

Diegetic and Non-Diegetic Sound Discourse in Zola's *Nana*

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RÉSUMÉ

Cet article examine l'utilisation du discours sonore dans Nana aux fins de démontrer que ce discours fait partie intégrale de la pratique romanesque de Zola. Bien que le roman soit d'une grande richesse visuelle, certains aspects des personnages ainsi que l'évocation du décor ou le développement de l'intrigue sont le fruit de la sensibilité acoustique de Zola et des intentions créatrices de l'écrivain. S'inspirant de la visite d'endroits particuliers et de nombreux documents de recherche, Zola crée des paysages sonores évocateurs pour les événements qu'il narre. Nous arguons que la représentation d'éléments acoustiques permet une instantanéité dramatique qui donne un caractère palpable aux situations et les anime pour le lecteur, qui peut alors, par un processus de synesthésie esthétique, les visualiser. L'approche qui guide cette analyse est celle qui a orienté nos études d'adaptations cinématographiques de romans de Zola, adaptations dans lesquelles l'univers sonore joue un rôle essentiel.

Nana is a novel of sexual obsession and decadence in which the pursuit of sensual pleasure tragically confounds rationality and leads to social shame and destruction.¹ Zola's moral purpose is well documented while aesthetic approaches to the novel have understandably focussed on the highly visual aspects of his discourse, such as the painterly descriptions of Paris or the Longchamp race course. As a scantily dressed actress, Nana herself is intended to be the focus of lustful attention and it is through the dominant male gaze, and particularly the eyes of the Catholic Comte Muffat, that the sexual objectification of Nana is conveyed.² As Comte Muffat watches her pleasuring herself, naked, in front of a mirror, he is clearly aroused, fascinated, and fearful: "Il songeait à son ancienne horreur de la femme, au monstre de l'Écriture, lubrique, sentant le fauve. [...] Muffat regardait toujours, obsédé, possédé [...]"³ Here, the moral and the aesthetic come together in this intimate scene of scopophilia. David

¹ In his ébauche for *Nana*, Zola outlines his intentions with some force: "Toute une société se ruant sur le cul. Une meute derrière une chienne, qui n'est pas en chaleur et qui se moque des chiens qui la suivent." *Nouvelles acquisitions françaises*, Ms. 10313, folio 208, BnF. Subsequently, in the *Personnages* section, folios 166-204, his character notes for Nana are equally blunt: "Il faut que le livre soit le poème du cul, et la moralité sera le cul faisant tout tourner." Cited by Henri Mitterand in *Émile Zola, Les Rougon-Macquart. Histoire naturelle et sociale d'une famille sous le Second Empire*, vol. 2 (Paris: Gallimard, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1961) 1673.

² For an informed discussion of this aspect, see Anna Gural-Migdal, *L'Écrit-Écran des Rougon-Macquart, Conceptions iconiques et filmiques du roman chez Zola* (Villeneuve d'Ascq: Presses Universitaires du Septentrion, 2012) 199-219.

³ *Émile Zola, Nana in Les Rougon-Macquart. Histoire naturelle et sociale d'une famille sous le Second Empire*, vol. 2 (Paris: Gallimard, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1961) 1271. All subsequent quotation is from this edition and thereafter indicated parenthetically with page numbers.

Baguley sums up the implicit visual eroticism characterizing *Nana* as follows: "The novel is one long, frenzied, vertiginous peep show, a veritable orgy of voyeurism."⁴

Yet Zola's account of Nana's life as actress-cum-courtesan is not simply a visual experience: it is a novel of all the senses. Sensual tactile and olfactory references abound as do frequent allusions to food and orgiastic parties in this critical exposure of hedonistic lifestyles. What is more, *Nana* draws extensively on acoustic determinants both to pattern and structure the narrative as well as to convey defining aspects of character, location and atmosphere. These elements of sound discourse are central to Zola's purpose and derive in part from documentary visits to key locations and information provided by, amongst others, Henry Céard, Ludovic Halévy and Edmond de la Porte.⁵ By weaving together such elements into his carefully shaped fiction, Zola relays a series of expressive soundscapes while furthering the trajectory of his plot. It is through auditory prompts, that Zola invites us to *experience* the ambient sounds of *Nana*. This diegetic and non-diegetic sound discourse merits further examination.

