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The Gospel According to Zola:  
National Identity and Naturalist Utopia in Fin-de-Siècle France

By

Gina Katherine Zupsich

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of

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in

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Committee in charge:

Professor Debarati Sanyal, Chair

Professor Michael Lucey

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Abstract

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My dissertation, “The Gospel According to Zola: National Identity and Naturalist Utopia in Fin-de-Siècle France” is a sustained interdisciplinary investigation of Emile Zola’s *Quatre Evangiles* (1899-1903). These novels are an allegory of the French Republic of the future in which the heroic Froment family cures social diseases such as depopulation, agricultural stagnation, recession, anti-Semitism, as well as class and sexual inequality.

Although critics have tended to dismiss this series as marginal status to the Zola canon, I show how the study of these works should cause us to rethink our usual approaches to the whole of Zola’s œuvre. These late novels mark a radical shift from Naturalism’s critical dissection of the Second Empire to a positivist Republican utopianism. My study complicates the picture we have of Zola’s social and political commitments by historicizing how we came to understand republicanism as a progressive, pluralistic, inclusive politics. I show that, unlike his earlier works, the *Evangiles* envision active caretaking roles for men and advocate women’s equal educational and professional opportunities through original archival research on the critical reception of these novels by feminist journalists.

My analysis also suggests that these works epitomize a vision of government devoted to what Foucault calls biopower, where the state’s function is to “faire vivre et de laisser mourir” by resolving social conflict through the intermarriage of people of socially adverse backgrounds. The Froments’ biopolitical regulation of the family and education provides certain benefits for women and workers, nevertheless, the eugenic program they enact ultimately disallows for social, cultural and racial diversity. The *Evangiles*’ homogenization of religious, racial and class identity in continental and colonial France gives voice to an aggressive strain of imperialism supported by republican universalism. The study of the *Quatre Evangiles* enriches our understanding of Zola in ways overlooked by standard accounts of the *intellectuel engagé* by situating his literary interventions within *fin-de-siècle* reform discourses and ongoing debates on universalism, ethnic and religious specificity, and assimilation in the French Republic. My dissertation recovers Zola’s forgotten corpus as an important foundational fiction in French literary and historical canons.

## Introduction

Etre maître du bien et du mal, régler la vie, régler la société, résoudre à la longue tous les problèmes du socialisme, apporter surtout des bases solides à la justice en résolvant par l'expérience les questions de criminalité, n'est-ce pas là être les ouvriers les plus utiles et les plus moraux du travail humain?

Emile Zola, *Le Roman expérimental*, 1880

Emile Zola's rigorous critique of Second Empire France in his *Rougon-Macquart* novels, along with his theory of the experimental novel, earned him national fame and a place in the literary canon. However, it was his involvement in the Dreyfus Affair that made him an international legend. The *Rougon-Macquart* is a twenty-volume series written almost entirely during the Third Republic, 1871-1893, a historical distance that afforded Zola the political protection, time, and detailed research required for such a controversial project. In the novels that followed this historical and literary monument, *Les Trois Villes* (1894-1898) and *Les Quatre Evangiles* (1899-1903) Zola refocused his creative energy on diagnosing and healing problems of the young Third Republic. Together, the city and gospel novels transform decadent fin-de-siècle society into a healthy "France de demain," one figured through the proliferation of the healthy republican Froment family. The *Evangiles'* heroic Froment brothers, Mathieu, Luc and Marc, are social engineers who establish a new egalitarian, secular social order. Their regeneration of France replaces the authority of the Catholic church, the military, and the aristocracy with devotion to science, the state, and humanity.

Of the projected four *Evangile* novels, only three were completed before Zola's accidental death at the age of 62 in 1902.<sup>1</sup> These novels are an allegory of the French Republic of the twentieth century in which the heroic Froment family cures social diseases such as depopulation, agricultural stagnation, economic recession, anti-Semitism, as well as class and sexual inequality. *Paris*, the last of Zola's *Villes* trilogy, functions as a prequel to the *Evangiles* by announcing the marriage of Pierre and Marie Froment and the birth of their first son, who becomes one of the crusading brothers in the following series. The *Evangiles* recount the heroic conversion of Mathieu, Luc and Marc Froment to a new secular religion: scientific republican humanitarianism. Each novel focuses on one of the Froment brothers' reform campaign of social institutions deemed stagnant, degenerate, or otherwise corrupt. In *Fécondité*, Mathieu stimulates the national birth rate and rehabilitates the family by advocating for aggressive procreation and childcare reform; in *Travail*, Luc reorganizes labor systems by transforming a corrupt mining town into an elaborate self-sustaining workers' cooperative; and in *Vérité*, Marc builds a national secular school system, with its own teachers' training college, that makes parochial education obsolete.

The radical shift in Zola's writing from pessimism to prophecy in the twilight of his career is, without a doubt, linked to his intervention in the Dreyfus affair in 1898. As literary critics have argued, Zola's incendiary "J'accuse!" politicized the novelist so

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<sup>1</sup> *Vérité* appeared as a serial in *L'Aurore* just before Zola's death, from September 10, 1902 to February 15, 1903 and was published in book form after on February 20, 1903.

much that his writing remained “engaged” thereafter.<sup>2</sup> He began writing *Fécondité* during his exile in England from 1898 to 1899. Zola has been deemed an exemplary *intellectuel engagé* by Jean-Paul Sartre and Pierre Bourdieu, among others, for his defense of the Jewish captain Dreyfus in which he publicly accused the government of anti-Semitism and political corruption. Nevertheless, the utopian republic he envisioned in the wake of the affair has received scant attention from scholars since the publication of the *Évangiles* at the turn of the century. Zola’s utopian novels merit serious scholarly attention because they demonstrate better than any other work by the naturalist writer the same bold republican reformist spirit of “J’accuse!” Written in a climate of anxiety about France’s unity and health during the alleged population crisis, these novels synthesize Zola’s lifelong socio-literary project to paint a true portrait of social decadence under the empire and, at the same time, respond with positivist optimism to the climate of political and social crisis at the turn of the century. The bright social future projected by these secular “gospels” offered fin-de-siècle French readers hope that their nation would be restored to its former economic, cultural and political greatness.

In spite of the attention they drew at the turn of the century, the *Évangiles* have since been neglected by scholars of French literature and history, remaining overshadowed by Zola’s “J’accuse!” and his famous *Rougon-Macquart* series. While many of Zola’s contemporaries praised his *Évangiles* as an attempt to renew his narrative style, some panned them for their aesthetic weakness by comparison to his earlier works. Such negative response is undoubtedly a reaction to their experimental, rather awkwardly grandiose, utopian style, which is fused with Zola’s familiar realist social dissection. The sheer volume of these novels may also account for some of the negative criticism of them. Indeed, at an average of seven hundred pages each, the *Évangiles* were a much more daunting read than the *Rougon-Macquart* novels, the average length of which was about four hundred pages.<sup>3</sup> Though the naturalist novelist was no stranger to moral disapproval, the attacks on his *Évangiles*’ stylistic innovation led him to wonder, “N’ai-je pas le droit, après quarante ans d’analyse, de finir dans un peu de synthèse? L’hypothèse, l’utopie, des droits du poète.”<sup>4</sup>

On the other hand, the *Évangiles* won the admiration of intellectuals from both literary and political circles, such as Paul Brulat who applauded the fifty-nine year old naturalist for his ability to “renouveler sa forme, sa manière et sa vision artistique.”<sup>5</sup> Writers like Camille de Sainte-Croix, Laurent Tailhade, Octave Mirbeau and Gustave Kahn celebrated a new lyrical turn in Zola’s writing. For Maurice Le Blond, the *Évangiles* breathed new life into the fin-de-siècle literary scene:

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<sup>2</sup>In David Baguley’s words, “L’affaire Dreyfus a surtout canalisé les énergies, attisé les émotions [...] Les derniers écrits de Zola sont manifestement déterminés par les mêmes forces idéologiques qui s’affrontent dans l’arène politique.” *Zola et les genres*, (Glasgow: University of Glasgow French & German Publications, 1993), 148. FWJ Hemmings lamented this connection: “the solemnity with which [Zola] embarked on his self-appointed mission to regenerate the French nation could be regarded as one of the few regrettable consequences of his embroilment in the Dreyfus affair.” *Emile Zola* (Oxford: Clarendon Press), 1953, 177.

<sup>3</sup> Alain Pagès and Owen Morgan, *Guide Emile Zola* (Paris: Ellipses, 2002).

<sup>4</sup> Emile Zola *Correspondance*, Ed. by B. H. Bakker. Vol. X: 1899-1902 (Montreal: Presses de l’Université de Montreal; Paris: CNRS, 1995), 75.

<sup>5</sup> Cited in David Baguley, *Fécondité d’Emile Zola: roman à these, évangile, mythe* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1973), 149.

A une époque où la littérature paraît avoir totalement dégénéré de sa mission primitive, où l'ironie, la manière artiste, l'élégance idéologique et la coquetterie verbale sont préférés à l'héroïque recherche de la beauté simple et de la vérité humaine, voici donc un écrivain qui ne redoute pas de prendre la posture apostolique et pontificale des poètes des anciens âges bibliques ou païens, de prêcher la régénérescence morale, de tenter le nouvel évangile de la religion future qui proclame la foi dans la vie terrestre et sainte, qui glorifie le travail séculaire des hommes, qui célèbre l'épique et perpétuel épanouissement des races à la surface des vieilles terres pacifiques!<sup>6</sup>

Prominent socialists like Jean Jaurès, and feminists Maria Pognon, Louise Debor, and Harlor, including the radical feminist, Caroline Kauffman, praised Zola's secular "gospels" for their important contribution to social reform. For all the *Evangiles*' allegedly clumsy new lyricism, admirers of these novels believed that they would have a very real, very positive influence on French audiences. Studying these neglected works should cause us to rethink our usual approaches to the whole of Zola's œuvre not only for the ways in which their utopian vision of the republic complements the *Rougon-Macquart*'s critique of the Second Empire, but because they demonstrate French writers and artists' increasing engagement with social and political discourses. As this dissertation shows, Zola's *Quatre Evangiles* directly participate in the collaborative theorization of republican reforms concerning biological evolution, national education and secular morality during the Third Republic.

Today, the positive reception of the *Evangiles* from fin-de-siècle critics has been either forgotten or dismissed as support for Zola's political bravery in the Dreyfus affair rather than for the novels' intellectual or literary value. Many recent critics of the *Evangiles* have judged them unrepresentative of Zola's literary naturalism even though they are written with the same rigorous research as his earlier works, only with broader and more optimistic outlook on the future of France. For some critics, the novels' unconventional religious, scientific utopianism makes them artistic failures, rejected as the product of "un dernier Zola sénile et radoteur dont la source de création s'est tarie."<sup>7</sup> Jean Borie described the *Evangiles* as a "pathétique échec."<sup>8</sup> This dismissive view relies on a reductive definition of naturalism as a perverse critical discourse, and wrongly rejects a unique and challenging corpus on the subjective conviction that it is "bad writing."

Over the course of the past decade, scholarly attention to the *Evangiles* has been superficial and tokenistic, for the most part. Most of these studies refer to one of the *Evangile* novels in passing, as a confirmation of assumptions about naturalist literature from the *Rougon-Macquart* series in order to make an argument about Zola's writing as a whole, not an innovative literary project in its own right. Rather than exploring their unique utopian naturalist aesthetic and its various political implications, most studies of the *Evangiles* reiterate existing interpretations, for example, Zola's alleged misogyny or scientific naivety. This series has suffered neglect even in Zola studies, the present study being one of only four comprehensive studies of the *Quatre Evangiles* to date.<sup>9</sup> The

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<sup>6</sup> Untitled article from *La Nouvelle revue internationale*, novembre 1899.

<sup>7</sup> Béatrice Laville, "Les *Evangiles*, entre épuisement et modernité," *Lire/Délire Zola*, sous la direction de Jean-Pierre Leduc-Adine et Henri Mitterand. (Paris: Nouveau Monde Éditions, 2004), 313.

<sup>8</sup> Jean Borie, *Zola et les mythes, ou la nausée au salut* (Paris: Seuil, 1971), 12.

<sup>9</sup> Mieczyslaw Kaczynski, « *Les Quatre Évangiles* » d'Émile Zola: *entre la vision catastrophique et la vision utopique* (Lublin, 1979); Evelyne Cosset, *Les Quatre Evangiles d'Emile Zola: espace, temps, personnages* (Genève: Droz, 1990), and Jacques Pelletier, *Le Testament de Zola. 'Les Évangiles' et la*

disjuncture between the *Évangiles*' popularity in fin-de-siècle artistic, intellectual, and political circles, and their current marginal status in literary and historical canons calls attention to significant differences between aesthetic, social and political values then and now. For this reason, this dissertation proposes a historically contextualized reading of Zola's *Évangiles*. Zola's secular gospels are forgotten foundational fictions of French national identity, according to Benedict Anderson's definition of a nation as "an imagined community [...] both inherently limited and sovereign."<sup>10</sup> Literature has the unique potential to unite French people regardless of religious faith because it "connected [fellow readers] through print, formed, in their secular, particular, visible invisibility, the embryo of the nationally imagined community."<sup>11</sup> By imagining the political, economic and cultural hegemony of a future French republic, these novels promote a powerful myth of French national superiority.

The *Rougon-Macquart* novels brilliantly convey the conscious engagement of Zola's literary projects with social and historical critique. This critique is continued and complemented by the *Quatre Évangiles*' utopian vision, Zola's most explicit literary experiment with scientific inquiry, positivism and social reform discourse. Because they represent the culmination of his entire naturalist project, the study of the *Évangiles* provides a more complete understanding of the relationship between his naturalist novels and ideological production in nineteenth-century France. This dissertation reconstructs the dominant fin-de-siècle scientific, political and sociological theories of the Third Republic. Within this context, I compare Zola's preparatory documents and critical reception of the novels to the actual *Évangile* texts. By juxtaposing the obvious thesis of these novels and the unconscious discourse they produce, I show that Zola's fictional republic not only draws on, but translates contemporary discourses into a unique vision of naturalist social and biological evolution. By resituating the Froment brothers' fictional reforms within actual fin-de-siècle discourses on racial perfectability, repopulation, feminism, and secular education, I argue that the *Quatre Évangiles* best articulate Zola's belief in the power of literature to enact social and political change.

In *Le Roman expérimental* (1880), Zola explains that naturalist novels did not simply borrow methods of scientific inquiry to achieve separate creative goals, he

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*religion de l'humanité au tournant du XXe siècle* (Québec, Éditions Nota bene, 2004). David Baguley's *Fécondité d'Émile Zola: roman à thèse, évangile, mythe* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1973) is a book-length study which focuses solely on the first gospel. Other recent work on *Les Quatre Évangiles* includes Julia Przybos' "Zola's Utopias," in *The Cambridge Companion to Émile Zola*, Ed. Brian Nelson (Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Evelyn Gould's "From Happiness to Truth: Educating Consumers in Zola's *Au Bonheur des dames* and *Vérité*," in *New Approaches to Zola*, ed. Hannah Thompson (London: Emile Zola Society, 2003): 43-56, and "Race, Culture, 'Truth': The 'Jews,' the Intellectuals, and the Dreyfus Affair," *Excavatio*, vol. XVI (Fall 2002): 1-22; Carmen Mayer-Robin's "Justice, Zola's Global Utopian Gospel," *Nineteenth Century French Studies* 36.1 (2007) 135-149, and "Midwifery and Malpractice in Fécondité: Zola's Fictional History of Problematical Maternities" in *Birth and Death in Nineteenth-Century French Culture*, Eds. Harkness, Downing, Stephens & Unwin (Amsterdam/New York: Rodopi, 2007); Sophie Guermès' *La religion de Zola: naturalisme et déchristianisation* (Paris: Champion, 2003); Chantal Pierre-Gnassounou's "« Bâtir une utopie »: Emile Zola/Anatole France" in *Champ littéraire, fin de siècle, autour de Zola*, Ed. Béatrice Laville (Pessac: Presses universitaires de Bordeaux, 2004); and Béatrice Laville's "Les Évangiles, entre épuisement et modernité" in *Lire/Dé-lire ZOLA*, sous la direction de Jean-Pierre Leduc-Adine et Henri Mitterrand (Paris: Nouveau Monde Éditions, 2004).

<sup>10</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London, New York: Verso, 1983), 6.

<sup>11</sup> *Imagined Communities*, 44.

believed that infusing literary production with scientific method would help reach their common goal of revealing the truth, which would free humanity of ignorance and superstition: “La république ne peut vivre qu’à condition d’être le gouvernement des supériorités intellectuelles, la formule scientifique de la société moderne, appliquée par des esprits libres et logiques.”<sup>12</sup> Unlike romantic literature, whose idealism moored it in a “déisme nuageux et lyrique,” and the social sciences’ hypocritical worship of “la religion du beau,” naturalist literature is truly republican because of its purely rational foundation.<sup>13</sup> For naturalists, religion was obsolete; they proclaimed the death of God and other deities, including what Zola called artistic “divinity.” He exclaimed, “il faut que vous acceptiez notre littérature naturaliste, qui est précisément l’outil littéraire de la nouvelle solution scientifique cherchée par le siècle. Quiconque est avec la science, doit être avec nous.”<sup>14</sup>

Zola maintained his rigid defense of naturalistic objectivity against romantic idealism and symbolist mysticism well into his career. In an 1894 interview about the state of French literature, he balked at the new wave of spiritualism he observed in symbolist literature: “[son] mysticisme m’inquiète [parce qu’il] paraît supposer insolubles les problèmes auxquels la science s’acharne à trouver des solutions positives.”<sup>15</sup> Like romanticism, the symbolist vision of the future was grounded in faith, not fact. Ironically, only a few years later, Zola began to experiment with a new alliance between science, humanism and the sacred in *Paris* (1898), which recounts the Catholic priest Pierre Froment’s spiritual disillusionment and secular rebirth. In the *Évangiles* novels that followed, Mathieu, Marc and Luc Froment inherit their father Pierre’s secular devotion to humanity and make it the primary force for a more just, more peaceful new republic. Despite Zola’s disdain for traditional forms of religion and spirituality, the *Évangiles’* utopian naturalist aesthetic unites science and art in a positive, lyrical voice. While in 1881, Zola claimed that naturalism had no god, but instead a “force créatrice” based on objective analysis and devoid of idealism, twenty years later, his *Quatre Évangiles* not only present a new lyrical naturalist ideal, but a new secular religion. These secular gospels mark the end of Zola’s reticence towards religion, mysticism, God, and the sacred. Science and technology, in his utopian republic, become the foundation for a modern, naturalist “religion de l’homme.”<sup>16</sup>

Though it is curious that Zola named his utopian novels “gospels,” few critics have paid attention to the paradoxical nature of his secular gospel-writing. By its very title, this fictional series raises questions about its content and tone, the first of which being why a staunchly anticlerical writer like Zola would cast his revitalized republic in religious, even Christian terms. One might be tempted to interpret the sacred naming as an ironic gesture. Yet, such a reading would have to disregard the important new optimism in Zola’s creativity marked by this unusual project. Through his secular gospels, the naturalist critic of French imperial society deliberately transformed his pessimistic social vision into a republican fantasy to satisfy his own creative needs and what he considered the needs of French literature and government. In “La République et

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<sup>12</sup> Emile Zola, *Le Roman expérimental* (Paris: Charpentier, 1881), 411.

<sup>13</sup> *Le Roman expérimental*, 401.

<sup>14</sup> *Le Roman expérimental*, 403.

<sup>15</sup> Emile Zola, “Naturalisme et symbolisme” *Le Journal*, 20 août 1894.

<sup>16</sup> Emile Zola, *Travail*, OC 8: 907.

la littérature,” he argues that naturalist literature and the Third Republic must ultimately unite or part ways indefinitely: “La république vivra ou la république ne vivra pas, selon qu’elle acceptera ou qu’elle rejettera notre méthode. La république sera naturaliste ou la république ne sera pas.” For Zola, the French republic, like naturalist “republican” literature, must adopt modern scientific methods and rules in order to survive. He believed that the French republic would only grow by making reason and truth, rather than faith or obedience, the forces of national unity and the primary means of government.<sup>17</sup>

This dissertation complicates the picture we have of Zola’s social and political commitments by historicizing how we came to understand republicanism as a progressive, pluralistic, inclusive politics. After mapping out actual reform discourses that inform Zola’s fictional Republic of the future, I examine the tension between its progressive and reactionary social implications for both France at the fin-de-siècle and today. In Zola’s experimental naturalist utopianism, biopower explicitly consecrates republican humanism in the age of scientific and industrial progress. By drawing attention to issues such as bodies, love, job satisfaction, the individual’s sense of belonging and sacred, the *Evangiles* make private life a subject of public debate. These novels imagine the ways in which treating formerly hidden social problems in popular literature might benefit men and women, particularly among the working class.

One of the most surprising aspects of the *Evangiles* is their relatively progressive representation of gender roles. These novels envision more active roles for women in the public, professional sphere, and, conversely, more active roles for men in the private, domestic sphere. Although feminist scholars have criticized *Fécondité*’s aggressive repopulation campaign, they have missed some of the more progressive aspects of the *Evangiles*’ gender paradigm. These novels explicitly advocate for the protection of women’s health as well as for new educational and professional opportunities, all crucial issues in fin-de-siècle French feminist discourse. Despite the patriarchal logic behind men’s increased participation in childbirth, the fact that the *Evangiles* hold men accountable for their sexual conduct promotes greater equality between men and women. By promoting men’s responsibility in the welfare of their families and the sexual health of the nation, the *Evangiles* imagine more equal parental duties. The celebration of women’s professional service to the Republic as teachers and workers in *Travail* and *Vérité* confirms Zola’s relatively progressive vision of gender roles.

Yet, Mathieu, Marc and Luc Froments’ abundant colonizing family, cooperative labor system, and centralized mandatory education also depict the triumph of a future eugenic biopolitical regime. The *Evangiles*’ fictional rehabilitation of colonial and domestic French populations exemplifies what Michel Foucault calls the modern biopower regime, a new system of power that combines disciplinary and ideological power technologies.<sup>18</sup> The desire for mastery over good and evil, over society and life itself that Zola expressed in his experimental novel theory is an early indication of the link between literature and biopower. Zola’s fantasy of national rehabilitation is a fantasy of mastery. By promoting bourgeois goals such as self improvement and devotion to the

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<sup>17</sup> *Le Roman expérimental*, 375-376.

<sup>18</sup> See the last chapter of Foucault’s *Histoire de la sexualité*, Volume I and the final lecture in “Il faut défendre la société.”

family, the Froments enact slow but steady large-scale reforms like racial perfection and national unification.

The Froments' biopolitical regulation of the family and education provides certain benefits for women and workers, nevertheless, the eugenic program they enact ultimately disallows for social, cultural and racial diversity. The success of the Fromentian republic for the future not only provides a moral counter-balance to the corrupt Second Empire, it justifies the destruction of social groups who do not conform to Zola's image of an ideal republican citizen: a white, educated, middle-class man or woman with a large family a strong work ethic. Our current-day perspective makes it impossible to ignore the marginalization of certain social groups such as the colonial indigenous, racial minorities, clergy, religious believers and the aristocracy. The *Evangiles*' homogenization of religious, racial and class identity in continental and colonial France gives voice to an aggressive strain of imperialism supported by republican universalism.

Biopower is implicit in Zola's earlier novels insofar as the *Rougon-Macquart* series suggests that the corrupt Second Empire could not effectively unite, much less manage its citizens because it relied primarily on disciplinary forces. Whereas the *Rougon-Macquart* blames immoral behavior for the decay of French society (illustrated by the tragic downfall of the Rougon-Macquart family), the *Evangiles* invite readers to emulate the Froment family's building of the ideal republic. Together, the *Rougon-Macquart* and *Evangile* novels express like no other nineteenth-century corpus, the overlapping political forces that constitute modern state biopower. Critics often dismiss scientific experimentation in Zola's literary naturalism as a theme or naïve subtext because they have generally not taken scientific discourse seriously. Careful study of the relationship between literature, science and social reform in the *Evangiles* reveals, on the contrary, that science, as part of biopower, is not merely a plot device in Zola's regenerated republic; it emerges as a new form of social control through the dissemination of republican anticlerical ideology. These utopian novels epitomize literature's function as what Louis Althusser and Michel Foucault have called an ideological apparatus of power. This dissertation shows that by self-consciously investing art and literature with the power to mold the French population into a coherent nation, Zola's *Quatre Evangiles* series posits naturalist utopian literature as sacred republican scripture.

The *Evangiles* retain much of the rhetoric of scientific scrutiny characteristic of naturalism and exemplified in the *Rougon-Macquart* novels, while venturing into unfamiliar romantic, spiritual, even mystical territory. Through the intimate conversion of the Froment sons into social missionaries, each gospel helps bolster modern French identity through new republican cults: procreation in *Fécondité*, industry in *Travail* and education in *Vérité*. Together, these novels celebrate the Third Republic and posit scientific national utopianism as a kind of secular sacred scripture. The Froment brothers incarnate Zola's belief in the inherent good of humanity and his faith in science to engender social progress. The *Evangiles* offer not only a model of social action, but also social gods to replace the corrupt authority of monarchs and the Church.

Critics who have interpreted the *Evangiles*' simplistic, yet longwinded plot structure as an effect of the "roman à thèse," seem to imply that the novels' transparent ideology is to blame for their aesthetic inelegance. Many of these stylistic problems, however, are a result of Zola's adaptation of religious narrative in a secular gospel in

which the apostolic Froments experience conversions to “faith” in humanity and in republican institutions. Each gospel uses conventional forms of biblical narrative, such as glorious, persistent refrains of republican beliefs, parables and an intimate yet omniscient narrative tone, to inspire new republican faith. These features evoke the Christian bible, myths which many French readers would have recognized regardless of their religious beliefs. Indeed, these novels clearly assume a shared understanding of the sacred. The simplicity and familiarity of Zola’s spiritual republican narrative tone and conversion plot structure only enhance their readability, their sacred status and their potential for ideological influence. Like the Gospels of the Christian New Testament, Zola’s secular gospels spread the good word of new faith and a new religion.

Zola’s vision of the ideal French republic can be best described as biopolitical fantasy. His *Evangiles* are overlooked examples of what Benedict Andersen calls foundational fictions that promote the myth of French national superiority based on the French population’s biological, economic, industrial, social and political strength. While the *Evangiles* might have induced political or social action, as some of Zola’s contemporary admirers hoped, at the very least, they offered hope and inspiration to the reading public in a moment dominated by waning spiritual faith and intense social pessimism.<sup>19</sup> The heroic Froment men and women invite readers to experience a spiritual-social conversion similar to their own: the renewal of republican faith through the triumph of reason and science over ignorance, of community over prejudice and rivalry. By interpolating readers as participants in the glorious regeneration of the republic, these novels are a powerful ideological apparatus. Zola’s secular *Evangiles* are far more complex than thesis novels in that they consecrate the modern republican religion of scientific humanitarianism. Indeed, as *Travail*’s narrator explains, literature acts as a sanctifying force for republican atheism. Nearly twenty years after Zola’s censure of religion in all its forms in his *Roman expérimental*, his *Evangiles* ironically provide a dogma to a growing republican mystique in turn-of-the-century France.

Zola’s *Evangiles* mark an evolution from the romantic mysticism of earlier nineteenth-century French utopian works to a naturalist biopolitical republic. However, through the process of rationalizing love, labor and education, these novels sanctify them as central cults in the republican humanist religion. Despite his will to depart from mysticism, Zola actually returns to it by inventing, not a deity but a new secular sacred entity: the French republic. Mathieu, Luc and Marc Froment are his fictional republican apostles who deliver France into its scientific destiny as the ideal nation of the future. The *Evangiles*’ personal narratives of the Froments’ conversion to positivist humanism suggest that reading and writing inspirational national myths, such as the *Evangiles*, is the ultimate secular sacred humanist act.

My first chapter, “Science and the Race for Utopia,” examines race and republican identity politics in relation to nineteenth-century eugenics discourse in France. I read Zola’s literary raciology alongside raciological theories from leading scientists like Lamarck, Letourneau, Lucas, Renan, Hippolyte Taine and procolonial republican politicians like Jules Ferry and Waldeck-Rousseau. This chapter analyzes Zola’s broad

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<sup>19</sup> The Centre Zola at the CNRS in Paris houses a fascinating collection of correspondence to Zola from his readers. Many of these letters written to the naturalist novelist expressed gratitude for the new optimism that average readers found in the *Evangiles*.

use of the term “race” in French commercial enterprise abroad by comparing the different treatments of European races and African or Middle-Eastern races in Zola’s earlier novels, *Thérèse Raquin* (1867), *L’Argent* (1891) and his first *Évangile*, *Fécondité* (1899). The chapter outlines an evolution in the rhetoric of French biological superiority in Zola’s regenerative novels, which culminates in the *Évangiles* pronouncement of a virile white republican race made possible by the Froment family’s establishment of a dynasty in France and their colonization of the Sudan. Finally, I investigate the ambiguous political implications of Zola’s fictional exclusion of black West Africans, Algerians, and his call for assimilation of the Jews in his article “Pour les juifs” (1896), and its fictional realization in *Vérité* (1903). I examine the apparent contradiction between Zola’s public condemnation of anti-Semitism and his problematic assimilationist strategy in light of twentieth-century reflections on republicanism and Jewish identity by Bernard Lazare and Jean-Paul Sartre. As this chapter shows, the joint goals of racial perfection and imperial power in Zola’s utopia exemplify a new republican elitism and the undercurrent of racist ideology in French universalism.

Whereas Chapter 1 considered the racial implications of the *Évangiles*’ biopolitical republic, the following chapter, “Gender, Parenthood and Patriotism,” focuses on the stakes of sex and gender in *Fécondité*’s (1899) celebration of the abundant family. Though the mystification of childbirth is hardly innovative, Zola’s novel continues his task of exalting national repopulation as a sacred republican rite. In it, I challenge feminist claims that *Fécondité* is nothing more than the misogynistic male appropriation of reproduction thinly veiled as a patriotic duty. My study suggests, instead, that the Froments’ ideal fecund family is more socially progressive than it initially seems in the context of contemporary debates on family planning, sexual education and repopulation. This chapter evaluates *Fécondité*’s gendering of familial and sexual reforms within the context of turn-of-the-century reproductive campaigns by medical experts such as Alfred Pinard, Jacques Berthillon and Etienne Canu alongside contraception advocates like Paul Robin and Nelly Roussel. First, I delineate the three main reproductive campaigns in France from 1880 to 1905: neo-Malthusianism, a pro-contraception, family-planning campaign; pronatalism, an anti-contraceptive movement; and *puériculture*, a uniquely French family-planning system that endorses positive discrimination of sexual partners for the successful propagation of the “French race.” Although *Fécondité*’s consecration of fertile mothers and fathers operates on patriarchal logic, its depiction of men as conscientious lovers, husbands and fathers breaks down the notion of separate gender spheres.

