

Chapter 8

Determinism: When Nature and Circumstances Lead The Dance

8.1 Readings and Homework

- Readings: Zola, chapter 1-32
- Study questions:
 1. The opening description of the Passage du Pont Neuf (chapter I): A critic in literature, Sainte-Beuve, has written that this description is not true, but "fantastically true". Explain what literary devices are used in order to set the atmosphere in the first chapter. How do you think this can be reconciled with Zola's claim that his writings are a perfect imitation of reality in the plain and objective style of scientific reports?
 2. The scientific experiment's components: give the physiological characteristics of the three main characters: Camille, Thérèse and Laurent
 3. A love affair? What are the motivations of Laurent and Thérèse to sleep together?
 4. What about cats? Why do you think Zola insists on the cat's stare on the lovers?

5. The murder. What are the motivations of the lover for the murder? In what sense is the scene of the murder an example of Zola's uncovering the "human beast"?

8.2 Action

Action by chapter:

I: Exposition, the Passage du Pont Neuf

II: Back in time: life of the Raquin family: mother and son, in Vernon. Childhood of Camille and Thérèse. Wedding.

III: After the wedding: moving in in the Passage du Pont Neuf

IV: Every day life in the store. Thursday "parties".

V: Laurent's first appearance, Camille friend from childhood

VI: Laurent, who believes he is a painter, decides to paint Camille's portrait. Also decides to seduce Thérèse in order to be part of the house. Thérèse does not resist.

VII: Beginning of the affair between Laurent and Thérèse

VIII: Everyday life in the family. Laurent's and Thérèse's respective reactions to the affair.

IX: Laurent cannot see Thérèse anymore because of his work. First vague idea to get rid off the husband.

X: Discussion about unpunished crimes

XI: Walk at Saint-Ouen along the Seine. Camille is thrown into the water and drowns.

XII: After the murder: Sorrow of the mother

XIII: The Morgue: Laurent recognizes Camille

XIV: Thérèse's and the mother's convalescence

XV: Thursday parties start again – Camille is forgotten by everyone but his mother.

8.3 The components of the experiment

8.3.1 Zola and his characters

We have to remember that Zola intends to illustrate the following theories:

- Physical appearance is a mirror of the physiological constitution.

- Characters determined by
 - their environment
 - their physiological constitution
- Physiology at the time: four temperaments corresponding to the predominance of one of the major organs or "system" over the three other : (From A. Bossu, *Anthropology*, 6th ed., Paris, Aux bureaux de l'Abeille médicale, 1870, 2 vol., tome 1 p.414 sq.)
 - Lymph – too much liquid, soft in all aspect: flesh, mind. Slow mind and imagination. Easily happy, unable of great crime or sublime action.
 - Nerves – senses over the muscles. Often women. Intense and deep impressions, overreacting people, but often nice from the outside. burning interiors. Bad digestion. Can be genius.
 - Blood – Powerful circulation and breathing. Produces heat (red skin). Easygoing, direct, joyful, and somewhat inconstant people. Vivid imagination, not so much power of judgment. like luxuries and women.
 - Bile

8.3.2 Thérèse

1. serious, pale face; long, narrow, sharp nose; thin lips, etc.
2. compare to mother-in-law: fat, sleepy, happy (12)
3. Thérèse may appear to be calm, but she's actually quite high strung. Hence the comparison with cats (15, 16/39, 40)
4. the Algerian blood is also important (15/38)
5. her emotions generally are suppressed because of the way she was brought up: she had been so often told to keep quiet that she kept all of her impulses hidden (16/39)
6. Her will, ironically is totally oriented at being passive. Note the importance of the blank stare.
7. She is all nerves.

8.3.3 Camille

1. neither manly nor attractive: small, weak, thin beard, freckle-faced, childlike

2. even as children, Thérèse's "animal" nature frightened Camille (17/41-42)
3. no affection displayed between husband and wife
 - a. Zola describes the couple going to bed at night:
 - 1.) Camille is too ill, Thérèse is indifferent (12/35, q.v.); even on their wedding night (18/42)
 - 2.) same cold bed every night (22/48)
 - b. Camille appears to have never felt any sexual needs (17/41)
 - 1.) his "soft body had never felt a shudder of desire" (29/56)
 - 2.) Thérèse says sleeping with her husband like still sleeping with a six year old boy (38/67)
 - c. Thérèse actually finds Camille disgusting he smelled bad (36/65)
4. both the disease and the constant nursing and pampering by his mother have made him what he is
 - a. she would not let him go away to boarding school; barely lets him out of her sight (14/37)
 - b. even at 18, she would keep him wrapped up beside her
 - c. when she arranges his marriage to Thérèse, her goal is to give her son someone to keep watch over him (16/40)
5. the effect of all this is to make him egoistical (14/38)
6. first job:
 - 1) gets a job not out of duty, but a "natural need" and to get away from his mother (14/37-8)
 - 2) thrives on mindless routine
7. when he moves to Paris, he seeks a similar sort of job in a large organization
 - he is proud to be a petty bureaucrat, a "humble cog in a big machine" (26/52)
 - mindless work made him feel better (14/37)
 - as he walks to work, his mind is a blank (21/46)
 - at the end of the day, he walks through the zoo, looking slack-jawed, like an idiot, at the animals (21/46-7)
7. Thus he is of lymphatic temperament