Significant aspects of characterization are determined by acoustic elements. As though actors in a radio drama, individuals come to be recognized by their voice quality and speech register. For Zola, this vocal element conveys both character and social background while, by extension, reception by others can indicate societal values. A few examples will suffice. Whereas the talented, but overlooked, Rose Mignon is "une adorable chanteuse" (1099), Nana simply cannot sing: "Jamais on n'avait entendu une voix aussi fausse, menée avec moins de méthode. [...] elle chantait comme une seringue" (1107); but the theatre owner Bordenave cynically judges that Nana, despite her "voix vinaigrée" (1108), her "voix faubourienne" (1113), has the sexual allure to fill his theatre. Her easily remembered name with "la vivacité chantante de ses deux syllabes" (1100) suggests a fun-loving spirit and, in the theatre and at the races, repeated shouts of "Nana! Nana! Nana!" signal only too clearly a decadent, pleasure-seeking society's misplaced obsession. Though Nana can play the grand lady, she cannot escape her formative past as Anna Coupeau raised in the slums of rue de la Goutte-d'Or.⁶ This is evidenced in the following scene with her maid Zoé:

[...] Nana se vengea des ennuis qu'on lui causait, en mâchant de sourds jurons contre les hommes. Ces gros mots chagrinaient la femme de chambre, car elle voyait avec peine que madame ne se dégraisait pas vite de ses commencements. Elle osa même supplier madame de se calmer. "Ah! Ouiche! répondit Nana crûment, ce sont des salauds, ils aiment ça." Pourtant, elle prit son air de princesse, comme elle disait. (1136)

⁴ David Baguley, "Zola, the novelist(s)," in *Zola and the Craft of Fiction*, eds. Robert Lethbridge and Terry Keefe (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1990) 23.

⁵ Dossier préparatoire, *Nouvelles acquisitions françaises*, Ms. 10313, BnF. *Notes de Laporte et de Céard*, folios 240-269 provide information about the world of the demi-mondaine; *Notes de Ludovic Halévy*, folios 276-81, have details of celebrated courtesans.

⁶ Anna Coupeau's promiscuous teenage years in rue de la Goutte-d'Or are sketched in the penultimate chapter of *L'Assommoir*: "Nana roulait le quartier. [...] allumait tous les bals des environs." Émile Zola, *L'Assommoir* in *Les Rougon-Macquart. Histoire naturelle et sociale d'une famille sous le Second Empire*, vol. 2 (Paris: Gallimard, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1961) 742. Lantier informs Gervaise: "Elle a fait un vicomte, je crois. Oh! très lancée! Elle peut se fichier de nous tous [...] cette gueuse!... L'amour de petit chat! non, vous n'avez pas idée d'un petit chat pareil!" (*L'Assommoir* 748).

In the company of Satin, Fontan or her maid, Nana readily reverts to slang peppered with coarse, crude expressions. Suitors or creditors, for example, are variously dismissed as “vieux grigou” or “moricaud” (1124), “nigaud” or “morveux” (1141). In this she echoes the gutter language of Satin which Zola indicates as “un langage d’une ordure continue.”⁷ Again the expression attributed to a character, either as voiced or as unvoiced thought, is a distinguishing narrative marker for Zola. The polite, refined discourse of Comtesse Sabine and her coterie talking about composers provides the indicative class contrast: “Les voix de ces dames étaient molles et languissantes. On eût dit, devant la cheminée, un recueillement d’église, le cantique discret et pâmé d’une petite chapelle” (1157).