Chapter 3, “New Women for the New Republic” proposes a reconsideration of Zola’s reputation as a confirmed anti-feminist in recent feminist scholarship. This chapter aims to broaden the scope of feminist approaches to Zola’s fiction by studying feminist criticism of his modern women figures in conjunction with fin-de-siècle response to his writing in Marguerite Durand’s feminist newspaper, *La Fronde*. I proceed by reconstructing the rich landscape of French feminist discourse in Zola’s day. Within this context, I reassess recent attacks on Zola’s alleged misogyny by comparing his remarks on feminism in preparatory notes for his novels to the republican heroines produced in his *Évangiles*. This chapter traces a clear evolution of feminist discourse in Zola’s writing from the *Évangiles*’ prequel, *Paris* (1898). This novel’s heroine, Marie Froment is Zola’s version of a “new woman,” his prototype for modern republican women he developed in

the following novels *Fécondité*, *Travail*, and *Vérité*. My analysis of feminist reception of the *Evangiles* reveals that Zola's fictional reform of pregnancy and childcare, girls' education and professional opportunity had positive social implications for women journalists and political activists. His portrayal of women as active republican mothers, workers and teachers resonates with the maternalist discourse that dominated fin-de-siècle French feminism. Zola's late journalism and novels attest to his growing commitment to women's social movements, and that prominent feminist leaders of this era both recognized and celebrated his efforts to imagine a better future for French men and women.

The final chapter, "Secular Education and Republican Rites," examines the relationship between education, religion and the state in Zola's utopian republic in light of nineteenth-and twentieth-century debates on *laïcité*. *Travail* (1901) and *Vérité* (1903) depict School as a sacred republican institution and the pursuit of knowledge as the most important republican rite. I begin by using Emile Durkheim's scientific definition of religion and the sacred to explain how the *Evangiles*' "religion de l'homme" proposes a scientific idea of the sacred for the secular world. This chapter then contextualizes his fictional public schools in campaigns for rational secular education led by feminists anticlerical reformers and pedagogues including Pauline Kergomard, Jules Ferry, Ferdinand Buisson and Emile Durkheim, all of whom promoted School as the legitimate source of morality and national unity. Next, I compare *Travail*'s economics to the romantic social utopian thought that inspired it, looking in particular at how *Travail* adapts Charles Fourier's industrial utopia, *Harmonie*. This chapter suggests that, despite Zola's attempt to truly resolve class struggle in his *Evangiles*, his heroic Froments translate the value of education, technology and work, into a new republican social hierarchy with teachers and writers at the top. Rather than eliminating capital and privilege, Zola's evangelists distribute them more justly according to atheistic, scientific morality, producing a new bourgeois society that values property, leisure, and status, as well as hygiene, regulation, and utility. This chapter concludes by reflecting on the implications of the *Evangiles*' message that republican art and literature as modes of learning, are modern religious acts.

## Chapter 1: Science and the Race for Utopia

Il n'est pas, aux colonies, de race plus féconde que la race française, elle qui paraît être devenue stérile sur son antique sol. Et nous pullulerons, et nous emplirons le monde! [...] Il y a là-bas place pour tous, des terres neuves, du grand air que n'a respiré personne, une tâche à remplir qui fera de vous tous des héros, des gaillards solides heureux de vivre [...] vous vous taillerez d'autres provinces, et vous fonderez d'autres villes pour la toute-puissance future de la grande France démesurée!

Emile Zola, *Fécondité*

Le racisme colonial ne diffère pas d'autres racismes.

Franz Fanon, *Peau noire, masques blancs*

It seems odd that recent studies of the liberal origins of French racism have passed over the work of literary naturalist Zola, one of the most prolific analysts of racial degeneration and regeneration. Despite the profound impact of Taine, Renan and Letourneau's racial theories on Emile Zola's literature, racial discourse in his corpus is often taken to be simply symbolic: the diseased and decaying bodies of his famous *Rougon-Macquart* family are read as metaphors for the corrupt government and rotten social relationships and not the study of racial degeneration. The privileging of body as metaphor overlooks the fact that Zola's literary naturalism contributes to the development and dissemination of nineteenth-century medical and anthropological theories of race. The critical neglect of scientific racism in Zola's work may be explained by his reputation as a popularizer of science the marginal status of his most explicitly eugenic works, *Les Quatre Evangiles* (1899-1903) which imagine the French republic as the most biologically, morally and politically evolved twentieth-century nation.

Historians routinely reject scientific discourse in Zola's fiction as naïve and misinformed scientism, while literary scholars dismiss his obscure secular gospels as longwinded utopian fantasy, uncharacteristic of his naturalist social dissection, and therefore unworthy of critical attention.<sup>1</sup> No less focused on the degenerate state of France than his better known *Rougon-Macquart* series (1871-1893), the *Evangiles*' imagined utopian regeneration of the Republic continue his naturalist social critique, proposing an optimistic future made possible by the very same scientific theories and technologies that informed his negative vision of decadent France.

Zola's *Evangiles* confirm the transformation of his social and literary pessimism into social utopianism and national regeneration hinted at in the final installments of his prior two series *Le Docteur Pascal* (1893) and *Paris* (1898). This optimistic movement was intensified by Zola's courageous intervention in the Dreyfus Affair (1897-1898). The *Evangiles* were written during the alleged depopulation crisis, which demanded aggressive moral and physical reform within national borders and justified French colonization of sub-Saharan Africa for the "health" of the French nation. Zola's racial study prior to the *Evangiles* entails the observation of degenerate characters whose bad genes and behavior caused them to rot. These narratives of degeneration depict what might be called "Naturalist" racial selection, an inversion of a Darwinian survival of the

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<sup>1</sup> Tzvetan Todorov uses scientism in a neutral sense despite its more common derogatory connotation in modern usage. *Imperfect Garden* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 20-25.

fittest. The dispassionate social dissection of Zola's *Rougon-Macquart* legitimates the deaths of unfit characters that represent unfit segments of the French population. Moreover, the fact that literary naturalism became synonymous with social dissection and critique of moral and physical degeneracy explains why the "third Zola," who wrote the progressively optimistic *Trois Villes* and *Quatre Evangiles*, has all but fallen into oblivion. The negative eugenic narrative of Zola's earlier work stands in stark contrast to the *Evangiles*' celebration of the Froment family's vitality and prosperity in metropolitan and colonial France. The evolutionary optimism of these novels resonates with scientific naturalism and romantic utopianism in the belief that rational thought and scientific advances would lead to social progress.

The *Evangiles*' genetically fit Froment brothers, Mathieu, Luc, Marc and Jean accomplish a regeneration of the French republic through militant reform of the family, the workplace, and the education system. Each novel ends in the pronouncement of a biologically and economically stronger future for France, which Zola projected would be totally unified sometime between 1960 and 1980. Guided by logic and science, the Froments successfully cure social diseases such as depopulation, agricultural stagnation, economic recession, and anti-Semitism. The republican Froments triumph over the deathly vestiges of the corrupt *Ancien Régime* through their tenacious production and reproduction: by the end of the first gospel *Fécondité*, Mathieu and Marianne Froment's children fill up and cultivate land in France and in West Africa where the potential for expansion of the great colonial Republic is claimed to be virtually limitless. Luc and Marc Froment in turn contribute to the restoration of French world power by generating their own vast families of republican reformers in the following gospels, *Travail* and *Vérité*.

At first, it seems surprising that the *Evangiles*' naturalistic regeneration produces a more violent ideological discourse than Zola's critique of degeneration and Empire. His project to reform and rehabilitate France through the story of the proliferation of the healthy Froment family does not seem to have any negative consequences. However, upon closer examination, the Froments' encouragement of fit members of the population to live justifies a policy of social negligence because they also allow the unfit to die out. In fact, the Froments' proliferation and reproductive evangelism inadvertently lead to the degeneration of their unfit neighbors. As shall see in this chapter, and those that follow, that examining the imbrication of degeneration and regeneration of Zola's social visions reveals a similar entanglement of imperialist discourse and social elitism in his naturalist republican utopianism. Indeed, over the course of the series, the Fromentian brood is able to dominate national education, absorb neighboring economies and monopolize agriculture, and spill over into African land. This chapter will show that the *Evangiles*' imperialism makes more sense in the context of the Third Republic's endorsement of colonial expansion and its interest in improving France's status as an economic and political world leader.

*Les Quatre Evangiles* affirm Zola's desire that the French republic be realized through naturalist selection, a kind of French adaptation of Darwin's survival of the fittest. In 1879 he articulated this desire exclaiming: "la République sera naturaliste ou elle ne sera pas!"<sup>2</sup> According to Zola's naturalist formula, the weak decadent population and its values must die off so that the strong republican one and its values may survive

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<sup>2</sup> Emile Zola, *Le Roman expérimental* (Paris: Charpentier, 1881), 376.

and prosper. Zola's critique of the decadent Second Empire and his dream of an omnipotent modern republic are complementary visions of naturalist racial selection, and yet it is the positive eugenic discourse of the later novels that most clearly reveals the violent ideological implications of French racial evolution for those parts of the population who are ineligible for republican membership. The *Evangiles* epitomize a vision of government devoted to what Foucault calls biopower, where the state's function is to "faire vivre et de laisser mourir." In Zola's final novels various populations face the choice of either being culturally and racially absorbed into the superior white, atheist republican Froment "race" or fading into social obscurity and death.<sup>3</sup>

The radically eugenic tone of the *Evangiles* is reinforced by Zola's approval of colonialism once it became justified as a vital republican mission to improve the French population by raciological theories similar to his own at the dawn of the Third Republic. During this period republican politicians, intellectuals, and scientists alike promoted colonial expansion in Africa as a necessary, rational, and glorious path to France's economic, social, and biological evolution. I hope to demonstrate here that Zola's treatment of race shares the violent rhetoric that underlies the scientific racism and imperialism that emerged during France's Third Republic.

By resituating Zola's racial genealogies within the scientific and colonial French republican racial paradigm, I argue that Zola's naturalist fiction is a mode of inquiry equivalent to scientific raciological discourse. The biopolitical lyricism of his *Evangiles* contributes a unique rhetoric to evolutionary theories of social progress. This chapter traces the evolution in his naturalist genealogies from his censure of racial degeneration during the Second Empire to the racial regeneration he imagines for the French republic of the future by studying the naturalist rhetoric of French racial superiority prevalent in *Thérèse Raquin* (1867), *L'Argent* (1891), and *Les Quatre Evangiles* (1899-1903), and juxtaposing this rhetoric and its evolution in Zola's work to his public condemnation of anti-Semitism in "Pour les juifs" (1896) and "J'accuse" (1898). The simultaneous exclusion of black Africans and Arabs in the French colonies and the assimilation of European Jews within Zola's "race républicaine" provides the basis for an analysis of the relationship between the Third Republic's quest for imperial power and the racism inherent in French universalism. As we shall see, the latent imperialist and eugenic discourse of Zola's fiction becomes more explicit and persuasive the more fantastical his literary experimentation becomes, reaching its boldest expression in the sacred republican gospels.

## Naturalism and Racial Science

Zola scholarship to date has produced two distinct lenses for interpreting scientific discourse in his fiction: one that acknowledges but ultimately dismisses Zola's interest in scientific theory and experimentation on the grounds of diletantism, and the other that validates his intellectual engagement with raciology. Henri Mitterand represents the dismissive attitude by referring to hereditary discourse in *Le Docteur Pascal* as "pseudo-

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<sup>3</sup> Michel Foucault, "Il faut défendre la société," *Cours au Collège de France (1975-1976)* (Paris: Seuil/Gallimard, 1997), 213.

scientific medical babble.”<sup>4</sup> He does, however, admit that “if we look closely, in fact, he very often came close to anticipating their discoveries.”<sup>5</sup> On the other hand, critics like Yves Malinas and Rainer Warning contend that Zola was exceptionally knowledgeable in contemporary scientific theory. Malinas’ book-length study outlines many of Zola’s scientific references, sources that, according to Warning, provide inspiration for new approaches in Zolian studies “based on [the] possibility of taking Zola just as seriously as his references.”<sup>6</sup> Mitterand’s comment might be supported by a look at Zola’s famous study of the relationship between medical and literary experimentation, *Le Roman expérimental* (1880), which draws directly from Claude Bernard’s theory of experimental medicine, often merely substituting the word author for physician in Bernard’s text. Nevertheless, this obvious appropriation of scientific discourse in Zola’s literary experimentation is only the tip of the iceberg. Science and literature were so intertwined in the last few decades of the nineteenth century that Zola’s friend Huysmans suggested that they invite anthropologist Dr. Letourneau to contribute to a new journal of theirs because he would attract his science-reading clientele to their literary works.<sup>7</sup>

Scientific theory and literature were highly compatible and equally creative modes of inquiry in the nineteenth century. For Zola and his contemporaries, physical and social sciences were subject to as much creative imagination and subjective interpretation as literature. Thomas Kuhn and Stephen Jay Gould have shown that nineteenth-century science was far more experimental and creative than one imagines from a twenty-first-century point of view.<sup>8</sup> Both historians argue that science must be understood as a product of its own cultural moment, not simply discredited because its beliefs have since been surpassed. As Kuhn puts it, “If [out-of-date beliefs] are to be called science, then science has included bodies of belief quite incompatible with the ones we hold today.”<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, fin-de-siècle French scientists and physicians such as André Lefèvre, André Couvreur, Henri Cazalis, and Charles Richet dabbled in fiction, playing the role of writers just as Zola played the role of the scientist in his literature.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Henri Mitterand, “The Novel and Utopia: *Le Docteur Pascal*,” *Emile Zola, Fiction and Modernity* (London: Emile Zola Society, 2000), 123.

<sup>5</sup> Mitterand, “The Novel and Utopia: *Le Docteur Pascal*,” 124.

<sup>6</sup> Rainer Warning, “Zola’s *Rougon-Macquart*: Compensatory Images of a ‘Wild Ontology,’” *MLN*, vol. 113, No. 4, French Issue (September 1998): 705-733; Yves Malinas, *Zola et les hérédités imaginaires*, (Paris: Expansion Scientifique Française, 1985).

<sup>7</sup> Jennifer Michael Hecht, *The End of the Soul* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 96.

<sup>8</sup> See the introductions to Thomas Kuhn’s *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1962) and Stephen Jay Gould’s *The Mismeasure of Man* (New York & London: W.W. Norton and Company, 1981). Gould refers to French radiologist Paul Broca to illustrate science’s inherently creative and subjective nature: “Science is rooted in creative expression. Numbers suggest, constrain, and refute; they do not, by themselves, specify the content of scientific theories. Theories are built upon the interpretation of numbers, and interpreters are often trapped by their own rhetoric. They believe in their own objectivity, and fail to discern the prejudice that leads them to one interpretation among many consistent with their numbers. Paul Broca is now distant enough. We can stand back and show that he used numbers not to generate new theories but to illustrate a priori conclusions. Shall we believe that science is different today simply because we share the cultural context of most practicing scientists and mistake its influence for objective truth?” *The Mismeasure of Man*, 74.

<sup>9</sup> *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 2-3.

<sup>10</sup> Anthropologist André Lefèvre translated poetry and published original poetry and novels; Dr. André Couvreur’s novels include *Le Mal nécessaire* (1899) *La Graine* (1903), and *Caresco surhomme* (1904); Dr. Henri Cazalis published poetry under the names Jean Lahor and Jean Caselli in *L’Illusion* (1888), and *Le*

It is well known that scientific positivism exerted a profound influence on Zola's theories about literary experimentation. Thanks to their personal narratives of the triumph of sacred republican missionaries, the *Evangiles* make abundantly clear that literature is an instrument of the biopolitical regime. The detached narrator of *Thérèse Raquin* and *Rougon-Macquart* is replaced by an intimate account of social evolution through the conversion of Mathieu, Luc and Marc Froment into republican reformers and social leaders. These novels fuse the Naturalist critique of Zola's earlier fiction and the latent passionate utopianism of Zola's more optimistic novels, *Le Docteur Pascal* and the *Trois Villes*. The *Evangiles* serve to discipline readers by advocating the neglect people whose behavior does not support the Froments' devotion to life, work and truth and simultaneously regulate readers' behavior by promoting the racially and morally fit Froments' astonishing procreation, professional and colonial expansion as "normal" republican conduct. By the end of each gospel, the Fromentian way of life as prolific and industrious civil servants becomes not just the norm for all of metropolitan France, some of its colonies and even its European neighbors, but a global social ideal.

Zola repeatedly emphasized experimentation as a common practice in science and literature, and what he described as the most republican means of discovering the truth about the natural and social world.<sup>11</sup> Science offered a wealth of inspiration to fiction writers in terms of subject matter, as well as experimental approaches and even style. Zola reveled in the unorthodox creativity that scientists shared with modern fiction writers like himself: "Chez tout historien, tout philosophe, il y a un littérateur, un artiste, s'accusant dans ses œuvres avec un relief plus ou moins puissant. C'est dire qu'il y a un homme, un tempérament fait d'esprit et de chair, qui voit à sa façon les vérités philosophiques et les faits historiques, et qui nous donne ces vérités et ces faits tels qu'il les perçoit, d'une façon toute personnelle."<sup>12</sup> Letourneau, Lucas, Renan and Taine's theories on the relationship between environment and heredity were all powerful influences on Zola's fiction and literary naturalist theory. Rather than meticulously isolating these specific influences in Zola's novels, however it suffices to characterize his conception of biological and social processes as Lamarckian, or neo-Lamarckian according to fin-de-siècle parlance. The reason for this is that the physical and social scientists that Zola studied and admired share the basic idea of Lamarckian genetic theory: that environment can definitively alter the physical and moral characteristics of a given race, for better or worse, through sustained influence on many generations.

French raciology during the nineteenth-century cannot be reduced to the influence of Darwin or Lamarck on scientific theories of race. It was a broad interdisciplinary discourse with contributions by anthropologists, historians, social psychologists and naturalists. The general consensus defined race as "un groupe humain possédant des caractères communs transmis par l'hérédité."<sup>13</sup> Dispelling the common belief that

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*Bréviaire d'un panthéiste et le pessimisme héroïque* (1906). Radical eugenicist Dr. Charles Richet, in addition to his minor plays and poetry, wrote fantasy novels under the pseudonym Charles Epeyre: *Possession* (1887), *A la recherche du bonheur* (1879), *Sœur Marthe* (1890), *A la recherche de la gloire* (1892), and *La douleur des autres* (1896).

<sup>11</sup> Zola, *Le Roman expérimental*.

<sup>12</sup> Zola, "M. Taine, artiste," *La Revue contemporaine*, 15 février 1866.

<sup>13</sup> Carol Reynaud-Paligot, *La République raciale* (Paris: PUF, 2006), 12. Taine exemplifies this interdisciplinarity because of his literary background and subsequent study of human heredity. His work on

eugenics had always been grounded in extremist rightwing ideology, Carole Reynaud-Paligot argues that it was actually liberal republican anthropologists and social scientists who constituted the majority of *raciologues*.<sup>14</sup> Liberal scientists like Letourneau, Broca, Taine, and Renan were responsible for developing the republican racial paradigm. The unequal vision of humanity presented by this nebulous “science of races” was a central part of progressive, even militant, republican ideology.<sup>15</sup> Likewise, Anne Carol’s *Histoire de l’eugénisme en France* dismantles the myth that eugenics had always been a conservative and marginal discourse in French medical history, showing that the leading eugenicists in France were well-respected republican physicians like Adolphe Pinard and Nobel laureate Charles Richet, rather than rightwing eccentrics like Vacher Lapouge, and Gobineau.

Rather than condemn liberal contributions to the racial paradigm as a shameful part of France’s intellectual history, critics like Reynaud-Paligot, Carol, Taguieff and Foucault have sought to explain how and why scientific theories claiming white, European, and French racial superiority gained prominence in a wide range of nineteenth-century republican discourses in fields as varied as medicine, anthropology, history and literature. As Reynaud-Paligot explains, “la science des races...s’est insérée dans le combat en faveur de la République, celle des républicains, la République laïque, voire même anticléricale, et progressiste.”<sup>16</sup> Michel Foucault suggested a direct link between French socialism and modern racism in the establishment of a racial hierarchy that authorized State biopower, or sovereign power to determine which citizens live and which die:

[...] le thème du bio-pouvoir, développé à la fin du XVIIIe et pendant le XIXe siècle, non seulement n’a pas été critiqué par le socialisme mais, en fait, a été repris par lui, développé, réimplanté, modifié sur certains points, mais absolument pas réexaminé dans ses bases et dans ses modes de fonctionnement...ce n’est pas simplement au niveau de l’Etat socialiste que l’on retrouve ce même fonctionnement du racisme, mais aussi dans les différentes formes d’analyse ou de projet socialiste, tout au long du XIXe siècle [...].<sup>17</sup>

Since early novels like *Thérèse Raquin*, Zola’s fiction and journalism reveal the belief in French racial superiority posited by both left and rightwing raciologists of his time. Liberal French racism has, however, been a subject so taboo that Pierre-André Taguieff labeled it an “objet de phobie idéologique,” making it equally controversial to associate Zola’s work with raciology, especially given his reputation as the valiant defender of Jewish captain Dreyfus against the French government.<sup>18</sup>

Zola’s literary genealogies contribute to the Foucauldian biopolitical paradigm by advocating positive racial selection as the only path to social progress both at home and

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environmental and biological influences on national character, like many of his contemporaries, appears more philosophical than scientific by modern-day standards.

<sup>14</sup> Pierre-André Taguieff calls raciology “racialisme,” while other scholars refer to it as biological or scientific racism. All of these terms refer to scientific justifications for racial hierarchy, segregation and discrimination.

<sup>15</sup> Carole Reynaud-Paligot, *La République raciale*, 2, 11.

<sup>16</sup> *La République raciale*, 279.

<sup>17</sup> Foucault, “Il faut défendre la société,” 233.

<sup>18</sup> “L’eugénisme, objet de phobie idéologique: lectures françaises récentes,” *Esprit*, 156 novembre (1989): 95-115.

abroad by allowing “degenerate” populations to die and “healthy” ones to survive. Naturalist science plays a key role in the *Évangiles*’ republican identity discourse as the principal modern authority on moral, intellectual and physical fitness; it legitimates racial segregation in the French colonization of Africa and the homogenization of white races in the metropolitan republican French super-race.

What Zola describes as the “natural” domination of the fit over the unfit and the courageous over the weak culminates in the creation of *Fécondité*’s abundant Froment race. Their family’s proliferation inevitably and naturally causes the defeat of their weak neighbors. *Fécondité* biologizes the kinship ties of Mathieu and Marianne’s success:

leur innombrable lignée qui se trouvait là, la tribu conquérante née de leur entrailles, n’avait d’autre force que la force d’union dont elle héritait, ce loyal amour des ancêtres légué aux enfants, cette solidaire affection qui les faisait s’aider, lutter pour la vie meilleure en un peuple fraternel.<sup>19</sup>

Fraternal love, affection, and solidarity are imagined as genetically transmitted through Mathieu and Marianne’s bodies. Yet, the stated motive of fraternal solidarity becomes suspicious when one considers the very real exclusionary growth of the Froments, elsewhere described as a dynasty, an empire and a kingdom, and here as a “tribu conquérante.” The Froments do indeed help out one another, but their innumerable proliferation in France and in Africa in no way invites the participation of other people outside of their family. In fact, the novel concludes with the unmistakable racial authorization of French imperial conquest: “les héros bientôt centenaires triomphaient, dans la floraison débordante de leur race. Par-dessus les mers, le lait avait coulé, du vieux sol de France, jusqu’aux immensités de l’Afrique vierge, la jeune et géante France de demain.”<sup>20</sup>

Dominique, Mathieu and Marianne’s grandson by Nicolas, returns to the family home on the occasion of their 60<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary to invite his family to join him in the colonies. Having affirmed their quantitative success in France—the metropolitan Froments count 300 family members—the remaining chapter of the novel details the patriotic victory of the colonial Froment branch. Dominique shares Mme Caroline’s civilizing mission in *L’Argent*, project which he reports, is already at a well advanced stage:

Notre Algérie reliée à Tombouctou par la voie du Sahara, des locomotives électriques qui emporteront toute la vieille Europe, au travers l’infini des sables! Tombouctou reliée au Sénégal, par les flotilles à vapeur du Niger, par d’autres voies ferrées qui sillonneront de partout le vaste empire! la France nouvelle, immense, reliée à la France mère, l’antique patrie [...] prête pour les cent millions d’habitants qui doivent y pousser un jour!<sup>21</sup>

Images of possession and invasion pervade Dominique’s account of the colonial Froments’ success in West Africa. This passage resonates with Saccard’s campaign for French financial speculation in the Middle East. This account does not mention, however, the human beings excluded from or sacrificed in their conquest, with the clear assumption that the Africans are not among the “cent millions d’habitants” meant to grow there, nor the people with whom they will unite, “en un peuple fraternel.” Again, when discussing the new kinds of labor that the *colons* have created through adaptation to African land, Dominique appropriates these accomplishments for his family and for France, repeatedly

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<sup>19</sup> *Fécondité*, *Œuvres Complètes*, 8: 490.

<sup>20</sup> *Fécondité*, *OC*, 8: 502, my emphasis.

<sup>21</sup> *Fécondité*, *OC*, 8: 496.

referring to “notre Algérie,” “mon Niger” and “Notre domaine.”<sup>22</sup> “Nous vivons en république,” he exclaims, reassuring future émigrés that they would be safe in the colonial republic. For French Africa is, according to Dominique, so much like France itself, precisely because he and his colonial brethren continue to preserve the republican political traditions: “nous sommes des hommes libres [...] avec cette récompense de nous dire que notre œuvre est très grande, très belle et très bonne, puisqu’elle est l’autre France, la France souveraine de demain.”<sup>23</sup>

Zola’s fiction demonstrates the dominant belief among nineteenth century raciologists that the perfectability of races was unequal and that the white races has the most potential for greatness. Ultimately, race and environment could determine the successful evolution of a given group of people or “race” but only within the limits of their distinct racial capacity. Even though all races can be improved through environmental influences, the color hierarchy of race can never be altered, meaning that white races had the greatest potential and blacks, the lowest. The French race, as a superior blend of white European races, led raciologists to pronounce its racial superiority over all other races, including other white races. *Fécondité*’s colonial hero, Dominique Froment, reiterates racial theories that placed the French race at the top of the racial hierarchy and was a common justification for colonization during the Third Republic. To this effect, Dominique’s declaration that “Il n’est pas, aux colonies, de race plus féconde que la race française,” echoes Ernest Renan’s scientific claim that European races, Aryans and Semites, constituted a “race de maîtres et de soldats” meant to conquer, govern and regenerate inferior races.<sup>24</sup> By synthesizing biological, historical, economic, and spiritual justifications for French emigration to Africa, *Fécondité* is the clearest expression of literature’s function as a biopolitical technology. As I will show, the sacredness of France’s historical destiny to enlighten in Zola’s colonial vision becomes replaced by modern biopolitical prestige, which joins the old aristocratic paradigm of purity and heritage with the new power granted by scientific mastery over society.

### New Imperial Imaginaries

Unlike most of its imperial rivals, the French Third Republic promoted colonial emigration as an exciting opportunity for young enterprising people. France was the only democratic nation involved in colonial conquest. While countries like Great Britain and Germany cast off their undesirable citizens in the colonies, France endeavored to send the strongest and best of their population to cultivate colonial land for their own, and by extension French, financial interests. France promoted colonial emigration to men and women in search of a better life and a bigger piece of the French patrimony, targeting

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<sup>22</sup> *Fécondité*, OC, 8: 492-493.

<sup>23</sup> *Fécondité*, OC, 8: 494.

<sup>24</sup> Renan, “La Réforme intellectuelle et morale de la France” 1871 in *La Réforme intellectuelle et morale*, (Paris: PUF, 1990), 94. This popular vision of republican manifest destiny is by no means limited to scientific justifications. In fact, Jules Ferry called the French to manifest divine destiny by saying “We must believe that if Providence deigned to confer upon us a mission by making us masters of the earth, this mission consists not of attempting an impossible fusion of the races but of simply spreading or awakening among the other races the superior notions of which we are the guardians.” Cited in Alice Conklin’s *A Mission to Civilize: The Republican Idea of Empire in France and Western Africa, 1895-1930*, 13.

entrepreneurs, civil servants, literate workers and the lower middle class.<sup>25</sup> The French press advertised sub-Saharan Africa as a fertile paradise where French colonials would rapidly proliferate in the spacious and sunny land, enabling France to continue its march toward the apex of historical greatness. Scientific racism and a quasi-mystical faith in historical destiny collectively justified the new wave of colonial conquest in Africa.

Throughout the first twenty years of the Third Republic, scientists, writers, politicians and journalists promoted French colonial expansion in the Sudan, or current-day Mali, as a necessary path to national regeneration. Given the vast imperial losses in the first French Empire and Algerian natives' hostile resistance to French occupation of Algeria, new French enthusiasm for staking its own claims in the "scramble for Africa" was immense. Imperial fever in France became so strong that one popular newspaper changed its anti-colonial stance to a pro-colonial one in order to keep sales up.<sup>26</sup> In light of the new imperialist enthusiasm, many of *Fécondité's* critics have chalked up its glorification of a new France born on African land as a surrender to the fin-de-siècle imperial craze.<sup>27</sup> Its position at the end of the novel has justified the view that its inclusion in *Fécondité* was a kind of afterthought or nod to popular colonial discourse. Because it was regarded as an anomaly in the novel and in Zola's corpus, it is often overlooked. Such views yet again dismiss Zola's literature as an important site for producing discourses on race. The African episode exemplifies how literary naturalism disseminated and reinforced republican racial ideology. Not only does it tie contemporary scientific racism and social hygiene campaigns to colonial expansion, it reconciles the more "civilized" republican colonial expansion with the violent conquests of the First and Second Empires, acting as a kind of historical or ideological reparation for France's hostile invasion and occupation of Algeria.

The civilizing mission of fin-de-siècle colonialism positioned the French as model world citizens, republican rulers over the French African empire. Firmly grounded in republican raciology, the French example was meant to guide Africans, not to become compatriots, but instead in the inferior parallel evolution of their own cultures and races. According to historian Alice Conklin, raciological theories of African inferiority encouraged the Third Republic's efforts to learn from earlier mistakes made in Algeria by adopting more separatist policies in West African colonies founded about fifty years later.<sup>28</sup> In fact, many of the difficulties in Algerian colonization were blamed on France's naïve conduct towards the natives.<sup>29</sup> Though Algerians' hostile resistance to French rule in the 1850s and 1860s was eventually "subdued," later colonial policy became strictly

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<sup>25</sup> William H. Schneider, *An Empire for the Masses: The French Popular Image of Africa, 1870-1900* (Greenwood Press, 1982), ix-xx; William B. Cohen, *The French Encounter with African: White Response to Blacks, 1530-1880* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003), 270-175.

<sup>26</sup> Schneider, *An Empire for the Masses*, 70-72.

<sup>27</sup> Footnote to *Fécondité*, OC, 8: 525, n. 60.

<sup>28</sup> *A Mission to Civilize*, 21-22.

<sup>29</sup> Ann Stoler writes that "Rationalization of imperial rule and safeguards against racial degeneracy in the colonies converged on particular moral themes. Both entailed a reassertion of European conventions and middle-class respectability. Both promoted stronger and more frequent ties with the metropole and a restatement of what was culturally distinct and superior about how colonials ruled and lived." See Stoler's *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule* (University of California Press, 2002), 66-70.

insular, and proscribed cultural and racial mixing between French citizens and indigenous subjects.

