

INTRODUCTION

This volume of *Excavatio XXVI* reveals the breadth and depth of Zola and naturalist studies. The articles included give an indication of the scope and historical impact of naturalism's basic tenets, their durability and adaptability to points in time and space, modifying our view of naturalism and enabling new media to emerge.

The volume begins with a reflection on the perennial and universal character of naturalism as an artistic idea, since Zola's thoughts on pictorial representation coincide on many points with the precepts of Taoism, in China, as elaborated centuries before the Christian era. Both systems agree on the importance of human perception in the development of ideas and art, with the body central to the experiencing of one's surroundings through the senses. We are reminded that Zola's theory of naturalist representation emphasizes the visual and his art criticism played no small role in the development of his experimental and esthetic approach to the novel. China is therefore our starting point.

Zola is the nexus for other works that spread out from France, taking in other European countries, starting with France's Continental cousin, Austria, in his time an important component of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, with Vienna the second largest city on the Continent, after Paris. The influence of Zola and naturalism extends to the outer reaches of Europe, to Portugal, for example, and to the Americas, represented here by the U.S. and Brazil, and then transitions into neo-naturalism in the later twentieth century, surfacing at particular moments of crisis, in post-war Britain and, in the filmic medium, in post-communist Romania. Naturalist aesthetics find their way across the Mediterranean to Africa – used to address other periods of crisis and/or transition, taking on other forms, even photography, and various approaches in fiction, with naturalist *topoi* and themes appearing and evolving. These versions of naturalism develop under different circumstances in a number of geographical and political climates, changing accepted notions of literary history, cultural transfer and exchange. The final consideration of naturalist elements, in twenty-first century film, broadens the possibilities of this aesthetic and its basic entropic character, to deal with facing end-of-life issues, which are relevant for human beings in all social classes, eras, and geographical situations.

The many facets of naturalist representation become manifest when considered from comparative, pluri- and interdisciplinary perspectives. The question could be asked, what connects all these different works and approaches to Zolian naturalism? And this very question allows for a re-thinking and re-conceiving of naturalism, both as described in Zola's theoretical writing and as exhibited in his novels.

The universality of Zola's conception of naturalism in art is revealed when compared to Lao Tseu's cosmological thought, according to Chiuyen Shih. Through its promotion of an instinctive observation of the world, Taoism anticipates Zola's theory of sensation and the role it plays in the origin of "knowledge." Zola's artist Sandoz, in *L'Œuvre*, explains that "la pensée est le produit du corps entier." Through intuition, the artist "listens" to his body, suspending the "cultural" screen (preconceived notions and prior knowledge), in order to experience what is observed through the senses, and filters that perspective on reality through his/her "temperament." Zola's conception of the work of art – "un coin de la création vu à travers un tempérament" – echoes that of this esteemed Asian thinker, while it feeds into the central idea of naturalism, first formulated in the novelist's art criticism. Following Zola's line of thinking, Shih explains the impetus for art, especially for impressionists and post-impressionists, as the coming together of the sentient being and the environment that acts on him. This insight is reminiscent of Lao

Tseu's and forges a link between the Chinese thinker's conception of art and Zola's. The two thinkers valorize the role of the senses which govern the human experience of observation in its engagement with the natural world, identifying this relationship to be the source of all thought and knowledge.