Similar differentiating techniques apply to male characters, often being more memorable for their voices and speech register than for their appearance. The brash, stentorian Bordenave brutally trumpets his theatre as “mon bordel” (1097 and *passim*), while backstage the callboy is reduced to his functional shrill-voice: “la voix aiguë de l’avertisseur” (1197). The aristocratic Hector de la Falaise has “une voix flûtée” (1097), contrasting the rasping timbre of a street urchin “d’une voix de rogomme” (1101), while Comte Muffat, distinguished and pious, will comment “de sa voix sévère” (1114). However, it is above all with the beguiling womanizer Dagueuet, that voice timbre is signalled as all-important: “Il avait pris sa voix de cristal, une voix aux notes d’harmonica qui faisait tout son succès auprès de ces dames” (1267). Zola reiterates the seductive quality of his voice:

Les grands succès de Dagueuet auprès des dames étaient dus à la douceur de sa voix, une voix d’une pureté et d’une souplesse musicales, qui l’avait fait surnommer chez les filles Bouche-de-Velours. Toutes cédaient dans la caresse sonore dont il les enveloppait. (1363)

Zola’s characters are in part acoustic constructions and, as such, in the reader’s imagination they are clearly intended to be heard as well as visualized. Voice quality and speech are intrinsic to Zola’s technique of characterization.

Acoustic elements also contribute to Zola’s evocation of location, from Nana’s chaotic, much-frequented apartment and boisterous parties, to the contrasting formality and sedateness of Muffat’s ancestral home pointedly akin to the cold silence of the nation’s empty churches.

Two key locations, the Théâtre des Variétés and the Longchamp racecourse, serve to illustrate Zola’s technique. Following his documentary visits, both settings are established with informed architectural and topographical detail, but it is through characteristically evocative sounds that their distinctive atmosphere is rendered with the immediacy necessary to involve the reader’s emotions. These auditory prompts immediately place the narrative in the dramatic present.

In the case of the theatre in chapter 2, Zola creates a sense of space by moving the reader from the boulevard through the building and to the stage by his annotation of sound. External traffic noise is registered as the audience begins to arrive: “Des roulements de voiture s’arrêtaient court, des portières se refermaient bruyamment, et du monde entrant [...]” (1096). Inside the theatre, there is an incremental buzz as curiosity about Nana grows. Zola marks the progression, as follows: “[...] un tapage de voix montait dans lequel le nom de Nana sonnait [...]” (1100); “[...] comme un écho, Nana sonnait aux quatre coins du vestibule sur un ton plus haut [...]” (1101); “[...] une clameur grandissait, faite du bourdonnement des voix appelant

⁷ Cited by Henri Mitterand in Émile Zola, *Les Rougon-Macquart*, vol. 2, 1677.

Nana, exigeant Nana, dans un de ces coups d'esprit bête et de brutale sensualité qui passent sur les foules" (1101).

Interval bells ring out to summon late-comers and, inside the auditorium itself, the once silent, empty shell is now filled with the multi-layered sounds of excited playgoers and the orchestra tuning up: "À leurs pupitres, les musiciens accordaient leurs instruments, avec des trilles légères de flûte, des soupirs étouffés de cor, des voix chantantes de violon, qui s'envolaient au milieu du brouhaha grandissant des voix. Tous les spectateurs parlaient [...]" (1102); "[...] les musiciens attaquaient l'ouverture. On entrait toujours, l'agitation et le tapage croissaient" (1103). Cries of "Chut!" (1104), "Assis!" (1104), "Silence!" (1105) chastise late-comers. It is, then, through this layered interior soundscape that Zola builds expectation and sets the scene for Nana's stage appearance.

Thereafter the auditorium is characterized through constantly changing patterns of noise with bouts of laughter mixed with stony silence. This sound vacuum is quickly filled by the manufactured applause of the hired claque: "[...] les applaudissements de la claque crépiterent avec la régularité d'un feu de peloton" (1106). Genuine audience reactions follow, moving from the initially hostile, "on sifflotait" (1107), to ecstatic applause prompted by Nana's thinly veiled nudity: "Des applaudissements éclatèrent [...], devinrent furieux" (1108). A crescendo of cheering marks her triumph: "[...] et il y eut deux rappels, au milieu d'un tonnerre de bravos. Le cri: 'Nana! Nana!' avait roulé furieusement" (1120). Captivated males take away the voluptuous waltz tune which has become Nana's musical signature. Her baleful influence, already encapsulated in this tune, rapidly extends beyond the theatre and through society at large. The celebrated visual image of Nana as the golden fly spreading disease from the slums⁸ is matched acoustically by that of her all-pervading signature waltz now lodged in the minds of her besotted admirers.