*Fécondité's* exalted invasion of West Africa echoes contemporaneous republican racial justifications for colonization.<sup>30</sup> Since this conquest had actually occurred by the time Zola wrote this novel, his interest in creating a fictional French supercolony in Africa is less prophetic and more interpretive. This episode is an extension of the Froments' metropolitan colonization and imagining a happy ending for French colonial history through the allegory of Marianne Froment, an orphan of Algerian colonization, who with the help of her husband Mathieu Froment, becomes the grandmother of the republican colony in Africa. The Froments' successful colonization of French Sudan redeems France's disastrous past in Algeria, a redemption incarnated by Marianne. Her parents, early pioneers in Algeria, who were tragically "massacred" by natives at the very moment when they had begun to prosper, leaving Marianne orphaned.<sup>31</sup> The following narrative description of her tragic background foreshadows the poetic justice of the Froment family's eventual colonization of Sudan:

Félix Beauchêne, après des échecs de toutes sortes, esprit brouillon, hanté d'un besoin d'aventures, s'en était allé, avec sa femme et sa fille, tenter la fortune en Algérie; et, cette fois, la ferme créée par lui, là-bas, prospérait, lorsque, dans un brusque retour de brigandage, le père et la mère furent massacrés, les bâtiments détruits, de sorte que la fillette, sauvée par miracle, n'eut d'autre refuge que la maison de son oncle.

Marianne's financial and social rehabilitation through marriage to Mathieu are obvious, because he rescues her from uncle's house and provides her with her own home and family, replacing the ones she had lost. The proliferation of Marianne's children and grandchildren in the Sudan represents a biological redemption of their ancestors' colonial tragic death in Algeria; in the place of two pioneers sprung up an entire colony. In the logic of Lamarckian determinism, Marianne and Mathieu genetically transfer moral strengths like courage and faith, along with fertility and physical tenacity to their children. This rich genetic heritage explains astonishing prosperity of Mathieu and Marianne's son Nicolas in West Africa. In contrast to Marianne's parents, Nicolas' brood already had a genetic advantage, which only increased their physical and moral adaptability to African life. *Fécondité* confirms this republican imperial strategy in the other Froment kingdom abroad. With science and industry on their side, the Froment race fulfills France's destiny to regenerate and rule the colonies.

The picture of the African colonial experience painted by Marianne's tragic orphanhood perpetuates the racial stereotype of the dangerous African *sauvage* that is essential to republican imperialism. If France was to conquer land in Africa, it would have to be in areas where the indigenous must be perceived as incompetent, lazy, even subhuman: incapable or unworthy of reaping its abundant economic benefits. As this chapter will later discuss in depth, the nomadic Blacks that Nicolas Froment encounters in West Africa did not present the same threat as the dangerous brigands who murdered French colonials in Algeria. Zola's vision echoed procolonial republicanism, which instead of seeing colonization itself as the problem, argued the need for a more effective colonial policy to establish a strong and pure French imperial population by genetically excluding inferior races. Although the justification for France's aggressive colonial

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<sup>30</sup> The Federation of French West Africa or *L'Afrique Occidentale Française* was officially created in 1895. Alice Conklin, *A Mission to Civilize*, 23.

<sup>31</sup> *Fécondité*, OC, 8: 27-28.

expansion as the cultivation of *liberté, égalité, and fraternité* seems blatantly paradoxical in today's political perspective, it was widely accepted as a liberal campaign during the Third Republic. Perhaps in no other literary work is the fin-de-siècle paradox of republican imperialism more explicit than in Zola's *Fécondité*.

The earlier French colonials' friendly relations with the natives led to military, social, and legal problems, not the least of which were mixed-blood children who were a living symbol of the naïve and regrettable intimacy between the French and the Algerians. Over a decade before writing *Le Roman expérimental*, based on Dr. Bernard's medical methodology, Zola's 1867 novel *Thérèse Raquin* attests to his early interest in the dangers of *métissage*. This novel is an experiment of a woman whose savage Algerian blood ultimately contaminates her civilized French blood. Thérèse's crimes are explained as the result of her biological corruption because she is the child of a French captain and Algerian woman. It is no coincidence that this novel, as Zola writes in his 1868 preface, is meant to be a serious scientific study, which would later be nurtured by his fascination with Taine, Lucas, and Letourneau's theories on racial psychology.<sup>32</sup>

It was at time of his second preface that Zola began to research scientific racial theory in preparation for his *Rougon-Macquart* series. At this time, Zola relied on the growing authority of racial science to legitimate what was denounced as an aesthetic transgression, under the umbrella charge of pornography. His self-defense against the charge of "putrid" literature reveals the early scientific justification for literary raciology:

J'ai choisi des personnages souverainement dominés par leurs nerfs et leur sang, entraînés à chaque acte de leur vie par les fatalité de leur chair [...] On commence, j'espère, à comprendre que *mon but a été un but scientifique avant tout* [...] Qu'on lise le roman avec soin, on verra que chaque chapitre est l'étude d'un cas curieux de physiologie.<sup>33</sup>

Zola's wording here—the sovereign domination of blood and nerves over his characters—resonates more with Letourneau or Taine's raciological studies than with Bernard's theories on medical experimentation. His attention to the fatalism of heredity and blood, and insistence on the scientific goal of his work confirms the conscious racial determinism of his characterization. The racial hierarchy theorized by raciologists like Taine and Letourneau, which privileges the white French race, would continue to exert its influence on Zola's fiction, from his "histoire naturelle et sociale d'une famille," until the utopian *Quatre Evangiles*. As Zola had invoked the authority of science in defense of artistic innovation, he would later turn to the seductive power of art to make his industrial technocracy more appealing in his *Evangiles*.

*Thérèse Raquin*'s critique of Franco-African miscegenation during the Empire illuminates the republican racism in *Fécondité*. Thérèse Raquin's murder of her frail, bourgeois husband/cousin, Camille, is Zola's earliest naturalist study of racial corruption and criminality. Like Marianne Froment, Thérèse is orphaned because of difficulties between French colonizers and native Algerians. Unlike Marianne however, who is of pure white French stock, Thérèse is the product of an Algerian woman and French soldier. After the death of Thérèse's mother, her father, captain Degans, rescued his child from Algeria, endowing her with his name, nationality and a proper French upbringing:

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<sup>32</sup> Around the time that Zola wrote this second preface, he was studying Dr. Prosper Lucas' *L'Hérédité naturelle* and Charles Letourneau's *Psychologie des passions*. Owen Morgan and Alain Pagès in *Guide Emile Zola*, eds Alain Pagès & Owen Morgan (Paris: Ellipses, 2002), 497-498.

<sup>33</sup> My emphasis, *Thérèse Raquin* (Paris: Gallimard, 2001), 24-25.

la chère petite était née à Oran et qu'elle avait pour mère une femme indigène d'une grande beauté. Le capitaine, une heure avant son départ, lui remit un acte de naissance dans lequel Thérèse, reconnue par lui, portait son nom. Il partit, et on ne le revit plus: quelques années plus tard, il se fit tuer en Afrique.<sup>34</sup>

Even before Thérèse plots with her lover Laurent to kill her husband, she symbolizes French moral weakness in Algeria. This child is proof of her mother's mysterious and fatal beauty, which seduced a French soldier into a racially unnatural alliance. Her father's folly is reinforced by the suggestion that his death was an stupid accident: "il se fit tuer." The fact that Thérèse's father is a captain in the French army and her mother the daughter of an Algerian chief makes Zola's colonial metaphor clear: the early French military encounter with Algerians would prove to be fatal to France, both on African and metropolitan ground. The legitimate Algerian rulers would have their revenge by murdering French colonials and by racially contaminating future French generations. Thérèse's barbaric African blood ultimately resists being civilized by French blood and education.

It is Camille's equally degenerate friend, Laurent who unleashes Thérèse's criminal desires by seducing her because he cannot afford to quench his sexual urges with prostitutes. Thérèse's sexual intimacy with Laurent sparks her musings about her true savage identity. Her physical rage and sexual desire are clearly attributed to her degenerate African blood. During an intimate disclosure with Laurent, she explains the multitude of psychological conflicts created by her mixed heritage:

On m'a dit que ma mère était fille d'un chef de tribu, en Afrique; j'ai souvent songé à elle, j'ai compris que je lui appartenais par le sang et les instincts, j'aurais voulu ne la quitter jamais et traverser les sables, pendue à son dos [...] [je] ne saurais croire combien ils m'ont rendu mauvaise. Ils ont fait de moi une hypocrite et une menteuse [...] Ils m'ont étouffée dans leur douceur bourgeoise, et je ne m'explique pas comment il y a encore du sang dans mes veines [...] ils avaient fait de moi une brute docile avec leur bienveillance molle et leur tendresse écœurante. Alors, j'ai menti, j'ai menti toujours. Je suis restée là toute douce, toute silencieuse, rêvant de frapper et de mordre.<sup>35</sup>

For Thérèse, her upbringing in France by the smothering bourgeois Mme Raquin proves to be as unnatural as white French interactions with natives in Algeria. Although she has never known either Africa or her mother, Thérèse identifies with the wild freedom and physical passions she equates with African life. Her aunt's gift of Thérèse in marriage to her phlegmatic son Camille completes her abject status as a commodity in the Raquin household. The tension that results from Thérèse's extreme social reserve and her profoundly violent desires reinforces the belief that white and black miscegenation can only lead to the genetic and moral corruption of the white French race. Mme Raquin and Camille's dull bourgeois lifestyle only exacerbates her inborn desire for social and sexual freedom and eventually leads to adultery and then to the murder of her husband.

Thérèse's concerted efforts to become the bourgeois French wife she was raised to be are thwarted by her corrupt genes. The novel proves that her will to conform to white bourgeois domesticity is ultimately powerless to overcome her biologically determined nature. As a symbol of the genetically and morally weak French bourgeoisie, Camille is the sacrifice necessary to repair France's illegitimate colonization of Algeria. His entitled attitude towards his half-Algerian wife, and his utter ignorance of Thérèse's affair with his best friend liken him to captain Degans whose vanity and naivety got him

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<sup>34</sup> *Thérèse Raquin*, 30.

<sup>35</sup> *Thérèse Raquin*, 74-75.

killed in an act of Algerian revenge. Thérèse is a powerful allegory for France's illegitimate conquest of Algeria: Her particular motives for adultery and murder represent Zola's condemnation of first, racial miscegenation in French Algeria, and second, France's failed attempt to redeem mixed-blood orphans through legal entitlement. *Thérèse Raquin's* censure of miscegenation critiques the entitlement, hypocrisy and dishonesty encouraged by the acculturation model of colonialization during the Second Empire, and at the same time, demonstrates Zola's belief in unequal racial perfectability.

### Consecrating French Imperial Destiny

One of Zola's greatest mentors, raciologist Hippolyte Taine, expanded on Lamarckian evolution by adding the historical moment as a third factor in human racial success. His formula was race, milieu and moment.<sup>36</sup> Not only were some races created with more biological potential than others, but they were bound by their geographical and political destiny. In other words, Taine and Zola both believed that European races, especially the French, were destined by the natural cycle of civilization to dominate other races as leaders of civilized nations. Naturalist racism in Zola's œuvre serves as a justification for French domination in the European race for imperial power. *L'Argent* and *Fécondité* suggest that because ancient African and Middle Eastern civilizations have passed their prime, they must allow younger European civilizations, France in particular, to assume their rightful place in history.

*Fécondité's* fictional colonial republic exemplifies Taine's theory of the civilization cycle, according to which ancient peoples, like African tribes, must make way for, even fuel "younger" societies, like France, in their cultural ascent. Zola's novels *L'Argent* (1891) and *Fécondité* (1899) exalt French enterprise abroad as both a means of personal, spiritual gratification and national survival. The late *Rougon-Macquart* novel and the first *Evangile* share the same spiritual and scientific justifications for French imperialism and manifest a xenophobic dimension to French interests in foreign land. Whereas *L'Argent's* heroine Mme Caroline views the industrialization of the Middle East as humanitarian mission, *Fécondité's* establishment of "une autre France" in the Sudan is an overt endorsement of France's new republican imperialism. By paying close attention to the shifts in colonial discourses between humanistic opportunism and aggressive conquest in *L'Argent* and *Fécondité*, it becomes clear that Zola's literature promotes the French colonial expansion as the key to national progress, and as such, a sacred republican mission.

Zola's *L'Argent* is one of the rare *Rougon-Macquart* novels that ends happily. It is the sequel to *La Curée* that continues the story of professional gambler, Aristide Saccard (né Rougon). Like Nana, Saccard is a mythical Zolian character, a personification of the Second Empire's corrupting forces on French society. Just as Nana is a sexual vortex sucking up all of Paris' libidinal energies, Saccard's risky speculations drain every iota of wealth and capital that he touches. The novel traces his tumultuous involvement in the Parisian banking world and financial speculation abroad. Moving deftly through high and low society, spending as quickly as earning, Saccard embodies the corrupt flow of cash that eventually leads to material and moral decay. He was originally meant to become the novel's hero by making money transcend its corrupting function, according to Zola's

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<sup>36</sup> Taine, préface, *Histoire de la littérature anglaise* (Paris: Hachette, 1866-1878).

plan: “Montrer que l’argent est devenu pour beaucoup la dignité de la vie : il rend libre, est l’hygiène, la propreté, la santé, presque l’intelligence.”<sup>37</sup> The transformation of money into fuel for cultivating dilapidated land was meant to symbolize an ideological purification of speculation. What occurs in the novel is that Saccard ultimately loses his wealth along with his mind and is forced to flee the country, a fate predestined by his degenerate Rougon blood.

Saccard’s mistress, Mme Caroline Hamelin, who is neither Rougon nor Macquart, escapes his corrupting influence to become the novel’s regenerative heroine and Zola’s voicebox. At the end of *L’Argent*, Mme Caroline is inspired by the novel’s socialist dreamer Sigismond and his utopian colonial dream. In his last living breaths, Sigismond projects that humankind will also benefit from European civilization abroad:

Ah! que d’activités nouvelles, l’humanité entière au travail au terres incultes, les mains de tous les vivants améliorant le monde!... Il n’y a plus de landes, plus de marais, plus de terres incultes. Les bras de mer sont comblés, les montagnes gênantes disparaissent, les déserts se changent en vallées fertiles, sous les eaux qui jaillissent de toutes parts. Aucun prodige n’est irréalisable, les anciens grands travaux font sourire, tant ils semblent timides et enfantins. La terre enfin est habitable... Et c’est tout l’homme développé, grandi, jouissant de ses pleins appétits, devenu le vrai maître. Les écoles et les ateliers sont ouverts, l’enfant choisit librement son métier, que les aptitudes déterminent. Des années déjà se sont écoulées, et la sélection s’est faite, grâce à des examens sévères, il ne suffit plus de pouvoir payer l’instruction, il faut en profiter. Chacun se trouve ainsi arrêté, utilisé, au juste degré de son intelligence, ce qui répartit équitablement les fonctions publiques, d’après les indications mêmes de la nature. Chacun pour tous, selon sa force.... Ah! cité active et joyeuse, cité idéale de saine exploitation humaine, où n’existe plus le vieux préjugé contre le travail manuel, où l’on voit un grand poète menuisier, un serrurier grand savant! Ah! cité bienheureuse, cité triomphale vers qui les hommes marchent depuis tant de siècles, cité dont les murs blancs resplendissent, là-bas... Là-bas, dans le bonheur, dans l’aveuglant soleil...<sup>38</sup>

Sigismond’s premature death inspires Mme Caroline to see the possibility for a similar dream by transforming Saccard’s egomaniacal speculation into a humanitarian civilizing mission abroad. She resolves to go to Beirut with her brother Hamelin where they will foster French industrial development. In the aftermath of the vicious battle between the Catholics and Jews over control of French banking that dominates the novel, the last few pages present a glimmer of new hope for the future of the French civilization and race through the enlightened eyes of Mme Caroline.

Mme Caroline is a cosmopolitan Enlightenment figure who has gained special wisdom from international life and travel with her brother. Her wisdom of experience is enhanced by faith in human evolution, resulting in the unique combination of experience, reason, and faith. The balance of faith and reason are the privileged qualities in the majority of Zolian narrative doubles, though usually in the form of physician or priest—for example Dr. Pascal (*Le Docteur Pascal*) or Pierre Froment (*Les Trois Villes*). Precisely because she incarnates the balance between reason, faith and philanthropic ambition, Mme Caroline is a rare female Zolian narrative double.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> BNF, N.a.f., Ms 10268, f°379.

<sup>38</sup> *L’Argent*, OC, 5: 394. Zola’s ellipsis.

<sup>39</sup> In his notes, Zola intended to make Mme Caroline his voice box, “me mettre tout entier là-dedans.” In Brian Nelson, *Zola and the Bourgeoisie: A Study of Themes and Techniques in Les Rougon Macquarts* (London: MacMillan Press, 1983), 182.

*L'Argent's* endorsement of French commercial speculation in the Middle East anticipates colonial regeneration in *Fécondité*, though in the gentle terms of discovery and expedition. Saccard's lust for capital and Caroline Hamelin's penchant for world exploration synthesize the two most prominent imperial imaginaries in the late nineteenth century. According to William Schneider, two distinct images of Africa were popularized by the French press of the late nineteenth century: the Africa of exploitation and the Africa of Conquest.<sup>40</sup> The former was a negative image of a backwards, barbaric culture in need of imperial conquest, and the latter, a positive image of undeveloped land abounding with natural resources ripe for imperial exploitation. The republican civilizing mission that became synonymous with twentieth-century French imperial policies on the education of colonial subjects underlies these popular images. Instead of civilizing natives, however, *L'Argent's* industrial pioneers exclusively help French civilization abroad and at home. The success of such a mission nevertheless promises the spread of world peace and order through commercial progress.

Unlike Saccard, who represents pure financial interest, and Hamelin, whose scientific interests are warped by his desire for imperial power in the restoration of Christianity in the Middle East, Mme Caroline succeeds in ennobling colonial exploitation by rationalizing it as part of civilization's naturalist cycle in which death makes way for new life. Money, she discovers, may be ennobled when used for scientific and social goals: "L'argent, aidant la science, faisait le progrès" foreshadows her ultimate spiritual mission to purify money by using it the necessary capital to rehabilitate land in the Middle East.<sup>41</sup> According to the narrative's logic then, Mme Caroline's faith in the regenerative promise of colonial expansion redeems the destructive influence of Saccard's unchecked avarice and restores life to the arid desert territory.

While *L'Argent's* Saccard ultimately perverts the naturalist civilizing discourse for his own gain, he effectively seduces Mme Caroline into joining France's industrializing mission overseas, though on her own humanitarian terms. In his discussions with his mistress, Saccard romanticizes colonization by likening the construction of Oriental railways of the 1860s to Europe's past conquest of the Mediterranean sea, making it the seat of ancient Western civilization: "[la Méditerranée] autour de laquelle la civilisation a fleuri, dont les flots ont baigné les antiques villes, Athènes, Rome Tyr, Alexandrie, Carthage, Marseille, toutes celle qui ont fait l'Europe."<sup>42</sup> In this evocation, Europe is an established civilization, yet unlike ancient Middle-Eastern civilizations, European civilization is still on the rise. The narrator condemns the violence of Saccard's imperialism, saying that, "c'était pour lui la spéculation, la vie de l'argent, prenant d'un coup ce vieux monde, ainsi qu'une proie nouvelle, encore intacte, d'une richesse incalculable, cachée sous l'ignorance et la crasse des siècles."<sup>43</sup> Through this narrative judgment, Zola exposes the hypocrisy and danger of colonialism evident in Saccard's clever speech. Saccard's final exile in Belgium reinforces *L'Argent's* critique of excessive colonial desire.

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<sup>40</sup> *An Empire for the Masses: The French Popular Image of Africa, 1870-1900*, William H. Schneider 1982, 154.

<sup>41</sup> *L'Argent*, OC, 5: 77.

<sup>42</sup> *L'Argent*, OC, 5: 75.

<sup>43</sup> *L'Argent*, OC, 5: 75.

What effectively convinces Mme Caroline of the potential benevolence of colonialism is Saccard's evocation of France's regenerative mission as a "resurrection" of depopulated territory. Colonial industrialization is like new blood reviving the corpse-like Middle-East, "comme [la vie] revient à un corps malade, lorsque, dans les veines appauvries, on active la circulation d'un sang nouveau."<sup>44</sup> The romantic promise of bringing new civilization to ancient lands eclipses the negative side of financial exploitation and human dispossession. In this civilizing paradigm, blood is no longer a mere symbol of European industry in the colonies; it is a metonym for the new generations of French people who will work and proliferate in the "cols déserts" and "plaines dépeuplés" of the Middle East.<sup>45</sup> *L'Argent* makes it clear that imperial fever can and should be regulated; successful colonization must be tempered by patience and wisdom, and especially, undertaken in the name of civilization and humanity. As we shall see, this victory of new blood and technology reviving dilapidated land and regulating productivity foreshadows the biopolitical regime incarnated by the *Evangelies'* modern Froment family.

Mme Caroline's brother Georges Hamelin, is an engineer whose altruistic early study of canal and mine-building in the Middle East develops into an egocentric hunger for power and money; Georges' interests align more closely with Saccard's avarice than his sister's selfless philanthropy. Although Hamelin outwardly justifies this mission as a great industrial enterprise that would aid the development of natural resources in Lebanon, in private he confesses his secret political agenda: "quand nous serons les maîtres, nous referons le royaume de Palestine, et nous y mettrons le pape..."<sup>46</sup> The real motive behind agricultural industrialization is for Hamelin to claim the spoils in the name of French national and Catholic authority, revealing the imperial lust for fame and power beneath an objective scientific veneer. Zola's narrative criticizes Saccard and Hamelin's colonial vision as an extension of the Catholic church and the aristocracy's project of world domination during the Crusades.<sup>47</sup> Hamelin represents the blurring of the old Catholic and the new republican imperialism that justified France's appropriation of Middle Eastern territory by claiming the modern authority of science.

The language of regenerative exploration and enterprise in Zola's *Rougon-Macquart* series is highly altruistic, bordering on spiritual. Mme Caroline's optimism as an industrial missionary differs, however, from Sigismond's altruism in its rational logic. Narrative sympathy towards Mme Caroline's newfangled humanitarian project is signaled by the narrated monologues that dominate the final pages of the novel. These passages justify the industrialization of dilapidated Lebanese land as a benefit both natives and foreigners. However, doesn't the French interest in building Beirut as a trade

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<sup>44</sup> *L'Argent*, OC, 5: 77.

<sup>45</sup> *L'Argent*, OC, 5: 77.

<sup>46</sup> *L'Argent*, OC, 5: 79.

<sup>47</sup> According to William I. Shorrock, French influence in the Middle East reached its zenith after 1860: "[After the Franco-Prussian war,] Russia, Austria, Italy and Greece all sought to take over positions previously occupied by France. But if France's diplomatic and political influence was on the wane after 1870... Granted, France suffered a serious check in 1888, when the Porte accorded Germany the right to build the Anatolian railway. But France obtained concessions too—notably the right to administer the ports and quays of Izmir, Constantinople, and Beirut; various railroad companies in Syria; and the *Tramways libanais* and the *métropolitain* at Constantinople. *French Imperialism in the Middle East: The Failure of Policy in Syria and Lebanon* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1976), 18.

post under their control, prove that it is really foreign industries that benefit, leaving aside concerns about the newly dispossessed native population? A victim of Rougonian pathological avarice, Saccard fails to cash in on mining exploitation abroad, becomes bankrupt and insane, whereas the rational non-Rougon-Macquart Mme Caroline experiences a more tempered imperial enthusiasm. Her cool intellect filters out Saccard's folly, although he is able to indoctrinate her with his belief that money is a necessary modern social force. For Mme Caroline, capitalism in the form of industrial development is not just a means for individual gain, but a part of France's cultural destiny:

Elle revoyait la côte de Beyrouth, où s'élevaient, au milieu d'immenses magasins, les bâtiments de l'administration, dont elle était en train d'épousseter le plan: Marseille mise aux portes de l'Asie Mineure, la Méditerranée conquise, les nations rapprochées, pacifiées, peut-être. [...] Le village de cinq cents habitants, né d'abord de la mine en exploitation, était à présent une ville, plusieurs milliers d'âmes, toute une civilisation, des routes, des usines, des écoles, fécondant ce coin mort et sauvage. [...] le sol de l'antique berceau venait d'être ensemencé d'une nouvelle moisson d'hommes, le progrès de demain y grandirait, avec une vigueur de végétation extraordinaire, dans ce merveilleux climat, sous les grands soleils. N'y avait-il pas là le réveil d'un monde, l'humanité élargie et plus heureuse ?<sup>48</sup>

The humanitarian fantasy that closes *L'Argent* expresses the imperial tone of Mme Caroline's vision of her civilizing mission. Where there was presumably no one, an entire village sprung up, thanks to the benevolent exploitation of the mine. The Mediterranean sea is "conquered," yet the nations that are "brought closer together" also may need to be "pacified." The agricultural images of soil are infused with human reproductive imagery, suggesting that the "coin mort et sauvage" is an intellectual and commercial wasteland, rather than a natural one. Exactly who the inhabitants of this brand-new civilization are is unspecified, yet it seems clear enough that only modern industrial nations like Mme Caroline's native France could possibly create progress where there is only raw natural potential. According to Mme Caroline, even the sun and good climate in the Middle East will go to waste if no one capitalizes on their agricultural potential. In this imperialist perspective, any indigenous people living in these parts are overlooked, implying that for Zola, a nation is only constituted by its commercial productivity. The Lebanese and Israelis' apparent inability to capitalize on their natural resources legitimates France's commercial enterprise in Beirut, leading the French to eclipse and dislocate the native Lebanese population

*L'Argent's* penultimate paragraph collapses objective narration and Mme Caroline's perspective in a narrated monologue. This passage is an example of this narrative technique's power to shift between personal and impersonal voices, the effect of which is a more intimate and spiritual account of Mme Caroline's thoughts as well as a powerfully optimistic closure to the novel.<sup>49</sup> As Dorrit Cohn explains, "Precisely because they cast the language of a subjective mind into the grammar of objective narration, [narrated monologues] amplify emotional notes."<sup>50</sup> Indeed, the elision of the objective, third-person narrator into Mme Caroline's narrated thoughts of creates the impression that the narrator shares her faith in France's imperial destiny to colonize the Middle East. Here, the novel concludes by describing the death of one civilization as "le terreau

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<sup>48</sup> *L'Argent*, OC, 5: 397-398.

<sup>49</sup> *Transparent Minds: Narrative Modes for Presenting Consciousness in Fiction* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), 100.

<sup>50</sup> *Transparent Minds*, 117.

nécessaire aux grands travaux qui facilitent l'existence."<sup>51</sup> This omniscient declaration suggests that the renewal of humankind justifies one nation's feeding on the decayed matter of dying civilizations, in this case, France germinating in the remains of ancient Israel. In this perspective, colonization is not only necessary, it is beautiful because it engenders universal happiness. Furthermore, the blurring of figural and narrative voices interpolates the reader as an imperial subject by Mme Caroline/Zola's rhetorical question: "N'y avait-il pas là le réveil d'un monde, l'humanité élargie et plus heureuse?" By the end of *L'Argent*, the reader understands vicariously through Mme Caroline's imperialist enlightenment, that money is a necessary social force and a "hygienic" force, according to Zola.<sup>52</sup> Precisely because the economic exploitation of undeveloped foreign lands serves as "le réveil d'un monde," meaning the Western civilization of the East, as it allegedly served as divine providence for Crusaders, this modern, humanistic imperialism represents progress. *L'Argent's* sympathetic portrayal of Mme Caroline hints at Zola's endorsement of the new wave of French colonialism that emerged during the late nineteenth century: the republican civilizing mission.

In his first gospel, *Fécondité*, Zola returned to the theme of French enterprise abroad, this time in the republican colonization of the Sudan. *Fécondité* was conceived during the "scramble for Africa," a period of aggressive conquest in sub-Saharan West Africa. In 1898, while Zola was working on this first *Évangile*, Great Britain and France literally raced to lay claim over a geographically crucial piece of land near Egypt. If won, the new colony would unite either French or British African empires. France eventually lost this game of imperial tic-tac-toe, a loss which only intensified French desire to secure areas in between its existing colonies, particularly in the French Sudan. This mission was characterized by a rigorous assimilation policy, according to which French colonial government would provide a positive political and social model to the indigenous peoples but discourage intimate social and physical interaction between colonials and natives.

In its exaltation of the economic and health benefits of colonial life for the French population, *Fécondité's* utopian vision of republican expansion redeems King Charles' disastrous occupation of Algeria, a colony that continued to be fraught with hostility and violence between colonials and natives for over a hundred years. Zola's peaceful republican empire presents a new imperial imaginary based on the rational policy of association, which proscribed French interaction with the indigenous population. *Fécondité's* utopian empire rehabilitates the French racial image through the Froments' triumphant proliferation, proof of French racial superiority, as well as France's international status as a prosperous, civilized imperial power.

By contrast to *L'Argent*, *Fécondité's* vision of French colonial regeneration is expressed in a decidedly more imperative and entitled tone. A continuation of Zola's preceding novel series, *Les Trois Villes*, *Fécondité* tells the story of Pierre and Marie Froment's miraculous son, Mathieu, a child born out of a renewed faith in life. The first of three children produced by the former priest and his young atheistic wife, Mathieu is a symbol of Nature's triumph over the cult of sterility and death. With the help of his wife Marianne, Mathieu Froment carries on his parents' cult of life by propagating a new race

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<sup>51</sup> *L'Argent*, OC, 5: 398.

<sup>52</sup> In his preparatory notes, Zola wrote, "Montrer que l'argent est devenu pour beaucoup la dignité de la vie: il rend libre, est l'hygiène, la propreté, la santé, presque l'intelligence." Quoted by Own Morgan and Alain Pagès in *Guide Emile Zola*, 295.

of French republicans in and around Paris as well as in the French territory in the African Sudan. Like Saccard, *Fécondité*'s colonial ambassador Dominique Froment also relies on the rhetoric of civilization to justify French colonization in Africa:

[Dominique] disait Tombouctou déchue, appauvrie, l'opulente et la resplendissante cité d'autrefois qui paraît aujourd'hui en ruine, qui cache derrière ses façades lépreuses, dans la crainte des voleurs du désert, les débris des trésors qu'elle a gardés, mais qui redeviendra demain la cité de gloire et de fortune, assise royalement entre le Soudan, grenier d'abondance, et le Sahara, route de l'Europe, lorsque la France aura ouvert cette route, relié les provinces du nouvel empire<sup>53</sup>

Dominique's vision is even more overtly imperialistic than Saccard and Mme Caroline's. Though Timbuktu is described as impoverished, its raw material potential for French colonizers remains, evoked in aristocratic terms of luxury, opulence, glory, and fortune. People already living in this area are mentioned only in passing as desert thieves whereas the French are destined to claim this land and its treasures in the name of cultural restoration and republican destiny. Reminiscent of *L'Argent*'s approval of Mme Caroline's enlightened colonial enterprise, *Fécondité*'s narrative frequently shifts between the objective reporting of events and a marked sympathy for its proliferating hero, Mathieu Froment. Such a profusion of narrated monologue, Dorrit Cohn argues, may result in the sustained ambiguity of personal and impersonal narrative perspective:

If the novel nonetheless creates the impression of absolute homogeneity, of a poetic monologue from beginning to end, it is because the narrative voice is tuned to exactly the same pitch as the figural voice; or, phrased in terms of the acting metaphor applied earlier, the narrated monologue here casts the narrator in a role that coincides with his own "real" self. It becomes the choice medium for the mental portraiture of a verbal artist by a verbal artist, both joined in a language flow of sustained poetic prose.<sup>54</sup>

The lyrical prose of *Fécondité*'s gospel of social progress demonstrates a confusion of objective reporting and personal experience, and, of narrating and figural voices. Momentarily stepping outside of Mathieu's thoughts, *Fécondité*'s narrator seems to advocate the "humanitarian" republican justification for domestic and African colonization. This "objective" voice, having adopted Mathieu's zealous tone, applauds the Froments' familial expansion as "le bon exemple civique, la race raffermie, la patrie refaite, au milieu des affreux déchets, par la belle folie du nombre, de la prodigalité à pleines mains, saine et joyeuse."<sup>55</sup>

The image of civilization in *L'Argent* as recycled natural matter, "le terreau nécessaire aux grands travaux," stands in stark contrast to *Fécondité*'s image of the pullulating Froment race as a scythe that razes weak living vegetation to the ground in order to provide space and nourishment for a new, superior biological crop. As I shall explore in greater depth in Chapter 2, the regenerative imagery of *L'Argent* was truer to actual scientific naturalist theory than *Fécondité*'s colonial vision of West Africa. The Froments' prosperity is, in fact, accomplished by a series of violent conquests. In the Froment dynasty, marriages are formed, land is acquired and businesses are taken over because of the ineptitude or sterility of others.

