, by implacable fate... as a form of social determinism. Yet the ‘poetic’ aspect of this realism was attained not only through the aesthetic evocation of social ambiance, but also by the characters' struggles to transcend fate and achieve important life goals” (Sklar, qtd. in Helman 130).

grand'chose" (Carné). Laurent meets Camille by chance as they are working, and thus enters into the story. Riton, who blackmails the couple in order to open a used bicycle shop, attributes his actions to circumstance, telling Laurent "Tu n'es pas un vrai criminel, et je ne suis pas un véritable maître-chanteur. Mais les circonstances... c'est comme ça" (Carné). Carné transforms Thérèse and Laurent into "existential heroes fighting an absurd universe of inexorable fate, courtesy of [Riton]" (Braudy 84). Just after the couple pays the blackmailer to escape their crime and start afresh, a truck kills Riton by accident and the viewer sees the post of the letter Riton wrote to the judiciary tribunal, ending the film with a shot of Lyon and the sound of sirens, predicting the guilty couple's destiny.

Some of the most notable differences in Carné's interpretation lie in his characterization of Thérèse and Laurent. Carné ignores the Orientalist stereotypes with which Zola paints his heroine, choosing to make her a typical French woman;⁸⁸ instead, the director displaces the Otherness onto Laurent's character, played by Italian actor Raf Vallone (Carné). Michelle E. Bloom attributes this alteration to the change in attitudes between Zola's and Carné's times:

The erasure of Zola's Orientalism, the transformation of the savage Oriental into a passionate European Other, entails a substantial change that arguably reflects the temporal shift from novel (situated in the nineteenth century) to film (set in the twentieth century), as Orientalism, though still pervasive in both high and popular culture today, was more pronounced in

⁸⁸ Griffeths writes that "the genetic memories of Zola's heroine are cut in their entirety, as Carné effaces Thérèse's family and background" (194). Carné may have done this because of the relationship between France and Algeria at the time, full of tension just before the Algerian War of Independence began.

France in the earlier period. (35)

The prejudice towards the “sexual/passionate Oriental” Other of the nineteenth century and towards the “sexual/passionate Italian” Other of the twentieth century mirror one another. Laurent fills the role of outsider while exhibiting different stereotypes of a European Other: “he is an impulsive Italian who easily becomes irritable and angry, although generally his outbursts do not result in harm towards others” (Helman 125). Just as Zola’s Thérèse can represent the *type* of the exotic temptress, Carné’s Laurent⁸⁹ personifies the “rêve d’une vie romanesque... une figure de la sensibilité” (Dubois and Sonntag 257). A truck driver who travels for a living, Laurent becomes an outsider everywhere he goes, a loner who exists outside of “normal” or “stable” society; he tells Thérèse early in the film, “Quand j’en ai assez d’une ville, je vais dans une autre. Mais dans ma vie il n’y a personne” (Carné). Furthermore, in his transient work as a truck driver, Laurent constitutes a representation of the blue collar/working class, while the Raquins represent the white collar/middle class. The Camille of the film, played by Jacques Duby, shows some bitterness towards *les étrangers*,⁹⁰ making comments such as: “Le règlement est pour tout le monde, et figurez-vous, même pour les étrangers” and judging Laurent, exclaiming to Thérèse, “Un camionneur?... et un étranger en plus!” (Carné). Emphasizing Laurent’s different social class and his “exotic” *étranger* aspect, Carné successfully transposes the Otherness of Zola’s female protagonist onto a male

⁸⁹ Carné’s Laurent “est devenu un étranger, un ‘bel italien’ grand et fort, aux épaules larges et puissantes et au regard ténébreux... [opposé] à [la vie], triste et étriquée, de l’héroïne... Figure de la liberté” (Dubois and Sonntag 257).

⁹⁰ Alicja Helman explains that, in Carné’s film, “Laurent is not Camille’s friend.... He is also not from the same social class as the Raquins. He is an Italian man, an outsider, not used to living in one place for long” (123).

character – a gendered transfer.⁹¹

Although Carné transposes the Otherness onto Laurent, Thérèse remains an Other as well due to her gender and role as an obedient wife and daughter-in-law. The Thérèse of the film, played by Simone Signoret, is a submissive woman who incarnates a traditional feminine stereotype,⁹² “allow[ing] herself to be steered and look[ing] to others for guidance” (Helman 128). Carné portrays her in a much more sympathetic light than does Zola, as a victim of “her mother-in-law’s autocratic behavior and her husband’s egotism” (Helman 127). Her character inspires compassion, such as when she tells Laurent, “Je ne sais faire que des choses tristes – coudre, soigner, compter l’argent” (Carné).

In painting Thérèse as a victim, Carné communicates a critical portrait of middle-class marriage in his film. Camille and Madame Raquin are both selfish and unkind towards Thérèse, who is clearly unhappy, with a tedious life full of “toujours la même chose” (Carné). At the beginning of the film, Madame Raquin criticizes Thérèse for

⁹¹ The reason for this transposition could be that women, having more (but still limited) freedom at the time that Carné made this film than when Zola wrote his novel, though still Other (as discussed later) were less obviously so; furthermore, the recent memories of World War II, in which Mussolini’s Italy was allied with Hitler’s Germany and Hirohito’s Japan, may shed light on Carné’s choice of a male Italian Other.

⁹² Carné’s Thérèse is desexualized, reduced to a mere witness of the events around her (including the murder). Signoret wears modest dark dresses with her hair pulled back tightly and a cardigan loosely draped around her shoulders for the majority of the film, excepting just after her affair begins and she is seen briefly with her hair down and in a light-colored blouse. Duboile and Sonntag write that “La tenue austère de Thérèse, un gilet gris sur une robe noire, ‘désexualise’ l’héroïne zolienne pour en faire un être qui vit dans l’oubli de son corps comme pour mieux s’occuper de la santé fragile de son époux malingre lorsque, dans sa petite boutique, elle n’est pas occupée à coudre ou à compter l’argent du commerce” (256).

dreaming too much⁹³ and instructs her that real love “n’a rien de romanesque” and consists rather of making sure that “son mari se porte bien” (Carné). When Camille confronts Thérèse about her affair, he invokes the power of the law,⁹⁴ which continued to favor males: “La loi t’ordonne de m’obéir et de me respecter!” (Carné). Camille confesses his plan to shut Thérèse in their aunt’s apartment as a punishment, threatening that “Elle va apprendre ce que c’est qu’un mari” (Carné). Carné makes a visual contrast following this scene and Camille’s menacing dialogue, by cutting immediately to a shot of a newlywed couple happily dancing at a restaurant, where Laurent struggles to hear Thérèse on the telephone (Carné). This visual contrast could symbolize the difference between a marriage of obligation/convenience and a marriage based on choice/love, and the fact that the latter may be more difficult given the characters’ social context; furthermore, the filming highlights the unfortunate situation of Thérèse,⁹⁵ far from being that happy bride, even during the “honeymoon stage” of her marriage to Camille.

As in Zola’s novel, the affair in Carné’s film is a means of escape from a loveless

⁹³ One can make a connection here between the nineteenth-century woman who reads novels considered “dangerous” by the patriarchy, such as Emma Bovary, and the twentieth-century woman who daydreams too much, a “dangerous” pastime that could lead to thinking about her subjugated situation.

⁹⁴ During this scene (and, in fact, throughout most of the film), the viewer feels sympathy for Thérèse and her powerlessness in her marriage to Camille. Twentieth century laws, like nineteenth century laws, continued to favor males and support the patriarchal social paradigm. Here, Carné appears to offer a critical perspective on the patriarchy, just as Zola appeared to show some sympathy for the lot of the bourgeois wife; however, both men will have proved themselves to be men of their times, generally adhering to the gender norms of their respective contemporaries.

⁹⁵ Duboile and Sonntag argue that the lovers are punished in the end “pour répondre à l’attente du public des années 50, attaché au respect des bonnes moeurs conjugales,” but that, simultaneously, Carné wanted “faire le procès de la société de son temps, en montrant, à l’écran, une femme osant braver les interdits” (263).

marriage; Laurent and Thérèse agree that her life with the Raquins is “pire que la mort” (Carné). Laurent offers her a chance to flee her monotonous existence, her secure “petite vie où il ne se passe rien” (Carné). Despite sympathizing with Thérèse in her role as Camille’s wife, Carné does not transform her into an independent character; she relies on a man for her deliverance,⁹⁶ just as does Zola’s Thérèse. Thérèse declares to Laurent, “Je vous admire. . . . Vous êtes fort, vous êtes libre. Vous ne pensez qu’à vous” (Carné), and yet wavers in a state of indecision when he offers her a chance to escape the mediocrity of her loveless marriage. As a victim, Thérèse can neither “master a spirit of rebellion [nor] come to a decision” (Helman 127). With the arrival of Riton, the blackmailer, “she turns to a man [Laurent] and depends on him as she did earlier when her life was compromised by a sense of social and economic pressure” (Helman 128). Carné, like Zola, displays some sympathy for the suffering wife while still maintaining an adherence to his generation’s gender norms; Carné portrays woman as submissive Other and victim, while Zola portrays woman as exotic/dangerous Other and criminal.