Apart from this well-crafted building of atmosphere, it is important to note how Zola uses ambient sound to create a sense of movement, and therefore space, as he takes the reader from the traffic noise of the boulevard, through the box office area to the auditorium and eventually to the stage itself.

In his subsequent account of the theatre backstage in chapter 5, Zola again draws on ambient sound to create a sense of movement and space. Interval bells and the shouts of the callboy chivvying up actors resonate up and down the corridors:

Depuis un moment, une sonnette au loin tintait. Le son prolongé s'affaiblit, puis revint; et, quand la sonnette eut cessé, un cri courut, monta et descendit l'escalier, se perdit dans les couloirs; "En scène pour le deux!... En scène pour le deux!..." Ce cri se rapprochait, un petit homme blafard passa devant les portes du foyer, où il jeta de toute la puissance de sa voix grêle: "En scène pour le deux!" (1196)

The noise of actors' clumping feet is added to the mix: "[...] et l'on entendait, au bout du corridor, la dégingolade des pieds tapant les cinq marches de bois qui descendaient sur la scène" (1197). The call-boy grows more insistent: "'C'est frappé! c'est frappé!' répétait la voix de plus en plus perdue de l'avertisseur, courant les étages et les corridors" (1198). A burst of music heard briefly through an opened door links the space behind the stage to the stage itself:

⁸ The journalist Fauchery has written an article about Nana titled *La Mouche d'Or* in which he depicts her as a golden fly spreading disease from the slums (*Nana* 1269).

“C’est commencé! jeta la voix longue et déchirée de l’avertisseur. C’est commencé! c’est commencé!” Le cri roula un instant. Un bruit de pas rapides avait couru. Par la porte du couloir brusquement ouverte, il vint une bouffée de musique, une lointaine rumeur; et la porte retomba, on entendit le coup sourd du battant rembourré. (1198)

In these passages the modulation of sound conveys movement and frenetic activity backstage while serving to create the sense of space through its varying intensity.

The second location is again a public space: the Longchamp racecourse (ch. XI). Zola visited the course, took advice about betting procedures and the conduct of races and recorded his impressions, both visual and acoustic. This is a highly pictorial episode and the author’s painterly techniques are very much in evidence, but, once again, it is in his evocation of ambient sound that the setting is given immediacy. Here, even more so than in the theatre, the suggestion of space and movement through the present-tense characteristic of sound is paramount.

The ambient noise of high-spirited race-goers establishes the atmosphere of the scene: “Sur l’herbe, tout d’un coup, le roulement lointain qui venait des allées du Bois cessait dans un frôlement sourd; on n’entendait plus que le brouhaha de la foule croissante, des cris, des appels, des claquements de fouet envolés dans le plein air” (1379). As betting fever mounts, so does the cacophony: “Des voix glapissantes montaient, la passion du jeu soufflait, [...] tandis que les bookmakers [...] criaient des cotes [...]” (1384). In the ever-increasing din disparate sound snatches intermingle and are evoked as “[...] le tapage croissant où les noms des chevaux revenaient, dans les phrases vives des Parisiens, mêlées aux exclamations gutturales des Anglais [...]” (1384).

The sound of champagne corks popping, the odd glass breaking, horses snorting, whinnying, the thunder of hooves, bells ringing, excited spectators laughing and shouting, all serve to bring alive the day at the races, to transport the reader to the unfolding events. Zola’s invaluable documentation can be further witnessed in the hectic activities of the bookmakers:

C’était une confusion, des chiffres criés, des tumultes accueillant les changements de cote inattendus. Et, par moments, redoublant le tapage, des avertisseurs débouchaient en courant [...] jetaient violemment un cri, un départ, une arrivée, qui soulevait de longues rumeurs, dans cette fièvre du jeu battant au soleil. (1394-95)

The accumulation of these defining acoustic features testify to Zola’s aim of providing a social portrait based in observed reality while confirming his creative abilities to bring that sound portrait alive for his readers.