What is somewhat disconcerting is that the increased aggression of Fromentian evolution is the narrative slippage between the fact and fiction of colonization caused by the narrator's identification with each Froment's social reform mission. Unlike Zola's

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<sup>53</sup> *Fécondité*, OC, 8: 496.

<sup>54</sup> *Transparent Minds*, 124-125.

<sup>55</sup> *Fécondité*, OC, 8: 500.

earlier works, the *Évangiles*' narrator becomes progressively fused with the hero's voice indicated by the increased frequency of narrated monologues towards the conclusion of *Fécondité*, and in *Travail* and *Vérité*. The profusion of this technique blurs the distinction between objective, naturalist narrative and Mathieu, Luc, and Marc's personal evangelism, which results in a homogenous ideological discourse. In the case of the first *Évangile*, the narrator seems to have adopted Mathieu and Dominique's procreative ideology as fact. This narrative fusion results in the apparent endorsement of racist and imperialist discourse, making it impossible to read the novel as a neutral account of colonialism, much less its critique. The following praise of the Froments' excessive reproduction and domination of local industry epitomizes the novel's narrative ambiguity. This narrated monologue follows Mathieu and Marianne's congratulation (in direct discourse) of one another for their tremendous prosperity:

Grâce à la famille nombreuse, à la poussée fatale du nombre, ils avaient fini par tout envahir, par tout posséder. [...] cette conquête [...] ils ne l'avaient ni voulue, ni organisée, ils ne la devaient, dans leur loyauté sereine, qu'au *devoir rempli* de leur longue tâche.<sup>56</sup>

The language of this passage is strikingly violent, considering that the many casualties of the Froments' colonization within and outside of France, such as poverty and death, are only briefly insinuated here and nowhere else in the novel. It seems all the more violent as a moment of heightened imperialist discourse, in which the narrator and characters share the belief that the fit have not only the right but the duty to conquer.

If the Froment's growth is destined for their racially superior genes, for whom then, is their "poussée" fatal, in the deadly sense of the word? In spite of these repercussions in France, as in Africa, the Froments are depicted as exemplary citizens because they have accomplished the expansionist destiny of their race and nation. What was formerly a patriotic duty has become a moral right to power and property. Their regenerative mission in France, a poeticized form of domestic imperialism, is part of their mission to simultaneously repopulate and rehabilitate France. It is exactly this type of conquest that historian and anthropologist, Ann Stoler, identifies as part of the biologized internal enemy in Foucauldian biohistory:

For if Foucault's biohistory of the discourses of race and class is correct, that both emerged out of an earlier binary conception of the social body as part of the defense of society against itself, out of a shared vision of a deeper biologized "internal enemy" within, then racism emerges not as the ideological reaction of those threatened by the universalistic principles of the modern liberal state, but as a foundational fiction within it (...) We could look specifically to those who have attempted to explain the racialized "interior frontiers" that nationalisms create, not as excesses of a nationalism out of hand, but as social divisions crucial to the exclusionary principles of nation-states.<sup>57</sup>

The Froments' appropriation of neighboring metropolitan land that dominates the novel foreshadows the even more violent appropriation of African resources in the last chapter. Although colonial expansion appears only in *Fécondité*, domestic imperialism traverses all three *Évangiles* in the reform projects of Mathieu's brother, Luc and Marc.

Well before the French entered the scramble for Africa, Zola imagined France as the most civilized of nations by its philosophy, institutions, and industry, with a mission to spread civilization, either by the forced assimilation of natives or the proliferation of

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<sup>56</sup> My emphasis. *Fécondité*, OC, 8: 483.

<sup>57</sup> *Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault's History of Sexuality and the Colonial Order of Things*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), 130.

pureblood French colonials. Whereas colonial expeditions in *L'Argent* are justified by their spiritual humanitarian nature, which Zola imagined as a system of racial reincarnation, *Fécondité's* regeneration loses the sacred valence in its imperative message of French political survival.<sup>58</sup> By representing the French as the masters of modern civilization, *Fécondité* transforms *L'Argent's* humanitarian industrialization into an explicitly republican mission. The civilizing mission was promoted not simply as a right to conquer; rather, it was for Zola among other republican repopulationists and colonialists, a necessary step towards cultural and political survival in the twentieth-century imperial world. In this new model, France enjoys the dual status as both the ancient *patrie* that comes to feed off of the deserted, rich land in Africa and the new, growing generation of French imperial citizens in Africa.

### Colonial Policy and Racial Perfectability

Thérèse Raquin's murder of her French cousin/husband condemns the social and biological repercussions of the French Empire's sexual and political misconduct in Algeria. This early naturalist narrative exposes Zola's belief in the unequal perfectability of races in that inferior black Arab blood cannot be improved by mixing with superior white European blood. According to Reynaud-Paligot, in addition to a standard color hierarchy—white races being superior, black inferior and yellow even more inferior—each of these racial groups was thought to have an internal hierarchy: “Les races noires sont diverses et hiérarchisées en fonction du développement technique de leur société, révélateur de leur intelligence.”<sup>59</sup> Renan stated that racial inequality, including unequal perfectability or biological aptitude, was a biological fact, “Les hommes ne sont pas égaux, les races ne sont pas égales. Le nègre est fait pour servir aux grandes choses voulues et conçues par le Blanc.”<sup>60</sup> While in Thérèse's case, it may seem that African blood is more physically powerful than French blood, her crime proves African blood to be morally inferior in the sense that it is immune to French civilizing forces, racially and culturally. Furthermore, Thérèse's demise, indicated by her hallucinations about Camille vengeful haunting, suggests that resistance to French civilization is at least psychologically traumatic, if not fatal for African or mixed-blood colonial citizens. Zola's writing on race eventually leads to a eugenic social vision in his final utopian works. The creation Froment super-race crystallizes the implicit anti-miscegenation attitude of *Thérèse Raquin*, and ultimately claims French white supremacy.

In stark contrast to *Thérèse Raquin's* critique of Napoleonic colonialism, *Fécondité's* African episode is an endorsement of French expansion its fin-de-siècle republican guise. While Zola disapproved of French rule over Algeria in the Napoleonic era, his later writing supports the exploratory and civilizing missions that propelled the extensive French colonization of West Africa, which aimed to spread republican values like democracy, reason, and civility. New colonial policy called for the education of African natives in the French republican fashion. Waldeck-Rousseau's 1901 speech to the Senate summarizes this policy:

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<sup>58</sup> *L'Argent*, OC, 5: 78.

<sup>59</sup> *La République raciale*, 138.

<sup>60</sup> Préface, *Dialogues et fragments philosophiques* (Paris: Calmann Lévy, 1876). See also *La République raciale* 253-275.

Sans nous leurrer de l'espoir d'amener les indigènes à une assimilation impossible, nous devons nous appliquer à les faire entrer dans la voie du progrès, dans la direction, dans la logique de leur caractère; de leurs mœurs, de leur traditions et les porter [...] à évoluer, eux-mêmes, non pas dans notre civilisation mais dans la leur.<sup>61</sup>

In reality, however, the more rational and diplomatic association missions largely ignored what they considered inferior races in favor of improving French racial viability in Africa. Association, as James Cooke argues, “simply tried to ignore the natives of the empire. The natives, in the minds of the imperialists, were present in the colonies, and were unable to comprehend the values of French technology or assimilate the glories of French culture...Equality, or the hope of first-class French citizenship, was simply not a part of the associationists’ concept of empire.”<sup>62</sup> Zola’s redemption of Algerian conquest through Fromentian victory in the West Africa reiterates this very same eurocentric civilizing program that in theory would assist native cultures in their own evolution, but which in reality excluded natives from the legal and social protection of the republican colonial government.

In *Fécondité*, sub-Saharan African land and cities must be cultivated and returned to cultural glory in the name of the French republic. *L’Argent*’s assertion that indigenous African civilizations had long since expired at the same time reaffirms France’s ongoing cultural evolution. Both novels fantasize a new glorious period of imperialism, which redeems former losses and errors. While French cultural and political superiority are unquestionable, as *Fécondité* demonstrates, timing and method are key to successful colonization. Zola’s heroic Froment race is not only greater in number than early colonizers, the Froments choose virtually uninhabited land, facilitating the foundation of a biologically and morally pure French empire abroad.

The Froments’ prosperity in the French Sudan glorifies the segregationist policies of fin-de-siècle French republican imperialism. It is not only that Nicolas Froment and his wife arrive in the right part of Africa at the right time; their strong European genetics play a crucial role in their imperial success. For example, Nicolas and Lisbeth actually outspawn their fertile parents by producing eighteen children, nearly double the size of Mathieu and Marianne’s brood. That the natives surrounding the great Froment race are barely mentioned is not surprising since it was republican policy to physically isolate citizens of the French republican colonies from imperial subjects.

Zola’s colonial fantasy relies on the logic of civilization through appropriation in more overtly racist terms. The Froments represent the superior French race that bulldozes weaker African races. Dominique Froment urges his metropolitan relatives to emigrate to Africa in order to help fill it up with best and most fertile of French blood, vaunting the manifold opportunities for economic and physical improvement that Africa offers to French men and women: “Il y a là-bas place pour tous, des terres neuves, du grand air que n’a respiré personne, une tâche à remplir qui fera de vous tous des héros, des gaillards solides heureux de vivre.”<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>61</sup>Hugues Le Roux, “Les idées coloniales de M. Waldeck-Rousseau,” *La Revue bleue*, 4<sup>e</sup> série, tome XX (1<sup>er</sup> juillet – 31 décembre, 1903). See also Carole Reynaud-Paligot, 253-254 and Chapter 6 of Alice Conklin’s *A Mission to Civilize*, 174-211.

<sup>62</sup>James J. Cooke, *New French Imperialism 1880-1910: The Third Republic and Colonial Expansion* (Hamden, Conn.: Archon Books, 1973), 22.

<sup>63</sup>*Fécondité*, OC, 8: 497.

The image of French regeneration in Africa as a blood transfusion reveals the biopolitical complexity of Zola's colonial vision. The black natives are virtually non-existent to the Froments: Dominique's briefly alludes to them as "nègres doux pour la plupart" and the rare "bande de nègres rôdeurs" who might either migrate elsewhere or die out.<sup>64</sup> Dominique is unfettered by the sparse presence of the black African natives, declaring that the republican Froments will repopulate and take over West Africa: "Et la vie seule, de longues années de vie peuvent seules créer un peuple nouveau, l'adapter à la terre nouvelle, en fondre les divers éléments, lui donner son existence normale, sa force homogène, son génie..."<sup>65</sup> As the colonial French population grows, it will push out the Muslim and black African natives. According to Dominique, the racially superior white bodies of the French would only become stronger and hardier in the healthy open plains of the French Sudan thanks to the good climate and the agriculture that promises to flourish with the help of new technology. Ever-faithful to Lamarckian genetics, Zola's virile Froments would pass these new physical attributes on to their offspring. Since the French race is more perfectable than black races, white West African colonizers would move closer to their racial destiny.

In his colonial advertisement to the metropolitan Froments, Dominique explains the steps necessary to success in the colonies. First, there is the most obvious need, the need for financial capital to fund mine exploitation and urbanization. Yet, the colonies also need human capital to ensure productivity as producers and reproducers. Dominique's rhetoric emphasizes the value of pure French blood as a kind of imperial currency:

[...] une France est née au loin, un empire illimité, et elle a besoin de notre sang, et il faut lui en donner pour qu'elle se peuple, qu'elle tire du sol ses incalculables richesses, qu'elle devienne la plus grande, la plus forte, la plus souveraine, dans le monde entier.<sup>66</sup>

As this passage makes clear, the African colony requires the best kind of labor, meaning the strong, morally pure French laborers with a good work ethic. The survival of the colony demands the constant growth of the colonial population to maintain productivity and the French claim to the goods that their labor produce.

In the name of the Froment family, and the aging French Republic in need of renewal through its colonial blood line "cette autre France démesurée, près de laquelle l'antique patrie ne sera plus qu'un peu de cervelle pensante, le cerveau qui dirige."<sup>67</sup> Africa as "other France" is not described as a real physical place with its own history or identity. It is rather uncontrolled sheer potential or, in other words, a body primed for the necessary transfusion of "ancient" French blood and brains. As an agent of French and European regeneration in Africa, Nicolas Froment and his progeny represent a positive economic and genetic outcome of imperial experimentation. Zola's vision here resonates more with Third Republican procolonial rhetoric than with an ostensibly objective, naturalist discourse, which claimed that French ingenuity was destined for the cultivation of otherwise undeveloped, wasted resources in the interests of the human collective.<sup>68</sup>

The raciological theory that legitimates *L'Argent's* imperialism reemerges again in Zola's first gospel, which juxtaposes Algerians and black Africans within a hierarchy

<sup>64</sup> *Fécondité*, OC, 8: 496, 498.

<sup>65</sup> *Fécondité*, OC, 8: 496

<sup>66</sup> *Fécondité*, OC, 8: 497.

<sup>67</sup> *Fécondité*, OC, 8: 496.

<sup>68</sup> *La République raciale*, 273.

of African races. Dominique Froment's colonial campaign, simultaneously downplays the dangers of encounters with black Africans in the area, a clear attempt at quelling the common French fear of dark savage races such as those who massacred Marianne's parents. In his description of the fate of Marianne's parents, Zola hints at the bloody 1860s and 70s Algerian uprisings against the French: "la ferme créée par [le père de Marianne], là-bas, prospérait, lorsque, dans un brusque retour de brigandage, le père et la mère furent massacrés."<sup>69</sup> The fact that the massacre was accompanied by the pillaging of a newly prosperous farm suggests that the motive for murder was a quid pro quo revenge against French *razzias* of Algerian communities.

Zola categorizes both Middle Easterners and black Africans by their cultural archaism and, because culture is inscribed in race, by their racial difference from the progressive white French colonizers. Unlike the Algerians, the black natives in sub-Saharan West Africa, according to Dominique, do not pose a real threat to French colonial settlers. Indeed, he describes the Blacks they encounter in Africa as sparse, "peuplades...faites des nègres doux pour la plupart" whose incompetence and laziness do not pose an agricultural or economic threat.<sup>70</sup> Like the indigenous Middle Easterners vaguely alluded to in *L'Argent*, the diminutive term "peuplade" implies that black Africans do not constitute true peoples (in the republican sense of *peuple* as a political category of people), societies or civilizations. Although most of the natives do not present any opposition to French colonization, there are Muslims whose religious beliefs make them especially dangerous to French republican expansion in Africa. These groups, Dominique cautions, are "féroces, voleuses, d'une sauvagerie exaltée par le fanatisme religieux, aggravant la grande difficulté de notre conquête, ce terrible problème de l'Islam."<sup>71</sup> This hostility towards religious faith recalls Mme Caroline's impassioned lament about the pervasive barbarism in Baghdad and Mecca in *L'Argent*: "Pas d'écoles, pas de routes, le pire des gouvernements, la justice vendue, un personnel administratif exécration, des impôts trop lourds, des lois absurdes, la paresse, le fanatisme; sans compter les continuelles secousses des guerres viles, des massacres qui emportent des villages entiers."<sup>72</sup> So the "terrible problem of Islam" symbolizes the insurmountable cultural difference for European entrepreneurs and colonizers both in the Middle East and Africa.

The novelty of *Fécondité's* prejudice against the non-European "other" is the overt biologization of religious and cultural difference, a biologization of non-physical traits that would only grow in popularity and importance to French colonial policy in the early twentieth century.<sup>73</sup> As dangerous as these ferocious religious zealots may seem, Dominique's tone is a haughty imperialistic one, almost dismissing the natives' religious faith as an obnoxious complication to the task of land conquest. There is the sense that the peaceful natives can mostly be ignored, except for those few whose religious fervor drives them to resist the secular scientific authority of French colonials. This was a common view among republican statesman who opposed only violent methods of

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<sup>69</sup> *Fécondité, OC*, 8: 28.

<sup>70</sup> According to the *Trésor de la langue française*, *peuplade* means "groupement humain de faible ou de moyenne importance, dans une société primitive."

<sup>71</sup> *Fécondité, OC*, 8: 496.

<sup>72</sup> *L'Argent, OC*, 5: 76.

<sup>73</sup> See Reynaud Paligot's discussion in "Hérédité raciale et psychologie ethnique," *République raciale*, 228-234.

colonization, promoted by Jules Ferry, hoping that savages would agree to be civilized by French republican standards rather than forced.<sup>74</sup>

As history had proven to French politicians, the Muslim “religious fanaticism” of which Dominique is so apprehensive, is something that cannot be politically subdued—and even for literary raciologists like Zola, a trait that cannot be genetically expelled.<sup>75</sup> Reynaud Paligot affirms that racial heredity of physical as well as intellectual, moral and cultural traits was integral to French colonial policy under the Third Republic.<sup>76</sup> In what might be understood as a bad joke, Dominique writes off the threat of suspicious black natives:

[...] on s’attend à ce que le bon Niger emporte un jour notre village, si quelque bande de nègres rôdeurs ne nous tue pas et ne nous mange pas auparavant... Ah ! je suis bien tranquille, nous vaincrons comme vous avez vaincu, parce que la folie de l’action est la divine sagesse. Il y aura, là-bas, un autre royaume des Froment, un autre Chantebled immense dont vous serez tous les deux grand-mère et vous, les ancêtres, les patriarches lointains qu’on vénéra comme des dieux...<sup>77</sup>

How, one might wonder, can Dominique be so cocky in his dismissal of black cannibals as a real danger in French colonial life? With faith in technology, reason and industry, the superior French colonials are prepared to defeat the vestiges of cannibalism and religious fanaticism by sheer number. This dismissive view echoes new information about the Sub-Saharan black population, disseminated by anthropologist and experienced colonial, general Faidherbe who claimed that the Blacks’ hereditary apathy would make it easy for them to assimilate to French culture if they were motivated to do so.<sup>78</sup> Through emigration and proliferation, Dominique predicts that the French colonials will quickly outnumber the natives, who are in reality, only a mild and temporary nuisance. For the savage African is as unpredictable and rare as a flood, but when expected and planned for, these obstacles are easily overcome. It is furthermore possible that here Zola’s narrator is mocking the image of the ferocious savage, while at the same time perpetuating the same belief in the intellectual and cultural inferiority that informs such a stereotype of the African “other.”

Dominique’s vision destroys the geographical limitations of the French Republic, projecting a slow yet steadfast evolution of the French race abroad that parallels metropolitan progress: “la vie seule, des longues années de vie peuvent seules créer un peuple nouveau, l’adapter à la terre nouvelle, en fondre les divers éléments, lui donner son existence normale, sa force homogène, son génie...”<sup>79</sup> *Fécondité* is much more than a fantasy about France’s national progress: It is an allegory of racial evolution that affirms

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<sup>74</sup> Jacques Thobie quoted in *A Mission to Civilize*, p. 13.

<sup>75</sup> Alice Conklin writes that “the [French] government, at least initially, proceeded on the same assumption as Napoleon, that Muslim “fanaticism” was merely the result of ignorance and despotic rule. It followed that an important part of civilizing the Algerians was offering the knowledge.” *A Mission to Civilize*, p. 20.

<sup>76</sup> She writes, “Selon le ministre des Colonies, Albert Sarraut, les caractéristiques du Noir (paresseux, indolent, imprévoyant) sont le résultat d’une « longue hérédité. » Le concept ‘hérédité raciale est au cœur des écrits de Léopold de Saussure, fils du naturaliste Henri de Saussure et frère cadet de Ferdinand.” *République raciale*, 229.

<sup>77</sup> *Fécondité*, OC, 8: 498, my emphasis.

<sup>78</sup> Anna Pondopoulo “L’image Des Peul Dans L’Œuvre Du General Faidherbe,” *History in Africa*, Vol. 23, (1996): 279-299; *République raciale*, 67-68.

<sup>79</sup> *Fécondité*, OC, 8: 496.

white European racial supremacy as well as republican cultural and political superiority in the non-European world.

### Republican Universalism and the “Other” White Race

As an allegory of racial perfectability, *Fécondité*'s utopian colonial republic illustrates that the problem of Islam was more than a geographical one in France's colonization of Africa. French republican universalism proscribes the competing allegiance to a God or nation above the French republic. Furthermore, religious faith is for republican reformers like Zola, the enemy of reason. As we saw in *L'Argent* and *Fécondité*, Zola conflates Islamic faith with ignorance and religious fervor, an anti-republican trait. Although the problem of Islam is repeatedly evoked by Zola's characters as a glaring example of Arabs' religious intractability and resistance to Western civilization, due to their small number in West Africa, Arabs do not pose a serious danger to the construction of Zola's fictional colonial republic.<sup>80</sup> Dominique Froment's solution for undesirable racial influence in the colony is a biopolitical strategy that encourages reproduction of fit, technologically advanced white colonials, thereby discouraging the survival of the natives through socio-economic neglect. *Fécondité*'s narrator glorifies the Froments' colonization as the fulfillment of its historical destiny:

La fécondité victorieuse restait la force indiscutée, la puissance souveraine qui seule faisait l'avenir. Elle était la grande révolutionnaire, l'ouvrière incessante du progrès, la mère de toutes les civilisations, recréant sans cesse l'armée de ses lutteurs innombrables, jetant au cours des siècles des milliards de pauvres, d'affamés, de révoltés, à la conquête de la vérité et de la justice. Il ne s'est pas fait, dans l'histoire, un seul pas en avant, sans que ce soit le nombre qui ait poussé l'humanité en sa marche. Demain, comme hier, sera conquis par le pullulement des foules, en quête du bonheur.<sup>81</sup>

In Zola's naturalist selection, the problem of racial and religious difference in the colonial republic is resolved by their erasure in the colonial imaginary and ultimately by the process of “natural” extinction of primitive races asserted by raciological theory.

Zola elaborates a similar biopolitical discourse in the imagined unification of Semites and Aryans within the metropolitan France. His last published novel, *Vérité* (1903), prophesies the achievement of social harmony among atheists, Catholics and Jews through the radical abolishment of religious fanaticism by racially fusing them in one white republican family. I would like to consider the contradictions and ambiguities of Zola's relationship to Jewishness first by looking more closely at the complex representation of anti-Semitism in *L'Argent* and then juxtaposing Zola's fictional assimilation of Jews in *Vérité* to his 1896 article “Pour les Juifs.”

Whereas *Fécondité*'s colonial allegory of racial evolution excluded non-whites as ineligible for membership to the republic, *Vérité*'s national republican school system puts an end to racial discrimination against the French Jews by integrating them into the French population as rightful citizens of the Republic and estranged members of the white race. According to nineteenth-century raciological theory, European Jews

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<sup>80</sup> This hostility towards religious faith recalls Mme Caroline's impassioned lament about the pervasive barbarism in Baghdad and Mecca in *L'Argent* (1891): “Pas d'écoles, pas de routes, le pire des gouvernements, la justice vendue, un personnel administratif exécration, des impôts trop lourds, des lois absurdes, la paresse, le fanatisme; sans compter les continuelles secousses des guerres viles, des massacres qui emportent des villages entiers,” *L'Argent*, OC, 5: 76.

<sup>81</sup> *Fécondité*, OC, 8: 499.

(Semites) constitute the “other” white race, one that unlike darker races is racially compatible with the Aryan French race. In Renan’s words, “Envisagés par le côté physique, les Sémites et les Ariens ne font qu’une seule race, la race blanche; envisages par le côté intellectuel, ils ne font qu’une seule famille, la famille civilisée.”<sup>82</sup> This special status accords European Jews the unique potential for racial assimilation in Zola’s republican race which seeks to resolve social strife by eradicating racial difference. The radical secularization of the school engenders cultural and racial homogeneity among Catholics, atheists and Jews. *Vérité*’s thorough assimilation of the Jews glorifies the mutual, biological and cultural benefits of Jewish and gentile intermarriage for the French race. Moreover, by rehabilitating the Jews as equal republican citizens, France might redeem itself from its history of anti-Semitism.

According to the cultural logic of the colonial discourse in Zola’s fiction, white colonials may ignore black races because they are feeble and impotent, but they must either subdue or shun Arab races because they are ferocious and unpredictable and therefore pose the greatest threat to French colonies. European Jews, on the other hand, are the “other” white race, a special status which provides them unique potential for racial assimilation in France. In fact, Zola’s interest in the Jewish people’s place in French society was not strictly ideological; his writing reveals a strong belief in the mutual, biological benefits of Jewish and gentile intermarriage for the French race. Zola’s desire to assimilate the Jews in French society paradoxically perpetuated the racial claims that European Jews’ were not fulfilling their racial destiny as well as the Aryan race in the evolution of white races. To a certain extent, the idea that the Jews needed to be assimilated at all, whether culturally or racially, reinforces the belief in their cultural and racial difference and inferiority.

Despite Zola’s valiant defense of Jewish captain Dreyfus in 1898, critics have taken issue with the pervasive anti-Semitism in *L’Argent* (1891), a novel from the *Rougon-Macquart* series about the battle between the Catholics and Jews over control of French banking. Published only seven years prior, the novel, critics claim, exposes his early or even unconscious anti-Semitism.<sup>83</sup> Robert Stuart, for example, says that “Zola is rightly famed for the great Dreyfusard manifesto *J’accuse* [sic], but also wrote the rightfully forgotten anti-Semitic *L’Argent*.”<sup>84</sup> Richard B. Grant provides a more moderate explanation of anti-Semitic sentiments in Zola’s work. He concludes that Zola’s attitude about the Jews at the time he wrote *L’Argent* was neutral; if anything, his Jewish stereotypes echoed the more moderate “cultural anti-Semitism” prevalent in nineteenth-century France and evoked by Jean-Paul Sartre’s *Réflexions sur la question juive* (1946).<sup>85</sup>

The lack of extensive scholarship on Jewish identity and anti-Semitism in Zola’s writing is surely in large part due to Zola’s reputation as the greatest defender of Dreyfus. His defense is an indictment both of governmental abuse of power in the scapegoating of an innocent man and of the irrational perpetuation of anti-Semitic myths. Zola’s defense

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<sup>82</sup> *Histoire générale et système comparé des langues sémitiques*, (Paris: Imprimerie impériale, 1858), 464.

<sup>83</sup> Richard B. Grant, “The Jewish Question in Zola’s *L’Argent*” *PMLA*, Vol. 70, No. 5 (December 1955): 955-967.

<sup>84</sup> Robert Stuart, *Marxism and National Identity: Socialism, Nationalism, And National Socialism During The French Fin De Siècle* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006), 103.

<sup>85</sup> “L’antisémite reproche au Juif d’être Juif; le démocrate lui reprocherait volontiers de se considérer comme Juif,” (Paris: Gallimard, 1954), 69.

symbolizes the republican fight for individual human rights and the triumph of justice and truth over ignorance and fear. For many of *L'Argent's* gentile bankers, the Jews represent a growing economic threat, embodied by the tireless banker Gundermann, to Catholic banks in Paris. The degenerate Rougon Saccard expresses the most extreme anti-Semitism in the novel, being given to statements like, “L’empire est vendu aux juifs,” and “C’est bien de la juiverie entière [...] Voilà des siècles que la race nous envahit et triomphe, malgré les coups de pied et les crachats.”<sup>86</sup> His dream is not only to rise to socio-economic world power, but to get rid of the Jews in the process as punishment for their illegitimate success in French banking. For the embittered Saccard, rapacity and social distrust are racially inscribed in the Jews.

Zola identifies Saccards’ anti-Semitism as a “haine héréditaire,” a hatred that is literally in his blood:

[...]il avait contre le juif l’antique rancune de race, qu’on trouve surtout dans le midi de la France; et c’était comme une révolte de sa chair même, une répulsion de peau qui, à l’idée du moindre contact, l’emplissait de dégoût et de violence, en dehors de tout raisonnement, sans qu’il pût se vaincre.<sup>87</sup>

By perpetuating the stereotype of the hot-blooded, Mediterranean Frenchman, *L'Argent's* narrator explains racial prejudice and competition as biological facts. In a fit of rage Saccard reaffirms his powerlessness over racist sentiments saying, “c’est le cri même de mon sang. Oui la haine du juif, je l’ai dans la peau, oh! de très loin, aux racines mêmes de mon être.”<sup>88</sup> Zola’s spokesperson, Mme Caroline, is the only character that objects to biological racism. She alone declares that Jewish difference is a product of their history of persecution and ghettoization in Europe.

The numerous stereotypical portraits of devious Jews in *L'Argent* (for example the conniving Busch, Saccard’s partner in crime) seem to be what causes critics’ disapproval. The Busch brothers represent the yin and yang of nineteenth-century Jewish stereotypes: Busch is an unethical, avaricious gambler, while his brother Sigismond, is an intellectual and altruist.<sup>89</sup> Richard B. Grant asserts that Sigismond’s social idealism merely serves to develop his brother’s negative character through polar opposition, and that for Zola, his altruism was probably not a Jewish racial trait. Sigismond’s revolutionary, albeit impotent character, recalls the radical revolutionary ideals of other outsiders in Zola’s corpus, for example, the Russian revolutionary Souvarine in *Germinal*. It seems more likely that Sigismond’s Jewishness, a foreign import like Souvarine’s anarchism, allowed Zola to distance his characters’ romantic radicalism from his own evolutionary political ideals.<sup>90</sup> While it stands to reason that, as Grant argues,

<sup>86</sup> *L'Argent*, OC, 5: 182; 245; 384.

<sup>87</sup> *L'Argent*, OC, 5: 91.

<sup>88</sup> *L'Argent*, OC, 5: 384.

<sup>89</sup> Sigismond’s tragic character immediately conjures up the hero of Calderón’s famous seventeenth-century metaphysical play *La vida es sueño*, Sigismundo whose excessive imagination caused intense suffering and social alienation. In a similarly tragic fashion, Zola’s character dies before he able to realize the humanitarian social project that he had so meticulously researched and designed.