Far from simply a poetics or an aesthetics, naturalism is profoundly anchored in a social context, which will determine its parameters. As a literary current in Austria, naturalism merits reconsideration, argues Karl Zieger. If naturalism seems to have been set aside, with a privileging of realism and modernity, it nevertheless attracted the interest of readers and critics in Austria, through the translation of Zola's works into German and the discussion of their impact on the literary scene in journals. In fact, Austria's move toward modernity could be traced back to the critical attention Zola's novels commanded, promoting the representation in literature of a materialist, objective reality that would mirror modern life, but recommending a move beyond naturalism. Writers such as Arthur Schnitzler, the best-known Austrian naturalist, drew his subjects from the *petite bourgeoisie* in contemporary Viennese society of the *fin de siècle*, albeit depicting them from a psycho-sociological perspective which became more and more prominent in Austrian literature in the early twentieth century. Other Austrian authors, who have not previously been recognized as naturalist, need to be re-evaluated from this angle. Not only did popular forms of representation featuring commoners and daily life pre-exist Zola's influence, but also naturalism was a current that would come to the fore in an author like Jakob Julius David, whose novellas about village life have some points in common with works by Gerhart Hauptmann, the most famous German naturalist writer. Furthermore, a number of Austrian writers of the late nineteenth century have been called realists, when in fact the characteristics of their works (materialism, determinism, pessimism) are traits usually associated with naturalism. In re-writing literary history, and distinguishing Austrian cultural history from Germany's, Austrian naturalism will gain more of a profile during the *fin-de-siècle* period alongside the more commonly acclaimed "Young Vienna" group of writers, with their aesthetic and psychological approach to literature.

Naturalism lends itself, also, to studies that plumb the depths psychoanalytic and philosophical considerations, with a focus on the way authors depict the characters in their environments, evident in the examination of naturalist novels from these angles. Sébastien Olson-Niel applies examples of literature, *La Bête humaine* by Émile Zola and *The Octopus* by Frank Norris, to the principles of psychoanalysis and the concept of ego, thus bringing new insights. He discerns psychic processes which co-exist paradoxically in the subconscious of the texts, assuming that the naturalist narrator obeys the same ancient and subconscious mental processes in analyzing reality. Zola's and Norris's novels would be examples of this construction of an historic fresco, obeying the subconscious logic of a psychic opposition which develops. The narrator in Norris's novel, *The Octopus*, takes inspiration from the Marxist class struggle in his description of life on farms in California and the social organization, not omitting the possibility of violence. In *La Bête humaine*, Zola intuitively keeps in mind that violent events could only result from latent fantasies. The murderous subject does not have access to psychic processes, becoming (pure) ego, in this case, losing all sensitivity, and acting to conquer his environment. Both authors show the ego of their subject in full regression to the early childhood mother-connection. This primary narcissism, called a "topography of skin" (by Didier Anzieu), is seen in Zola as the source of comforting contact and stands in opposition to the vicious desire to penetrate the mother, viewed as a slut. In *The Octopus*, the ego senses that the surface of skin is about to crack under the stress of (sexual) violence. Norris's particular genius could be the use of

an agrarian theme to evoke the role of container (like skin) played by both parents, allowing the subject to find a place in the social community.

Naturalist novels can be read with influential contemporary philosophy in mind, since the primacy of context renders these texts permeable. Stephen Brennan sees vestiges of William James's secular philosophy of pragmatism in Theodore Dreiser's novel *An American Tragedy*. The focus is on the evolving mindset of the character Clyde Griffiths and the ambiguous role he plays in Roberta Alden's drowning, which is analysed from the angle of James's controversial notion of the subjectivity of truth and rationality, a criticism of the idealistic philosophy that dominated in the American academy at the turn of the twentieth century. For James, an idea is validated when its "practical consequences" involve "the progressive, harmonious, satisfactory" agreement with previous experience. This process is played out most clearly in the narration of Clyde's imprisonment and trial for the murder of his pregnant sweetheart, Roberta Alden. What becomes important in this reading is not whether or not Clyde (as he sits on Death Row) will adhere to or embrace the Christian principles of his up-bringing, and succumb to feelings of guilt encouraged by the establishment for failing to save Roberta from drowning, but the fact that he first struggles to come to terms with his own behavior. He recognizes his mistake, while at the same time actually arriving at a more positive view of himself and resisting other interpretations of his character or his action – before ultimately submitting to urges for him to repent and accept the grace of God, for fear of what may come after death. From the angle of James's pragmatist philosophy, this change in Clyde's outlook at the end of the novel could be seen as a "waste" of human potential, following Pizer, for example, who identifies this as a recurring theme of naturalism.