Charlie Stratton’s 2014 film *In Secret* differs in its portrayal of Thérèse. In general, the film follows Zola’s novel more closely than does Carné’s *Thérèse Raquin*; the action takes place in nineteenth-century France, beginning in Vernon and ending in Paris. The shadows and color scheme of the film mirror Zola’s descriptions of the dark and lugubrious Passage du Pont-Neuf, and much of the action stays faithful to the novel. The opening of Stratton’s film evokes memories from the novel, with an underwater shot (anticipating Camille’s drowning) and then “furiously galloping horses and sweeping

⁹⁶ Laurent desires “to conquer [Thérèse] as a man gains (fictional) mastery over a woman, but he also wants to free her from her class- and gender-based shackles” (Helman 128).

camera movements... [that suggest] urgency” (Dargis).

Regarding the protagonist, a notable difference between Carné’s Thérèse and Stratton’s Thérèse, played by Elizabeth Olsen, is her position as “exotic” Other. The opening scene of *In Secret* shows Thérèse’s father taking the young Thérèse (Lily Laight) to the Raquin household; Stratton includes Zola’s Orientalist element,⁹⁷ as the captain informs his sister that Thérèse’s mother is dead, and tells his daughter that “Before you can even start to miss me, I’m going to sail right up that river and take you back to Africa” (Stratton). Madame Raquin, played by Jessica Lange, polarizes her hybrid-heritage niece from the beginning, scolding her: “Girls in Africa may not wear shoes, but French girls do” (Stratton). Stratton’s Thérèse appears less passive and more restless than Carné’s; she laughs incredulously when Madame Raquin informs her that she will marry Camille. Her Otherness is again highlighted as Madame Raquin reminds her, “We don’t even know who your mother was... Illegitimates have been dealt an unlucky hand” (Stratton).

To a twenty-first-century audience, the connections between Thérèse as Other due to her hybrid heritage and her sexualized image may not be overtly recognizable, but Stratton effectively embeds both aspects in Thérèse’s character. Within the first ten minutes of the film, Thérèse’s sexuality is emphasized, and she is painted as having sexual needs that are not being met, first, as she “grinds her body into the earth” while

⁹⁷ In Stratton’s film, Thérèse’s mother is not specified as being Algerian. The only clue the audience is given is when Madame Raquin informs Thérèse of her father’s death, saying that he “went down off the coast of Algeria” (Stratton). Later on, Madame Raquin sings a song to Thérèse about her father, and includes a statement about Thérèse’s unidentified mother: “My brother was an officer, he went away to sea; he met someone, somewhere, somehow, and brought you home to me” (Stratton).

watching a man working in a field and then as she tells Camille to kiss her⁹⁸ (Dargis, Stratton). After her marriage, Thérèse makes an effort to seduce her husband,⁹⁹ growling and saying, “I might be a bear”; however, Camille, as weak and sickly as in Zola’s novel, brushes her aside, replying “But you’re not – you’re my little Thérèse” (Stratton). For Camille, Thérèse is little more than a companion and “portable pillow” (Stratton).

With the arrival of Laurent, played by Oscar Isaac, Thérèse’s desires begin to heighten, as does the dramatic (and sexual) tension;¹⁰⁰ Thérèse trembles as Laurent recounts a story of painting a nude model as he works on Camille’s portrait. In the scene following Laurent’s completion of Camille’s portrait, Laurent instructs her to unbutton her blouse – thus begins their affair. Thérèse takes on the role of mistress with natural ease. From a meek and somberly dressed woman, she seems to be “awakened” with the commencement of the affair, wearing her undergarments with her hair down to meet Laurent. Thérèse is the first to suggest that she and Laurent “meet” in her marriage bed, emboldened by her affair;¹⁰¹ when Laurent hesitates, she replies: “She [Madame] wouldn’t dream of leaving the shop, and besides, I have a terrible headache and I need to rest.... You’re afraid!” (Stratton).

Her adulterous relationship with Laurent is sharply contrasted with her stifled

⁹⁸ Thérèse tells Camille to kiss her, and he does so on her cheek; Thérèse replies, “No, not like that” (Stratton).

⁹⁹ Later on, Camille asks Laurent’s advice on how to make his wife happy. Laurent tells Camille to “Just love her” – Camille does so, but the scene is awkward, with Camille wheezing and Thérèse looking almost frightened (Stratton).

¹⁰⁰ When Laurent is present, Thérèse becomes short of breath, saying, “I have to open a window [...] He smells like an animal – I can smell him from here” (Stratton).

¹⁰¹ Laurent comments on Thérèse’s transformation: “I can’t believe that you’re the same lifeless girl that always sat in the corner” (Stratton).

marriage to Camille. In a similar scene to where, in Zola's novel, Thérèse tells Laurent how she has suppressed her nature and become a hypocrite through her life with the Raquins, buried alive in the boutique, Stratton's Thérèse tells Laurent, "You have no idea how much they've stolen from me. I almost ran away twice, but she always told me I couldn't survive without them. And I believed her. There is nothing left of me but a bit of burnt wick and a wisp of smoke." The Thérèse of the film takes pleasure in deceit, enjoying lying and blaming her environment for her hypocrisy; she also makes a reference to being buried alive: "I'm good at it [lying]. They made me better. Thank you for locking me up in a sick room. And thank you for burying me alive!" (Stratton).

Her affair with Laurent is a temporary escape for Thérèse, trapped in her unhappy marriage, telling Laurent "You dug me up too late.... Save me, please save me" (Stratton). Dialogue such as this emphasizes the captivity and powerlessness of Thérèse's situation, commenting critically on gender norms of the nineteenth century. Olsen's Thérèse, like Zola's, desires freedom; she sits up late "listening to the river,"¹⁰² and Camille's response that it is "just a brick wall" symbolizes her captive situation and inability to escape (Stratton). The protagonist wants deliverance; however, she also asks to be saved, indicating, as in Carné's film, her lack of independence. Like Signoret's character, like Zola's title character, Olsen's Thérèse can also escape one man only with the help of another, showing perhaps that, despite the fact that the women of Stratton's

¹⁰² There is a moment of irony in this scene. Camille awakens from a nightmare to find Thérèse "listening to the river" by the window. Upset, he instructs her to return to bed, saying, "I want to hold you. I never dream when I hold you" (Stratton). While Camille means that literally, he does not have nightmares when with Thérèse, one could transfer his line to Thérèse, who cannot dream (in the sense of hope, or dream of a better life) when she is with Camille.

twenty-first-century audience enjoy vastly more freedom and independence, there remains much room for progress in intrinsic ideas about gender.

Her character is dominated by sexuality until her husband's murder. Laurent first suggests Camille's murder, with Thérèse's quiet acceptance;¹⁰³ she does, however, express doubts and feelings of guilt before the murder occurs. Her first sleepless night follows Laurent's suggestion of the murder. Stratton's Camille, played by Tom Felton, is kinder than the Camille in Zola's novel; he does not demonstrate the selfishness and condescendence of Zola's nor Carné's Camille. His only stern moment transpires when he tells Thérèse that the family will move back to Vernon (not in the novel), and he exerts his dominance as a husband: "I'm the husband. I make the decisions... I'm not asking you, I'm telling you." However, in his next scene he gives Thérèse flowers in a moment of repentant, kind goodwill. One sympathizes with Stratton's Camille more than with Zola's and Carné's, and the viewer can see Olsen's Thérèse waver as she begins to feel guilty even before the murder (Stratton).

The Raquins' friends, *les invités du jeudi*, in Stratton's film resemble those in Zola's novel, and they remain oblivious of the intrigues taking place throughout the majority of the film. Odie Henderson, in a review of the film, comments on how their ignorance allows the plot to move forward, with the lovers' marriage: "They misread everything by filtering the obvious through a prism of societal sexism and individual

¹⁰³ The dialogue between Laurent and Thérèse where murder is indirectly suggested follows:

Laurent: "If only he'd go away." Thérèse: "People don't just go away." Laurent: "Sometimes, they do." Thérèse: "But it's dangerous for the people they leave behind." Laurent: "Not if the going away is an accident... people have accidents every day and sometimes they just don't come back, that's all" (Stratton).

idiocy” (Henderson). The Thursday guests play a role in forwarding the story, as Suzanne also discovers Madame’s written exposal of the murder (not in the novel), and in providing a foundation for things to come with their conversations about murder and the morgue, but the social critique of the bourgeoisie so strongly present in Zola’s novel is essentially absent from Stratton’s film.

In Secret includes scenes of Thérèse attempting to forget her guilt through vice, as she does in Zola’s novel, through prostitution. Just before this scene, as Thérèse prepares to go out, one can observe the social critique previously discussed; she angrily asks the paralyzed Madame Raquin, “Who sold me into marriage? Who would do anything to keep from being alone? You!” (Stratton). Stratton’s film shows Thérèse going out dressed and made up like a “lady of the night,” and drinking at a bar very late; Laurent asks if he can buy her, and she replies, “I’m free” (Stratton). Stratton’s sexualized Thérèse, like Zola’s, is unable to escape the mental ramifications of her crime; she goes from one unhappy marriage to another (to Laurent), with no means of escape from their haunting crime and from the role of wife. The film closes in a similar way as does the novel, albeit the Thursday guests discover their crime in the film; Thérèse and Laurent commit suicide under the judging gaze of Madame Raquin. Stratton sets their suicide, instead of in their apartment, by the river, to end, as he began the film, with an underwater shot – this time, showing Thérèse’s body sinking.