<sup>90</sup> The anarchist Souvarine is a curious example of the political “other” in *Germinal*. Amidst the macho, French republican miners, the overly insistent description of this physically effeminate, highly educated, Russian anarchist is a constant reminder to the reader of his awkward and foreign presence. Significantly, his disapproval of Etienne’s political leadership, his absolute disagreement with the confusion of socialist and communist strategies that characterize Etienne’s actions, results in the quiet realization of Souvarine’s anarchistic plan to destroy the mine itself. His accusation of Etienne and the miners’ goal to take the place

Sigismond's altruism and decency "offset" the anti-Semitism apparent elsewhere in *L'Argent*, it is no coincidence that Zola represented these qualities in the frail body of a social outsider, the polyglot German-Jewish intellectual. Sigismond's dream of social justice and harmony is reiterated verbatim by *Travail* and *Vérité*'s regenerative heroes Luc and Marc Froment and finally realized in an evolutionary rather than revolutionary process of social reform.

It is precisely because Zola acknowledged many positive qualities in the Jews, for example, in his view, their strong work ethic, commitment to education, and great capacity for loyalty, that he enthusiastically campaigned for their membership to the French republic. Zola fiercely condemned France's pervasive ignorance and intolerance of the Jews for their so-called anti-republican values. For Zola, the Jews were not bound by the same religious fanaticism and superstition as the Muslims and the Catholics. He agreed with contemporary racial anthropologists and ethnographers that this other white race (the Jews) had over time become a cultural category, and that their racial and social insularity were the unfortunate results of anti-Semitic discrimination and segregation in Europe.<sup>91</sup> Echoing Mme Caroline's condemnation of Jewish ghettoization, Zola rejected the popular belief that the Jews chose to be "des sans-patries," living "en parasite chez les nations."<sup>92</sup> His solution to this perceived socio-economic parasitism was simply to provide the Jews with full membership to the French republic by eradicating religious social influence altogether. In other words, if the Jews were not a part of French republican society, they merely needed to be absorbed into it. While defeating clerical privilege was part of realizing universalist social ideals, Zola's program for social integration of the Jews nonetheless retains the eugenic undertones of *Fécondité*'s French republican super-race.

As his notes for *L'Argent* show, Zola intended to have Saccard take over French banking and eradicate Jews: "je voudrais mon homme fort [Saccard], arrivant et nettoyant le juif." The term "nettoyer" is particularly unsettling from a modern-day perspective given the Nazi's use of racial "cleansing" to mean stripping the Jews of their identity or liquidating them. Even though the destruction of Jews never occurs in *L'Argent* (since Saccard meets a hysterical rather than heroic fate), it is central to the biopolitical reform program in Zola's last novel.<sup>93</sup> *Vérité* (1903) tells the story of Marc Froment's rehabilitation of France through the struggle for secular education and the separation of Church and state.

*Vérité* is clearly a partial literary transposition of the Dreyfus affair in which the character Simon, like Dreyfus, is accused of a crime he did not commit as part of an anti-Semitic cover-up, the real criminals being members of high clerical society. Like Zola, Marc is a republican apostle of universal human rights; he undertakes to defend a Jewish teacher (Simon) against the corrupt social and legal community in their clerical provincial town, Maillebois. Simon is accused of the rape and murder of a young schoolboy, a

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of the bourgeoisie points out the underlying bitterness and envy are revealed to be true motives for their calls for "justice."

<sup>91</sup> Renan's advocacy of racial miscegenation between European Aryans and Semites was shared by anthropologists such as Taine, Ribot et Fouillée, Reynaud Paligot, 161-166.

<sup>92</sup> *L'Argent*, OC, 5: 91; *Vérité*, OC, 8: 1026.

<sup>93</sup> Saccard's pathetic fate represents for Grant Zola's principle method of attack on anti-Semitism. In the final chapter, the normal gender roles are reversed leaving Saccard pathetic, irrational and hysterical and Mme Caroline as strong, rejuvenated and logical.

conspiracy devised by the clergy who know that the actual criminal is one of their own, a Catholic priest. Though Marc had been privately combating his in-laws' religious prejudice and ignorance, his outrage at the anti-Semitic scapegoating of Simon energizes Marc's official struggle for social equality through secular education. Through his combat against Catholic corruption and hypocrisy, Marc successfully accomplishes Saccard's proposed mission to "clean the Jew" in the name of French universalism by exposing anti-Semitism as an irrational and fraudulent discourse, one which is used as a convenient front for clerical crime and corruption.

Marc's defense of universal truth and justice calls for the destruction of corrupt Catholic institutions that perpetuate religious and sexual inequality, while exploiting their naïve parishioners. This destruction takes place on two levels. First, on a legal and institutional level, Marc fights to have Simon exonerated and simultaneously reforms and recruits for Maillebois' public schools. Second, *Vérité* abolishes religious and racial prejudice on a personal and biological level through the successful intermarriage of Catholics, atheists, and Jews. Like *Fécondité*, Zola's universalist reform of France in *Vérité* has a biological dimension represented by the racial inclusion of the Jews in the Froment family. Although Marc disliked the Jews, his involvement in the Simon affair made him empathetic to their social marginalization in the predominantly Catholic French provinces. Free of Saccard's hereditary Mediterranean racism, Marc's anti-Semitic sentiments are cultural, perhaps even precultural:

Marc, qui n'aimait guère les juifs, par une sorte de répugnance et de méfiance ataviques, dont il n'avait jamais eu la curiosité d'analyser les causes, malgré sa grande libération d'esprit, gardait pourtant à Simon, qu'il tutoyait, un amical souvenir de leur rencontre à l'école normale. Il disait de lui qu'il était fort intelligent, très bon instituteur, pénétré de ses devoirs. [...] Aussi ne se faisait-il pas pardonner d'être juif que grâce à beaucoup de correction et surtout à un patriotisme ardent, exaltant dans sa classe la France armée, la rêvant glorieuse, maîtresse du monde.<sup>94</sup>

Marc admires Simon because he distinguishes himself from other Jews by his great intelligence, sense of obligation, dedication to teaching, and most of all by his ardent patriotism, which is an integral part of Marc's pedagogy. Yet, Marc also attributes Simon's excessive submission to his superiors, described as "l'humilité de la race," the unjust social conditioning of social outcasts. His rational mind is preoccupied by social progress, not historical explanations; he seeks not so much to understand anti-Semitism in himself or others, but to rise above it through reason and devotion to the French republic. Calling Marc's mistrust and repugnance towards the Jews "atavistic" implies that, at least in his enlightened republican family, anti-Semitism has been bred out for several generations. Himself a victim of Catholic prejudice in his profession and in his marriage, Marc condemns anti-Semitism. His belief in universalism bolsters his defense of social victims like the Jews, women, and children, against the ignorance and elitism, embodied by the Catholic church and its members.

Decades after the Simon affair, times have changed in Zola's fictional utopian republic not because the Jews enjoy equal rights, but because as a distinct racial and social group they have become extinct. As one young villager puts it, "Il y a beau temps qu'il n'y a plus de juifs, puisqu'il ne va plus y avoir de catholiques... La disparition des Eglise est la fin de toutes les guerres religieuses."<sup>95</sup> Inspired by the example of his own

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<sup>94</sup> *Vérité*, OC, 8: 1019.

<sup>95</sup> *Vérité*, OC, 8: 1444.

daughter Louise, the liberal product of an atheist schoolteacher and Catholic woman, Marc believes that future generations of mixed-background children will help defeat discrimination. Zola's vision of perfecting the human race through French and Jewish racial mixing was shared and developed by republican raciologists like Renan, Ribot and Fouillée who were "favorables au métissage entre races blanches, défavorables au métissage entre races éloignées."<sup>96</sup> By the novel's end, Zola's heroic Froment family overcomes social segregation institutionally and biologically, by merging other families into one: "C'étaient les quatre générations, tout ce qui avait poussé du sang de l'innocent mêlé au sang des justiciers."<sup>97</sup>

This model of social reform through institutional and biological channels is firmly rooted in French universalism. The defense of human rights is a constant battle, and yet the long-term solution to inequality, according to *Les Quatre Evangiles*, is the biological homogenization of the French, a process contingent upon the erasure of Jewish difference. Nevertheless, the disappearance of religious identity is one thing, whereas the loss of racial and cultural identity is quite another. Zola's oft-cited essay, "Pour les juifs," (1896) openly reveals his eugenic attitude towards the Jews almost a decade before *Vérité's* prophesy, "il n'y avait plus de juifs, puisqu'il n'y avait désormais que des citoyens libérés des dogmes."<sup>98</sup>

*Vérité* enacts this eugenic theory through the biological incorporation of the Jewish Simon's blood into the righteous republican Froment family. Although this racial fusion occurs in the realm of utopian fiction, it reiterates Zola's republican racial bias, which underpins even his journalism. In "Pour les juifs," Zola evokes the senselessness of religious warfare, and yet, at the same time, relies heavily on discriminatory racial theories. He describes the Jews as a "race pratique et avisé, ils apportent dans leur sang un besoin du lucre, un esprit prodigieux des affaires." The Jewish community, according to Zola, is tragically insular: "Les juifs se marient entre eux, gardant un lien de famille très étroit, au milieu du relâchement moderne, se soutiennent et s'encouragent." Zola suggests here that the French oppression of the Jews is also responsible for aggravating their racial inferiority and cultural atavism vis-à-vis the Gentiles:

S'il y a encore des juifs, c'est de votre faute. Ils auraient disparu, se seraient fondus, si on ne les avait pas forcés de se défendre, de se grouper, de s'entêter dans leur race... Ne parlez donc plus d'eux, et ils ne seront plus. Le jour où le juif ne sera qu'un homme comme nous, il sera notre frère. Et la tactique s'indique, absolument opposée. Ouvrir les bras tout grands, réaliser socialement l'égalité reconnue par le Code. Embrasser les juifs, pour les absorber et les confondre en nous. Nous enrichir de leurs qualités, puisqu'ils en ont. Faire cesser la guerre des races en mêlant les races. Pousser aux mariages, remettre aux enfants le soin de réconcilier les pères. Et là seulement est l'œuvre d'unité, l'œuvre humaine et libératrice.<sup>99</sup>

Because the closed Jewish community is for Zola a constant sign of their marginalization, he demands the Jews' immediate and total integration into modern French society. This integration however, is not a promotion of "israélitisme," the enthusiastic Jewish patriotism that Philippe Landau has described as a kind of dual identity.<sup>100</sup> In his study of

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<sup>96</sup> *La République raciale*, 164.

<sup>97</sup> *Vérité*, OC, 8: 1453.

<sup>98</sup> *Vérité*, OC, 8: 1447.

<sup>99</sup> "Pour les juifs," OC, 14: 781.

<sup>100</sup> For more on this movement, see Landau's remarkable study, *Les Juifs de France et la Grande Guerre: un patriotisme républicain, 1914-1941* (Paris: CNRS, 1999).

Zola and the nebulous “question juive,” Jacques Durin points out that despite Zionist leader Bernard Lazare’s attempts to engage Zola in a dialogue about Zionism and anti-Semitism, Zola remained uncharacteristically silent.<sup>101</sup> The defense of a wrongly accused man, scapegoat of the Third Republic’s corrupt government, seemed to be a separate issue from the protection of Jewish identity for the author of “J’accuse.” Two years earlier in “Pour les juifs,” Zola admits that French gentiles could compete with Jews in commerce in an effort to best them by becoming like them. He nevertheless insists that biological and cultural integration is the best tactic to end race wars.

Zola proposes the racial absorption of the Jews by the French, “les absorber et les confondre en nous.” It is by erasing (Jewish) difference, biologically *and* culturally, that Frenchmen become equals. This erasure of Jewishness exemplifies the French universalist position that Sartre would later critique as a false friend to the Jews: “L’antisémite reproche au Juif *d’être* Juif; le démocrate lui reprocherait volontiers de se *considérer* comme Juif.”<sup>102</sup> One could draw a compelling parallel with Zola’s ideas in “Pour les juifs” and *Vérité* with a simple substitution of *républicain* for *démocrate* in Sartre’s assertion. Despite Sartre’s ambiguity about the possibility for Jewish specificity within a democratic republic, the issue is more complex for Zola since Jewish being (race) and Jewish identity (social membership) were inextricably linked.

Zola’s campaign for the integration of the Jews echoes Ernest Renan’s belief that Semites and Aryans were destined to unite in the march toward civilization:

L’histoire morale et religieuse du monde n’est que le résultat de l’action combinée de ces races. On expliquerait à peine comment deux espèces, apparues isolément, se montreraient aussi semblables dans leur constitution essentielle, et se seraient si facilement confondues en une seule et même destinée<sup>103</sup>

By intermarriage with the Jews, the French stand to gain racial wealth, because Jewish dedication to duty and business acumen are genetically transferable to their offspring. Were it not for the evidence of French racial superiority in *Fécondité*’s exclusion of African natives in its utopian colonial republic and *Vérité*’s absorption of the Jews into the metropolitan republic through education and intermarriage with Gentiles, the language of Zola’s essay may pass as rhetorical hyperbole. But his desire to make the Jews disappear, meld with the French, indeed, cease to be named and to exist strikes the modern reader as a shockingly violent strategy for the acclaimed defender of captain Dreyfus. One of Zola’s contemporary critics, Marcel Théaux, took issue with the violent eugenic form of his *Évangiles*’ vision of national reform:

[...] après avoir lu [*Travail*] avec respect et émotion, je continue à croire, hélas! que pour faire régner le bonheur (?) parmi les hommes, il faudrait commencer par exterminer tous ceux qui vivent, ou à peu près? Ce massacre accompli, peut-être naîtrait-il des cendres de la vieille humanité une race moins encline à l’égoïsme, à la brutalité, à l’avarice, à la sottise, à l’esclavage? Alors la paix, la justice, l’amour fleuriraient naturellement pour la joie d’une humanité régénérée. Mais M. Zola ne prévoit pas ce cataclysme total où s’effondrerait le vieux monde de la guerre et de la haine. Sans doute, il ne le juge pas nécessaire pour la purification de l’humanité. Il n’a besoin que de petites catastrophes pour fonder et faire prospérer la cité future, la cité de joie et d’honneur.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> Zola *et la question juive 1890-1902* (Paris: Editions GM, 1989), 100.

<sup>102</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, *Réflexions sur la question juive* (Paris: Gallimard, 1954), 69.

<sup>103</sup> Renan, *Histoire générale*, 464.

<sup>104</sup> Marcel Théaux, *La Grande Revue*, 1901, 725-744.

The directness of the first part of Théaux's critique lends the diplomatic gesture of the apology in his last three sentences an ironic tone, underscoring the troubling ethical problem of eugenic reform in *Les Quatre Evangiles*. It is clear that from *L'Argent* to *Vérité*, Zola's vision of an ideal Republic supports the universalist policy of cultural and racial homogenization as a means to world peace. The tacit reverse idea here is that as long as the Jews continue to "s'entêter dans leur race," or in other words remain Jewish, they will not become equals in the French republic.

### The Myth of Universalist Colorblindness

Although Zola's writing continues to be overlooked as a productive site of racial discourse, his journalism and fiction relied on, disseminated and developed republican raciology and scientific racism. As this chapter has shown, the logic of race in Zola's fiction, crystallized in his fictional Froment family whose astonishing genetic strength revitalizes land and people alike, reaffirms nineteenth-century theories of French moral and racial superiority. Some races, like the Rougon-Macquart family, are irreversibly corrupt, immune to regeneration even through miscegenation with stronger blood. The Arabs are tainted with religious fanaticism, a sign of their innate savagery. The black Africans, a mostly gentle race, past its historical prime, are likewise ineligible for French racial integration because of their apparently slow rate of intellectual progress. Endowed with superior genes and morality, the Froment family appropriates African land for its own gain, replacing dying native civilizations with modern industry, and simultaneously absorbs other strong white families in France. As opposed to the fatal degeneration caused the *Rougon-Macquart* stock, the Froments' blood is a conquering, regenerative force able to effectively filter out undesirable traits in generations of new, genetically and socially superior, republican children. Zola's use of the term race ranges from a genetic raciological category to more historical and national categories. In a complimentary fashion, the degenerate Rougon-Macquart race and the regenerative Froment race represent the health of French nation. As I have shown, Zola's treatment of race is more than a metaphor for social decline; the racial logic of his novels acts as disciplinary and regulatory forces on the French population.

The next chapter further explores biopower in *Fécondité*, focusing on the relationship between gender and regeneration in medical and literary discourses. The language of Zola's literary raciology, in both negative and positive outcomes, shares the entitled rhetoric of republican raciologists, scientists, historians, and politicians. Zola's campaign for exclusion of darker, non-European races in the French colonies, and conversely, the integration of the Jews in metropolitan France confirm the republican racial paradigm which claims the white French population as intellectually, morally, and biologically superior, even to other white races. The inclusion of the Jews in the French republic confirms to this notion of superiority, to the extent that it makes the French Third Republic even more politically progressive, and in Zola's view, biologically stronger, enriched by the positive genetic traits of the other white race.

*Les Quatre Evangiles* are not mere reflections of intellectual trends, nor are they diluted, or misguided interpretations of scientific theory as critics have argued. They directly participate in the imaginative theorization of heredity and racial destiny alongside eminent republican scientists and theorists. The racial exclusion of the Africans

and Arabs, and the erasure of Jewishness that are integral to the creation of Zola's ideal republic are clear manifestations of the myth of universalist colorblindness and the racism it attempts to conceal. The *Evangiles*' exclusion of inferior dark races and assimilation in the ideal French republic make it clear that racial superiority is important to French national identity.

This biological control of a population, and its consequences are most effectively described by Foucault in his lecture on biopower and state racism. Racial differentiation or racialization, according to Foucault, creates the possibility for state-endorsed violence against either its internal (Arabs or Jews in France) or external enemies (the Blacks or Arabs in French Africa):

La spécificité du racisme moderne, ce qui fait sa spécificité, n'est pas lié à des mentalités, à des idéologies, aux mensonges du pouvoir. C'est lié à la technique du pouvoir, à la technologie du pouvoir. C'est lié à ceci, qui nous place, au plus loin de la guerre des races et de cette intelligibilité de l'histoire, dans un mécanisme qui permet au bio-pouvoir de s'exercer. Donc, le racisme est lié au fonctionnement d'un Etat qui est obligé de se servir de la race, de l'élimination des races et de la purification de la race, pour exercer son pouvoir souverain. La juxtaposition, ou plutôt le fonctionnement, à travers le bio-pouvoir, du vieux pouvoir souverain du droit de mort implique le fonctionnement, la mise en place et l'activation du racisme.<sup>105</sup>

Zola's racialization of people within a population in *Les Quatre Evangiles* is such a mechanism of biopower, which authorizes both racial inclusion or exclusion based on perceived eligibility to the secular, white republic. Because the *Evangiles* do not stage, much less valorize the extermination of populations or individuals, their positive, eugenic evolution represents the biopolitical model for racial success, not to be confused in any way with genocide. The subtle, and potentially long-term biopolitical process that Foucault describes conforms to Zola's naturalist imitation of natural life cycles and racial destiny. Even in his most optimistic vision of race, however, Zola's regenerative heroes thrive on the losses of the socially and biologically degenerate. Although his evangelists do not kill their neighbors: they attempt to integrate white neighbors into their family, however, if this integration is unsuccessful, the Froments do *allow* those around them to die out as a result of their own degenerate values and lifestyles. Furthermore, as I have shown, there is an obvious color dimension to Zola's ideal republican race. The Froments' absorption of the Jews into their white, European family or "race" erases Jewish racial inferiority (and identity) while the social and biological exclusion of non-white, African natives in the Froment's West African "dynasty", be they Black or Arab, ensures republican racial homogeneity and white domination in the colonies.

In Zola's experimental *Evangiles*, the birth of the republican Froment race synthesizes old and new paradigms of power, the result of which is what I call Zola's biopolitical aesthetic. *Les Evangiles*' social vision fuses the religious language of redemption and conversion, the aristocratic language of pure blood and historical destiny with the bourgeois language of scientific progress, sexual utility, and racial hygiene. The following chapters will continue to explore biopolitics in *Les Evangiles*' new republican family as a positive naturalist aesthetic and as a site of national identity formation.

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<sup>105</sup> Foucault, "Il faut défendre la société," 230.

## Chapter 2: Patriotism and Parenthood

O mères françaises, faites donc des enfants, pour que la France garde son rang, sa force et sa prospérité, car il est nécessaire au salut du monde que la France vive, elle d'où est partie l'émancipation humaine, elle d'où partiront toute vérité et toute justice! Si elle doit un jour ne faire plus qu'une avec l'humanité, ce sera comme la mer où tous les fleuves viennent se perdre.

Et je voudrais, chez elle, que le déchet de la vie cessât, que la vie fût adorée comme la bonne déesse, l'immortelle, celle qui donne l'éternelle victoire. Et je voudrais qu'elle eût une littérature puissante et naturelle, virile et saine, d'une honnêteté qui brave les choses et les mots, remettant en honneur l'amour qui enfante, créant de vastes monuments de solidité et de paix pour le flot débordant des générations futures.

Emile Zola, "Dépopulation," *Le Figaro*, 23 mai 1896

It is deceptively positive to call the period of French social history between 1872 and 1914 *la Belle Epoque*, despite the relative military calm of this period. Fin-de-siècle popular press and literature reveal that French society was, in fact, deeply troubled by the future of the nation in the aftermath of the Franco-Prussian war July 1870 to May 1871 and the bitter domestic uprising, the Paris Commune, from March to May 1871. France's efforts to recover from both incidents and prevent future military harm brought concerns about the nation's health and virility to the fore, most notably with respect to the alleged crisis of depopulation. From the early 1850s onward, reports of the declining birthrate in France began to appear, prompting debates about its various causes and solutions.

Robert Nye, William H. Schneider and Karen Offen have argued that, compared to other European nations, the French population and economy of the late nineteenth century were hardly in as an alarming state of decline as French repopulationists purported. Schneider shows that pronatalist statisticians published skewed information focusing on national birth rate decline, while omitting other factors that attested to France's general population equilibrium rather than decline.<sup>106</sup> Nevertheless, the perception of the population crisis was very real. In Offen's view, anxiety about depopulation derived from France's fear of being permanently surpassed by neighboring nations, and most especially by enemy Germany.<sup>107</sup> The statistical "proof" of the national depopulation crisis was aggravated by Prussia's siege of Paris, the casualties of Paris Commune, and the 1882 crash of the Union Générale. France's national identity was perceived to be damaged not just by diminished number but also quality, since the "strongest young" men died during the violent events that preceded the Third Republic. Because of this bloodshed, France struggled to fortify its stock by urging men and women to make as many healthy babies as possible. The aggressive reproductive campaigns of the fin-de-siècle show how economic and military problems grew into a widespread preoccupation with the relationship between sexuality and national welfare.

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<sup>106</sup> William H. Schneider, *Quality and Quantity: The Quest for Biological Regeneration in Twentieth-Century France* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 38-39.

<sup>107</sup> Among contributing factors of depopulation, the annexation of Alsace-Lorraine accounted for the loss of some 1.6 million French inhabitants. Karen Offen, "Depopulation, Nationalism, and Feminism in Fin-de-Siècle France," *American Historical Journal* 89, (June 1984): 651.

While Chapter 1 investigated the racist implications of *Les Quatre Evangiles* and its biopolitical paradigm, this chapter focuses on the sexual stakes of Zola's fictional republican biopower regime. Published a few years after his article, "Dépopulation," Zola's first social gospel, *Fécondité* (1899) is his fictional response to the depopulation crisis. Its panegyric of monogamous procreation as a sacred national duty offers a solution to the preoccupations with parenthood, sex and sexuality of fin-de-siècle physicians, political activists, and social reformers. Although the proliferation of the heroic Froment family takes place in all three of the published *Evangiles*, it is in *Fécondité* that reproduction and sexuality take center stage. Indeed, *Fécondité's* creation of the ideal republican family depends on the sexual discipline of men and women, women's health and childcare reform. I suggest that although the glorification of fertility is not a novel literary concept, *Fécondité's* celebration of reproduction is a modern reformist vision insofar as it secularizes the sacredness of sex and childbirth. Instead of obeying divine law, citizens in Zola's fictional republic are called to reproduce for the moral, biological, and economic good of the nation. By contrast to the demonization of sexual excess in Zola's critique of French society during the Second Empire, *Fécondité* legitimates abundant sexual energy by transforming men and women's natural instincts into the respectable fulfillment of republican civic duty and a modern sacred rite in the *Evangiles's* secular humanist religion.

In order to better understand Zola's treatment of gender and reproduction, I first outline the dominant strains of medical and social reproductive discourses in Fin-de-Siècle France. Then, I show how the secular-sacred rhetoric of Zola's repopulating Froment family responds to the real campaigns of pronatalists, neo-Malthusians and proponents of puériculture, a uniquely French family-planning system, and ultimately fuses politically conservative pronatalism with progressive puériculture. I then study how *Fécondité's* fusion of the secular scientific theories and the divine exaltations of procreation in biblical erotic poetry and classical mythology constructs a unique reproductive aesthetic. My aim is to determine what Mathieu Froment's family life and his crusade for national repopulation reveals about Zola's complex gendering of virility, domesticity and national population growth. Although today's feminist critics have taken Zola to task for *Fécondité's* patriarchal vision of reproductive roles, they have missed the ways in which it reforms gender iniquity in the family. Zola's first gospel actually includes men in sexual discipline and domestic responsibility as husbands and fathers by scrutinizing their moral and physical fitness and demanding their increased participation in childrearing.

I conclude this chapter by comparing two contemporary literary responses by male authors to fin-de-siècle feminist movements: the cautionary tale that is Eugène Brieux's polemical plays *Les Avariés* (1902) and *Maternité* (1903) and by returning to Zola's *Fécondité*. While the radical feminist message of Brieux's play may overshadow the more moderate gender politics of Zola's novel, *Fécondité's* evolutionary (rather than revolutionary) vision of social reform is surprisingly prescient of very recent concern for extending the rights of fathers. As we shall see, despite its reaffirmation of the active/passive gender dichotomy, by drawing men's and women's private sexual lives into public discourse Zola's utopian novel supported the reform of men and women's rights both in Zola's time and today. By historicizing sexual and reproductive discourses in this first *Evangile*, I show that Zola's ideal republican family blurs gender the

boundaries of parenting by making motherhood and fatherhood not only patriotic but spiritually satisfying, and even seductive.

### Fin-de-Siècle Reproductive Movements

Late nineteenth-century debates on population growth and degeneration prompted great interest in the reproductive rights and responsibilities of French women and men. Although at first, these biological reform movements may seem clearly defined as either pro-contraception (neo-Malthusianism) or pro-life (pronatalism), closer analysis of socio-sexual discourse from 1890-1905 shows that political alliances were anything but neatly divided.<sup>108</sup> Debates on reproduction, like the Dreyfus affair, blurred the boundaries of liberalism and conservatism, forging new and unconventional alliances that challenged traditional French social dichotomies. Joining geneticists, physicians, economists and politicians in the debate on population and social reform were fiction writers from across the political spectrum, republicans like Emile Zola, decadents like Catulle Mendès and Rachilde, reformist playwright Eugène Brieux and even reactionary Maurice Barrès. The epigraph, taken from Zola's 1896 article "Dépopulation" suggests that fiction, too, participate in social and sexual debates. Zola's impassioned plea for making more French babies—"O mères françaises, faites donc des enfants"—foreshadows his own literary contribution to social discourse, underscoring the unique relationship between naturalist literature, social change and national identity. His desire for a virile literature that would best represent the French republic, and bolster its virilization indicates his multi-faceted engagement with national regeneration.

In Fin-de-Siècle France, the two main movements for biological regeneration, which proffered competing ideas of reproductive norms, were the neo-Malthusian and pronatalist movements. While many other countries witnessed the development of this same polarity around questions of population and reproduction, what distinguishes the situation in France is the generally optimistic social perspective of French medical advocates in both neo-Malthusian and pronatalist poles. Both groups believed in stimulating the national birthrate among healthy families. French eugenics has a unique origin in pronatalist discourse. Unlike Germany's program of negative eugenics—the elimination of unfit parents and children—France witnessed the development of a positive eugenics, which promoted positive (careful) selection for health in marriage and conscientious, or "positive" procreation.

Neo-Malthusianism was relatively marginalized at the turn of the century, and was perceived to be a reactionary social movement. Utilizing Thomas Malthus' theory on population control as a means of stimulating national economic progress, Neo-Malthusianism fought for increased contraception. According to Paul Robin, the leader of French Neo-Malthusianism, supporters of this movement preferred to be called "régénérateurs" because they preached "*la vraie morale, celle de la santé, de la*

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<sup>108</sup> In his "Défense du néo-Malthusianisme", (1906) Paul Robin explains that neo-Malthusianism, unlike Malthus's doctrines, provides more realistic means to limit the population after as well as before marriage. He quotes London's League of Neo-Malthusians: "L'abstention prolongée du mariage, que recommandait Malthus, est la source de nombreuses maladies et de beaucoup de vices sexuels: l'union précocée, au contraire, tend à assurer la pureté sexuelle, le confort domestique, le bonheur social, la santé individuelle [...]" in *Controverse sur le néo-Malthusianisme*, 16.

modération,” and they alone, he boasted, offered a viable solution to prostitution by encouraging safe sexual outlets to men whose appetites might lead to extramarital affairs and the spreading of venereal disease.<sup>109</sup> Since Neo-Malthusianism advocated contraception even in married couples, it was aligned with aristocratic and bourgeois economic conservatism, as well as with upper-class hedonism and sexual perversion. In addition to cultural decadence, neo-Malthusians were blamed for exacerbating extreme financial conservatism in members of middle and lower classes who aspired to belong to a higher class. Neo-Malthusians were criticized for encouraging coitus interruptus and other types of birth control in lower middle-class couples who wished to imitate the behavior of the haute bourgeoisie despite the fact that they could not sustain such a lifestyle. Contraception not only failed to fulfill one’s patriotic duty to produce more French citizens, it was also seen as a dangerous invitation for the lower classes to increase their own wealth and social status while enjoying the pleasure of marital sex without the economic burden of children.<sup>110</sup> The charge of sexual perversion was a convenient smoke screen for neo-Malthusians’ real mission to make contraception accessible to all people, which no doubt threatened the existing class system. The technology of sexual discipline hid deeper socio-economic anxiety.

Despite the upper-class image ascribed to them, French neo-Malthusians, unlike their foreign analogs, were largely working-class in organization and audience.<sup>111</sup> Their detractors nevertheless insisted that sexual perversity and financial conservatism were the neo-Malthusians’ primary motives, thus undermining the movement’s advocacy of conscientious parenthood and birth control as key, preventative strategies for controlling the quality of French population. Another significant aspect of neo-Malthusianism in France was its lack of support from official socialist groups. Schoolteacher Paul Robin, the leader of neo-Malthusianism, founded *La Ligue de Régénération Humaine* in 1896 and was also a militant Marxist. Robin’s proposals for coeducational training, like his proposals for contraception, were feared as radically egalitarian, even anarchistic.<sup>112</sup> Robin was a pragmatist who advocated safe contraception in marital sex and, most especially women’s right to choose the moment of conception:

Les femmes doivent savoir que la science leur fournit les moyens efficaces et non douloureux de ne mettre au monde que quand elles le veulent, et elles ne le voudront certainement alors que dans des conditions telles que leurs enfants aient toutes les chances d’être sains, vigoureux, intelligents et bons. Que toutes l’apprennent, les inférieurs aussi bien que les supérieurs [...] En un mot, la maternité doit être libre.<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> Italics original. *Le Néo-Malthusianisme*, 11.