In naturalist novels, the failure to achieve one's potential is most often viewed as the result of circumstances beyond the control of the individual. Despite the abolition of slavery in Brazil in 1888, and the formation of the First Republic (1889), many sectors of the population remained disadvantaged and neglected in the early twentieth century. Naturalism gained strength in this situation, as a result of differing views as to directions literature should take, according to Maria Cristina Batalha. In reaction to the official elitist notion of culture, which governed avant-garde aesthetics, Lima Barreto (1881-1922) developed a strategy that was both critical that was both critical and populist. Breaking with the avant-garde, which dictated novelty at any price and leaned toward opacity and enigma, and instead substituted a model with origins in the culture of the suburbs, used methods of mass diffusion, and had recourse to the simple language of the people. Rather than an aesthetics of *exclusion*, Barreto recognized and addressed the faults lines in a society based on inequality and substituted a policy of *inclusion*, resurrecting an older model, Manuel Antônio de Almeida's *Memórias de um sargento de milícias* (1852), to inaugurate his approach on the literary scene. Barreto's *Triste fim de Policarpo Quaresma* (1911) illustrates this socially aware perspective, in its foregrounding of issues such as the repression experienced by dissident intellectuals, violence in the prison system and in asylums, authoritarianism implicit in the legal system – even offering a critique of *arrivisme* and the practice of favoritism. His more egalitarian and critical approach to naturalism should be revalorized within the academic literary history of Brazil.

In Brazilian naturalism, the lines of influence descending from Zola are not necessarily restricted to the vertical, argues Haroldo Ceravolo Sereza, as he traces a model in the representation of homosexuality which takes into account the lateral. In *Le Roman expérimental*, Zola provided a working and "reproducible" method for literary creation, leaving room for the "tempérament" of each writer to create an original work. In Zola's novels, while heterosexual practices are dealt

with extensively, homosexuality is only lightly touched on; but in Portugal, Abel Botelho wrote a novel dealing with the subject much more centrally, *O Barão de Lavos* (1891), telling the story of a nobleman and his relationship with a talented young man. This novel was generally treated seriously by contemporary critics, some of whom acknowledged that there were homosexuals who managed to live their lives successfully. This treatment of homosexuality enabled the Brazilian author Adolfo Caminha to produce *Bom-Crioulo: The Black Man and the Cabin Boy* in 1895, and now these two works are recognized for the introduction of explicit male homosexuality into the naturalist novel. A comparison of the plots reveals to what extent the Brazilian author takes the Portuguese writer's topic further and brings it into the realm of ordinary people.

New directions for fiction, encouraged by the precepts of naturalist aesthetics, will continue throughout the twentieth and into the twenty-first centuries. Tony Williams brings our attention to two novels which were written in England shortly after World War II and immediately transformed into *film noir*. In retrospect, the original novels, *It Always Rains on Sunday* (1946) and *Night Darkens the Street* (1947), written by Arthur La Bern, exhibit clear traces of what Robert Singer, quoted by Williams, has described as that naturalist moment, that is, a particular dynamic existing in either literature or film illustrating a certain "social *circulus*," or the interaction among people, society, and the respective era, which affects the individual, who is viewed through the naturalist lens by a knowledgeable observer. La Bern's post-war novels illustrate a sector of British naturalist popular fiction that reveals the dark culture of contemporary life as it snares victims. The novels paint a grim picture of the period at the beginning of the war, during an "age of austerity" in Britain, and feature characters affected by the squalid working-class world in the same way that many of Zola's characters are traumatized by the environmental forces of the Second Empire. *Night Darkens the Street* centers on a young English woman's trajectory to become a hardened killer. She joins up with two American deserters, creating a group fully united in their criminally perverse activities. Along with her accomplices, Gwen ends up receiving a death sentence, failing to achieve whatever potential existed within her, in a similar manner to Zola's Gervaise or Nana. Gwen's fate occurs during the deadly conditions of wartime London, conditions that would have a lasting impact on witnesses, contributing to a perverse post-war social *circulus* deeply embedded within a certain contemporary social psyche. As a neo-naturalist chronicler of this period, Arthur La Bern deserves a place in twentieth-century literary history.