The Grand Prix itself is conveyed through the excitement of spectators with as much emphasis on the auditory as the visual. Modulated sound again acts to suggest space. The pack of runners may not be seen, but they can be heard approaching:

On en sentait l’approche et comme l’haleine, un ronflement lointain, grandi de seconde en seconde. Toute la foule, impétueusement, s’était jetée aux barrières; et, précédant les chevaux, une clameur profonde s’échappait des poitrines, gagnait de proche en proche, avec le bruit de mer qui déferle.[...] Et le cri de tout ce peuple, un cri de fauve reparu sous les redingotes, roulait de plus en plus distinct: “Les voilà!... Les voilà!... Les voilà!...” (1403)

An enthusiastic crescendo of cheering greets the winning success of Nana the horse:

Tout le train passa avec son roulement de foudre [...] Puis une immense acclamation retentit [...]. Ce fut comme la clameur montante d'une marée. Nana! Nana! Nana! Le cri roulait, grandissait, avec une violence de tempête, emplissant peu à peu l'horizon [...] Sur la pelouse, un enthousiasme fou s'était déclaré. Vive Nana! Vive la France! À bas l'Angleterre! (1404)

Zola's repeated use of sea and storm imagery to convey Nana's triumph inevitably recalls the use of similar imagery in *Germinal* as waves of striking miners march on the pits. With her name echoing round the race course, Nana raises a glass to her namesake: "'À Nana! À Nana!' criait-elle, au milieu d'un redoublement de vacarme, de rires, de bravos, qui peu à peu avait gagné tout l'Hippodrome" (1406). This rhythmic movement towards a crescendo of applause replicates the pattern of Nana's stage triumph witnessed in *La Blonde Vénus*.

Sound is also deployed to register differences between locations and within locations. If the emphasis given to ambient sound is important then so too is its relative absence. Whereas Nana's apartment is informal, noisy and chaotic, Sabine's drawing room speaks of cheerless aristocratic refinement, discretion, and good manners. For his account of Sabine's soirée, Zola indicates a series of contrapuntal conversations; society ladies politely discussing artistic, homely matters and men exchanging whispered confidences about sexual intrigues and, inevitably, Nana: "Les deux musiques du chapitre. Le monde, ne pas laisser tomber les conversations, en garder le ton, – et les apartés des hommes, l'échappée continue sur Nana."⁹

Accordingly, the narrative elements in the chapter are carefully orchestrated. After establishing the cold formality of the setting – "On entrait dans une dignité froide, dans des mœurs anciennes, un âge disparu exhalant une odeur de dévotion" (1144) –, Zola identifies various groups of guests in conversation. Young men, initially animated, become subdued: "Dans le fond de la pièce, les jeunes gens ne riaient plus. Le salon était collet monté, ils ne s'y amusaient guère" (1147). The arrival of Comte Muffat further dampens the mood: "Deux jeunes chuchotaient, mais ils se turent à leur tour; et l'on n'entendit plus que le pas étouffé du comte Muffat, qui traversait la pièce" (1155).

By the fireplace well-mannered society ladies, discuss in discreet tones various personalities and musical preferences: "Alors, ces dames discutèrent. Mais leurs voix demeuraient discrètes, de légers rires par moments coupaient la gravité de la conversation" (1154). Meanwhile, men exchange scurrilous stories, recount amorous adventures and discuss Muffat's patent sexual inexperience along with Sabine's apparent unwavering fidelity. Details of Nana's forthcoming party excite male interest, while female guests have a more aesthetic focus: "La phrase courait, on prenait rendez-vous; pendant que les dissertations sentimentales des dames sur la musique couvraient le petit bruit de cet embauchage" (1158).