<sup>110</sup> In *Histoire de l’avortement: XIX<sup>e</sup>-XX<sup>e</sup> siècle*, Jean-Yves Le Naour, Catherine Valenti emphasize the ethical difference between Malthus’ doctrine and fin de siècle neo-Malthusian campaigns: “Mais si Malthus, austère pasteur anglican, préconisait la seule continence pour restreindre les naissances, la pratique malthusienne est tout autre: elle consacre l’usage des procédés anticonceptionnels, au premier rang desquels figure le coit interrompu, et trahit en quelque sorte la morale ascétique du père fondateur. Bientôt, des propagandistes vont recenser les différents moyens anticonceptionnels et inviter leurs lecteurs à ne plus redouter de procréer lors des rapprochements sexuels. C’est cette dissociation de la sexualité et de la procréation, comble de vice et du péché pour les religieux, qui forme le fondement du néo-malthusianisme,” 39.

<sup>111</sup> Schneider, *Quality and Quantity*, 33.

<sup>112</sup> Schneider, *Quality and Quantity*, 35.

<sup>113</sup> *Le Néo-Malthusianisme*, 5-6.

Socialists tended to oppose neo-Malthusianism on the grounds that truly effective social reform should be economic rather than biological. Nationalists, whether conservative or republican, likewise discredited Robin's movement as anti-patriotic because he did not demand quantity of births over quality and thus offered no solution to the depopulation crisis.

Pronatalists, on the other hand, enjoyed great institutional support from the Ecole de Médecine and philanthropic societies for their positive promotion of parenthood as a patriotic mission. Since many political and medical officials in the pronatalist camp headed single-child or childless households, they evidently did not practice the abundant procreation that they preached to French citizens. This political hypocrisy, which merits a more in-depth discussion, will be addressed later in my discussion of Eugène Brieux's satire, *Maternité*. In 1896, physician and demographer Jacques Bertillon, physiologist Charles Richet and deputy André Honnorat founded l'Alliance nationale pour l'accroissement de la population française (formerly, l'Alliance nouvelle contre la dépopulation). This was the group to which Zola belonged.<sup>114</sup> This organization was a prominent vehicle for pronatalist campaigns to heavily promote procreation, including proposals for tax-based financial incentives for fathers of large families.<sup>115</sup> Since the Alliance's mission greatly relied on perpetuating the fear of depopulation, it published exaggerated statistics about the dire state of population decline and direct attacks against the decadent and unpatriotic neo-Malthusian doctrine.<sup>116</sup>

The third movement for biological reform in France, *puériculture*, was neither natalist nor neo-Malthusian. Developed in the early 1890s by Alfred Pinard, a well-respected obstetrician at the Ecole de Médecine in Paris, *puériculture* was a program that aimed to improve childbirth and rearing, including increased prenatal rest for mothers and long-term breastfeeding periods. Pinard's belief that precaution and health of the mother would ensure healthy children had strong neo-Lamarckian underpinnings. Like Taine's theory of cultural destiny, it emphasized the environmental impact on heredity, an affinity which later led to Pinard's involvement in French eugenics movement.<sup>117</sup> Despite Zola's public affiliation with the pronatalist movement, puericultural theories and practices strongly resonate with Zola's ideal republican parental model in *Fécondité*. Regardless of their methodological differences, neo-Malthusians, pronatalists and puericulturalists were all deeply concerned with improving the French stock through the promotion of healthy maternity and paternity, though, as we shall see, their distinct visions of regenerative gender roles were hardly uniform. From the 1890s onward, maternity and paternity were touted as the foremost patriotic duty of male and female citizens of the French republic.

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<sup>114</sup> Cheryl A. Koos "Gender, Anti-Individualism, and Nationalism: The Alliance Nationale and the Pronatalist Backlash against the Femme Moderne, 1933-1940," *French Historical Studies*, Vol. 19, No. 3 (Spring, 1996): 699-723. According to Robert Nye, the Alliance was an "umbrella organization" for those who encouraged large families. At its height, the organization boasted 40,000 members. *Masculinity and Male Codes of Honor in France*, 81.

<sup>115</sup> No laws on such incentives were passed until 1939.

<sup>116</sup> Schneider notes that Bertillon's book-length report, *La Dépopulation de la France* resembles a "legal brief with charges and evidence against the neo-Malthusians." 35.

<sup>117</sup> See Schneider's discussion on Pinard and the history of *puériculture* in *Quality and Quantity*, 73-82.

## Biopower and Zola's Repopulation Crusade

Zola's awareness of repopulation movements inspired him to make sexual reproduction the topic of his first social gospel, *Fécondité*. This novel is the first installment of his utopian vision of the French republic of the future. It is a bridge between the *Rougon-Macquart*'s morose dissection of the society under the Second Empire and the *Évangiles*' dream of regeneration by treating social corruption, sexual degeneracy and population crisis as the acute symptoms of a nation in premature cultural and political decline. Unlike the *Rougon-Macquart*'s dark prognosis about French society, the Froments' tenacious reform of sexual degeneracy and agricultural stasis provide hope for building a strong Republic in the twentieth century. With the help of his wife Marianne, the novel's hero, Mathieu Froment, becomes a crusader for repopulation by producing his own large family and converting his friends and neighbors to the national cult of familial love and fertility. I wish to consider here how the same biopolitical paradigm that gave rise to an imperialist and racist vision of the future (discussed in Chapter 1), paradoxically plays an equalizing role in Zola's fictionalized reform of gender roles and sexuality. I will evaluate specifically to what degree state regulation of the intimate domestic and sexual lives of individual men and women in *Fécondité* equalizes gender roles and benefits feminist causes in ways that resonate with gender discourse in Zola's time and today.

Though he represents a pronatalist stance, at the beginning of the novel, Mathieu Froment practices safe sex in his marriage in order to materially provide for his wife and four children. Mathieu's repeated exposure to scenes of sexual decadence and sterility (reminiscent of degeneracy in the *Rougon-Macquart* novels) prove to be a powerful catalyst in his decision to abandon himself to his sensual wife, Marianne. Their positive experience of carefree marital sex spurs Mathieu begin spreading the good word of fertility and domesticity to his coworkers, friends and neighbors. Encouraged by his adoring wife and his obstetrician friend, Dr. Boutan, Mathieu becomes inspired to take on the daunting task of national regeneration by preaching about the vast health benefits of reproduction for individuals, and by producing his own large family of "birth apostles" who, in turn, reproduce and proselytize the sexually degenerate. Dr. Boutan best voices the fin-de-siècle anxiety about the population crisis's detrimental effect on the health of the French republic: "Nous ne sommes plus qu'à un rang très inférieur en Europe; et le nombre, aujourd'hui, c'est plus que jamais la puissance."<sup>118</sup> Boutan's quantitative concerns resonate with Jules Ferry's 1885 procolonial speech to the Senate:

Rayonner sans agir, sans se mêler aux affaires du monde, en se tenant à l'écart de toutes les combinaisons européennes, en regardant comme un piège, comme une aventure toute expansion vers l'Afrique ou vers l'Orient, vivre de cette sorte, pour une grande nation, croyez-le bien, c'est abdiquer, et, dans un temps plus court que vous ne pouvez le croire, c'est descendre du premier rang au troisième et au quatrième.

Ferry's declaration of a colonial imperative to maintain France's political status as the leader of civilized nations when compared to Boutan's sober recitation of statistics seems more befitting of a character in Zola's novel. Boutan is clearly not the novel's hero, but a medical authority figure whose access to the private realms of birth and childcare facilitates Mathieu's regenerative mission. Mathieu and his colonial progeny are Zola's appointed reformers and ideologues, the forefathers of a new republican super-race, who

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<sup>118</sup> *Fécondité, Œuvres Complètes*, 8: 35.

are granted passionate words akin to those exhibited in Ferry's speech. Zola reiterated his desire to make France the world leader even more explicitly in his article "Sur la guerre" (1899):

Je voudrais voir [la France] à la tête des nations qui vont *engendrer* cette société future où, grâce à l'organisation du travail, il y aura une répartition juste, enfin, de la richesse. Je voudrais qu'elle fût *l'ouvrière* de cette société future, de cette évolution attendue, qui va transformer le monde en lui *apportant* une civilisation nouvelle.<sup>119</sup>

Though Zola is clearly speaking metaphorically here, that France will engender a new future civilization might also be taken quite literally in light of his secular repopulation crusade in "Dépopulation" and *Fécondité*. France as a laborer bringing a new civilization to the world also reinforces the childbirth metaphor.

Mathieu and Marianne are living examples of the joys of sexual fertility and its benefits to the French republic. They succeed in producing the dozen children that Zola wrote every couple should in "Dépopulation," a more humble size than what René Gonnard recommended in his study on depopulation.<sup>120</sup> Their twelve children produce one hundred fifty-eight children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren by the celebration of the couple's seventieth wedding anniversary, at which time they are respectively ninety and eighty-seven years old.<sup>121</sup> Such a proliferation regenerates the once stagnant natural resources in France and simultaneously initiates a new era of French colonial expansion in Africa. Zola sums up Mathieu and Marianne's gospel of fecund love, "Et ils eurent la superbe, la divine imprévoyance. Dans leur possession, tous les bas calculs sombrèrent, il ne resta que l'amour vainqueur, ayant confiance en la vie qu'il crée sans compter."<sup>122</sup> The improbability of their fertility and economic success form the foundation of the novel's social fantasy.

The notion of population, as Michel Foucault argues in "Il faut défendre la société," emerged in the nineteenth century as part of the establishment of biopower. Biopower, as Foucault explains, combines the older, disciplinary model of institutional power that aims to correct the individual body, and the modern, regulatory and regenerative model of state power, which targets the collective social body, or population: "La biopolitique a affaire à la population, et la population comme problème politique, comme problème à la fois scientifique et politique, comme problème biologique et comme problème de pouvoir."<sup>123</sup> For Foucault, nineteenth-century reproductive movements, particularly repopulation, exemplify one concept of biopower because they successfully unite the modern power technologies of biological and social reform in the normalization of sexual practices: "la sexualité, en tant qu'elle est au foyer des maladies individuelles et étant donné qu'elle est, d'autre part, au noyau de la dégénérescence, représente exactement ce point d'articulation du disciplinaire et du régularisateur, du corps et de la population."<sup>124</sup> One can trace the operations of "biopower" in Zola's earlier fiction, in the dual narrative of sexual degeneration and regulated regeneration in *L'Argent* (1891) and *Le Docteur Pascal* (1893) and *Paris* (1898). However, biopower is most powerfully articulated in the tightly intertwined

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<sup>119</sup> *OC*, 14: 852. My emphasis.

<sup>120</sup> *OC*, 14: 790. See René Gonnard's law thesis "La Dépopulation en France," (Lyon: A.H. Storck, 1898).

<sup>121</sup> *OC*, 8: 483.

<sup>122</sup> *OC*, 8: 92.

<sup>123</sup> "Il faut défendre la société," 218-219.

<sup>124</sup> "Il faut défendre la société," 225.

sexual disciplinary and repopulationist technologies of *Fécondité*'s ideal French republic of the future. As we saw in Chapter 1, the first gospel clearly identifies with whom French republicans should reproduce by excluding inferior African races in its colonial vision of regeneration. In this chapter we will show that the promotion of monogamous, fertile sex represents *Fécondité* biopower's positive function to "faire vivre." Mathieu's campaigns for procreation targets who he considers physically and morally fit men and women of the white lower and middle working classes.<sup>125</sup>

*Fécondité* begins with young Mathieu Froment's unexpected encounter with a bewitching old lover Séraphine. He ultimately overcomes the temptation to cheat on his wife with this femme fatale, a triumph which triggers Mathieu's heroic conversion from sexual defrauder to faithful father. That same night, an excited Mathieu suggests to Marianne that they satisfy their desire in "sterile" sex (coitus interruptus) because they cannot afford to have another child. That Mathieu insists on using a contraceptive method whereas Marianne would rather not have sex at all if they must be safe goes against fin-de-siècle gender clichés. Firstly, this challenges the belief that women rather than men prefer to practice safe sex and, secondly, the belief that men refuse to use contraception because they experience less pleasure in coitus interruptus.<sup>126</sup> At her urging the couple indulges its passion, convinced that their divine love will conquer any future hardship. The birth scene of this child conceived out of faith in life contains *Fécondité*'s prophesy:

Ah! cette chambre de combat et de victoire, dans laquelle Mathieu rentra, comme dans une gloire triomphale! [Marianne] restait frémissante de la souffrance passée, mais quelle souffrance sainte [...] et de quel espoir sans fin, ouvrant l'avenir, l'emplissaient maintenant la joie délicieuse, l'orgueil vainqueur d'avoir enfanté! [...] la vie jaillissait de partout en rejets vigoureux, pullulait d'un côté, lorsque la faux avait passé de l'autre, éclatait à cette heure, ici, dans cette chambre de bonté, de gaieté si tendres, comme pour racheter d'autres grossesses coupables et clandestines, d'autres couches affreuses et criminelles. Un seul être qui naissait, ce pauvre être nu [...] c'était l'immense trésor de vie accru, c'était l'éternité assurée.

Because this sacred birth takes place in the very same bedroom of faithful conception, it demonstrates Mathieu's transition to a healthy vision of sexuality, ie., monogamous, heterosexual, marital sex. Here, burning passion, female and male sexual desires are channeled into a healthy, productive sexuality. This passage also makes clear the excesses authorized by healthy reproduction. As is evidenced by the violent metaphor of the scythe, clearing away the waste in its path to make room for more life, *Fécondité* figurally conveys the biopolitical standpoint that death is a necessary step towards new boundless creation.

Throughout the novel, Mathieu's regenerative mission enacts biopower, or, in Foucault's terms the right to "laisser mourir" and "faire vivre" but on a more personal,

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<sup>125</sup> The transformation of Zola's former naturalist dissection into positivist republican utopianism is strangely prescient of the biopolitical fantasies that characterized the twentieth-century science fiction genre. The nineteenth century witnessed a plethora of fiction dealing with the aesthetics of health. Many of Zola's French and British contemporaries shared a common concern about the proper role of science and medicine in national welfare. Toward the end of this century, novels by authors such as Alfred Jarry, Villiers de L'Isle-Adam and André Couvreur as well as H.G. Wells, William Morris and Aldous Huxley took on a more dystopian tone, marking a new skepticism in the positivist faith in science's absolute beneficence.

<sup>126</sup> See Paola Tabet's "Natural Fertility, Forced Reproduction" for a cultural anthropological analysis of gender and reproductive politics in *Sex in Question: French Materialist Feminism*, eds. Diane Leonard and Lisa Adkins (London: Taylor and Francis, 1996).

intimate level. The steady expansion of one hardworking family is a fantasy with which readers might more readily sympathize rather than the lofty regenerative missions of Zola's other heroes such as the scientist Dr. Pascal or *L'Argent's* Mme Caroline and her industrial enterprise in the Middle East. For instance, Mathieu chooses not to interfere with the corrupt bourgeois Morange family's two fatal abortions, procedures motivated by Mme Morange and her daughter Reine's vanity and social ambition. Mathieu's lack of intervention in the lives of the Morange women exemplifies the subtle process of "laisser mourir" in biopower. By ignoring corrupt individuals, Mathieu leaves perverse families to meet their destructive fate in order to focus his energy on strengthening his own family. Mathieu does, however, come to the aid of Norine, a single working-class mother on the verge of giving up yet another baby for adoption. Despite her sexual misconduct, Norine is portrayed as the victim of seduction and economic oppression: Mathieu's corrupt boss, Beauchêne, seduces, then abandons the young shop girl who is also Beauchêne's employee. By prompting her to nurse her baby and experience the maternal joy of breastfeeding, Mathieu effectively converts Norine to the cult of life. In these two examples, it is evident that decadent values and fraudulent behaviors should be allowed *literally* to die out in order to make way for the strong and faithful apostles of national repopulation. Mathieu's selective intervention in the lives of his procreative disciples is an integral part of his biopolitical mission. Mathieu and Marianne capitalize on their own biological potential and on the neglected land that they lovingly cultivate in a distant suburb of degenerate Paris. By the end of the *Fécondité*, scores of Froment children and grandchildren constitute a new breed of French republicans expanding well beyond Parisian borders in the rest of France and sub-Saharan Africa. Mathieu's biopolitical mission joins qualitative and quantitative repopulation strategies by exalting colonial conquest and sexual desire as a means of national regeneration.

Zola endeavored to universalize and beautify repopulation by using a constellation of sacred, literary, social, and scientific discourses in each of his *Evangiles*. His first novel draws together the lyrical voice of biblical and classical poetry, the evangelical rhetoric of social and political debate, and the detached rational authority of pronatalist and puericultural technologies. As Chapter 1 shows, *Fécondité* and *Vérité's* pullulating Froments disseminate and embody the republican raciological theories that declare the moral and racial superiority of the white French race in the Hexagon and French African colonies. Though Zola's imperial African fantasy is limited to *Fécondité*, the Froments become agents of domestic imperialism through their metropolitan takeover, which occurs in all three *Evangile* novels.<sup>127</sup> Those surrounding the Froment family either become part of the revitalized Froment clan or die out as a result of their failure to fulfill their reproductive duty. The Froments' vast proliferation and fortune building, which are instrumental to the destruction of sexually and biologically perverse families, illustrate how the combined pronatalist and puericultural imperatives to produce vast quantities of more healthy babies exemplifies Foucault's definition of modern state racism:

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<sup>127</sup> Ann Stoler, referring to Foucault's notion of "a deeper biologized "internal enemy" within," argues that racist principles of inclusion and exclusion in colonialism are also an integral part of nationalist ideology. See *Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault's History of Sexuality and the Colonial Order of Things* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), 130-132 and "Between Metropole and Colony" in *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World*, 1997, 2-4.

La mise à mort, l'impératif de mort, n'est recevable, dans le système de bio-pouvoir, que s'il tend non pas à la victoire sur les adversaires politiques, mais à l'élimination du danger biologique et au renforcement, directement lié à cette élimination, de l'espèce elle-même ou de la race.<sup>128</sup>

Because *Fécondité's* biological normalization is explicitly represented as a process of purification—that is, the elimination of a dangerous and degenerate race—it activates a kind of “positive” racism, or eugenics. The purified proliferation of Mathieu, Luc and Marc's own extensive families unites the quantitative and qualitative improvement of the French population defended by both pronatalist and puericulturalists. Abnormal, immoral, and “sterile” sexual acts are also targeted by this process of what Zola and his fellow raciologists consider “natural” extinction. From this biopolitical perspective, the encouragement of the healthy, socially and morally fit to procreate makes contraception and abortion unnecessary, since only high quality children would be produced from “normal” sexual unions, meaning monogamous heterosexual sex among married couples. *Fécondité's* war on sterile sexuality and fights for repopulation, provides a very clear definition of what kind of life is worth preserving and multiplying: the white, fertile, republican middle-class.

Critical response to *Fécondité* at the time of its publication was at once divided and intense. Those who commended *Fécondité's* grandiose national vision excused its improbability as a by-product of Zola's new creative energy. Here at last, they exclaimed, was a poetic vision of the happy French family, which might success in encouraging procreation through the glorious representation of republican mothers and fathers in the face of fashionable decadent sterility. In this light, Zola's solution is more aesthetic than political; it offered inspiration, not a social program. Doctors Pinard and Richet shared Zola's belief that changing ideology would be the most effective solution to degeneration. The ennobling of parenthood by popular media would both sanctify repopulation and vilify the socially decadent causes of depopulation. In 1903 Pinard and Richet published a report on depopulation arguing that, in the absence of any biological explanation solution to depopulation, the French must seek out a sociological one. Repopulation must somehow become attractive to the French so as to stimulate the national birth rate. They explained, “To remedy the drop in births in France, one can only count on means that will change the preference of French families and encourage them to have more children than they want today.”<sup>129</sup> Zola's novel presented itself as one such method for renewing French men and women's desire for family life. Echoing the real-life theories of Drs. Pinard and Richet, *Fécondité's* Dr. Boutan announces the novel's social strategy in the very first chapter:

Toutes les mesures ne feront rien. Ce sont les mœurs qu'il s'agit de changer, et l'idée de la morale, et l'idée de la beauté. Si la France se dépeuple, c'est qu'elle le veut. Il faut donc, simplement, qu'elle ne le veuille plus. Mais qu'elle besogne, tout un monde à refaire!<sup>130</sup>

The novel tells the story of utopian regeneration, while at the same time, inviting readers to be inspired by the fantastical success of the highly productive republican family. As Boutan implies, Zola wished his literary fantasy of a stronger, better society to appeal to

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<sup>128</sup> “Il faut défendre la société,” 228.

<sup>129</sup> Quoted by Schneider, *Quality and Quantity*, 306, n. 106.

<sup>130</sup> *OC*, 8: 39.

French readers and influence them to act as the heroic Froments do; in this case, to embrace life and produce as much as possible.

While some applauded Zola's lyrical renewal of the novelistic form, others attacked the first gospel for its lack of social pragmatism. Zola's enthusiastic solution to the depopulation problem, make more babies, let down many of his socially engaged admirers. Why preach love and endless procreation with no consideration for social welfare? Charles Péguy expressed immense disappointment at the lack of serious socialist engagement from the formerly revolutionary author of "J'accuse." For Péguy, Zola's "poetic" novel now seemed to him unforgivably apolitical. He denounced *Fécondité* for being conservative and bourgeois, a book that was "indifférent au salariat comme l'Evangile de Jésus fut indifférent à l'esclavage."<sup>131</sup> The disillusioned Dreyfusard concluded, "Quand des socialistes ne sont pas révolutionnaires comme Zola, c'est une grande inconséquence. Mais quand un révolutionnaire comme Zola n'est pas socialiste, c'est une grande inutilité."<sup>132</sup> Indeed, aside from a few minor representations of philanthropic and state efforts to care for large families, Zola's first gospel more or less ignores the long-term economic, social, and political implications of abundant procreation that so concerned neo-Malthusians and puericulturalists.

Nevertheless, for the novel's supporters, Zola's first gospel was an innovative and deeply socially-minded work, if not properly socialist. Octave Mirbeau, for example, cautioned readers not to become overwhelmed by the novel's illogical aspects in order to truly appreciate this strange new Emile Zola, "cette sorte de thaumaturge [...] qui mieux détruit pour mieux reconstruire."<sup>133</sup> Lucien Victor-Meunier lauded *Fécondité* as the best of Zola's œuvre and likened it to Victor Hugo's "rêves utiles," a regenerative work of genius in the tradition of great French revolutionary writers.<sup>134</sup> Symbolist poet and theoretician Gustave Kahn read the first *Evangile* as a continuation of Zola's engaged writing. By contrast to Péguy's claim of Zola's political desuetude, Kahn likened *Fécondité*'s powerful social influence to the spirit of Victor Hugo:

[...] il est entré, non pas dans la politique, mais, pour ainsi dire, dans la socialité [...] il a été dans le rôle que doit prendre, à certains moments, l'écrivain; il a été le héraut de la conscience obscure de tous, et la voix forte de tous ses confrères en art [...] En obéissant ainsi à sa conscience et à son caractère, il a obtenu une chose à laquelle bien des écrivains avaient pensé lorsqu'ils évoquaient les horizons lointains de leurs ambitions: c'est ce principat d'ordre moral, plus encore que littéraire, qu'avait exercé Hugo à la fin de sa vie. Il a été, comme lui, la voix du faible: et il est à la place où fut le grand poète.<sup>135</sup>

While for some critics, this new novel represented a rupture with Zola's social engagement, for others, it clearly carried on the tradition of his socially engaged, even revolutionary utopian writing. And, like many of his utopian forefathers, Zola's republican vision implicitly frames moral order as a patriarchal enterprise in which men must assume responsibility for women and children's welfare. This patriarchal attitude was not simply a sign of masculine domination, it was a necessary condition of social reform at the fin-de-siècle. As Chapter 3 will discuss in more depth, women did not have the civil rights required to make policy changes to improve their lives nor could they

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<sup>131</sup> Quoted in Baguley, *Fécondité d'Emile Zola: roman à these, évangile, mythe* (Toronto and Buffalo: The University of Toronto Press, 1973), 159.

<sup>132</sup> *Fécondité d'Emile Zola*, 160.

<sup>133</sup> *Zola Correspondance*, tome X, 101.

<sup>134</sup> Quoted in Baguley, *Fécondité d'Emile Zola*, 150-151.

<sup>135</sup> *Fécondité d'Emile Zola*, 161.

assume financial or legal responsibility for their childrens' and their own bodies. Regardless of the various sexist implications of men claiming the role as national regenerators, any advocacy for women's and children's welfare during this era must be understood for what it was: a sign of progress.

### Zola's Modern Cybele

Over the past few decades, feminist critics such as Michelle Perrot, Carol Mossman and Susan Hennessy have taken issue with *Fécondité*. They cite it as another example of male writers' gynophilic misogyny, as ubiquitous in Zola's *Quatre Evangiles* as his earlier work. Through a modern-day feminist lens, the separate but equal maternal and paternal roles celebrated in *Fécondité* may seem thoroughly retrograde. From a modern Marxist feminist standpoint Perrot argues that *Fécondité*'s differentialist representations perpetuate rather than challenge political iniquity. She is equally critical of its "héroïnes négatives": the *femme fatale*, the conniving *bourgeoises*, and the ambiguously heroic midwives and wet-nurses who capitalize on unnatural prenatal and postnatal practices.<sup>136</sup> For these reasons, she qualifies Zola's new republican vision as "anti-feminist." Even Zola's positive female figures come under critical fire on the grounds that exaltations of the feminine encourage an idealized vision of women in society and ignores their real inferior political and material status.<sup>137</sup>

For Mossman, *Fécondité* is typical of a phenomenon in nineteenth-century patriarchal writing that she calls literary gynocolonization: the process by which a male author appropriates birth through the divestment of woman's reproductive function and annexation of the maternal body.<sup>138</sup> By usurping birth as writing, Mossman argues, authors such as Rousseau, Michelet and Zola, over-invest the maternal and divest women themselves of procreative power. While Mathieu's worship of Marianne's pregnant body may be argued as an usurpation of Marianne's female reproductive power, despite this sexist logic, *Fécondité* in no way ignores the need to improve women's political and material conditions. Mossman also scolds Zola's pronatalism as an social elitism and hypocrisy: "For someone who bills himself as socially progressive, this [pro-natalist] stance is a difficult one to maintain in the face of a neo-Malthusian agenda whose central tenet is that social inequality results directly from the underprivileged reproducing themselves at a higher rate than those with wealth and power."<sup>139</sup> Such criticism reduces the complex political landscape of fin-de-siècle reproductive discourse to a battle between upper-class pronatalists and working-class neo-Malthusianists, and overlooks the crucial importance of *puériculture* in French social discourse and in *Fécondité*. As Chapter 3 discusses in depth, thanks to its endorsement of modern reform movements for maternal breastfeeding, bottle-feeding and child support for working mothers as well as the demand for responsible family planning, *Fécondité* is representative of new social welfare initiatives at the turn of the nineteenth century.

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<sup>136</sup> Perrot, "Zola antiféministe?" in *Un siècle d'anti-féminisme*, ed. Christine Bard (Paris: Fayard, 1999): 85-102.

<sup>137</sup> Perrot, "Zola antiféministe?"; Mossman *Politics and Narratives of Birth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

<sup>138</sup> *Politics and Narratives of Birth*, 186.

<sup>139</sup> *Politics and Narratives of Birth*, 217.

From their politically advanced perspective, today's feminist critics may not fully understand how the needs and demands of women from an earlier era shaped a very different form of social and political progress. They perhaps take for granted the small initial steps toward what is recognized by Western feminists today as women's full emancipation. Fin-de-siècle pregnant women benefited from advances in obstetrics, including antibiotics and surgical techniques, yet they still faced a gross lack of patient advocacy as well as social and economic support for single mothers. As we shall see in Chapter 3, *Fécondité's* call for maternal rights (among other fictional reforms in the *Évangiles* that benefit women) earned Zola high praise from many of his feminist contemporaries. Nineteenth century feminists were more interested in Zola's promotion of social change. They were not only less concerned with problems of differentialist literary representation, they were mostly maternalists who fought for women's rights as wives and mothers.

Unlike some of his earlier works such as *Nana*, which demonize women as the source of sexual corruption, Zola's condemnation of sexual "perversion" in *Fécondité* is not misogynistic. The novel equally indicts sexual misconduct in men and women and is not based on a gendered vision of morality. This gospel of repopulation in no way identifies women's egoism or independence as the source of social decline. Male and female characters alike are "punished" (they meet psychologically and physically terrible ends, including death) for using contraception and engaging in extramarital affairs. Zola's novel lays equal blame on men and women for sterile and degenerate sexual practices; the narrative makes men as responsible as women for abortion.

*Fécondité* simultaneously condemns the philandering lecher Beauchêne and his insatiable sister Séraphine, Valérie Morange and her husband for seeking out abortions, the Angelin couple for using contraception to overindulge in sexual love, as well as the irresponsible Séguin couple in which the husband allows his wife to be seduced by a decadent novelist; all but the Froments are criticized for their poor child-rearing. In his revolt against degeneration, the novel's hero Mathieu is especially critical of men:

Mais ces gens-là n'aiment pas, mais ils sont incapables d'aimer! L'argent, le pouvoir, l'ambition, le plaisir, oui! ils peuvent ces choses, mais ils ne peuvent pas l'amour! Même ces maris qui trompent leurs femmes n'aiment pas leurs maîtresses. Ils n'ont jamais brûlé du grand désir, du divin désir qui est l'âme du monde, le brasier d'éternelle existence. [...] Comment veut-on que les hommes aujourd'hui trouvent la belle vaillance d'une famille nombreuse, s'ils n'ont pas l'amour qui accomplit sans lâche restriction sa mission de vie? Ils mentent, ils fraudent, parce qu'ils n'aiment pas. Ils souffrent ensuite, ils tombent aux pires déchéances morales et physiques, parce qu'ils n'aiment pas. Au bout, il y a la douleur, il y a aussi cet effondrement d'une société pourrie, qui craque sous nos yeux chaque jour davantage...<sup>140</sup>

The bulk of Mathieu's rage falls on wayward men, not women, whose lying, cheating behavior denies their deserving wives and lovers the love and happy environment that a large family affords. Zola's apostle of fertility condemns men for the worst physical and moral depravity; these lustful yet loveless creatures, Mathieu tells us, are the very source of social ruin.

The only redemption that *Fécondité* does offer for sexual deviance is in the cases of two female characters, Norine, a sexually promiscuous *ouvrière* and Mme Angelin, a contraception-using hedonist. Norine is seduced by Mathieu's philandering boss,

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<sup>140</sup> OC, 8: 236-237.

Beauchêne but redeems herself through motherhood. Perrot perhaps too hastily disregards Norine as pathetic attempt at “pro-feminism” because, according to Perrot, her happiness symbolizes the State’s interest in providing financial support for single mothers not out of philanthropy but demographic concern. She dismisses Norine’s successful motherhood as an example of Zola’s feminist antipathy. Yet, the feminist valence of this redemption should not be wholly denied given the familial feminist character of 1890s French feminism.<sup>141</sup> This feminist valence is present in *Fécondité*’s countless subplots.