CHAPTER FIVE: THÉRÈSE – PRECURSOR OF ZOLIENNES WOMEN

Émile Zola published *Thérèse Raquin* early in his writing career, and one can see from his second edition's preface that he was already forging the Naturalism that would distinguish his later works. Zola describes the goal of the novel in physical terms, far from the idealized sentimentality of Romantic authors:

Thérèse et Laurent sont des brutes humaines, rien de plus. J'ai cherché à suivre pas à pas dans ces brutes le travail sourd des passions, les poussées de l'instinct, les détraquements cérébraux survenus à la suite d'une crise nerveuse.... [M]on but a été un but scientifique avant tout.... [J]e me suis perdu dans la copie exacte et minutieuse de la vie, me donnant tout entier à l'analyse du mécanisme humain. (20-21)

Thérèse Raquin thus represents what Krakowski labels the “cristallisation¹⁰⁴ de la nouvelle conception du romancier” that would come full circle in the *série des Rougon-Macquart*¹⁰⁵ (13). The novel differs from Zola's previous works, paving the way for the *série* with a more detailed study of his protagonists' feelings and thoughts, and with “their perversions underscored [and] their motivations fleshed out” (Knapp 19-20).

¹⁰⁴ *Thérèse Raquin* marks an important step in the development and formation of Zola's Naturalism “dans le domaine de l'art, telle qu'elle restera à peu de chose près jusqu'à la fin de la série des *Rougon-Macquart*” (Krakowski 13).

¹⁰⁵ Schor defines the *Rougon-Macquart* as “a novelistic cycle whose ‘origins’ are bound up with the intimate secrets of Tante Dide, the ancestor figure who stands first in a long line of Sphinx-Women” (*Breaking the Chain* 47).

Zola's focus on the body,¹⁰⁶ his dualistic representation of *la femme*, and his inclusion of social critique in *Thérèse Raquin* present further evidence of its role as a precursor of his later works. The novel indicates what would follow in the *Rougon-Macquart*, both in Naturalistic presentation and in the characterization of its heroine. This chapter will concentrate on the correlation between Thérèse and two later *zoliennes* heroines from the *Rougon-Macquart*: Gervaise Coupeau (née Macquart) of *L'Assommoir* (1877) and Nana Coupeau of *Nana* (1880).

Zola states in his preface to *Thérèse Raquin* his desire to produce "l'étude du tempérament et des modifications profondes de l'organisme sous la pression des milieux et des circonstances" (24). He declares a similar goal in the preface of *L'Assommoir*, the seventh volume of the *Rougon-Macquart*, published in 1877. Zola defines the goal of *L'Assommoir* as follows: "J'ai voulu peindre la déchéance fatale d'une famille ouvrière, dans le milieu empesté de nos faubourgs. Au bout de l'ivrognerie et de la fainéantise, il y a le relâchement des liens de la famille, les ordures de la promiscuité, l'oubli progressif des sentiments honnêtes, puis comme dénouement la honte et la mort."¹⁰⁷ C'est de la morale en action, simplement" (7). In both the preface and the novel itself, Zola underscores the function of milieu and environment in the formation of his characters, who "ne sont qu'ignorants et gâtés par le milieu de rude besogne et de misère où ils vivent" (*L'Assommoir* 8).

¹⁰⁶ Susan Harrow writes that the novel "was to have a formative importance for the author of the embryonic Rougon-Macquart series, with its insistence on the body as a site of passion and disgust, its imaginative audacity, and its perspectival power" (119).

¹⁰⁷ These elements, "le relâchement des liens de la famille, les ordures de la promiscuité, l'oubli progressif des sentiments honnêtes, puis comme dénouement la honte et la mort," (*L'Assommoir* 7) are all present in *Thérèse Raquin* and in *Nana*.

In *L'Assommoir*, Zola presents a tableau of a working-class family in a poor neighborhood of Paris that is destroyed by the ravaging effects of alcoholism. Published ten years after *Thérèse Raquin*, *L'Assommoir* is the seventh book in the *série des Rougon-Macquart*, and focuses on the life of Gervaise Coupeau, née Macquart, the mother of Anna Coupeau (*Nana*), Étienne Lantier (*Germinal*) and Claude Lantier (*L'Oeuvre*). Despite the emphasis on the milieu of the working class in Paris during Haussmannization and on alcoholism and its negative social effects, this novel provides a point of comparison with *Thérèse Raquin*.

Despite the absence of a murder plot in *L'Assommoir*, Gervaise and her story serve as an interesting expression of how Thérèse served as a precursor for later *Rougon-Macquart* women in Zola's Naturalist works. Although Gervaise does not share the *exotisme* of foreign blood with her earlier counterpart, she is, throughout the novel, *une Autre*; almost everyone around her, especially the Lorilleux (her sister- and brother-in-law), seem to wait and wish for her failure. Gervaise, offspring from the illegitimate Macquart branch of Adélaïde Foque's family,¹⁰⁸ is already an outsider due to her heredity;¹⁰⁹ Mme Lorilleux judges her both for this¹¹⁰ and for her limp,¹¹¹ calling her “*la*

¹⁰⁸ The offspring of the legitimate branch, the Rougon, tend to meet less tragic endings in Zola's series.

¹⁰⁹ The lot of the Macquarts shows an “association of sexual transgression with the procreation of deviance and delinquency [that] reflects a conservative ideology of the body” (White 27). Similarly, in *Thérèse Raquin*, adultery leads to destructive delinquency in the form of murder.

¹¹⁰ Mme Lorilleux remarks, scandalized, “Une mariée qui n'amène seulement pas un parent à sa noce! ... Regardez-là! S'il est permis!... Oh! la Banban!” (*L'Assommoir* 83).

¹¹¹ The explanation of the origin of Gervaise's limp provides one example of how the violence present in *Thérèse Raquin* continued to permeate Zola's later novels (see below for relation to *Nana*). Her limp is attributed to her beatings as a child by her alcoholic

Banban.” When Gervaise purchases her new boutique,¹¹² the Lorilleux are jealously outraged at the success of such *une Autre*: “Les Lorilleux s’étaient brouillés à mort avec Gervaise. D’abord, pendant les réparations de la boutique, ils avaient failli crever de rage.... Une boutique bleue à cette rien-du-tout, si ce n’était pas fait pour casser les bras des honnêtes gens!” (*L’Assommoir* 83-145 passim). As Gervaise and Coupeau gradually capitulate to alcoholism and indifference as their financial situation falls apart, Virginie Poisson, with whom Gervaise brawls at the beginning of the novel, takes “revenge” on Gervaise. Virginie purchases her *lavoir* and turns it into a sweetshop, then hires Gervaise, now even more of an Outsider as her life is falling apart, to clean it for a pittance:

Et tous les deux, le chapelier et l’épicière, se carraient avantage, comme sur un trône, tandis que Gervaise se traînait à leurs pieds, dans la boue noire. Virginie devait jouir, car ses yeux de chat s’éclairèrent un instant d’étincelles jaunes, et elle regarda Lantier avec un sourire mince. Enfin, ça la vengeait¹¹³ donc de l’ancienne fessée du lavoir, qu’elle avait toujours gardée sur la conscience! (*L’Assommoir* 403-04)

Like Thérèse, Gervaise finds herself in an unhappy marriage (despite the fact that it begins happily), and begins an affair with a man who becomes a close friend of her husband (and who is also her own former lover). Gervaise’s lover, Auguste Lantier, resembles Laurent of *Thérèse Raquin*, and he moves in with the Coupeau family similarly

father: “Cent fois, celle-ci lui avait raconté les nuits où le père, rentrant soûl, se montrait d’une galanterie si brutale, qu’il lui cassait les membres; et, sûrement, elle avait poussé une de ces nuits là, avec sa jambe en retard” (*L’Assommoir* 46).

¹¹² Gervaise dreams of opening her own boutique as a laundress, while Thérèse’s boutique functions more as a prison.

¹¹³ The vengeful woman also fits into existent stereotypes.

to Laurent becoming part of the Raquin family through his frequent visits. The two novels thus both present a similarly organized *ménage à trois*. Just as Camille Raquin invites Laurent, Thérèse's soon-to-be lover, into his home, Coupeau¹¹⁴ invites his wife's former lover, Lantier, into their home: "Les hommes sont les hommes, n'est-ce pas? On est fait pour se comprendre" (*L'Assommoir* 248). The Raquins quickly accept Laurent into their family "naturally,"¹¹⁵ and Gervaise, in the same manner, comes to accept Lantier's presence:

D'abord, quand son mari avait poussé son ancien amant dans la boutique, elle s'était pris la tête entre les deux poings, du même geste instinctif que les jours de gros orage, à chaque coup de tonnerre. Ça ne lui semblait pas possible; les murs allaient tomber et écraser tout le monde. Puis, en voyant les deux hommes assis, sans que même les rideaux de mousseline eussent bougé, elle avait subitement trouvé ces choses naturelles... Une paresse heureuse l'engourdissait, la tenait tassée au bord de la table, avec le seul besoin de n'être pas embêtée. (*L'Assommoir* 249)

Analogous to the effects of Thérèse's stereotypically "exotic" heredity on her sexuality are the effects of Gervaise's "tainted" heredity (being a product of the illegitimate Macquart line) combined with a difficult milieu. Zola paints Gervaise as a

¹¹⁴ Coupeau dismisses Gervaise's concerns about this new ménage: "Le passé était le passé, n'est-ce pas?... [I]l savait à qui il avait affaire, à une brave femme et à un brave homme, à deux amis, quoi! Il était tranquille, il connaissait leur honnêteté... L'amitié avec un homme, c'est plus solide que l'amour avec une femme" (*L'Assommoir* 254, 278).

