

## Introduction

The AIZEN editorial team is very proud to present Volume XXXIV (2023) of *Excavatio*, the *International Review for Multidisciplinary Approaches and Comparative Studies Related to Émile Zola and Naturalism Around the World*, which comprises eight articles from distinguished contributors from the United States, Canada, France, and Portugal. Offering a wide variety of critical approaches to Émile Zola and naturalism – historical, political, scientific, feminist, and aesthetic – the volume celebrates the ongoing relevance of naturalism in our world today, underlining our indebtedness to the movement on a broad range of topics including the development of realism on the stage, the notions of paternal authority and feminine aging in literature, the advent of detective fiction, the role of the train in shaping modern concepts of the machine, and the expansion of naturalism outside France, as manifested in the *African Stories* of Doris Lessing (England), Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle* (United States) and translations of Zola's works by Eduardo de Barros Lobo (Portugal).

The first three articles, treating Zola's early theater and his novel *La Bête humaine* (1890), share *narrative techniques* as a common thread. In his article "Le théâtre de jeunesse de Zola, ou l'entrée en scène de l'apprenti contestataire," Daniel Long shows how, in creating the plays *La Laide* (1865) and *Madeleine* (1865), Zola was following up on the composition techniques that he had put into practice in his first novel *La Confession de Claude* (1865), by integrating into his theater a spirit of challenge already manifested in his journalistic writings. These two plays illustrate the situation of confinement in which the characters find themselves. Any possibility of liberation from constraints is eliminated through dialogue and stage directions, which emphasize the immutability of the conditions of existence. Thus, for Long, the year 1865 constitutes a key stage in Zola's career, when the young writer is careful to ensure a more naturalistic orientation to his work, through the creation of new dramatic effects.

Molly Deaver offers a different take on narrative techniques in her paper "'Wait for it...': Narrative Techniques of Suspense and the Experiment in Zola's *La Bête humaine*." Her article explores the intersection of this novel with the genre of detective fiction, arguing that the work strategically encodes the structures of detective fiction that highlight the aims of naturalism and the experimental novel. For Deaver, not only does detective fiction allow Zola to portray thematically the unsavory aspects of naturalism (prostitution, alcoholism, violence) within an acceptable generic package, its structures and strategies are also uniquely suited to engage with his late nineteenth-century project that unfurls in the ambiguous space between theory and fiction.

In his piece "*Chew-Chew: The Space-Devouring Train and the Fiction of Naturalism in Zola's La Bête humaine*," Alexandre Dubois links the concept of narrative technique to the complex image of the train. He demonstrates how the railway moves from function to fiction, becoming a literary figure catalyzing both the mathematical directness of the machine and a paradoxically elusive aspect that only fiction can bring about. Zola's ambivalent account of the machine – due, partially to his ambivalent use of naturalist aesthetics – reignites the fearful and unpredictable aspects of the train as a means of contesting its scientific exactitude and practical role. Hence, for Dubois, the train presents an uncontrollable, ghost-like entity embodying both an invisible and a tangible menace threatening to devastate everything in its path.

The next two essays shift the focus to the notions of *gender and power*. In her unique piece "Zola et les vieilles femmes," Florence Fix explores a neglected aspect of the writer's works, notably the theme of feminine aging. For Fix, the novels of the *Rougon-Macquart* series provide a gallery of portraits of girls who transition to adolescence and adulthood, but the other important

transition in the life of a woman, menopause, is also of great interest and, as such, merits study. The article celebrates the significant number of female characters who reach great age, during a century in which life expectancy remains fifty. Among them are women acquiring financial autonomy and conserving a keenness of the intellect. The novelist shows old age as an affirmation of character and a maturity of behavior: women who exhibit business acumen, wise merchants who are economical with their physical, emotional, and financial capital. In contrast, for Fix, those women who are overworked (from the poor working class) or the object of negotiations (courtesans, society women) tend to die young.

Miller McLean's article, "Rethinking Paternal Authority in Émile Zola's *Rome*," examines masculine power in relation to the Church. The article argues that the novel *Rome* (1896) promotes main character Pierre Froment's utopian "religion nouvelle" of science and fertility by disentangling the heteronormative western European family from the Catholic Church. To demonstrate the incompatibility of the family and the Church, the article focuses on three aspects of the novel: Pierre's doubts about the contemporary Church's socio-political position; the descriptions of a paradoxically strong and weak Pope Leo XIII; and Cardinal Pio Boccanera's decision to defend the Church at the expense of his family. Each of these men fulfill their roles as male leaders differently, and the novel explores its own conception of the ideal father figure by contrasting these three models of paternal authority.

The last three articles treat versions of *naturalism beyond the borders of France* – notably in the United States, England, and Portugal, respectively. In her paper "*Germinal* d'Émile Zola et *The Jungle* d'Upton Sinclair: Littérature et combat social," Isabelle Schaffner offers a comparative study of two iconic novels, Frenchman Emile Zola's *Germinal* (1885) and American Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle* (1906). Both novels depict conflicts linked to the first globalization, to a growing capitalism, and to the lightning growth of industry. Both treat the working and living conditions of workers and the birth of a consciousness of class which allowed a "littérature engagée" to enter fully into the arena of social and political struggle. Although there is proof for Zola's influence on Sinclair, the two writers clearly adopted two distinct novelistic mechanisms while converging in their purpose. Schaffner explores these variations by examining the characterization of the protagonists (Étienne and Jurgis), the metaphorical networks, and the myths in both novels.

The next piece, John McDowell's "Colonial Naturalism: Reading Doris Lessing's *African Stories*" moves solidly into the twentieth century with a treatment of the English-European author and her collection of *African Stories*, first published in 1965. McDowell underlines an important contradiction: While the work has received critical acclaim as a realistic depiction of Africa, Lessing is not African at all. Her Africa is thus a European construction. As such, her stories simultaneously show the destructive moral character of colonialism while also inscribing accepted racist language and tropes that support long-held views of Africa and Africans. McDowell proposes to understand the stories through the frame of colonial naturalism, an angle which exposes the complicated and problematic nature of writing about the "other."

Finally, in her essay "La voix naturaliste des écrivains-traducteurs: le cas d'Eduardo de Barros Lobo," Célia Vieira examines the translations of Zola's works by their main translator in Portugal, Eduardo de Barros Lobo, better known by the pseudonym Beldemónio. His translations of novels such as *La Fortune des Rougon* (1871), *Son excellence Eugène Rougon* (1876), *L'Assommoir* (1877), *Au Bonheur des Dames* (1882), and *Germinal* (1885) at the end of the nineteenth century, were re-edited, practically without correction, throughout the twentieth century. Vieira's study takes as its point of departure a quantitative analysis of translations of Zola's

work in Portugal, with the goal of identifying the socio-political, literary, and cultural contexts which frame these literary translations in general and those undertaken specifically by this particular translator.

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