

Chapter 5

Experimental Novel

5.1 Readings and Homework

- Readings: Zola, second half of the book, Bossu, *Anthropology*
- Study questions:
 1. Realists and naturalists aim at describing the world as it is. In what passages of the book do you think Zola achieves this aim?
 2. Motivations for action: What are the motivations for the love affair? What are the motivations for the murder? How does it fit the idea that Zola is relating the results of some scientific experiment?
 3. Bossu's text is an excerpt of an actual book of biology in Zola's times. Do you think the description of the various temperaments correspond to Zola's characters? Explain which character is of which temperament.

5.2 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.

XVI: Laurent cheats on Thérèse with a model

XVII: Nocturnal hallucinations of Laurent

XVIII: Laurent and Thérèse thinking about the wedding

XIX: Laurent and Thérèse gradually put the idea of the wedding in Madame's mind. Decision is taken.

XX: Wedding

XXI: Wedding night

XXII: Hallucinating together – continued

XXIII: Idem – Camille in their bed

XXIV: double life of Laurent and Thérèse

XXV: Laurent goes back to painting. He is now a real artist. But cannot paint anything but Camille's portrait.

XXVI: Madame paralyzed. She learns that her "children" are the murderers.

XXVII: Madame's failure to denounce the murderers to the Thursday's parties's guests.

XXVIII: Hatred growing up – quarrels and violence.

XXIX: "Remorse" of Thérèse. Laurent beats her.

XXX: François is killed. Laurent is afraid that Thérèse denounce them.

XXXI: Laurent follows Thérèse. She is cheating on him and give herself to a deprived way of life. They threaten one another to go to the police.

Suspicion growing. Thinking about killing the other.

XXXII: They attempt to murder one another the same night. Finally commit suicide under the stare of the paralyzed old mother.

5.3 The components of the experiment

5.3.1 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

5.3.2 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.

5.3.3 Camille

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

5.3.4 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

5.4 A physiological "love" affair

5.4.1 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

5.4.2 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 whats 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. hes 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".

5.5 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)

5.6 Aftermath

Remember that the aim of Zola in this novel is to study:

the deep modifications of an organism through the influence of environment and circumstances.

The rest of the experiment consists in observing what the effect of the murder are on the characters. These modifications are described as the result of a deterministic process, and Zola still pretends to conduct a scientific analysis:

And, at the start, Laurent and Thérèse allowed themselves to be carried along by his new life as it transformed them, working away secretly inside them in a way that will have to be analyzed very minutely if one is to establish all its phases. (80)

The most important point is that any appearances of moral behavior (like remorse) are systematically reduced to physiological reactions.

5.6.1 First, the relief, or is it?

Satisfaction and relief of the bodies

- The first modification in the bodies is the **end of desire**(80). Their desire has been satiated by the murder. The murder is an incomparably higher "orgasm" (see the French).
- Irony: they believe they are wise and cautious... while it is just that they do not desire each other anymore.
 - Thérèse: becomes "a little girl" – regression, and express herself (instead of "living in a state of dumb rebellion, wrapped up in thought of hatred and vengeance" 82), and teen type falling in love (student in the street)

- Laurent: “With his face pink and plump, his belly full and his head empty, he was happy” – pretty much like after working out madly. Body satisfied – no desire anymore for T. – takes a woman as a “necessary object that kept his body quiet and healthy” 85

Disorder is working indoors

- Thérèse:
 - “twists” of the mouth (80),
 - nightmares (82),
 - and new passion: novels – her balance is broken, and the thought of Camille comes back, and some proto-moral ideas The description reminds us of Madame Bovary, passionate but truly stupid reader. Nerves are getting their power. 82
 - She scares Laurent because of that p85
- Laurent seems perfectly happy... or does he?
 - Terror though. Zola’s image: Laurent went straight to the murder with the obstination of an animal, and is now turning around, lost, and terrified.
 - He is highly disturbed by Thérèse, instinctively feel like he should go away from her, and the influence of her nervous constitution
 - but has other arguments in favor of the wedding...coming from appetites 85

5.6.2 Second a crisis

The crisis

- Finally, both need sex again, one because of the novels, the other because he was dumped. They talk about getting back together, and this is it. Being back together finishes the work of disturbing their respective body balance.
 - Thérèse in need 97

- Laurent would not give up on getting married because he cannot imagine losing the expected benefits from the wedding (idle and satisfied life)
- Zola is going to describe the aftermath of this.
 - a common "failing of the nerves" (nervous breakdown), panic crisis etc.: break out of the physiological disorder. (94)
 - Both are described as being one 94. This is a quite peculiar kind of "fate" and tragic couple...

a psychological and physiological fact that often occurs between those who are thrown violently together by great nervous shock

This sounds like nothing else but post-traumatic disorder...

Modifications in Laurent: highly influenced by Thérèse's nerves.

- Terror
 - childish terrors at night 86 (cellars, stairs and looks under his bed!)
 - Has a recurring nightmare of going to visit Thérèse and taking Camille's drowned, decomposing corpse in his arms (88-92/128-32)
 - a. the nightmares and fears are explained in purely physical terms for us:
 - 1.) before he falls asleep, "his thoughts were working involuntarily . . ." (88/128, q.v.)
 - 2.) He could actually see his thoughts (89/129)
 - 3.) as soon as he loses control of his mind, it leads to horror through voluptuous enjoyment (91/132)
 - the scar is a permanent reminder
 - He cannot think about Thérèse without thinking about Camille 90

Careful: Laurent's "thought" is not the result of his will – rather passive association of ideas. Laurent has no power over his stream of thinking: images in front of his internal eye. This is a purely physical account of thought.

- Medical explanation: Laurent's temperament becomes that of a highly neurotic girl (123/179)
 - nervous side develops and overwhelms the sanguine (124/171)
 - Laurent's temperament no longer counterbalances Thérèse's
 - Finally turns mad and violent, and an artist (chapter 25)

Modifications in Thérèse

- Thérèse
 - is suffering from insomnia as well:
 - The "ghost" comes and visits her as well (94)
- medical explanation :
 - she is suffering a "nervous crisis," her "organism" needs Laurent (97/139, q.v.)
 - "her original temperament had been greatly over-stimulated" (125)
- Issue of remorse... Is it morality at all ??

Modifications in love

- desire dead with the fire – chapter 21
 - Chapter 23, compare to 7
 - Becomes hatred 28 159 and violence

5.7 Conclusion

- no soul, just physiology – human animals
- 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, gets infected by the nerves