¹¹⁵ "Le soir, dans la boutique, Laurent était parfaitement heureux... Mme Raquin s'était prise pour lui d'une amitié maternelle; elle le savait gêné, mangeant mal, couchant dans un grenier, et lui avait dit une fois pour toutes que son couvert serait toujours mis à leur table" (*Thérèse Raquin* 57-58).

character susceptible to the temptation of *volupté*, to “*la chute*,” emphasizing the dangers of “*l’abandon*”: “Elle *s’abandonnait*, étourdie par le léger vertige qui lui venait du tas de linge, *sans dégoût* pour l’haleine vineuse de Coupeau. Et *le gros baiser* qu’ils échangèrent à pleine bouche, au milieu des saletés du métier, était comme *une première chute*, dans *le lent avachissement de leur vie*.” Gervaise demonstrates a “vague preoccupation d’un désir sensuel, grandi dans sa lassitude,” and satisfies this sensual urge through watching Goujet (who harbors an innocent love for her) work at the forge. Characteristic of Naturalist writing, Gervaise also experiences a physical reaction to the presence of Lantier, her former lover, reminiscent of Thérèse’s physical reactions when she first sees Laurent:¹¹⁶ “Gervaise sentit un froid lui monter des jambes au coeur, et elle n’osait plus bouger.... Alors Gervaise, torturée par la présence de Lantier, ne put retenir ses pleurs; il lui semblait que la chanson disait son tourment.... Gervaise... vécut dans un grand trouble. Elle éprouvait au creux de l’estomac cette chaleur dont elle s’était sentie brûlée” (*L’Assommoir* 158-257 passim, emphasis mine).

One can observe how Zola’s views on adultery developed in *L’Assommoir*, in his descriptions of her affair with Lantier; the affair, as in *Thérèse Raquin*, is portrayed as both an immoral, yet unavoidable, crime against the family, a result of the woman’s predetermined hereditary “inability” to resist. Zola condemns adultery and paints the consequences, repercussions, and catastrophes caused by the “foyer disloqué” in the *Rougon-Macquart* (Krakowski 61). The portrayal of Gervaise’s affair shows that Zola’s views on the sexual dangers of women remain strong, as does his judgment about

¹¹⁶ One remembers Thérèse’s previously cited reaction (see Chapter Two) as she observes Laurent for the first time, experiencing a sensual curiosity (*Thérèse Raquin* 43).

adultery; he does, however, attribute Gervaise's "weakness" mostly to her milieu. Gervaise's "weakness," enveloped in her *volupté*, is made apparent before the affair commences, as she expresses fears of her lack of resistance; Zola writes that "Sa grande peur venait de ce qu'elle redoutait d'être sans forces, s'il la surprenait un soir toute seule et s'il s'avisait de l'embrasser. Elle pensait trop à lui, elle restait trop pleine de lui" (*L'Assommoir* 257). Gervaise succumbs to Lantier's seduction in a similar manner as does Thérèse to Laurent's seduction:¹¹⁷ "[E]lle fut *sans force*, elle sentit un grand *bourdonnement*, un grand *frisson* descendre dans sa *chair*. . . . Elle *tremblait*, elle *perdait la tête*" (*L'Assommoir* 294, emphasis mine). Unlike Thérèse, who gains some limited agency and adapts "naturally" to the role of mistress, one can see in Gervaise's initial disgust with herself Zola's judgment of adultery; Zola's perceptions of the dangers of *volupté* and his condemnations of adultery remain apparent even in the *Rougon-Macquart*. Hansen states that, in *L'Assommoir*, "La saleté correspond à l'immoralité" (44), and initially Gervaise expresses guilt with language of "*saleté*" and "*ordure*"¹¹⁸ (*L'Assommoir* 298). Despite this initial reaction, Gervaise becomes habituated to the *ménage à trois*, as a result of circumstances and the milieu in which she lives: "[D]ans ces conditions, tout se pardonnait, personne ne pouvait lui jeter la pierre. Elle se disait dans la loi de la nature" (*L'Assommoir* 299). Gervaise's "*péché*" eventually leads to the

¹¹⁷ "Puis, d'un mouvement violent, Laurent se baissa et prit la jeune femme contre sa poitrine. Il lui renversa la tête, lui écrasant les lèvres sous les siennes. Elle eut un mouvement de révolte sauvage, emportée, et, tout d'un coup, elle *s'abandonna, glissant par terre, sur le carreau*" (*Thérèse Raquin* 51, emphasis mine).

¹¹⁸ Zola writes, "Dans les commencements, elle s'était trouvée bien *coupable*, bien *sale*, et elle avait eu un *dégoût* d'elle-même. Quand elle sortait de la chambre de Lantier, elle se *lavait* les mains, elle mouillait un torchon et se frottait les épaules à les écorcher, comme pour *enlever son ordure*" (*L'Assommoir* 298, emphasis mine).

disintegration of the family, further evidence of the dangers of *volupté* and adultery:

Ils accusaient la malchance, ils prétendaient que Dieu leur en voulait. Un vrai bousin, leur chez-eux, à cette heure.... Tous les trois, Coupeau, Gervaise, Nana, restaient pareils à des crins, s'avalant pour un mot, avec de la haine plein les yeux; et il semblait que quelque chose avait cassé, le grand ressort de la famille, la mécanique,¹¹⁹ qui, chez les gens heureux, fait battre les coeurs ensemble. (*L'Assommoir* 351)

In both Zola's earlier novel and in *L'Assommoir*, one can also observe the image of woman as sexual object.¹²⁰ Like Laurent, Coupeau desires to "prendre possession" of Gervaise (*L'Assommoir* 59). Descriptions of Gervaise in the novel emphasize the physical,¹²¹ although her generous (and one could say, full of stereotypically feminine compassion) nature is also mentioned. The scene where Coupeau, intoxicated, wants to touch the female employees of the *lavoir* communicates a reified, sexualized view of women:¹²² "Les femmes, ça me connaît, je ne leur ai jamais rien cassé. On pince une dame, n'est-ce pas? Mais on ne va pas plus loin; on honore simplement le sexe... Et puis, quand on étale sa marchandise, c'est pour qu'on fasse son choix, pas vrai? Pourquoi la grande blonde montre-t-elle tout ce qu'elle a?" (*L'Assommoir* 162). The theme of woman

¹¹⁹ Gervaise, the wife/mother, is responsible for the morality of the marriage, and her adulterous behavior causes their broken home.

¹²⁰ This idea will be further explored below, in the comparative study of *Nana*.

¹²¹ "Gervaise, les manches retroussées, montrant ses beaux bras de blonde, jeunes encore, à peine rosés aux coudes, commençait à décrocher son linge" (*L'Assommoir* 23).

¹²² The comparison of *la femme* to animals, particularly to the cat, is also present in *L'Assommoir*; as Zola describes how Gervaise prefers Lantier's bed because it is cleaner, he writes that "Enfin, elle ressemblait aux chattes qui aiment à se coucher en rond sur le linge blanc" (299).

as victim especially dominates the character of Gervaise, who suffers as a victim of her own deterministic *hérédité* and her unfortunate milieu. The men of her *ménage à trois* help lead her to financial ruin,¹²³ and as her situation progressively worsens, she tells herself that “son malheur ne venait pas d’elle” (*L’Assommoir* 311); one can see the binary view of the woman-as-victim and the woman-as-evil perpetuated here. Furthermore, like Thérèse who turns to prostitution to escape her guilt- and nightmare-ridden marriage to Laurent, Gervaise attempts to prostitute herself to escape the throes of misery and hunger.¹²⁴

Zola includes social critique in both *Thérèse Raquin* and *L’Assommoir*, although he targets different issues in each novel.¹²⁵ The bourgeois critique, however, is present in both: in *Thérèse Raquin* through the Thursday night guests (see Chapter One), and in *L’Assommoir* through the Lorilleux (Coupeau’s sister and her husband). While Zola critiques the ignorance and mediocrity of the *petite bourgeoisie* in his earlier novel, he attacks the avarice and snobbish attitude of the group in *L’Assommoir*. The Lorilleux treat Gervaise with condescension, as a “curieuse importune amenée par Coupeau.” Mme Lorilleux haughtily regrets her brother’s choice of wife, stating that “Sans doute, la famille aurait peut-être désiré.... On fait toujours des projets. Mais les choses tournent si

¹²³ Coupeau and Lantier, “[l]es gaillards, attablés jusqu’au menton, bouffaient la boutique, s’engraissaient de la ruine de l’établissement; et ils s’excitaient l’un l’autre à mettre les morceaux doubles” (*L’Assommoir* 270).

¹²⁴ “Entre voler et faire ça, elle aimait mieux faire ça.... Elle n’allait jamais disposer que de son bien. Sans doute, ce n’était guère propre; mais le propre et le pas propre se brouillaient dans sa caboche, à cette heure; quand on crève de faim, on ne cause pas tant philosophie, on mange le pain qui se présente” (*L’Assommoir* 439).

¹²⁵ In *L’Assommoir*, Zola primarily exposes the misery of the lower classes during the period of Haussmannization and industrialization in the second half of the nineteenth century, and the negative causes and social effects of alcoholism.

drôlement. . . . Il nous aurait amené la dernière des dernières” (68). Their avarice distinguishes them as well; they refuse to support Maman Coupeau, whom Gervaise takes in herself, finding it “honteux qu’une femme de cet âge, ayant trois enfants, fût ainsi abandonnée du ciel et de la terre” (172). The Lorilleux never accept Gervaise, *une Autre*, into their family, choosing instead to envy her successes¹²⁶ and rejoice in her eventual failure (*L’Assommoir* 66-172 passim).