In the late 1950s and early 1960s, another crisis situation similar to that of war-torn Britain was developing on the African Continent, with the native populations coming to terms with the fall-out of revolutionary wars against colonial rule. In the context of post-colonial Senegal, Christian Mbarga identifies the importance of two documents – the identity card and the postal money order – in a work titled *Le Mandat*, by Ousmane Sembene. Here, the depiction of an oppressed people recalls the author's acclaimed naturalist novel, *Les Bouts de bois de dieu*, which has been compared to Zola's *Germinal*. The two documents in question could be seen as naturalist motifs, or *topos*, serving to satirize colonialism itself and bring attention to the degradation of traditional life and the greediness and cruelty of men. The identity card underscored the feeling of being enclosed or wearing shackles, since the allowed perimeter for movement was specified, resulting in a social and historical determinism where individuals were forced into a practically immutable destiny. With the *topos* of the postal order ("mandat"), Sembene explores the naturalist theme of human behavior when confronted with a moneyed economy, as in *La Curée*, although the contexts are entirely different. In Sembene's novel, the very different worlds are contrasted in the

depictions of two parts of town: the main character Ibrahima Dieng's squalid, ramshackle neighborhood, on the one hand; and, on the other, the commercial and administrative district's modern buildings filled with mostly foreign inhabitants. The road linking the two worlds fails to lead the destitute to a better economical situation, nor beyond a designation of anonymity. As a criticism of oppression and inequalities, Sembene's novel delivers an indictment of colonial history from a personal perspective.

Elements of twentieth-century neo-naturalist aesthetics find their way into the new media, such as film, and again during a period of transition that brings confusion and causes stress – the end of communist rule in Romania. Laszlo Fulop identifies a number of naturalist strategies in Romanian New Wave cinema, putting forward the idea that in the filmic medium Zola's naturalist theories can be realized to a greater extent than Zola was able to apply them in his fiction. Above all, Romanian New Wave is defined by its minimalist style, a designation that affects aesthetic choices on a number of levels, including meandering plot, downplayed acting, focus on the middle class. However, the dialogue is imbued with irony, dark humor, and an ambiguous complexity of meaning. The milieu is contemporary and perhaps what characterizes Romanian New Wave film most is the slow pacing in long takes (close-up shots are only rarely used). In Romanian New Wave, the camera looks on from a distance and avoids playing on the emotions of the audience. While brutal visual naturalism is missing from the Romanian New Wave, its shooting style is often described as “documentary-like,” since it by-passes “aestheticization.” Nevertheless, there is an important component of humour in these films, as in Romanian culture, of which the absurdist Ionesco is an internationally acclaimed example. The element of irony in this cinematic trend would seem to stand in contradiction to the “detached” scientific observation, as it would in literary naturalism. In fact, this ambiguity is part of the filmmakers' approach to the representation of the social and political reality in Romania, during a period of trauma, in the immediate post-communist era. The irony, pessimism and dark humour communicate the uncertainty and disillusionment that pervade the country and the region.