*Fécondité* rehabilitates the sterile young woman Mme Angelin who, after years of sterile sexual indulgence with her husband, finds she is unable to conceive. She finally realizes her maternal desire by becoming a social worker, helping to place and care for single mothers and orphans. Zola creates a gynocentric world made up of Norine, her child, her single, sterile sister Cécile—called the child’s other mother—and Mme Angelin. The latter’s visits capture the beauty of this non-normative maternal enclave:

Maintenant encore, elle venait parfois, aimait à passer là une heure, dans ce coin de tranquille besogne, égayée par les rires et les jeux de l’enfant. Elle y était loin du monde, elle y souffrait moins de sa maternité détruite. Et Norine lui baisait les mains, en disant que, sans elle, jamais le ménage des deux mères n’aurait pu vivre.<sup>142</sup>

Though Zola’s maternal feminism may not be perceived as feminist by today’s standards, the figuration of Norine, Cécile and Mme Angelin as relatively independent mothers represent a popular current of late nineteenth-century feminism. As Joan Scott points out, even a militant Third Republican feminist like Hubertine Auclert relied on maternalist rhetoric to win support for women’s legal equality. Auclert argued for women’s suffrage in maternalist terms: “En devenant citoyenne, la Française remplira encore mieux le devoir, puisque son rôle d’éducatrice s’étendra de l’unité à la collectivité humaine et que sa sollicitude maternelle embrassera la nation entière.”<sup>143</sup> Zola’s new republican family did not integrate maternal, or familial feminism simply because it was politically convenient for the pronatalist author, as Karen Offen has recently suggested. Her analysis categorizes *Fécondité* as a progressive variant of “French nationalist antifeminism,” ignoring the celebratory representations of Norine and Mme Angelin, which, according to the same article, would exemplify familial feminism during the Third Republic. Zola’s concerns for women’s welfare and physical protection were shared by many of his feminist contemporaries who, as we shall see in Chapter 3, recognized his support of their movement.

In his first sketch for *Fécondité*, Zola planned to make parenthood especially appealing to women from the female members of *le peuple* to the fashionable ladies of the aristocracy and bourgeoisie: “Rendre *esthétique* la femme féconde, la femme qui nourrit, la femme qui a beaucoup d’enfants.”<sup>144</sup> Once *Fécondité* is resituated in its specific cultural moment, it becomes clear that Zola’s family values strongly resonate with popular republican views on national welfare, even in feminist circles. Although for

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<sup>141</sup> Offen, “By the close of the century (...) most factions of the French movement for women’s rights, whether bourgeois or socialist, Christian or anticlerical, could still be classified as subcategories of familial feminism.” “Depopulation, Nationalism, and Feminism in Fin-de-Siècle France,” 654.

<sup>142</sup> *OC*, 8: 364.

<sup>143</sup> Quoted by Joan W. Scott in *Only Paradoxes to Offer: French Feminists and the Rights of Man* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), note 94, 211.

<sup>144</sup> Emphasis original. *OC*, 8: 505.

Zola, reproductive vitality is ultimately in the hands of French men, *Fécondité's* regenerative vision nevertheless integrates important feminist agendas of his time, as we shall see in Chapter 3.

Although the cult of fertility in *Fécondité* does indeed reflect the traditional patriarchal representation of Woman as Nature, Zola's treatment moves beyond a gynocentric religion of life, both sexually and politically. The novel's preparatory notes detail his plan to aestheticize the fertile woman as a means of encouraging procreative sexuality in a time when so many women allegedly resisted conception out of economic distress or simple vanity. Zola wanted to create an enticing yet pure secular vision of the fertile woman:

Je voudrais en somme prendre ce symbole de Cybèle, mais sans trop insister, et en l'animant d'un souffle actuel. La mère féconde, belle, correcte, et bien bâtie, avec des yeux de vache sacrée. Mais avec cela de la gaieté, de l'amour dans la santé.<sup>145</sup>

The fertile woman should be purified by her social function as a mother, be beautiful, sexually appealing, and physically resilient, yet at the same time she must be "correcte" or respectable. She must be monogamous as well as intellectually and sexually passive, in other words, an obedient cow. Last but not least, this modern republican Cybele should be satisfied with her own status as a patriotic domestic goddess. She was not, however, intended to be an idle idol. Zola's notes for the *Fécondité* make it clear that he was aware of and sensitive to feminist desire to recognize the worth of women's work in the home and their active roles in society.

This new republican fertility goddess, Zola hoped, would promote a positive, even pro-feminist, female ideal of the future. The domestic responsibilities assigned to the ideal republican mother, he speculated, would have tremendous social implications and thereby satisfy some of the major concerns of his feminist contemporaries:

Je veux lui donner un rôle dans le ménage, une fonction sociale (les féministes qui ne veulent pas qu'une femme soit seulement une amante et une mère) [...] Absorber sa vie en cela, et à la fin montrer, célébrer la terre nouvelle qu'il a créée et peuplée d'un peuple heureux.<sup>146</sup>

However retrograde this image may seem to readers today, the morally pure Froments conform to Third Republican familial ideals, which called for an egalitarian, productive and fertile loving couple who together nurture their children regardless of gender difference. Moreover, this image corresponds well to the familial character of feminism of Zola's day. As Chapter 3 will discuss in greater depth, fin-de-siècle women writers and activists heartily approved of this new maternal image because it matched the bourgeois ideal of a woman proud to be able to choose motherhood.

According to his notes, Zola's intended to humanize female reproductive power in such a way as to strike a balance between the novel's fictional social reforms that might appeal to militant readers and the divine mystification of motherhood that might appeal to more sentimental readers. Marianne answers her husband and other characters most frequently with laughter; instead of responding with ideas or arguments, she responds with emotion. Even during painful labor, she is silent. Although Marianne is denied important and eloquent speech, Zola does provide her with her own strong opinions on maternity and even a degree of reproductive agency. For example, she laments a neighbor woman who uses contraception, "Encore une qui ne veut pas d'enfant [...] elle a décidé

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<sup>145</sup> F° 20-1.

<sup>146</sup> F° 47 quoted in Baguley, *Fécondité d'Emile Zola*, 91.

de ne pas en avoir avant la trentaine, pour jouir un peu de l'existence avec son mari, sans tout de suite s'embarrasser d'une maternité qui lui prendra trop de temps."<sup>147</sup> Notwithstanding her placid demeanor, Marianne participates in the decision to conceive. She becomes infuriated at Mathieu's suggestion that they satisfy their desire through coitus interruptus. Though her words bespeak her obedience to Mathieu, her body revolts against Mathieu's sterile caress:

Il l'attira, la serra plus étroitement, chercha ses lèvres pour un baiser; pendant qu'elle bégayait, mal à l'aise, dans une révolte inconsciente de chair et de cœur:

—Oui, sans doute, je sais bien... Comme il te plaira, tu as la charge de l'avenir...

Et elle éclata en sanglots, elle s'enfouit la tête dans sa poitrine, pour étouffer des larmes, de grosses larmes dont il sentait le tiède ruissellement. Il était resté interdit, envahi à son tour d'une sorte de répugnance sourde, devant ce chagrin, dont elle n'aurait pu dire les profondes causes.<sup>148</sup>

While Marianne bends her will to her husband's, her body is a site of sexual revolt. Her resistance to childless, less pleasurable sex demonstrates a certain degree of autonomy. In a time where novels frequently represented marital sex as an unpleasant, and often violent "duty" for women, Zola's narrative makes Marianne's desire ambiguous. While modern accounts of female sexuality might read this scene as merely her ticking biological clock stimulating her libido, we should not dismiss its subtle erotic tone, although the binding of her pleasure to reproduction reinforces normative sexuality. Regardless, this passage emphasizes Marianne's sexual agency, which probably had a certain appeal to male and female readers.

Marianne's pregnant belly, described as the "sacred white dome from whence a world will emerge," has been read as a sign of male usurpation of female reproductive power through the illegitimate possession of foreign land.<sup>149</sup> Carol Mossman argues that this description, Mathieu's conquering of Marianne's fertile womb, foreshadows the Froments' colonization of Africa. Upon closer analysis, however, this scene does not have the same forceful language or imperialist tone of Dominique's description of the colonial republic discussed in Chapter 1. The sacred belly represents the unborn child's sacred status as an extension of Mathieu and Marianne (a symbol of their regenerative and therefore sacred love) and autonomous other not Mathieu's desire for colonizing a maternal or oriental other. Let us consider an earlier part of the scene that Mossman cites. While awaiting the good Dr. Boutan, called an *accoucheur*, or "male midwife," Mathieu experiences creative ecstasy conveyed by narrated monologue:

Cette communauté de l'œuvre, ne l'avait-il pas voulue, dès le soir où, cédant à l'éternel désir, tous deux s'étaient unis, en une flamme de volupté féconde? Dès lors, elle était devenue sienne davantage, il s'était senti davantage en elle, s'identifiant plus étroitement l'un à l'autre à mesure que la grossesse montante, dans le flot vivant *qui les confondait*, la faisant peu à peu pleine de lui.<sup>150</sup>

Childbirth is doubly divine for the virile hero because it is at once a part of Mathieu and also beyond him. He does not claim the child as an extension of his self alone, but one created by his and Marianne's loving bodies that becomes an autonomous individual. The pregnancy is clearly defined here as a "communitarian work," which had united Mathieu and Marianne. The use of "elle" in the second sentence is ambiguous, referring to either

<sup>147</sup> *OC*, 8: 84.

<sup>148</sup> *OC*, 8: 89.

<sup>149</sup> Mossman, *Politics and Narratives of Birth*, 216-217.

<sup>150</sup> My emphasis. *OC*, 8: 163.

the “œuvre”—his and Marianne’s child—as well as simply to Marianne. Accordingly, the choice of referent determines Mathieu’s birth perspective as either a male usurpation, or annexation of maternal power, to use Mossman’s term, or a mutually desired union of man and woman. This last interpretation is consistent with one type of maternalist feminism insofar as it promotes an image of the happy egalitarian male-female couple.<sup>151</sup> Furthermore, the ambiguity of this personal voice and the objective narrative fact suggests that Mathieu’s experience is what Zola is presenting as a new republican model of parenthood.

Furthermore, even if the “elle” refers to Marianne, who was more a part of Mathieu, it is evident that he felt himself inside of her. The fetus therefore operates a living fusion between mother and father. On the other hand, the partial exclusion that Mathieu feels during the physical birth ensures his sense of the mystery of procreation since his pain is not real, only sympathetic: “Ils connaissaient ensemble la grande et bonne souffrance, celle dont l’effort fait de la vie, dans le mystère qui veut que toute création soit douloureuse.”<sup>152</sup> In spite of this event’s beauty and power, its divinity retains a measure of mystery. Indeed, Mathieu is so overcome by his frustrated desire to share maternal divine suffering that Boutan eventually urges him to leave the room. While Zola’s new father is as active in conception as he is in post-natal childcare, his role in actual labor and childbirth is limited. This can perhaps be explained by Zola’s concern for avoiding the base representation of childbirth that had shocked readers of *La Terre*. Were Mathieu to witness the more violent and ugly aspects of birth, the reader, too would confront the accompanying ugliness of the beautiful event. Unlike the gory portrayal of birth in Zola’s earlier novel *La Terre*’s (1887), his utopian vision conceals the whole “truth” of life-giving by glossing over the less attractive parts and functions of the female body, preserving his maternal beautification and familial utopia. In this naturalist fantasy of reproduction, the blood and pain of real childbirth are omitted in order to create the clean healthy aesthetic. As we shall discuss later in this chapter, Zola’s ambivalence about the color red and blood explains why masculine regenerative symbols, such as white semen, dominates his new aesthetics of health.

By focusing solely on female characterization in *Fécondité*, recent critiques of gender have excluded any discussion of male characters or more abstract narrative gendering. Although feminist concerns about the patriarchal logic of the novel are valid, restricting gender analysis to issues of positive or negative representation of women’s roles provides, at best, only a partial understanding of Zola’s extremely complex gendering of reproduction. By concentrating on female characters, these critics have missed the somewhat surprising reform of men’s sexual behavior and domestic roles. Rather than viewing *Fécondité* as a reiteration of masculinist birth narratives, I suggest that its virilization of the French nation is, on the contrary, modern because it includes men in family life and childcare. Instead of decreasing agency in women’s regenerative power, Zola’s fictional biopolitical reforms actually increase awareness of serious problems in health care and parenting both at the turn of the century and today.<sup>153</sup>

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<sup>151</sup> Ann Taylor Allen, *Feminism and Motherhood in Western Europe, 1890-1970: The Maternal Dilemma* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 44.

<sup>152</sup> *OC*, 8: 163.

<sup>153</sup> The demand for men’s active participation in reproduction persists as a feminist issue today. Paola Tabet, for example, indicts men and society for abandoning women to the task of producing *and* raising

*Fécondité*'s advocacy of women's right to sexual pleasure and healthy pregnancy, as well as men's right to be included in the experience of childbirth and parenting challenge the alleged sexism of Zola's ideal family.

### From Decadence to a New Aesthetic of Health

Despite its support for women's and children's health care, *Fécondité*'s virile aesthetic reaffirms the patriarchal republican values of brotherhood and paternalism. The narrative privileging of masculine reproductive symbolism obscures the feminist discourse apparent in the plot. This phenomenon is partially a function of Zola's adherence to his earlier Naturalist symbolism in which, for male and female characters as well as anthropomorphized figures, femininity is weak and corrupting and masculinity is strong and regenerative. The *Évangiles* maintain the gender dichotomy of Zola's naturalist aesthetic: *Rougon-Macquart*'s narrative is driven by a feminine or effeminate degeneration, whereas the *Évangiles*'s narrative is driven by masculine or virile regeneration. Mathieu, Luc and Marc Froment's healthy reform and reproduction of the Republic signals the ultimate triumph of a patriarchal epistemology over effeminate decadence within the Zolian oeuvre.

The *Quatre Évangiles* answer the problem of Tante Dide's corrupting feminine body in the *Rougon-Macquart* with the Froment brothers' crusade for biological and social reform, healing Paris' contagious degeneracy and purifying the tainted blood of the French race. Their masculine national revitalization is a biopolitical solution to feminine corruption and cultural effeminacy. Zola's notes for *Fécondité* code virility as masculine:

Dans « Fécondité », faire, d'un bout à l'autre, circuler le torrent des germes. Il faut que la semence, la vie roule, déborde de partout. Le spasme du monde en continue fécondation. C'est là la grandeur et la bravoure qui hausseront seules le sujet.<sup>154</sup>

"Semence" meaning both semen and seed is syntactically equated with the life force itself, and one can easily imagine the overflow as specifically masculine. Consistent with popular Third Republic views on reproduction and sexual pleasure, the spasm described here refers to male sexual orgasm, that is to say, the only orgasm relevant to reproduction and regeneration.<sup>155</sup> Mathieu Froment's proliferation is not an example of the survival of the fittest; it represents the domination of a more virile, more morally pure and therefore, healthier population. It is through biopower, sexual management and selective reproduction, that Zola's male heroes revitalize decadent France.

The Naturalist dissection of a decaying social body under the Second Empire is replaced by a new virile republican utopianism. Credit for such a gender dichotomy can not entirely be attributed to Zola. Fin-de-siècle decadent artists and writers embraced femininity, though in its virginal form, and effeminacy as emblematic of their movement. It is perfectly logical that *Fécondité* fiercely critiques cultural decadence, and the decadent literati in particular, as a major cause of French degeneration. As pronatalist

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children, though her language insists again, on men's exemption from the "material and psychic costs of reproductive labor, from which they will continue to profit collectively and often individually." "Natural Fertility, Forced Reproduction" in *Sex in Question* (eds. Leonard and Adkins, 1996).

<sup>154</sup> *OC*, 8: 508.

<sup>155</sup> Mary Lynn Stewart, "Pleasure and Procreation", 112-114. For more information, see Stewart's book-length study of women's sexual education *For Health and Beauty: Physical Culture for Frenchwomen, 1880s-1930s* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001).

physicians attacked neo-Malthusianism, so Zola takes on the malevolent producers and consumers of the decadent cult of effeminacy, sterility and death. Zola's virile hero, Mathieu Froment acknowledges the power of decadence even though he defies its legitimacy:

Ce n'était pas ce pessimisme littéraire qui pouvait trouble Mathieu, car il en plaisantait volontiers lui-même, tout en reconnaissant la désastreuse influence sur les mœurs d'une littérature qui professait la haine de la vie, la passion du néant. Dans cette maison même, il sentait bien souffler la mode imbécile, l'ennui d'une époque anxieuse et souffrante, réduite à se distraire en jouant avec la mort.<sup>156</sup>

Mathieu's critique of literary fashion reiterates Zola's will to transform the naturalist pessimism of his earlier novels while at the same time criticizing those writers, self-proclaimed decadents, who pursued this negative social representation in literature. Regarding decadent writing, it is not hard to fathom Zola's bitterness towards the literary glorification of sterility, death and decay, its "imbecilic fashionableness," since his former student Joris-Karl Huysmans had only a few years prior rejected naturalism in his inaugural decadent novel, *A rebours* (1884). Although Huysmans's portrait of reclusive esthete Des Esseintes, praises male sterility and homosexuality, it also implicitly celebrates women's sterility, virginal or lesbian. *Fécondité* is, in turn, even-handed in its critique of decadent symbols and behavior, blaming selfish male and female pleasure-seekers for national degeneration.<sup>157</sup> Zola does however, pay special attention to the dangers of "female castration": casually practiced ovariectomy and hysterectomy. For this reason, Zola is one of the very few writers to address this violent medical abuse of women's bodies.

His vehement critique of female castration simultaneously raises awareness about the need to protect women's biological rights.<sup>158</sup> If toying with death is imbecilic for Mathieu Froment and the narrative's logic, toying with the maternal body is downright criminal. *Fécondité's* femme fatale, Séraphine Beauchêne, is the embodiment of female sexual perversion. Sexually insatiable, she seeks "castration" from the renowned surgeon Dr. Gaude, as a means to heighten her sexual pleasure, and to ensure no pregnancy. After a period of initial bliss, her "castration," however, leads to early bodily and mental decay. Séraphine's death in an insane asylum, having taken revenge on the castrating surgeon in the name of all Gaude's "castrated" women, is reminiscent of la Brûlé's castration of Maigrat in *Germinal*. Her tragic end makes it clear that artificial reproductive intervention has no place in Zola's fantasy of French regeneration.<sup>159</sup> While Séraphine's fate, to some degree, symbolically denies women's right to pleasure, it also protects potential victims against non-consensual or unnecessary surgery by raising awareness

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<sup>156</sup> *OC*, 8: 59.

<sup>157</sup> Some critics have speculated that Huysmans's well-known "horreur des enfants" and anti-Dreyfusard Paul Bourget's literary celebrations of adulterous worldly women provided the inspiration for *Fécondité's* ultra-decadent character, the dandy novelist, Santerre. Baguley, *Fécondité d'Emile Zola*, 130-133.

<sup>158</sup> Zola's research for *Fécondité* included Etienne Canu's 1897 doctoral thesis *La Castration chez la femme: Ses résultats thérapeutiques. Conséquences sociales et abus de cette opération*. This work is an extensive study of this abusive surgical experimentation on women's reproductive organs. According to Canu's interviews with "castrated women," surgery was most often performed without any consent or knowledge of the women or their spouses, and for symptoms as mild as chronic headaches.

<sup>159</sup> La Brûlé is the old woman in *Germinal* who avenges the poor townswomen by castrating the lecherous shop-owner Maigrat with her bare hands, 429-430.

about female mutilation and sterilization. Zola's condemnation of gynecological surgery is justified by the gruesome reality of fin-de-siècle operations on women.<sup>160</sup>

Fellow apostle of fertility Dr. Boutan, echoes Mathieu's disdain for modern decadence, especially its detrimental impact on Frenchwomen:

On en arrive à notre fameux névrosisme moderne, à notre prochaine banqueroute physique et morale. Voyez nos femmes, comparez-les aux fortes commères d'autrefois. Nos femmes désœuvrées, frémissantes, éperdues, *c'est nous qui les faisons, par nos pratiques, par notre art et notre littérature, par notre idéal de la famille restreinte, immolée aux furieuses ambitions d'argent et de pouvoir*. Mort à l'homme, et par là même mort à la femme, mort à nous-mêmes, à tout ce qui est la joie, la santé, la force!...<sup>161</sup>

These words single out men and patriarchal culture, including literature, as the primary agents of French depopulation. Whether performed out of desire for the pleasures of sexual promiscuity or out the fear of economic burden, as is the case with naïve working-class Euphrasie or the *bourgeoises*, Valérie and her daughter, Reine, Zola depicts hysterectomy as an irreversible sin of Man against Nature and of the individual against society. For Zola's apostles of repopulation, the psychological and moral consequences of gynecological surgery are as serious as its cultural and economic consequences (ie., low birth rate). This anti-surgery stance demonstrates the State's biopolitical imperative insofar as the maternal womb must be protected and preserved in the name of Nature and Life, and more importantly, in the name of French national interest. *Fécondité* reiterates Dr. Etienne Canu's concern for Frenchwomen's reproductive capacity: "Dans notre travail, nous ne voyons que la garantie thérapeutique due à la femme et l'intérêt de notre pays."<sup>162</sup> Even though State intervention in reproduction may objectify women as walking wombs, the increased physical, psychological and economic protection that it offers fin-de-siècle women regardless of class or marital status cannot be underestimated. Zola's image of mothers avoids the trappings of a virgin-mother by his emphasis of Marianne's sexual pleasure. Because she exercises sexual and reproductive agency, she cannot be interpreted as a subjugated baby-maker, generating human capital for her husband or the State. Furthermore, in Zola's view, if literature had been responsible for creating the degeneration crisis, it also had the responsibility to resolve it. In spite of the novel's biopolitical logic, which consecrates women's bodies as national reproductive vessels, the social consequences of making women's health a subject for national concern has social consequences that may be seen as progressive even by current-day feminist standards.<sup>163</sup>

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<sup>160</sup> For a detailed account of "female castration" practices, see Etienne Canu's *La Castration chez la femme: Ses résultats thérapeutiques. Conséquences sociales et abus de cette opération*, 1897.

<sup>161</sup> My emphasis. *OC*, 8: 287.

<sup>162</sup> From his medical thesis, *La Castration chez la femme: Ses résultats thérapeutiques. Conséquences sociales et abus de cette opération*, 1897.

<sup>163</sup> One is reminded of Hilary Clinton's powerful statement: "women's rights are human rights." From her speech as First Lady of the United States of America to the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women, Plenary Session in Beijing, China: 5 September 1995. Clinton defended women's roles in the family as well as in the workplace: "Families rely on mothers and wives for emotional support and care; families rely on women for labor in the home; and increasingly, families rely on women for income needed to raise healthy children and care for other relatives."

<http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/hillaryclintonbeijingspeech.htm>

## Sacred Virility

In *Fécondité*, virility, like domesticity, takes on new meanings for men and for women, challenging traditional gender categories. Though at first, the novel seems to represent repopulation as an exclusively masculine and virile enterprise, closer analysis reveals a more ambiguous gender paradigm. Zola's utopian narrative effectively blurs gender roles as part of the process of destroying the old degenerate social order and instituting a new healthy republican one. The *Quatre Evangiles*' fantastical regeneration of France is a positive example of what Rainer Warning calls Zola's "ontologie sauvage," or "the experience of life as a dark force" characterizes the Rougon-Macquart family's descent into madness.<sup>164</sup> As should be obvious by now, wild ontology in the *Rougon-Macquart* series is inscribed as feminine, given that the genetic corruption occurs consistently through female and effeminate male characters, beginning with the matriarch of the Rougon-Macquart family, Adélaïde Fouque, aka Tante Dide.<sup>165</sup>

In a complementary fashion, *Fécondité*'s narrative demonstrates a positive, healthy wild ontology which is an explosion of abundance and health. The novel's lyrical prose is rife with grandiose biblical refrains of genesis and exodus, violent images of salvation and redemption and paradoxically, masculine imagery of production and reproduction. Mathieu sees himself as a "bon semeur jetant le grain à main pleine" and repeatedly refers to Paris as "mal ensemené, mal moissonné." The novel's evangelical mission endorses a legitimate sexual energy and glorifies the healthful benefits of masculine sexual potency for the Froment clan as well as French culture and economy extending to the fictional colonial republic in Africa.

According to Janet Beizer, "Texts are either sired—and the textual production is described by metaphors of penetration, insemination, and dissemination—or they are given birth to, and their production is likened to gestation, labor, and delivery."<sup>166</sup> *Fécondité*'s frequent exclamations such as "que la semence humaine soit emportée pardessus les frontières" underscore a masculine siring of the text rather than a feminine long gestation followed by the slow labor of birth. While, as Beizer demonstrates, Zola's *Rougon-Macquart* clearly delineates a male paradigm of writing that is naturalist, scientific and masterful, versus a female paradigm that is erotic, poetic and hysterical, his *Evangiles*, on the other hand, produce a different gendering of writing altogether. This virile, regenerative Naturalist narrative aesthetic may perhaps be best described as biopolitical lyricism, a voice which encompasses biblical and classical poetry and sings Zola's great faith in national reform through genetic evolution and repopulation.

*Fécondité*, reveals a more nuanced writing paradigm that blurs the previous categories of male objectivity and mastery and female poetry and hysteria. No longer constrained to the naturalist approach of scientific exactitude, restraint, and dissection honed in his earlier novels, Zola's new voice in *Fécondité* exalts improbability, excess,

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<sup>164</sup> Rainer Warning, "Zola's *Rougon-Macquart*: Compensatory Images of a 'Wild Ontology,'" *MLN* 113, No. 4, French Issue (Sept. 1998): 705-733.

<sup>165</sup> The name Adélaïde Fouque suggests noble madness, Adélaïde meaning noble in German and Fouque is evocative of the French adjective for crazy, "fou."

<sup>166</sup> *Ventriloquized Bodies: Narratives of Hysteria in Nineteenth-Century France* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994), 169-170.

repetition and hyperbole. In his first gospel, the hysterical female body of the *Rougon-Macquart* series has been replaced by a different narrative source, that of Mathieu Froment's uncontrollably reproductive male body. This masculine reproductive model reappears to a lesser degree in the proliferation of Luc and Marc Froment's families in *Travail* and *Vérité*. The *Rougon-Macquart*'s represented the excesses and chaos of French society under the Second Empire as feminine. The entire narrative is an extensive experiment that follows the genetic corruption of Tante Dide's degenerate female body on her descendents. These degenerate Naturalist metaphors are consistently portrayed through feminine figures of the politically corrupt government and the corrupting decadent culture (including theater, art, various types of sexual "perversity" and drug-use). Zola's stringent naturalist critique of the degenerate female hysterical body and the emasculate Empire, is diametrically opposed to *Fécondité*'s regenerative metaphors in which the Republic is redeemed and strengthened by Mathieu, Luc and Marc Froment's productive virile male bodies. These virile men transform the weak young Republic into a healthy, modern nation through their reform of social institutions as well as their role in bringing fit members of society together to produce future physically and morally improved generations.

Despite the label *évangile*, *Fécondité*'s regenerative prophesy is more evocative of Old-Testament writing than Jesus' Gospels in the New Testament. Biblical prophetic discourse creates greater interpretive ambiguity for Zola's social prophesy since as Robert Alter explains "[divine] speech is directed to the concrete situation of a historical audience, but the form of the speech exhibits the historical indeterminacy of the language of poetry."<sup>167</sup> Zola's evocations of procreation as a divine natural law complicate a reading of *Fécondité* as pure propaganda. Prophetic discourse from the Old Testament, according to Alter, should be read as the expression of the divine voice; it is God speaking through the prophet, not the prophet interpreting God or speaking himself. In Zola's secular gospel, then voice of the higher power is not posited as God, but rather as Nature, who is speaking through the voice of Zola or his hero, Mathieu Froment.

*Fécondité* recalls the cautionary prophesies of the Hebrew Bible that reproach life on Earth doomed to cataclysm before moving to what Alter calls a prophesy of consolation: poems "dominated by images of flourishing vineyards and fields, planting and building, shining light, liberation and regal dignity, splendid garb, marital reconciliation and sexual union, firm foundations and calm."<sup>168</sup> Its lyrical expression of natural determinism, genetic as well as agricultural, is common to the prophetic poems of consolation. *Fécondité* embraces the destructive and constructive sides of Nature, infusing its naturalist social critique with images of abundance and regeneration. In fact, critics were quick to recognize the influence of the *Song of Songs* in Zola's prophesy.<sup>169</sup> As Laurent Thailhade wrote in his review for *La Petite République socialiste*:

Mais *Fécondité*, même pour les yeux inattentifs, passe de beaucoup la mesure d'un conte [...] c'est un évangile, une annonce des temps futures pour un monde nouveau. C'est

<sup>167</sup> *The Art of Biblical Poetry* (New York: Basic Books, 1987), 140.

<sup>168</sup> *The Art of Biblical Poetry*, 156.

<sup>169</sup> More recent example comes from Pierre-Henri Simon: "Dès lors, la pente érotique de l'œuvre, comme si elle avait été la revanche d'une frustration, s'atténue, ou du moins change de sens : la bacchanale se filtre et se sublime en *Cantique de Cantiques*." Pierre-Henri Simon "Un des derniers disciples de Rousseau." *Les Cahiers Naturalistes*, vol. 38 (1969): 105-14.

la bonne parole du travail, de la réconciliation finale et de la paix; le cantique majestueux glorifiant l'énergie impérissable de la terre et de l'amour.<sup>170</sup>

This choice of biblical inspiration is significant, given the polyvalent symbolism of the *Song of Songs*. They are erotic verses celebrating the union of two lovers and are often read as the celebration of a pagan fertility cult. Recent scholars contend, however, that the *Song of Songs* is not pagan, but instead the only instance of secular love poetry, or wedding songs, in the entire Hebrew Bible.<sup>171</sup> This ambiguous biblical language helped Zola to celebrate the divine yet secular power of love and evoke contemporary social disaster while appealing to a more universal victory of life over death.

*Fécondité's* color symbolism, which conveys the moral portrait of decadent Paris and the Froment's home in the ironically-named Chantebled, reinforces Zola's biopolitical lyricism.<sup>172</sup> First, there is an obvious tonal opposition: Paris is dark, unclean, hedonistic and sterile, its inhabitants are decadent pleasure-seekers identified by their dark clothing, whereas the utopian countryside is bright and sunny. The predominant color dichotomy is, however, white and red, the latter further develops material extravagance, effectively eclipsing black as the visual signifier of vice. Perhaps the most curious effect of this type of world-reduction to the modern-day reader is *Fécondité's* reductive biological imagery. Symbolism that adheres strictly to biology would logically associate birth and fertility with blood, eggs, swelling, and so on. Exercising his poetic license, Zola prefers to evoke fertility through white bodily fluids, especially milk and semen. Zola aligns not blood, but pure, white mother's milk with fecundity, perhaps to maintain a symbolic consistency, or to valorize male vitality, as semen is ever-present in the novel. *Fécondité's* images valorize white as the symbol of pure fertility even at the expense of biological fact. Once the color red is cast as evil, as it is throughout the Zolian oeuvre, uterine blood can no longer fit into *Fécondité's* regenerative paradigm. It becomes necessary to establish another female fluid as a part of the great human life force, despite the technical difference between male semen whose function is life-giving, and female milk whose function is life-sustaining. In this manner, Zola fuses his metaphors and morality in a vision of one abundant and patriarchal flow of human seed. Indeed, red and white are over-signified and over-simplified in *Fécondité*. In this symbolic structure, white is imbued only with positive aspects like purity, divinity, and vitality, and although mother's milk is essential to life, the most power life force in the novel is *la semence*.<sup>173</sup>

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<sup>170</sup> « Vénus Victrix » *La Petite République socialiste*, 25 octobre 1899.