In the same manner that Thérèse’s childhood, “stifled” due to her cousin’s constant illnesses, influences her adult (“hypocritical”) character, so does that of Anna “Nana” Coupeau, Gervaise and Coupeau’s daughter. One sees her as a child in *L’Assommoir*, neglected by her parents,¹²⁷ already “une vaurienne finie” at age six and demonstrating a love of power over others, “une despotisme fantasque de grande personne ayant du vice” (168-69). At age ten, Nana learns to dance and speak *patois* from Lantier, and has “les yeux déjà pleins de vice” (269). The child witnesses her mother going to bed with Lantier, and one can already guess what she will become,¹²⁸ with her “curiosité sensuelle” and her power over men. Zola describes, in Naturalistic fashion, how her dispositions combine with her environment to lead to her “fall”: “Nana complétait à l’atelier une jolie éducation! Oh! elle avait des dispositions, bien sûr. Mais

¹²⁶ Gervaise wants to “écraser les Lorilleux,” and experiences a brief moment of triumph at the dinner she hosts: “Lorilleux et Mme Lorilleux pinçaient le nez, suffoqués de voir une oie pareille sur la table de la Banban” (*L’Assommoir* 218, 231).

¹²⁷ Here lies another parallel between Nana and Thérèse: one was neglected by her parents while the other was abandoned/orphaned.

¹²⁸ Hansen states: “L’exemple maternel et l’hérédité pervertissent Nana dès l’enfance et selon les théories déterministes, elle n’a aucune chance d’être sauvée” (75).

ça l'achevait, la fréquentation d'un tas de filles déjà éreintées de misère et de vice.¹²⁹ On était là les unes sur les autres, on se pourrissait ensemble" (*L'Assommoir* 168-387 passim).

Zola published *Nana* in 1880, three years after *L'Assommoir*. The ninth book in the Rougon-Macquart series, *Nana* presents a critique of Second Empire society through a portrait of the adult life of Gervaise's daughter,¹³⁰ now a *courtisane* in Paris, and her ruination of her various lovers. The most prevalent aspect of Nana's character, observable from her very first appearance in the novel, is her sexuality:

[C]ette grosse fille qui gloussait comme une poule, dégageait autour d'elle une odeur de vie, une toute-puissance de femme, dont le public se grisait.... Elle était nue avec une tranquille audace, certaine de la toute-puissance de sa chair.... [S]es épaules rondes, sa gorge d'amazone dont les pointes roses se tenaient levées et rigides comme des lances, ses larges hanches qui roulaient dans un balancement voluptueux, ses cuisses de blonde grasse, tout son corps se devinait, se voyait sous le tissu léger.... Et Nana... restait victorieuse avec sa chair de marbre... souriante et grandie dans sa souveraine nudité. (*Nana* 31, 37, 39-40)

Zola objectifies Nana as a voluptuous body, just as he reifies Thérèse as a mere profile.

Physical, sexualized descriptions of Nana appear throughout the novel,¹³¹ as well as

¹²⁹ One can remark here the idea that women can corrupt other women, and the perceived danger of sororization.

¹³⁰ Hansen labels Gervaise and Nana "des allégories de la chair" (90).

¹³¹ Her physical traits are mentioned while comte Muffat and others tour the *coulisses du théâtre*: "Et les bras nus, les épaules nues, la pointe des seins à l'air, dans son adorable

repeated comparisons of Nana to different animals – cats and birds, in particular. The comparison between women and animals was commonplace at the time in art and literature; Dijkstra writes that “[w]hen Eve consorted with the serpent, the scaly patterns that stuck to her skin tended to transform themselves into a fowl’s feathers or, better still, into the mane of a predatory cat” (*Idols of Perversity* 271).

Such descriptions of the female form, used repeatedly by Zola in the *série des Rougon-Macquart*, “illustrate the commodification of sexual desire that characterised [sic] Second Empire society” (H. Thompson 61). In *Thérèse Raquin*, the dangers of *volupté* are connected to criminality, as the lovers murder Camille; in *Nana*, however, Zola develops this theme of the dangers of *volupté*, painting it more broadly as a threat to the social order.¹³² Nana’s power over men, stemming from her sexuality, is emphasized from the beginning of the novel; she has the faculty of giving “le coup de folie de son sexe, ouvrant l’inconnu du désir. Nana souriait toujours, mais d’un sourire aigu de mangeuse d’hommes.... Peu à peu, Nana avait pris possession du public et maintenant chaque homme la subissait.... [S]on sexe assez fort pour détruire tout ce monde et n’en être pas entamé” (*Nana* 38-40).

Nana manipulates others, especially her lovers, using her sexuality, and this

jeunesse de blonde grasse.... Elle avait les hanches très fortes” (*Nana* 145-46); and again as Nana contemplates herself in a mirror, “absorbée dans son ravissement d’elle-même.... [E]lle étudia d’autres parties de son corps, amusée, reprise de ses curiosités vicieuses d’enfant.... Lentement, elle ouvrit les bras pour développer son torse de Vénus grasse, elle ploya la taille, s’examinant de dos et de face, s’arrêtant au profil de sa gorge, aux rondeurs fuyantes de ses cuisses” (217).

¹³² Nana does, of course, indirectly “murder” men in the novel, since they die because of her; she also destroys the lives of others, metaphorically “murdering” them as well. See note 133 below.

power makes her a threat to the Second Empire patriarchy (H. Thompson 62). Hansen writes that in Zola's works, "la femme n'a pas le droit de disposer de son corps comme elle l'entend puisque ses écarts de conduite mènent au désastre" (147); Nana represents the summit of this corporally-inspired destruction, as she ruins lover after lover,¹³³ a true "mangeuse d'hommes" (*Nana* 359). One observes yet again Zola's fear of feminine sexuality, especially in the article "La Mouche d'or" that Fauchery writes about Nana in the novel (*Nana* 213-17). The article naturalistically explains the roots of Nana's sexual "détraquement" in her heredity and milieu, and characterizes her as a corruptive force of social destruction: "une jeune fille, née de quatre ou cinq générations d'ivrognes, le sang gâté par une longue hérédité de misère et de boisson... Avec elle, la pourriture qu'on laissait fermenter dans le peuple, remontait et pourrissait l'aristocratie. Elle devenait une force de la nature, un ferment de destruction, sans le vouloir elle-même, corrompant et désorganisant Paris entre ses cuisses de neige" (*Nana* 216-17).

Comparable to his emphasis on Thérèse's "wild" nature and alterity, Zola maintains a heavy accent on Nana's sexuality and her position as a destructive Other in the world of Comte Muffat and her other lovers.¹³⁴ Nana, coming from the "pavé parisien" of a *faubourg*, cannot ever truly belong in *le monde* of the aristocracy (*Nana* 216). The alterity confirmed by her background and profession is further emphasized

¹³³ A brief summary of Nana's primary ruined lovers follows: Vandevres, financially ruined, commits suicide; comte Muffat, morally and financially ruined and driven almost mad; Philippe Hugon, commits theft for Nana and finishes in prison; George Hugon, refused by Nana and commits suicide (*Nana* 376, 437, 412, 420).

¹³⁴ As in *Thérèse Raquin* and in *L'Assommoir*, love triangles play a role in this novel – between Nana, the comte Muffat, and her various rotating lovers, including Satin, a female prostitute.

when she begins a relationship with Satin, a prostitute. Together, the two women condemn the “saleté des hommes,” and find comfort in one another (*Nana* 249). For Nana, the relationship is at least partly an expression of liberty (or a desire for liberty); with Muffat installing her in an *hôtel*, and her dependence on her lovers for money to live, Nana communicates a desire for freedom at several points in the novel.¹³⁵ Nana defends her relationship with Satin, telling her male lovers that “il n’y avait rien de plus commun ni de plus naturel.... [S]i ça ne te convient pas, c’est bien simple... Les portes sont ouvertes... Voilà! il faut me prendre comme je suis” (*Nana* 324). One could view their relationship as a kind of revolt against male dominance, as both women have suffered abuse at the hands of men: “[L]es deux femmes, face à face, échangeant un regard tendre, s’imposaient et régnaient, avec le tranquille abus de leur sexe et leur mépris avoué de l’homme” (*Nana* 330). Zola connects both Thérèse’s Otherness (in her background) and Nana’s Otherness (in her background and in her lesbian relationship) to their sexuality, again expressing a fear of the feminine¹³⁶ and revealing social anxieties of the period; in the late nineteenth century, feminism and lesbianism were seen as linked,¹³⁷

¹³⁵ Nana begins a relationship with the comte de Vandevres as a protest of “liberty” against the exigencies of Muffat: “Elle céda, non par toquade, plutôt pour se prouver qu’elle était libre.... Lui aussi accepta les conditions de Nana, une liberté entière, des tendresses à jours fixes” (*Nana* 311). She manipulates the men in her life for money, and although she holds a sexual power over them, she does not experience true freedom: “Ça l’ennuyait à la fin, de n’être pas libre; et, dans sa révolte sourde, montait le furieux besoin de faire une bêtise.... [C]omme elle aurait lâché tout ce monde, si elle ne s’était répété vingt fois par jour des maximes de bonne conduite!” (*Nana* 211).

¹³⁶ Zola’s male anxiety can be sensed in his condemnation of their relationship, calling Satin Nana’s “vice” and explaining her threatening and dangerous power over Nana (*Nana* 321, 335).

¹³⁷ Shapiro explains the male fears of both the feminist and the lesbian: “The connection between the emancipated woman and lesbianism... had become... a commonplace [sic]

and these women were viewed as “dangerous in their independence and nonreproductivity”¹³⁸ (Shapiro 181).