With a return to the African Continent, but to South Africa this time, and to yet another period of crisis – post-apartheid –, in the medium of photography, in addition to fiction, elements of naturalist aesthetics serve to express the chaos of the changing social scene. In South Africa, the hated document was the “passbook” with headshots required for all non-whites to show when entering a “white only” area or building. By rendering skin in colorless shades, and exaggerating blemishes and scars for all races, in a selection of ID-like photos that were originally in color, Pieter Hugo, in his collection *There is a Place in Hell for Me and My Friends* (2012), makes skin the multi-levelled signifier of post-apartheid South Africa, as does Achmat Dangor in his collection of novellas *Strange Pilgrimages* (2013). Taking as a point of departure Zola's intense interest in photography as a hobby during the last eight years of his life, John McDowell's paper builds on the idea that reality is constructed in artistic works, heightening experience in order to convey deeper levels of reality, even in the photographic medium. Both South African works deal with the ruins of apartheid's legacy. Dangor's various novellas reference these vestiges of post-apartheid life, also with “skin” as the signifier, but now more clearly on the continuum of time – the before, the after, and the future of South Africa in relation to apartheid, and their confusion, resulting in fissures that open up in the effort to build a new identity. The relationship to skin in these novellas frequently has to do with casual sexual encounters between races, before part of a clandestine network connecting the different peoples of South Africa, but in the new climate most often bringing personal loss, especially for non-whites, in terms of shame, regret, betrayal, and/or escape.

In the final paper in the volume, Andrea Gogröf discusses Michael Haneke's very recent film *Amour*, addressing this Austrian filmmaker's dialogue with naturalism, evident in the realistically presented Parisian bourgeois décor and the emphasis on tedious daily tasks. The film deals with the ultimate human crisis – in any era and in all regions of the world -- of facing inevitable organic decline and death. Haneke himself quotes Nietzsche with regard to his choice of subject matter, saying "It's undignified for a philosopher to say the good and the beautiful are one," and then adds "Truth is ugly." The camera documents an elderly couple's physical and psychological challenges as they deal with the rapidly evolving illness of the dominant partner, Anne, a former piano teacher. Georges's love for Anne is not sentimentalized, but revealed in his sense of duty, as he carries out the details of palliative care, daily chores and hygiene. Their grown and married daughter, Eva, who makes appearances in the apartment, completes the family triangle that struggles with the changing configurations of authority, self-interest and economic concerns. With the figure of Eva, Haneke thus develops a further dialectic, between surface and depth, since at a lower level, there is a fundamental disconnect amongst the three. And Georges's final act of killing Anne underscores Haneke's point that "Truth is ugly," but the film *Amour* comes close to another of Nietzsche's ideas, his tragic insight regarding *Amor Fati*, explained by Gogröf as "the great affirmation of life and love with all its suffering, darkness, and destructive impulses."

We would like to thank the other members of the *Excavatio* team for their excellent work. Marie-Sophie Armstrong, Associate Editor of the review, who works on the articles written in French, continues to be an invaluable asset to the success of the undertaking and she deserves a hearty thank you. We are grateful to Lisa Ng, Editorial Assistant, for serving efficiently and faithfully since on-line production of the review began. Thanks also go to Philip Hoyt, who is responsible for the *Excavatio* platform on-line, for his expertise and friendly service. The entire team would also like to express our gratitude for all the authors of the articles published in this volume. In particular, we recognize the young researchers who represent the continuation of Zola and naturalist studies, for showing their interest in our journal and assuring its success by the quality and originality of their reflection.

Sadly, one of our contributors, Stephen C. Brennan, Professor of English at Louisiana State University, in Shreveport, USA, has passed away. Together with Stephen Yarbrough, Brennan coauthored *Irving Babitt* (Twayne, 1987) and he published a documentary volume (no. 368) on author Theodore Dreiser for the *Dictionary of Literary Biography* (Gale, 2012). His many essays on literary naturalism have appeared in journals and collections. From 1999, he coedited *Dreiser Studies* and continued in this role, with Keith Newlin, when it changed its name to *Studies in American Naturalism*. We proudly present his last article, on William James's pragmatic philosophy as played out in Theodore Dreiser's novel *The American Tragedy*. Our condolences go to his family, colleagues, and friends.

**Anna Gural-Migdal, University of Alberta
and Carolyn Snipes-Hoyt, Burman University**