Within this pattern of alternating conversations, the journalist Fauchery, is struck by an unexpected outburst of laughter from the group of ladies, apparently following an unintended sexual innuendo from one of the female guests: "Et ses rires, dans la solennité de la vaste pièce, prenaient un son dont Fauchery resta frappé; ils sonnaient le cristal qui se brise. Certainement, il y avait là un commencement de fêlure" (1155). The journalist's perception

⁹ Dernier plan détaillé, folio 25. Cited by Henri Mitterand in Émile Zola, *Les Rougon-Macquart*, vol. 2, 1710.

of cracks appearing in this façade of respectability is later confirmed during celebrations marking the nuptials of Muffat's daughter Estelle with Daigremont. At this stage in the narrative Nana has all but ruined Muffat, while the previously unassailable Sabine has become Fauchery's mistress in Zola's darkening account of the widespread disintegration of moral values. The waltz from *La Blonde Vénus* figures largely in the celebrations and the corrupting significance of this music, which symbolises Nana, is stressed:

Cette valse, justement la valse canaille de la *Blonde Vénus*, qui avait le rire d'une polissonnerie, pénétrait le vieil hôtel 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. (1420)

Nana may be the golden fly from the slums infecting high society, but her all-pervading corrupting influence is also found in her signature waltz:

Mais la valse déroulait toujours son balancement de rieuse volupté. C'était une reprise plus haute du plaisir battant le vieil hôtel comme une marée montante. [...] Les gaietés timides, alors à peine commençantes, que Fauchery, un soir d'avril, avait entendu sonner avec le son d'un cristal qui se brise, s'étaient peu à peu enhardies, affolées jusqu'à cet éclat de fête. Maintenant, la fêlure augmentait; elle lézardait la maison, elle annonçait l'effondrement prochain. [...] la valse sonnait le glas d'une vieille race, pendant que Nana, invisible, épandue au-dessus du bal avec ses membres souples, décomposait ce monde, le pénétrait d'un ferment de son odeur flottant dans l'air chaud, sur le rythme canaille de la musique. (1429-30)

There are many instances where the visual and the acoustic combine to set the scene and to carry the narrative forward. On other occasions, however, it is simply what is heard or rather overheard which defines the narrative. In these examples of *mise en abyme* mini-dramas, the action itself might be deemed to be off-stage.

A minor example occurs at the end of the novel as Zola establishes the all-important historical moment. With war declared against Prussia and shouts of "À Berlin! À Berlin! À Berlin!" (1474 and *passim*) ringing in the streets, a young Austrian couple feel compelled to leave Paris. They are lodged in a hotel room next to where Nana lies dying. We never see them, know nothing about them other than, crucially, their nationality, but we hear their hurried preparations to leave and experience their plight: "Justement, un vacarme venait de la chambre voisine; on roulait des malles, on cognait les meubles, avec tout un bruit de voix broyant des syllabes barbares. C'était un jeune ménage autrichien" (1480).

Another predominantly sound-based drama illustrates the Second Empire social mores and the repression of prostitution by the *police des mœurs*. Nana has joined Satin, her lesbian lover, in a hotel used by prostitutes. A police raid takes place but Nana avoids arrest by hiding on the balcony, as a dramatized account of prostitutes being rounded up follows. From her position on the balcony Nana clearly cannot witness these events but the third person omniscient narration, dominated by sound, appears anchored in her fearful audio perspective:

Des cris s'élevaient dans l'hôtel, une fille se cramponnait aux portes, refusant de marcher; une autre, qui était couchée avec un amant, et dont celui-ci répondait, faisait la femme honnête outragée, parlait de tenter un procès au préfet de police. Pendant près d'une heure, ce fut un bruit de gros souliers sur les marches, des portes ébranlées à coups de poing, des querelles aiguës s'étouffant dans des sanglots, des glissements de jupes frôlant les murs, tout le réveil brusque et le départ effaré d'un troupeau de femmes [...]. Puis l'hôtel retomba à un grand silence. (1320)