An important element present in *Thérèse Raquin* that Zola develops further in *Nana* is the dualistic image of woman as an incarnation of virtue/vice. Nana fills the role of temptress¹³⁹ (vice), and her image is weighed against that of the comtesse Sabine Muffat, the image of virtue, throughout the novel; Sabine herself becomes “corrupted” as the novel progresses, showing, once again, the prevalent view that all women have the capacity (if not the instinct or affinity) for evil and sexual transgression.¹⁴⁰ One observes a strong parallelism between the third chapter, describing a *salon hebdomadaire* of the aristocracy, and the fourth chapter, describing a dinner hosted by Nana (*Nana* 69-129). The gentlemen at the salon begin to compare the comtesse and the courtesan:

by the 1890s. Like earlier symbols of female deviancy, ‘the lesbian’ worked as the condensed image that fused multiple and overlapping anxieties.... [F]or Chevalier... the end for the woman who had the confidence and the independence of a man, who no longer needed the guardianship of men – that is, the end of *la vraie jeune fille* – could only be lesbianism. Doing without a man’s protection, she would do without his love” (197).

¹³⁸ Reproduction was highly valued as the feminine purpose; one can further observe Zola’s judgment of his female characters as both Thérèse and Nana miscarry (*Thérèse Raquin* 189; *Nana* 381-82).

¹³⁹ Thérèse precedes Nana in this role, and even in prostitution. In Zola’s earlier novel, Thérèse attempts to escape her guilt through vice and prostitutes herself for a brief time: “Elle était vêtue d’étoffes claires, et, pour la première fois, il remarqua qu’elle s’habillait comme une fille, avec une robe à longue traîne; elle se dandinait sur le trottoir d’une façon provocante, regardant les hommes, relevant si haut le devant de sa jupe, en la prenant à poignée, qu’elle montrait tout le devant de ses jambes, ses bottines lacées et ses bas blancs.... Les hommes qui l’avaient regardée de face se retournaient pour la voir par-derrière” (*Thérèse Raquin* 194). Before this scene, Laurent compares Thérèse to a prostitute as they quarrel about culpability (*Thérèse Raquin* 176).

¹⁴⁰ The nineteenth century saw a considerable rise in open prostitution, which led many contemporaries to the “conclusion that something deep in woman’s nature was at fault” (*Idols of Perversity* 356).

[L]es poils noirs du signe qu'elle avait au coin des lèvres blondissaient. Absolument le signe de Nana, jusqu'à la couleur... Et tous les deux continuèrent le parallèle entre Nana et la comtesse. Ils leur trouvaient une vague ressemblance dans le menton et dans la bouche; mais les yeux n'étaient pas du tout pareils. Puis, Nana avait l'air bonne fille; tandis qu'on ne savait pas avec la comtesse, on aurait dit une chatte¹⁴¹ qui dormait, les griffes rentrées, les pattes à peines agitées d'un frisson nerveux... Vandeuves jurait que la comtesse était une très honnête femme. (Nana 90-91)

Zola illustrates the hypocrisy¹⁴² of the Second Empire *haute société* and its moral decay¹⁴³ simultaneously, as the “virtuous” Sabine is discovered to have a lover of her own; this also further confirms Zola's view of the dual nature of women (vice/virtue). In a similar fashion to his use of Thérèse to express a critique of the bourgeoisie, Zola presents his critique of the aristocracy's hypocrisy using Nana as a mouthpiece:

Si vous n'étiez pas des mufes, vous seriez aussi gentils chez vos femmes que chez nous; et si vos femmes n'étaient pas des dindes, elles se donneraient pour vous garder la peine que nous prenons pour vous avoir... Tout ça, c'est des manières.... [E]lles ne sont seulement pas propres, tes femmes honnêtes!... Si les femmes honnêtes s'en mêlent et nous prennent

¹⁴¹ Another repetition of woman as cat.

¹⁴² Nelson writes that the “theme of social hypocrisy in *Nana* is associated with Zola's treatment of the traditional theme of the courtesan in a new and personal way... as an agent of corruption” (*Zola and the Bourgeoisie* 52).

¹⁴³ In the *Rougon-Macquart*, the targets of Zola's anti-Imperial “polemic are the corruption, frivolity, and greed of Second Empire society” (*Zola and the Bourgeoisie* 9).

nos amants!.... Si j'étais homme, c'est moi qui me ficherais des femmes!
Les femmes, vois-tu, en haut comme en bas, ça se vaut: toutes noceuses et
compagnie. (*Nana* 223-24)

In this scene, Nana attacks the idealization of the “femmes honnêtes,” and reveals to the comte Muffat that his “virtuous” wife also has taken a lover. Sabine’s image begins to increasingly resemble Nana’s, including an “appétit de jouissances mondaines, qui dévorait leur fortune” and “caprices ruineux” (*Nana* 388). In order to exhibit the destructive influence of Nana and those like her on society (and particularly on Sabine), Zola uses the metaphor of the song from Nana’s play, the *Blonde Vénus*, playing at Sabine’s party: “[L]a valse canaille de la *Blonde Vénus*, d’une onde sonore, d’un frisson chauffant les murs. Il semblait que ce fût quelque vent de la chair, venu de la rue, balayant tout un âge mort dans la hautaine demeure, emportant le passé des Muffat, un siècle d’honneur et de foi endormi sous les plafonds” (*Nana* 391).

In this way, Zola uses the dualistic female representation of virtue/vice as a component of his social critique presented in the novel. While he uses Thérèse to critique adultery and the *petite bourgeoisie* in his earlier novel,¹⁴⁴ he creates Nana as an incarnation of the destruction and moral decay of the Second Empire, and as a prototype

¹⁴⁴ The idea of the guilt of sexual fault is present in both novels. In *Thérèse Raquin*, Laurent’s guilt is physically manifested in his paintings, all with the face of his victim; in *Nana*, the Catholic guilt of comte Muffat is comparable (Bertrand-Jennings 28). Bertrand-Jennings expounds: “La pulsion sexuelle et sa manifestation sentimentale apparaissent uniquement comme source de tourments moraux les plus cruels ainsi que les catastrophes les plus variées: déchéances dans *L’Assommoir*... désorganisation... des fondements mêmes de la société dans *Nana*” (12).

of the “(sexually) threatening woman”¹⁴⁵ (Shapiro 23). The end of *Nana* can be seen as foreshadowing the end of the Empire; Nana’s body decomposes,¹⁴⁶ much as society was decomposing, as one hears the beginnings of the Franco-Prussian War with chants of “À Berlin! à Berlin! à Berlin!” (*Nana* 467). Zola’s examination of nineteenth-century life in his novels, especially in the *Rougon-Macquart*, exposes “the moral corruption, egoism and hypocrisy of an acquisitive society” (*Zola and the Bourgeoisie* 20).

Various themes and plot action present in *Thérèse Raquin* thus appear in Zola’s later works, especially in *L’Assommoir* and *Nana* as discussed above. Violence¹⁴⁷ plays a role in all three novels: Laurent beats Thérèse in an attempt to forget his guilt (*Thérèse Raquin* 185); Coupeau, lost in his alcoholism, strikes Gervaise (*L’Assommoir* 211); and Nana is physically abused by Fontan, one of her lovers (*Nana* 246). Death, or its symbolism, has an important presence in all three novels as well – it serves as an escape or “final” liberation for all three heroines. Bertrand-Jennings explains the significance of death in Zola’s novels:

Refuge ultime de la conscience coupable, dernière étape de l’expiation des

¹⁴⁵ Nana represents both the power of destruction and of pleasure. She is compared to both a monster, and to the sun rising on a battlefield: “Comme ces monstres antiques dont le domaine redouté était couvert d’ossements, elle posait les pieds sur des cranes; et des catastrophes l’entouraient.... Son oeuvre de ruine et de mort était faite.... [E]lle avait vengé son monde, les gueux et les abandonnés. Et tandis que, dans une gloire, son sexe montait et rayonnait sur ses victimes étendues, pareil à un soleil levant qui éclaire un champ de carnage, elle gardait son inconscience de bête superbe, ignorante de sa besogne, bonne fille toujours” (*Nana* 449-50).

¹⁴⁶ Nana’s body decomposes just as does Camille’s and then his murderers’.

¹⁴⁷ Recalling the violence between Thérèse and Laurent, Nana and Fontan, and Nana and Muffat, one might consider the idea of sadomasochism. Bertrand-Jennings comments, in the context of Zola’s *oeuvre*: “les délices goûtés par les amants s’accompagnent presque inévitablement des violences caractéristiques de rapports sado-masochistes” (13).

crimes contre la chasteté, cas limite de la dissociation de l'âme d'avec le corps, du sensible d'avec le sensuel, la mort semble donc seule capable, du moins au stade qui précède les romans messianiques, d'opérer la réconciliation par l'absurde de l'être avec sa conscience. (35)

As Thérèse can escape the hauntings of her guilt only through death, Gervaise escapes misery and poverty; and Nana's death functions as the only real liberation she experiences. Zola's *Thérèse Raquin* thus lays the foundations of his views on the dangers of (illicit) sexuality that are developed throughout the *série des Rougon-Macquart*; H. Thompson states that his primary message is that "failure to control the 'human beast' brings about the protagonists' untimely and horrific demise" (55).