8.3.4 Laurent

- A. description: (26-27/52-53, q.v.)
 1. Thérèse had never seen a "real man" before

2. body type
 - a. he's a throwback, practically a Neanderthal.
 - b. Hair, neck and strength
- C. his "temperament:" at once lazy and of "large appetites" (28/55)
 1. Camille is amazed at his lack of ambition: no desire to finish law school
 2. would prefer to be an artist:
 - a. paint-brush "a nice light tool" (28/55)
 - b. not to mention all the artists' models he meets
- D. however, in spite of the fun he was having as an artist, Laurent gives up art and ends up working in the same office as Camille:
 1. would not have gone a single day without food for the greater glory of art" (28/55) – contrast with Frankenstein on glory
 2. although the humdrum routine suits him – it does not make him tired and he does not have to think – it doesn't satisfy his appetites
 - a. not meeting women
 - b. not paid enough to afford the restaurants and cafes he would like

8.4 A physiological "love" affair

8.4.1 The motivations

- I. Laurent begins coming over every evening to paint Camille's portrait
 - A. sets up in the bedroom
 - B. where Thérèse sits and watches him the whole time: as if drawn by force (32/59)
- II. Laurent takes it in his head to seduce her (32-33/60-61, q.v.)
 - A. his only reason for hesitation is not any feeling of moral compunction; he's more worried about creating trouble for himself (32/60)
 - B. it's an animal thing: he's not in love with her
 - C. ultimately, it's an economic decision for Laurent (33/60, q.v.)
 1. free is cheaper than a whore
 2. and he does not love them either! D. note his opinion of Camille
 1. not only does Laurent think that Camille cannot satisfy Thérèse: hes a poor specimen (32/59)
 2. but he figures that it would be easy to punch Camille out if he makes any trouble (33/61)

E. Compare Laurent's attitude about friendship to Walton's, who discourses on how friendship completes us

8.4.2 Is this "love"?

I The first intercourse: brutal sex, and p.39 "sinister ardour and brutality"

II Note the several descriptions of T.'s desire: the female body is a privileged topic in the naturalist literature

III Note also the influence of the African blood

IV She becomes healthy and beautiful

V. Determinism

A. Zola explains the affair in terms of "nature and circumstances" (43/73, q.v.)

B. even Thérèse's ability (and pleasure!) in deceiving Camille and Madame Raquin is given an environmental explanation (42-42/72-73)

III. Laurent, on the other hand, seems to be oblivious to what's happening to him (43/73)

A. in the next chapter, Laurent is described as enslaved by his passions (46/77)

1. indulging in "lust had created new appetites" (46/76)

2. he's like a starving animal (46/77)

3. without his being aware of it, desire had made him bound hand and foot to Thérèse; he was no longer in control

B. Compare the way Laurent is not in control of his own actions with the way in which Victor Frankenstein at least claims not to be in control of his: something "lower" rather than "higher"

C. Thérèse describes her "love" as her being enslaved to her senses (sight and smell), with a "blank mind" (38-39). All she describes are physical reactions to Laurent's body: "your blood was sending waves of heat towards me" She is not in control either: "this sort of burning mist that wrapped around you drew me and kept me beside you".

8.5 The natural fatality of the murder

I. No more free time for Laurent: (45/76) It is purely circumstantial that they will decide to kill the husband.

A. Laurent and Thérèse are being constrained now in a new way: by time

1. compare to other ways:
 - a. by needs
 - b. by space: the arcade
 - c. by people: Madame Raquin, who "suffocates" Thérèse and Camille
2. "pressure of events" (50/81) leads Laurent and Thérèse to consider Camille's death
 - a. its actually Thérèse who first suggests it. The irony is that the woman Mme Raquin has chosen to take care of her son nurse is now plotting his death (49/80)
 - b. Laurent wouldn't kidnap Thérèse and run off with her (50/82)
 - 1.) they might starve (anti romantic)
 - 2.) his "brutal peasant reasoning" considers the advantages of killing Camille
 - II The murder itself
 - the way to do it was not planned
 - again, influence of circumstances: looks at the Seine, with his mind blank, and find the idea - what decides him is the hips and then the leg of his mistress. He wants to kiss her freely. Camille is "a constant obstacle" to satisfaction of his appetites.
 - the battle: two beasts – acme with the bite – and Thérèse loses control over her body
 - III After the murder
 - A. nervous crisis for T. – the nerves's burst goes its way.
 - B. Laurent is back to himself
 1. hungry, makes a trip to the bakery (66/101, q.v.)
 2. a reawakening of appetites
 3. see also p. 68/103: "blood" begins to flow calmly and gently again. Sanguine temperament is back.
 4. Felt an "animal satisfaction thinking of Thérèse resting upstairs (68/104)

8.6 Conclusion

- no soul, just physiology
- determinism of action by circumstances and physiology – from causes to effect

- the experiment was: let's us make frustrated nerves encounter overall satisfied blood
- the result is: nerves goto crisis, blood becomes enslaved, follows the will of his partner's nerves, and goes easy for now