A more significant plot-centred episode concerns Georges Hugon, his brother Philippe and Nana. Mme Hugon disapproves of Georges' involvement with Nana and dispatches her elder son Philippe to forbid Nana any further contact. Georges is not allowed to witness this meeting and the ensuing events are played out behind closed doors with Georges condemned to second guess what is going on by listening at the door. Neither he, nor the reader, is party to what passes between Philippe and Nana; "Il entendait très mal, l'épaisseur des portières étouffait les bruits" (1354). This presentation places the focus firmly on his emotional turmoil. His anxiety increases as he catches the occasional word: "Pourtant, il attrapait quelques mots prononcés par Philippe, des phrases dures, où sonnaient les mots d'enfants, de famille, d'honneur" (1354). An expected angry retort from Nana does not materialize and, after a baffling silence, a softer tone is registered: "Bientôt même, la voix de son frère s'adoucit. Il ne comprenait plus, lorsqu'un murmure étrange acheva de le stupéfier. C'était Nana qui sanglotait" (1354). At this point in the unseen drama, further tension is created with the arrival of Zoé, thus preventing Georges from eavesdropping. As she calmly sees to the linen cupboard, suspense increases as does Georges's torment. Since he is the reader's conduit for the unseen drama, his lack of knowing condemns the reader to suspenseful ignorance. If overhearing is painful for Georges not being able to listen is perhaps even more so: "Que pouvaient-ils faire, pendant si longtemps?" (1355) Eventually, Zoé leaves and Georges can resume his eavesdropping: "Et il resta effaré, la tête décidément perdue, car il entendait une brusque envolée de gaieté, des voix tendres qui chuchotaient, des rires étouffés de femme qu'on chatouille" (1355). The innocent is left confused and distressed.

The drama acted out is visual in that Georges's suffering is witnessed, but the drama behind the closed doors with only a few, intermittent auditory clues is left to the imagination. Here Zola has succeeded in creating a scene of tense, rapidly changing emotions entirely without providing access to the determining events. He rejects the possibility of an omniscient narrator to provide the perspective denied Georges and instead creates drama through his restricted, subjective viewpoint – or, more precisely, hearing experience. The detail of what happens behind the closed doors is ultimately less important than the effect the unseen drama has on the young man himself. In these instances, both minor and major, it is to a sound-based narration that Zola turns.

This diegetic sound construct – the use of sound in narrative development – is also deployed in an anticipatory, pre-cinematic way, when an action is foregrounded acoustically before the action itself is revealed. Nana has left her apartment to raise much-needed money, leaving madame Maloir and madame Lerat playing cards. Footsteps are heard on the stairs from someone clearly out of breath:

Et, dans le silence qui régna, dans le murmure étouffé des deux vieilles femmes se querellant, un bruit de pas rapides monta l'escalier de service. C'était Nana enfin. Avant

qu'elle eût ouvert la porte, on entendait son essoufflement. Elle entra très rouge, le geste brusque. (1134)

Zola's soundtrack here prefigures Nana's breathless arrival set against the angry silence of the women playing cards.

During Nana's stay in the countryside in chapter 5, madame Hugon organises an outing for her guests. An advance group of walkers are seen to stop unexpectedly by a bridge. The narrative continues:

Ils ne bougeaient pas, regardant quelque chose qui venait et que les autres ne pouvaient voir encore. La route tournait, bordée d'un épais rideau de peupliers. Cependant, une rumeur sourde grandissait, des bruits de roue mêlés à des rires, à des claquements de fouet. Et, tout à coup, cinq voitures parurent à la file, pleines à rompre les essieux, égayées par un tapage de toilettes claires, bleues et roses. (1250)

Here, an element of mystery is created. Only the advance party know what is going on. Zola again turns to sound effects, – “une rumeur sourde grandissait, des bruits de roue mêlés à des rires, à des claquements de fouet” – to create a sense of anticipation for the others, foregrounding the arrival and eventual visual recognition of the overloaded carriages. This technique echoes that of the mini-drama involving the Austrian couple. It is only after sharing the sound of furniture being moved that Zola indicates who is making the noise.

Zola also uses repeated acoustic elements to pattern the text. The presence of bells, for example, is ubiquitous. At the theatre the interval bell is integral to the action, summoning both audience and actors, thus tracing the play's progress: “Mais, au-dessus du vacarme, la sonnette de l'entracte se fit entendre. Une rumeur gagna jusqu'au boulevard; ‘On a sonné, on a sonné’; et ce fut une bousculade [...]” (1101-02). In the same vein, the traditional three raps on the stage signalling the start, or resumption, of the performance provide a temporal acoustic marker: “On frappa les trois coups” (1118).