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Zola's *Thérèse Raquin* goes beyond the all-too-often reductionist analyses of Naturalism critics, and even beyond the author's stated intent¹⁴⁸ communicated in his second edition's preface. In the novel, one can observe a typical bourgeois marriage, portrayed in a way that shows the author's support for contemporary norms and gendered roles in marriage. At the same time, Zola describes his heroine's ennui in her marriage and her desire for escape through her adulterous affair. It is clear that Zola was influenced by his own social milieu in his characterization of Thérèse and Camille's *ménage*; Schor writes that Zola was "the heir to an entire century of questioning sexual roles" (*Breaking the Chain* 30). Novels of the nineteenth century often included a "crisis of distinctions," manifested by the increased presentation of "effeminate male characters," such as Camille, and of "viriloid female characters," such as Thérèse¹⁴⁹ (*Breaking the Chain* 30).

¹⁴⁸ Sophie Ménard writes that Zola's Naturalist characterization of Thérèse and Laurent serves a symbolic purpose: "En faisant de ses personnages des 'brutes humaines,' Zola ne rebaisse pas nécessairement... l'homme à son animalité; il fait plutôt abstraction de l'hypocrisie et du vernis sociaux tout autant que des voiles qui masquent réellement le corps et la conscience pour mettre à nu une autre voix, qui est celle de l'instinct" (262).

¹⁴⁹ Again, a connection can be made between Thérèse's "masculine" characteristics and both her "exotic" sexuality and her criminality, taking murder, traditionally a man's tool, as her own to achieve the death of Camille and her later marriage to Laurent. One could also point out that social critics at towards the end of the nineteenth century were attributing the loss of the Franco-Prussian War to Frenchmen's "effeminate" nature;

Using the character of Thérèse, an outsider in the Raquins' Parisian life due to her hybrid background and her gender, Zola also expresses social critique. The Raquins' Thursday night guests, *des bourgeois types*, are portrayed as ignorant and ridiculous, incarnations of middle-class mediocrity. One glimpses nineteenth-century industrialization in the employ of Laurent and Camille at the railway company, and shifts in consumerism can be seen in the description of the arcade in decline¹⁵⁰ (the *Passage du Pont-Neuf*) (Harrow 107). The imagery of the *Passage*, dismal and tomb-like, connotes "la mort dans ce Paris du Second Empire en pleine métamorphose" (Dubois and Sonntag 258). Thérèse's feelings of being buried in the boutique are symbolic of her repression in this milieu,¹⁵¹ and also represent the monotony of the repetitive consumer-driven lifestyle.¹⁵² According to Naturalism, a character's milieu and education are, with *hérédité*, deciding factors in his or her formation and the source of flaws (Krakowski 72); a hypocrite due to her milieu's influence, Thérèse becomes an adulteress due to her stereotypically-painted heredity.

In spite of Zola's descriptions of his heroine's ennui in her marriage, her desire

Shapiro indicates that "the defeat of France by the Prussians in 1870 intensified worries that modern French civilization was fundamentally emasculating" (195).

¹⁵⁰ Lapp describes the arcade as "a kind of nether world, shutting out or denaturing life. By its very narrowness and darkness it represents the antithesis of all that is natural.... Life in this narrow space...must be marked by futility" (90).

¹⁵¹ The descriptions of the *Passage du Pont-Neuf* are filled with images of "sickness, death, crime and violence. The total immersion of the reader in the 'thickened' description is a stylistic analogue to the metaphorical drowning of Thérèse in the cloying Raquin milieu, and anticipates the literal immersion of Camille in the muddy waters of the Seine" (Harrow 116).

¹⁵² Rachel Bowlby writes that, in the nineteenth century, "the human subject in consumer capitalist society is objectified and fragmented, broken up according to the constantly changing demands of fashion" (26).

for escape through her adulterous affair, and her judgment of the bourgeois Thursday guests, his representation of Thérèse remains embedded in the prevalent views of his contemporaries. Her Otherness is highlighted, both as a wife powerless in marriage and as a woman of hybrid, “exotic” identity. The nineteenth-century wife was the husband’s personal property; Dijkstra describes how the servitude of the female sex in the marital context was very attractive “to the middle-class male, with his well-developed acquisitive urge and its concomitant aggressive energies” (*Idols of Perversity* 111). Woman is subjected to man’s law, and she and her children take the man’s name; one must recall how Thérèse was legally recognized by her French father, who gave her his name, and then takes the name Raquin when she marries Camille. According to the perspectives of Zola and his nineteenth-century contemporaries, women’s roles in their bourgeois patriarchal society were reduced to spouse and mother (Hansen 144). Thérèse, in representing the bourgeois wife, has no agency; as Schor writes, “Zola’s bourgeois women are under house arrest” (“Mother’s Day: Zola’s Women” 14).

On one hand, thusly, Zola presents Thérèse as a victim – she is unhappy in her marriage and has become a hypocrite in her milieu, having to repress her “wild” nature.¹⁵³ Nevertheless, Zola’s condemnation of her attempted escape, her affair with Laurent, is clear in this novel (and in his later works). Zola does not describe the affair abstractly in terms of emotions, but rather as a physical appetite, with “[t]he illusions of

¹⁵³ The repression of female desire, in particular, is a common theme in the fiction of this time; Schor explains that “representational fiction has from its origins figured the particularly inexorable repression to which female desire is subject under bourgeois patriarchy.... [S]trategies [were] deployed in representation to contain female libido” (*Breaking the Chain* x-xi).

desire...deromanticised by the analytical force of physiology” (White 21). Krakowski explains Zola’s disapproval of the violence of passion and his perception of *volupté* as dangerous: “Zola...n’approuve pas, dans l’amour, les sentiments violents, qui sont de nature à dérégler l’existence.... [Thérèse et Laurent] vivent dans une espèce d’exaltation permanente qui leur ôte souvent toute sagesse.... Livrée à la passion, la femme la plus raisonnable perd toute notion de bon sens et de justice” (83-85). One feels the presence of the male judge,¹⁵⁴ who could represent patriarchal society, in Camille’s haunting of Thérèse and Laurent after the murder and after their marriage; Madame Raquin’s silent gaze also symbolizes judgment. Bertrand-Jennings points out the moralistic *lexique* of Zola’s early novels as an indication of his condemnation of adultery as sin/crime and of his confirmation of assigned gender roles within marriage: “[L]’accouplement n’est jamais désigné que comme le mal, la faute, la honte, la souillure, le péché,¹⁵⁵ voire le crime [...] [L]’approche de la sexualité est toujours une descente aux enfers; et la passion amoureuse toujours maudite, uniquement source des maux les plus atroces et les plus divers est durement *châtiée sur les perpétrants* ou sur leur descendance” (14, 127, emphasis mine). The perpetrators in *Thérèse Raquin* are, indeed, punished by death. Thérèse is Other not only in her role as wife, but also in her hybrid Algerian-French

¹⁵⁴ According to *Breaking the Codes*, “within the formula of melodramatic narrative, the appropriate power relations are fixed by the right of a male character to pardon as well as to punish – ‘the fate of the woman is only assured by the good will of the man.’ According to [Léon] Métayer, the symbolic importance of the pardon derives from the assumption that...the pardon of the male, less readily available, more discriminating, stands in for the will of Society” (Métayer, qtd. in Shapiro 168).

¹⁵⁵ Hansen confirms the link between female sexual transgression and sin in Zola’s works: “[L]a déchéance féminine chez cet écrivain est directement liée à l’idée de péché; la chute résulte d’une faute commise contre le dieu de la femme, contre l’homme” (xiii).

identity, and Zola uses stereotypes associated with the Orientalist image to present Thérèse as more particularly “susceptible” to adultery and dangerous *volupté*.¹⁵⁶ Zola makes Thérèse an Other, an *Étrangère*, in her milieu through what Mitterand labels as “situations de déracinement, de dépaysement, de déstabilisation, [et] d’inadaptation” (87). She demonstrates, as is typical from Orientalist perspectives of “exoticism,” the qualities of “laziness, dissimulation, dishonesty, suspicion, unpredictability, [and] love of voluptuousness” (Silverstein 50). Thérèse’s “genetic memory” of her Algerian mother can be understood as a manifestation of the Naturalist influence of heredity on the formation of her character (Griffeths 189). Thérèse’s sexual energy is attributed to her exoticism, to the influence of her mother, hence the Naturalist conflict between the influences of heredity and milieu, and her repression. Knutson explains this tension:

Thérèse’s hypocrisy and dissimulation, the disparity between her feelings and appearance, are portrayed as the product of her childhood oppression by Mme Raquin. Zola defines Thérèse’s appetite for life and love of freedom as an inheritance from her mother... [t]he image of a strong, free-spirited child stifled by a repressive upbringing... Rather than living according to her nature, Thérèse is forced to play-act; she is buried alive and suffocated. (Knutson 143)

Thérèse thus provides an example of the mutation/conflict of identities during France’s

¹⁵⁶ Edward Said expounds upon the sexual image of the Orient, referencing Flaubert’s description of Kuchuk, an Egyptian dancer/courtesan: “Woven through all of Flaubert’s experiences... is an almost uniform association between the Orient and sex... a remarkably persistent motif in Western attitudes towards the Orient... [T]he Orient seems still to suggest not only fecundity but sexual promise (and threat), untiring sensuality, unlimited desire, deep generative energies” (188).

colonization of Algeria.¹⁵⁷

In addition, Thérèse exemplifies the stereotypical woman of vice, or temptress. The dualistic image of woman incarnating either virtue or vice was rampant in the nineteenth century (and continues today). According to Lombroso, who published views that were widespread in the latter half of the nineteenth century, there were two categories of women: “one bad, primitive, and masculine in nature, the other law-abiding, civilized, and feminine.... [B]oth types are inferior to men.... [A]ll women are to some degree deviant” (Rafter and Gibson 10). The *femme fatale* was considered a social and sexual threat, a symbol of lubricity who victimized men (Bertrand-Jennings 73). The image of the *femme fatale* relates to the female criminal, as both are acting in “masculine” ways, exerting power and using violence;¹⁵⁸ Bertrand-Jennings writes that “les femmes licencieuses ou infécondes... continuent de perpétuer le mythe de la femme fatale porteuse de la plaie sexuelle” (128).