As in the theatre, the narrative dynamic at Longchamp is marked out by the ringing of bells, though it is initially through the sound of a clock striking twelve that Zola establishes a temporal frame for the ensuing action: “Midi sonnait. C'était plus de trois heures à attendre, pour la Course du Grand Prix” (1376). Thereafter, a series of bells ringing charts progress through the race card, as follows: “On fermait la piste, une volée de cloche annonçait la première course” (1385); “Des coups de cloche se perdaient dans le vent, les courses continuaient. On venait de courir le prix d'Ispahan [...]” (1388); “La cloche, pendue au mât de l'oriflamme sonnait avec persistance, pour qu'on évacuât la piste” (1396); and “[...] une nouvelle volée de la cloche annonçait l'arrivée des chevaux sur la piste” (1398). Bells, then, both contribute to the general ambient sound of the race meeting but also function as parallel temporal markers to the clock.

However, it is above all in chapter 2, when Nana is besieged by besotted admirers and unpaid creditors, that the persistent ringing of the door bell gives rhythmic shape to the narrative. Zola first lends character to the electric bell: “[...] la sonnerie électrique de la porte d'entrée, se fit entendre avec sa vibration rapide et tremblée” (1125). Soon the intrusive ringing, indicative of Nana's overnight theatrical success, is virtually non-stop: “Cependant, la sonnerie électrique marchait de plus belle. Toutes les cinq minutes, le tintement revenait, vif et clair, avec sa régularité de machine bien réglée” (1142). In Zola's imaginative

presentation, the modern electrical device seems capable of distinguishing between the endless visitors:

Trois fois, coup sur coup, la sonnerie avait tinté. Les appels du timbre se précipitaient. Il y en avait de modestes, qui balbutiaient avec le tremblement d'un premier aveu; de hardis, vibrant sous quelque doigt brutal; de pressés, traversant l'air d'un frisson rapide. Un véritable carillon, comme disait Zoé, un carillon à révolutionner le quartier, toute une cohue d'hommes tapant à la file sur le bouton d'ivoire. (1142)

This exploitation of sound repetition becomes a recurrent feature of the text. If in the theatre shouts of "Nana! Nana!" pulse through narrative, at Longchamp, excited racegoers echo this enthrall to Nana and the horse. Finally, as Nana's decomposing, diseased body anticipates the imminent demise of the rotten Second Empire, another cry is taken up and repeated by similarly enthusiastic and deluded crowds thronging the streets below: "À Berlin! À Berlin! À Berlin!" (1474 and *passim*). It is on this mindless ringing phrase, soon to represent the impending death knell of Napoleon III's enfeebled regime, that Zola completes the acoustic design for his novel of decadence.

Our examination has sought to show how sound discourse is integral to Zola's novelistic practice. Acoustic elements range from the individualization of characters by their voice quality and speech, through the evocation and differentiation of settings, to the creation of a sense of space and a significant shaping of the narrative itself. Patterns of sound, with repetition and pointed symbolism underscoring the decadence of Second Empire society are seen to be intrinsic to Zola's acoustically sensitive creativity. *Nana*, as are other novels in the *Rougon-Macquart* series, is to be experienced through all the senses and, not least of all, through the defining, dramatic immediacy of Zola's evocative sound discourse.¹⁰

¹⁰ For further considerations of Zola's sound discourse, see my articles: "Shifting the focus: Zola's sound discourse in *Thérèse Raquin*," *Bulletin of the Emile Zola Society* 41-42 (2010): 8-13; "Zola's Industrial Soundscapes: Acoustic Elements in *Germinal* and *La Bête humaine*," eds. Valerie Minogue and Patrick Pollard *Rethinking the Real: Fiction, Art and Theatre in the Time of Emile Zola* (London: The Emile Zola Society, 2013) 119-30.