Female criminality was viewed as social transgression, and one can view Thérèse’s crime¹⁵⁹ in the novel and the violent crimes of other women generally as a sort

¹⁵⁷ Patricia Lorcin explains the interrelation of colonialism and exile in identity formation: “The political, social, and cultural relationships established between the European and non-European populations of Algeria during the colonial period were the basis of both the collective identity of the colony and its individual members.... In exile or expatriation, these identities were again mutated, producing the ‘memory’ or ‘nostalgia’ associated with hybridity” (xxvii).

¹⁵⁸ In addition, many influential nineteenth-century scholars believed in women’s stunted evolution. According to Lombroso, “[f]emales – retarded by their passive role in courtship, their reproductive apparatus, and their material functions – remain less evolved than males into the present” (Rafter and Gibson 9).

¹⁵⁹ Knutson points out the symbolism of the outdoor setting of Camille’s murder, which “takes place in the open air, by the river, because it represents an attempt at liberation” (143).

of desperate protest. Shapiro explains this idea of protest:

The women who committed acts of violence against lovers, spouses, and rivals were producing a kind of polemic that attested to their profound sense of frustration with existing practices and customs, to their experience of extreme vulnerability, and to the loss of their hopes for the future. . . . [W]e need to read women's complaints on two levels: as descriptions of the material conditions and events of their lives and as evidence of their illusions – their hopes, dreams, and expectations. (165)

Female criminality can be considered as one expression of the tensions of social progress, as women began to increasingly question their prescribed social roles and identities, seeking to transcend the label of “inferior Other.”

This label of “inferior Other,” present in Zola's novel, appears in different forms in cinematic adaptations of *Thérèse Raquin*. Both adaptations examined in this study demonstrate different ways to construct meaning; Cheney explains that “art and film do not merely illustrate pre-existing ideas, they are also constitutive of them and themselves produce meanings for consumption. . . . Societal values are part of the meaning a spectator associates with an image” (205). The portrayal of Thérèse's crime and her Otherness in Marcel Carné's *Thérèse Raquin* and in Charlie Stratton's *In Secret* differ in each film. Carné examines social roles in the marriage of Camille and Thérèse, an unhappy one as in the novel, and paints Thérèse as a passive victim. She is a subjugated Other in her gender, but the element of Orientalist exoticism is transferred to Laurent in Carné's film, a romantic Italian Other, both a foreigner and a member of the working class. Carné

transposes the story into post-World War II Lyon and makes adjustments to appeal to his own contemporaries, becoming “a statement about psychic damage in the aftermath of the world wars” (Mayer-Robin 162). Instead of using the specter of the murdered husband to judge the guilty lovers, Carné personifies this judgment in Riton: Carné and Spaak “decided to embody rather than aestheticize the specter: ‘Why not, instead of remorse figured by a phantom, create a very vital character, who was the involuntary witness of the husband’s murder by the two lovers?’ Camille the *revenant*, a role elided by Carné, makes the novel more haunting than the film” (Bloom 36).

Stratton, on the other hand, for the most part stays faithful to Zola’s text; the temporal/geographical setting is the same, and the characters exhibit many of the same qualities as in the novel, excepting that Stratton’s Camille is a more sympathetic character than Zola’s. Stratton illustrates Thérèse as an Other from the beginning of the film, as her father leaves her at Madame Raquin’s; he maintains Zola’s Orientalist exoticism and portrays Thérèse as an extremely sexualized character. The murderous couple experiences intense guilt following the murder of Camille and opt for death (which also functions as a punishment) as an escape, as in the novel. The universal themes of *Thérèse Raquin*, including “feminine desire and family dysfunction, cynical passion and criminal plotting, adultery and murder, guilt and retribution, gothic horror and everyday ‘naturalism’” are evidence of the appeal of the story and the proliferation¹⁶⁰

¹⁶⁰ The various adaptations of *Thérèse Raquin* include: a play by Zola (1873); a silent film by Jacques Feyder (1928); Carné’s film, previously discussed (1953); versions for television (1965); mini-series (1980, 2002); an opera by Tobias Picker (2001) (Harrow 105); and the most recent film by Stratton (2014).

of cinematic and theatrical adaptations¹⁶¹ (Harrow 105).

The theme of sexuality and its dangers is one that appears throughout Zola's later work. Love and death are often connected in his novels, death serving either as punishment/atonement, as in *L'Assommoir* and *Nana*, or as an escape, as in *Thérèse Raquin* (Bertrand-Jennings 13). The heroines of these three novels share some notable traits; all three are punished in some way for violating "la loi divine de chasteté" (Bertrand-Jennings 20), for a failure to conform to social and gender-prescribed expectations.¹⁶² Each novel presents a triangular character structure (albeit a rotating triangle in *Nana*), a woman between two men; this structure, according to Becker, allows for the greatest possibility of tensions and violence, showing "la lutte des deux hommes, en présence de la femme, le vainqueur emportant sa proie" (61). Like Thérèse, Gervaise Macquart is an Other in her own family, as her in-laws never accept her, and an adulteress; like Thérèse, Nana is defined by her alterity (due to her background, heredity, and milieu) and her sexuality. Thérèse functions as a precursor for subsequent *zoliennes* women, and the social critique¹⁶³ included in her novel foreshadows "the realist project central to the *Rougon-Macquart* series"¹⁶⁴ (Mayer-Robin 161).

To conclude, Zola's *Thérèse Raquin* is a novel of complexities. Zola presents

¹⁶¹ Braudy attributes the popularity of Zola in film adaptations to "the realistic setting or, more recently, the steamy mixture of sex and violence" (84).

¹⁶² Zola's "faute d'amour" is manifested through murder in *Thérèse Raquin*, through promiscuity in *L'Assommoir*, and through prostitution in *Nana* (Bertrand-Jennings 20).

¹⁶³ Mayer-Robin comments on Zola's social critique, writing that "Zola clearly struck a nerve with his newspaper-reading, theatre-going public by calling attention to a society teetering toward madness and violence, perhaps all the more frightening given its veneer of civilized modernity" (161).

¹⁶⁴ "...the first three novels of which were already in print when [the theatrical version of] *Thérèse Raquin* was staged" (Mayer-Robin 161).

therein a multi-faceted portrait of Second Empire bourgeois marriage and life, providing both support and some critical perspective of contemporary moral codes and views on women. While emphasizing both her alterity and her sexuality, Zola also manages to use Thérèse as a mouthpiece of social critique; considering her double-Other perspective of half-Algerian, half-French, and of a woman, Thérèse cannot be reduced to a mere “femme nerveuse” or a simple adulteress. Carné and Stratton translated this Otherness each in their own way in their cinematic adaptations, one emphasizing alterity and the other emphasizing Thérèse’s sexualized image. *Thérèse Raquin*, a story of adultery and murder, furnished a protagonist who would appear, in different forms, in Zola’s later works; the novel and its themes remain relevant to our twenty-first-century world.

Considered by many as Zola’s first realist novel (Helman 119), *Thérèse Raquin* illustrates more than a fantasmagoric melodrama; the novel presents an intricate portrait of the nineteenth-century woman and the society in which she lived, and presents images of the feminine Other that are still abundantly present today.

Zola’s novel demonstrates many of the dominant social attitudes and views on women of the nineteenth century, and the complexities and layers of meaning found therein provide a glimpse of the social transformations that would begin to take place in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Like many of his contemporaries (and many conservative perspectives even today), Zola defined the role of women within a patriarchal, social, and familial context. However, the late nineteenth century saw a growth in organized movements for women’s rights, with many reformers condemning the hypocrisy of the “paradox of a republicanism that asserted democratic principles”

while simultaneously basing “its claim to legitimacy on a model of social organization derived from hierarchical, ‘normal’ families that guaranteed men’s rights and women’s dependence” (Shapiro 181). With France’s declining birthrate towards the end of the nineteenth century, medical views of women’s sexuality began to change, “expanded beyond its purely provocative purposes to allow for sexual pleasure” (Mesch 65).

However, while recognizing (instead of shying away from) women’s sexuality, medical texts limited the enjoyment of female sexuality to the context of marriage with the goal of procreation (Mesch 68). This limited recognition on the part of the patriarchy demonstrates the ambivalence between the persistent binary image of woman as virgin/whore, housewife/mistress; Zola, like many of his contemporaries, could not reconcile the two,¹⁶⁵ as shown in his late novel *Fécondité* (1899). *Thérèse Raquin* shows the beginning of the development of Zola’s position on women, and further study should trace the female characters throughout his *oeuvre*; one could thus observe therein the evolution of the gender polemic of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

¹⁶⁵ Rachel Mesch explains that “the eroticization of marriage seems, initially at least, to have constrained the wife by reinforcing patriarchal categories determining her sexual behavior. The literary response to the introduction of wifely pleasure mirrored the medical preoccupation with determining the precise parameters of this pleasure: medical texts’ discussions of the dangers of excess and deprivation were matched by fictional texts’ juggling of the categories of good wife and mistress. In both cases the ostensible expansion of the wife’s sexuality beyond procreative bounds was coupled with an effort to limit her sexual behavior; the transgression of these limits was depicted as fraught with physical and emotional peril” (83).

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