<sup>171</sup> Alter writes, "Although there are some striking love motifs elsewhere in biblical poetry—in Psalms, between man and God, in the Prophets, between God and Israel—the Song of Songs is the only surviving instance of purely secular love poetry from ancient Israel. The erotic symbolism of the Prophets would provide later ages an effective warrant for reading the Song of Songs as a religious allegory, but in fact the continuous celebration of passion and its pleasures makes this the most consistently secular of all biblical texts..." 185. See also David Pleins' discussion in *The Social Visions of the Hebrew Bible: a Theological Introduction* (Westminster: John Knox Press, 2000), 437-438.

<sup>172</sup> The town's name combines *chanter* and *bled*, translated as "Singing Hole-in-the-Wall" is the desolate land that Mathieu and Marianne lovingly rehabilitate, and which ultimately becomes the seat of the Fomentian dynasty, the heart of national regeneration.

<sup>173</sup> The *Trésor de la langue française* provides the following semantic hierarchy for *semence*: first, agricultural, second, by analogy, seminal male liquid, a synonym for sperm. [add date]. The entry for *fécondité* gives a similar hierarchy; a, the capacity for females to assure the reproduction of the species, b, the land's capacity to produce, c, figuratively, highly valued abundant production in the intellectual domain.

The prevalence of seminal images thus shifts the reproductive focus away from the mother, resulting in a celebration of virile creation rather than feminine reproductive power or potential. White, having already been established as all that is virtuous, forces red, an obvious symbol of female fertility, to signal vice: violence, anger, and sterile sexual desire. Virile regeneration celebrates not only through paternal investment in procreation as a personal and social mission but also by rejecting feminine/effeminate sexuality and corrupt child care. For example, Rougemont is the fictional provincial center of baby trafficking where Paris' unwanted children are left to die. In addition to the color red's common association with the satanic or the diabolical, sexual violence and excessive libido, the predominance of redheaded criminals in the *Évangiles* suggests the added stigma of genetic deficiency signified by lack of pigmentation. Nearly every one of Mathieu and Marianne Froment's enemies, that is to say, enemies of the religion of fertility, is a redhead. Sérafine, Parisian decadence incarnate, burns with her every pore, from her dark, burning eyes, sparkling with gold flecks, to her fiery hair, and blood-red lips. Her unnatural and selfish desires are announced by her own diabolical name, meaning burning fire in Hebrew. The evil bachelor, Dr. Gaude, whose name evokes his usurpation of Nature's divine role, gynecological surgeon responsible for the wave of "female castration" is young, single and a redhead.<sup>174</sup> Mme and M. Lepailleur, the Froment's curmudgeonly neighbors who resent the land and the Froments' success are, unsurprisingly, also redheads.

Since it has already been established as a tainted biological fluid, female blood never appears in *Fécondité*'s scenes of childbirth. The total absence of uterine blood from this gospel of reproduction suggests that maternal reproductive fluid might be too powerful to mention in a patriarchal narrative because it may undermine the power of masculine reproductive fluid. It is mentioned only once in the novel, on the occasion of a young *dévote*'s horror at seeing her first menses. The absence of menstrual and uterine blood is inconsistent with Zola's aim to praise natural maternity and womanhood. The ideal mother for Zola is a far cry from a biologically real woman: she may very well be made of flesh and bone, but certainly not blood and guts, the less attractive parts of the female body. Nevertheless, blood is not completely absent from the novel. Blood as a biological fluid, is virtually obliterated from *Fécondité*, but blood as an abstract concept related to 'race' and as currency of power (as discussed in Chapter 1), is ubiquitous.

The ubiquity of blood as abstract concept and absence of blood imagery in *Fécondité* reveals the complex relationship between discipline and regulation and repressive state and ideological apparatuses in a modern biopower regime. As Foucault argues, the shift from blood symbolism (birthright) to racism and sexual analysis signals the emergence of biopower. Modern power technologies abandon "blood," (or aristocracy) he claims, in favor of sexual and racial superiority, which constitute the power of the population. Population regulation appears voluntary, though it is actually more coercive by manipulating people's sense of duty. But because it relates to biology, sexuality refers back to blood and earlier power technologies like birthright, as Ann Stoler explains:

The nineteenth-century discourse on bourgeois sexuality may better be understood as a recuperation of a protracted discourse on race, for the discourse on sexuality contains

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<sup>174</sup> Mossman points out the transparency of the surgeon Gaude's god-complex, *Politics and Narratives of Birth*, 204.

many of the latter's most salient elements. That discourse on sexuality was binary and contrastive, in its nineteenth-century variant always pitting that middle-class respectable sexuality as a defense against an internal and external other that was at once essentially different but uncomfortably the same.<sup>175</sup>

*Fécondité* excels in synthesizing disciplinary sexual practices and regulatory reproduction, making it French citizens' physical and moral responsibility to reproduce the best examples of their race in order to ensure the future of the French nation. In Zola's *Évangiles*, progress is figured in positive blood symbolism: through aggressive, high quality repopulation, and decay, not murder and survival. Although its focus is promoting bourgeois sexuality, *Fécondité*'s pure, bloodless reproductive symbolism retains the power of what Foucault calls aristocratic sanguinity, and thereby diverts readers' attention away from the violence of its universalizing program of racial and social hygiene. Foucault emphasizes that blood symbolics are not wholly lost in biopolitical rule because modern racism relies upon the overlapping of the old power model of blood symbolics and the new scientific power of sexual technologies of control, or in the case of Zola's first gospel, repopulation campaigns.<sup>176</sup> *Fécondité*'s picture of national regeneration may cleanse blood of its usual gore and violence, yet the expanding Froment "dynastie" retains the aristocratic and sacred resonance of blood lineage. Blood purity is a great concern in Zola's utopian republican vision; however, it is all the more surreptitious because it is eclipsed by a battery of normalizing sexual technologies.

### Fathers of the New Republic

Unlike many decadent writers who celebrated sterile femininity through seductive images of lesbians and virgins, Zola's gospels glorify women in their fullest biological capacity as lovers and mothers. This revitalization of maternity is, as Chantal Bertrand-Jennings has shown, indicative of a new ethical formula in Zola's fiction, which finally accepts woman in her patriotic new state.<sup>177</sup> *Fécondité* opposes figures of degeneracy such as bachelors, seducers, philanderers and male neo-Malthusians, who shirk their biological and social duty, to the healthy image of Mathieu Froment, the ideal father physically and emotionally invested in his family, induces men to become proud and productive fathers. *Fécondité*'s praise of male fertility resonates with medical and political campaigns of the 1890s demanding men's increased sexual health and responsibility not just to their lovers and families, but to the nation. Like Zola, social advocates referred to these reform initiatives as a virilization of the republic.<sup>178</sup> Moreover, this promotion of happy, domesticated fatherhood is prescient of progressive twentieth and twentieth-first century men's reform movements.<sup>179</sup>

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<sup>175</sup> Ann Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire*, 193.

<sup>176</sup> Foucault, *Histoire de la sexualité*, I: 194-197.

<sup>177</sup> Bertrand-Jennings writes, "Le triomphe de la fécondité, nouvelle valeur qui vient se substituer à l'ancienne morale puritaine et religieuse, s'incarne dans le personnage de la mère qui se trouve ainsi lavée du péché originel de la sexualité." (93) See Chapter 3 of her book-length study, *L'Eros et la femme chez Zola* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1977), 87-131.

<sup>178</sup> One example of such a campaign is Léon Bourgeois's masculinist doctrine, *solidarité*. In speech to republican youth in 1897 he asserted, "Solitary man does not exist; man in the state of nature is already associates with another.... The origins of *solidarité* are the family and the fatherland."

<sup>179</sup> See Thomas Laqueur's "The Facts of Fatherhood," and Sara Ruddick's "Thinking about Fathers" in *Conflicts in Feminism*, eds Marianne Hirsch & Evelyn Fox Keller, (New York: Routledge, 1990).

Fin-de-siècle male republican reformers repeated Dr. Boutan's exclamation, "Nos femmes désexuées, frémissantes, éperdues, c'est nous qui les faisons." Many reformers felt that the duty to improve French women's conditions fell on them: they sought to "ensure women's material dependence on the good will of men."<sup>180</sup> Henri Thulié, an anthropologist who trained as a physician, argued that depopulation directly concerns women inasmuch as the irresponsible fathers and the State should be forced to provide for and protect French mothers. Karen Offen has described two distinct paternalist groups during the Third Republic: the patriarchal patriots, who viewed women as reproductive machine to bolster national strength, and the republican solidarists who vowed to aid women's conditions within the traditional family unit.<sup>181</sup> *Puériculture* advocate and obstetrician Adolphe Pinard rallied for charitable and national assistance to mothers, yet also for greater discrimination in marriage selection and carefully planned conception. Pinard demanded general male sexual responsibility and urged men to consider "marriage aptitude" when selecting a bride. For Pinard, men in particular, are

...the repositories of something sacred which they must respect as much as their honor, that they are responsible for the destiny of their race, and that it is in their power to annihilate, to diminish or, conversely, to assure the perpetuation and improvement of it.<sup>182</sup>

Paul Strauss, a republican solidarist according to Offen, used *puériculture* in his 1900 campaign for maternity services, claiming that it was part of a new patriotism: "In the state of armed peace and the economic rivalry of nations, [puériculture] constitutes the strongest and surest work for national defense."<sup>183</sup>

Judging by the social reform vision presented by *Fécondité* and the following *Évangiles*, Zola was a patriarchal patriot and republican solidarist. These two stances are clearly synthesized by Mathieu Froment's repopulation mission. While Mathieu's conversion to the cult of fertility and subsequent paternal mission endorse pronatalism, they are also excellent illustrations of Adolphe Pinard's more progressive program of *puériculture*. Pinard developed this childrearing program as a gendered process in which men are responsible for healthy conception and women, healthy fetal and neonatal care.<sup>184</sup> In this model, the work of childbearing is distinct but shared. According to Pinard, men and women must work together at every stage to plan a happy and healthy family:

Begin by instituting the means to permit every mother to stay at home and raise her children. Make sure that every worker returning to his family can bring it the necessities of life, even if they are numerous. Only then will you be the true apostles of Repopulation.<sup>185</sup>

*Fécondité's* virile image of French men attempts to encourage male readers to take up their patriotic duty by repopulating the Republic with happy and healthy children.

<sup>180</sup> *La Femme: Essai de sociologie philosophique* (1885), cited by Offen in "Depopulation, Nationalism, and Feminism in Fin-de-Siècle France," 653.

<sup>181</sup> Offen, "Depopulation, Nationalism, and Feminism in Fin-de-Siècle France," 669-672.

<sup>182</sup> Schneider citing Pinard, 80. See also Pinard's tract *A la Jeunesse Pour l'Avenir de la Race Française* (Paris: Ligue Nationale Française Contre le Péril Vénérien, 1925).

<sup>183</sup> Strauss used *puériculture* to demand maternity leaves. "La puériculture," (40) cited in Schneider, *Quality and Quantity*, 69.

<sup>184</sup> Schneider, *Quality and Quantity*, 77-80.

<sup>185</sup> Pinard, "Des aptitudes du mariage envisagées au point de vue physique, moral et social," *Revue pratique d'obstétrique et de pédiatrie*, 19 (1906): 16; cited in Schneider, *Quality and Quantity*, 77.

Mathieu's successful resistance to sexual infidelity ensures happy procreation with his wife. Though they sought to improve mothers' living conditions, Strauss, Pinard and Thulié shared Bertillon's campaigns centered on men's reproductive responsibility, on their premarital and marital sexual activity, whereas concerns for women were primarily *postnatal*. Thulié's statement, "La République doit être la fécondité" emphasizes male vitality and virile reproduction, in sum, a patriarchal patriotism that protects French women and children.<sup>186</sup> The demand for greater state intervention in funding for mothers and children and paternity suits, which would force men to marry and provide for the mothers of their children, was patriarchal and at the same time, feminist in the familial sense. In this light, the categories of anti-feminist patriotism and pro-feminist familial republicanism begin to blur.

Biological research during the turn of the century helped foster the political view that repopulation was a man's issue. Robert Nye demonstrates how genetic and fertility research from 1870 to 1900 signaled men's primary responsibility in fertilization, and consequently, in repopulation.<sup>187</sup> It was believed that depopulation was directly related to the "maleness" of the progenitors, increasing anxiety about the so-called crisis in virility, a cultural and population crisis, and the need to virilize French men's sexual activity in order to save the nation. The female population was, in fact, gaining on the male population, a fact explained by a lack of virile (masculine) reproduction. If there were fewer boys born, or fewer viable births, it was due to either to lost male "puissance" in old age or to fraudulent sexual practices—masturbation, premarital or extramarital affairs, homosexual activity, etc.—which weakened the vitality of the sperm.<sup>188</sup> Indeed, one scientist claimed that France was "wounded in its virility."<sup>189</sup> It was in this climate that Pinard and his students campaigned for young men's sexual education to ensure healthful reproduction in France. Dr. Bertillon, the most militant of the male-focused repopulationists, decreed that depopulation and repopulation were exclusively men's issues less because of a need for increased management of women's bodies and more because of men's glaring disinterest in family life and their biological duty to the regenerating the Republic.<sup>190</sup>

The solidarists, slightly more liberal versions of the patriots, expressed a desire to enhance men and women's mutual reproductive responsibilities, and to improve women's specific conditions as wives and mothers, their "benevolent" paternalism was nevertheless blind to women's full rights as autonomous citizens, that is to say any rights outside the family. As we shall see in Chapter 3, fin de siècle feminists, such as Hubertine Auclert and Louise Debor and pro-feminist reformers fought for women's economic and legal rights as mothers, not as individuals. As Nye puts it, "In order to be practical as well as *être de son temps*, a procreative discourse needed to take note of contemporary feminist concerns; but nonetheless find some way to square the new findings about the universality of sexual affinity with an updated version of the

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<sup>186</sup> *La Femme* cited by Nye, *Masculinity and Male Codes of Honor in France*. Studies in the History of Sexuality. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 91.

<sup>187</sup> Nye, *Masculinity and Male Codes of Honor in Modern France*, 83-84.

<sup>188</sup> Nye, *Masculinity and Male Codes of Honor in France*, 86.

<sup>189</sup> Dr. A Corviaud, *Le Lendemain du mariage* (1889), quoted in Nye, *Masculinity and Male Codes of Honor in France*, 86.

<sup>190</sup> Offen, "Depopulation, Nationalism, and Feminism in Fin-de-Siècle France," 669.

traditional doctrine of separate spheres.”<sup>191</sup> In this maternalist climate of feminism, Zola’s pro-family sexual model easily appealed to a majority of female and feminist readers, while at the same time nuancing the doctrine of separate gender spheres. *Fécondité*’s ideal family included a relatively empowered mother who chooses motherhood, and an even more progressive image of the father who embraces his new role as a tender lover to his wife and an affectionate and responsible father to his children. The novel promotes women in more professional public spheres, albeit nurturing professions like social work and healthcare, as well as men’s investment in the domestic, private spheres of the home and family. In Zola’s utopian vision, the reform of men’s sexual and social roles was the key to revitalizing the French nation. Perhaps this need was exaggerated because of the sexist logic that men needed to be held accountable for their sexual and domestic behavior, whereas women tended to be more sexually and socially responsible. While Zola’s vision of women’s roles was far from politically radical, his vision of men’s roles and responsibilities was certainly ahead of its time since the nineteenth century maintained the traditional separation between men’s domain as the public sphere and women’s domain as the private sphere. As a reproductive evangelist, Mathieu embodies the tension between biopolitical intervention and social reform.

Mathieu’s intervention in the sexual and gynecological activities of the many women around him—Marianne, Séraphine and Norine in particular—reflects the medical and social demand for increased male initiative in family life. This is a biopolitical intervention because it is a male intrusion into women’s lives: physically into the private domestic sphere and symbolically, invading women’s bodies. Mathieu represents the interests of the state in disciplining “bad” sexual behavior and urges these women to adopt “good” sexual behavior, in other words, to procreate. His intervention is described as increasingly heroic, evolving into a dogmatic social mission:

Il fallait être trop, pour que l’évolution pût s’accomplir, l’humanité déborder sur le monde, le peupler, le pacifier, tirer de lui toute la vie saine et solidaire dont il était gonflé. Puisque la fécondité faisait la civilisation, et que celle-ci réglait celle-là, il était permis de prévoir que, le jour où il n’y aurait qu’un peuple fraternel sur le globe entièrement habité, un équilibre définitif s’établirait. [...] c’était l’œuvre juste, œuvre bonne, que de ne point perdre une semence, de les confier toutes à la terre, comme le semeur dont la moisson ne saurait être trop abondante [...]<sup>192</sup>

Pronatalist discourse emerges here as a historical and political support for Mathieu’s personal faith in the need for proliferation. Rapid natal growth is no longer merely an ideal for Mathieu; it is a requirement for national growth. Zola’s diluted use of demographic theory enables him to glorify men’s sexual activity through a tirade against wasting even “une semence” meant to be committed to the earth, that is to say, to the woman who, following the metaphor, must be man’s vessel to fill and cultivate.

At the end of Book II, before the three following books describing the rapacious Froment expansion in French and African land, Mathieu’s narrated monologue articulates repopulation as a divine vocation:

Un cri d’égoïsme montait, plus d’enfant, rien qui vienne détruire les calculs d’argent ou d’ambition! [...] Toute la société agonisante le poussait, ce cri sacrilège, qui annonçait la fin prochaine de la nation. *Et Mathieu, qui avait senti Paris si mal ensemené, neuf mois plus tôt*, le soir où il s’était vu lui-même sur le point de céder à la folie libertine de la fraude, constatait maintenant de quelles mains méchantes et coupables on le moissonnait.

<sup>191</sup> Nye, *Masculinity and Male Codes of Honor in France*, 90.

<sup>192</sup> *OC*, 8: 91.

[...] toutes les puissances de mort luttant contre la vie, en face de l'impassible nature qui crée la prodigalité infinie des germes, pour l'infinie moisson de vérité et de justice.<sup>193</sup>

The images of Paris as poorly inseminated and therefore poorly harvested combine two distinct personifications: Paris as a Woman and Paris as a field. In her feminist reading of reproduction in Zola's fiction, Susan Hennessy claims that this metaphor is a typical Zolian conflation of production and reproduction, emphasizing the "sexuality of maternal spaces."<sup>194</sup> Men's roles in reproduction are pathological as evidence of subtle usurpation of feminine reproductive power, or conversely utter impotence in childbirth:

Zola's attempt to expand the role of man in the reproductive process is feasible because of the link he establishes between agricultural production and human procreation. By means of metaphor, Zola rationalized male involvement without appearing to take over the process of (re)production. In regard to literal childbirth, however, only by placing the birthing body in peril can he justify man's involvement. Inescapably, in both human and natural generation, man faces the same ineffectiveness and isolation that limit his role to sower of the seed.<sup>195</sup>

Closer scrutiny of *Fécondité's* family model challenges Hennessy's argument that men simply usurp female reproductive power. While it is true that much of the novel's logic is sexist and patriarchal, it also presents a more progressive, egalitarian vision of the family than feminist scholarship has claimed. Hennessy, Mossman and Perrot do not acknowledge Zola's concerted effort to hold men accountable for the sexual health of their lovers, wives and the nation, and to include men in the family as active parents. Though *Fécondité's* image of the family is not particularly radical, it is hard to understand how a more well-rounded family could be interpreted as retrograde and misogynistic. Men's new roles as tender and engaged fathers is a sign of their increased responsibility not of their exclusion or domination of women. The apparent appropriation of reproductive power is an effect of Zola's attempt at including men in family and reproductive life rather than excluding women from it. As will become more evident in Chapters 3 and 4, the *Quatre Evangiles* reconcile hostile relationships between man and Nature, man and technology and technology and Nature, woman and man.

The gospels do redeem corrupt or weak figures that are allowed to meet tragic fates in the *Rougon-Macquart* series, but only as long as they convert to the new religion of man and practice the sacred republican rites of fertility, work and truth. *Fécondité* effectively rehabilitates the paternal absence and masculine impotence in the degenerate Rougon-Macquart family. The responsible and loving Froment men redeem the philanderers and dandies that surround them, like Mathieu acting as surrogate husband to Beauchêne's lover Norine, or Luc in *Travail*, who rescues Josine and her young brother. Adélaïde's successive loss of her father, her husband, Rougon and her lover, Macquart is one of many examples of paternal abandonment and impotence in this series. We could also invoke Nana's biological and step-fathers, Lantier and Coupeau, the philandering Aristide Saccard, and Mme Sidonie's fatherless child, Angélique. Mathieu's inclusion in the intimate family niche introduces a modern paternal image: a father is present and protective and who provides materially and spiritually for his wife and children. While Zola had intended to rehabilitate the image of the mother as a sexually appealing and nurturing being, his utopian family is a more noteworthy paternal rehabilitation. Zola's

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<sup>193</sup> My emphasis. *OC*, 8: 159-160.

<sup>194</sup> Hennessy, "Zola's Male Creation: Reproduction in *Les Rougon-Macquart*," *The French Review*, LXXII, no 6, (mai 1999): 1010-1022, 1019.

<sup>195</sup> Hennessy, "Zola's Male Creation: Reproduction in *Les Rougon-Macquart*," 1021.

ideal father retains many patriarchal privileges, however with the added, traditionally maternal responsibilities of care giving and affection that he shares with the mother.

*Fécondité's* masculine creation and mystified maternity reinforce traditional, normative—or as Zola might have put it, “natural”—roles for French men and women. However, for Zola resolving the crisis of sterility through a secular cult of fertility invites interest in reforming the status of the father and mother. Thomas Laqueur recently bemoaned the missing history of fatherhood, writing that “man-as-father has been subsumed under the history of a pervasive patriarchy.”<sup>196</sup> Zola’s gospel of national regeneration responds to such an absence by privileging the domestic joys of fatherhood. An earlier mother-centered “tableau” from the first half of the novel is later replaced by a father-centered tableau in the latter part:

Et [Mathieu] s’émerveilla, dès lors, tellement le tableau était amusant, d’une beauté adorable et gaie. Ah! la belle et bonne mère Gigogne, comme elle s’appelait elle-même en plaisantant parfois, avec Rose sur sa poitrine, Ambroise disparu à moitié contre un de ses flancs, Blaise et Denis derrière ses épaules! [...] Et toute la nichée était si bien portante, si fraîche, la mère et les enfants, dans une splendeur de chairs roses et pures, baignée de clair soleil, que le père ne put résister au besoin tendre de les prendre tous dans ses bras, en tas, et de les baiser tous au petit bonheur de ses lèvres, grand joujou final qui les fit se pâmer [...]<sup>197</sup>

Mathieu’s desire to participate in the intimate union Marianne has with their children causes him to symbolically possess them all through his burst of affection, and with this gesture he punctuates the intense demonstration of familial, or rather fatherly, love. Once Mathieu begins to cultivate the land, parental privilege is turned over to the father as the children gather around him in celebration and Marianne looks on from a distance: “[Les enfants] en riaient follement, tourbillonnaient comme un vol sans fin, autour du père.”<sup>198</sup> In this nuanced vision of family gender roles, mother and father happily share domestic duties with the father’s role extended to include his new affective importance.

### Conclusion: Radical Versus Moderate Family Reform

Emile Zola was not the only male author who was sensitive to women’s movements and national repopulation. Unlike some of his socially critical contemporaries, Zola’s response to women’s conditions offered a much more optimistic picture of the future of marriage and the family.<sup>199</sup> His gospel of reproduction, *Fécondité*, was frequently compared to Leo Tolstoy’s provocative novella, *The Kreutzer Sonata* (1889) because of its indictment of marriage as prostitution. Closer to home, French playwright Eugène Brieux brought the issue of women’s conjugal servitude to the stage. Shortly after *Fécondité’s* publication, Brieux staged two polemical plays on depopulation: *Les Avariés* (1901) and *Maternité* (written in 1902, premiered in 1903). These plays are the second and third in a trilogy that was referred to in the Parisian press, among other things, as “the end of the family” and “the triumph of society.” By these very names, the polemical character of Brieux’s theatrical satire is obvious. The fact that both plays were initially

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<sup>196</sup> “The Facts of Fatherhood,” in *Conflicts in Feminism*, 205.

<sup>197</sup> *OC*, 8: 98.

<sup>198</sup> *OC*, 8: 232.

<sup>199</sup> It was perhaps by virtue of its gentle evolutionary image of the modern family that *Fécondité* was better received by audiences than Brieux’s plays or Tolstoy’s novella, which were quickly censored by their home societies.

banned by censors and performed in Belgium and later in England only bolstered Brioux's popularity in France, fueling social debate on marriage, reproduction and sexual hygiene. Brioux dedicated both plays to medical researchers working to improve the so-called population crisis: *Les Avariés* was dedicated to syphilis expert Alfred Fournier and *Maternité* to the *Commission extraparlamentaire de la dépopulation en France*, an organization to which Brioux also belonged.<sup>200</sup> George Bernard Shaw, critic and personal friend to Brioux, applauded the ingenuity of Brioux's forthright attack on a taboo subject. For Shaw, the stage is the ideal place to perform such political engagement: "The commonsense of the matter is that a public danger needs a public warning, and the more public the place, the more effective the warning."<sup>201</sup>

Brioux shared Zola's passion for repopulation and his plays testify to his commitment to the public disillusionment of sexual misconduct in turn-of-the-century French society. Like Zola, Brioux defends maternity while insisting on men's responsibility in reproduction and culpability in spreading sexual disease. In both plays Brioux launches a scathing critique of pronatalists' hypocrisy. He points out that most philanthropists and government officials do not only practice contraception, they are also completely ignorant of the bureaucratic red tape that prevents many women from benefiting from so-called maternal social welfare. In spite of the incendiary nature of *Les Avariés* and *Maternité*, Brioux denies the charge of pornography in a pre-play audience address. The stage manager utters the first lines even before the play begins, cautioning the audience about its instructive yet potentially offensive theme:

L'auteur et le directeur ont l'honneur de vous prévenir que cette pièce a pour sujet d'étude de la syphilis dans ses rapports avec le mariage.  
Elle ne contient aucun sujet de scandale, aucun spectacle répugnant, aucun mot obscène, et elle peut être entendue par tout le monde, si l'on estime que les femmes n'ont pas absolument besoins d'être sottes ou ignorantes pour être vertueuses.<sup>202</sup>

This warning makes it clear that regardless of *bienséance*, the play is appropriate for all spectators, particularly women who have been historically sheltered from explicit knowledge about venereal disease. Thus, the play immediately criticizes antiquated views on femininity.

Like Zola's Dr. Boutan, Brioux's doctor is wise, watchful, and above all concerned about social welfare. His first priority is to ensure medical and social responsibility by curing syphilitic men and preventing them from spreading the disease. George is so consumed by his own financial need to "marry well" that he refuses to postpone his marriage until after he has been cured. He proceeds with his financial scheme and puts his future wife, Henriette, at risk for contracting syphilis by marrying so soon. Ultimately, George infects his beloved wife and child and the family nurse, single-handedly causing his family's physical ruin. The third act provides a platform for the doctor to expound on the social need for sexual education implied by George's tragic fate in the first and second acts.

*Les Avariés* refers, of course to syphilis, and to secrecy and social hypocrisy, which Brioux also describes as forms of social disease because they corrupt and

<sup>200</sup> Jean Pedersen, *Legislating the French Family: Feminism, Theater and Republican Politics, 1870–1920* (New Brunswick, Rutgers University Press, 2003), 171.

<sup>201</sup> George Bernard Shaw's preface to *Three Plays by Brioux* (Cambridge, Mass: The University Press, 1907), xlix.

<sup>202</sup> *Les Avariés, Théâtre Complet de Brioux*, 6: 5-6.

contaminate society insidiously, in the same way as venereal disease. Like *Fécondité*, rejects legal reform in favor of raising public awareness about disease. When deputy Loches rallies for new marriage laws, the doctor exclaims, “Eh non, monsieur! Ne faites pas une loi nouvelle, nous en avons déjà trop. Il n’en est pas besoin. Il suffirait qu’on sût un peu mieux ce qu’est la syphilis.”<sup>203</sup> Both Zola and Brieux appear to agree that raising awareness and increasing male responsibility are the most effective measures of social and sexual reform. Moreover, Brieux’s heroic physician directs his most vicious attacks against men’s egotism and irresponsibility. Toward the end of the play, the doctor reiterates his lament of sexual recklessness and ignorance to the father of a newly syphilitic young man. The English version of the French clarifies that it is young men who are to blame, not young women: “Young men ought to be taught the responsibilities they assume and the misfortunes they may bring on themselves.”<sup>204</sup> He continues, condemning pretension to social decency which ironically helps spread syphilis thanks to perpetual silence about sexual education:

La pornographie est admise; la science ne l’est pas. C’est cela qu’il faudrait changer! Il faudrait élever l’esprit du jeune homme en soustrayant ces faits au mystère et à la blague; il faudrait éveiller en lui l’orgueil de ce pouvoir créateur qui fait de chacun de nous l’égal d’un dieu; il faudrait lui faire comprendre qu’il est une sorte de temple où s’élabore l’avenir de la race, et lui enseigner qu’il doit transmettre intact l’héritage dont il a le dépôt, héritage précieux que toutes les larmes, les misères et les souffrances d’une interminable lignée d’ancêtres ont constitué douloureusement.<sup>205</sup>

Brieux’s play concludes by addressing the relationship of prostitution to sexual disease. The doctor explains that the young prostitute who infects as many men as possible with the disease one of them gave her is a symbol, not the cause of syphilis: “Cette victime, transformée en fléau, est le symbole du Mal créé par nous et retombé sur nous.”<sup>206</sup> Speaking through the voice of the doctor, Brieux rejects the popular scapegoating of prostitutes by insisting that since men spread syphilis by perpetuating the demand for illegal prostitution, they must become aware of and responsible for its transmission in society. Though Brieux’s rhetoric is unquestionably more controversial than Zola’s utopian fantasy, both writers demand greater sexual responsibility from men in order to protect women. *Les Avariés* boldly asks why men should not be reformed and regulated instead of women, since it is they who enjoy political agency and social privilege and are therefore capable of harming or helping women who are denied agency and privilege. Because for Brieux, repopulation is more a sexual problem than a class problem, the resolution is the responsibility of the privileged sex, the only group with the power to change sexual behavior.

Written only months after *Les Avariés*, but censored in France until late 1903, *Maternité* takes up another side of sexual agency and responsibility: motherhood. Like *Les Avariés*, *Maternité* gives voice to the complexity of fin de siècle discourse on maternity. In this play, however, marriage presents only one area of mothers’ rights and conditions. *Maternité*’s heroine is bourgeois wife Lucie Brignac who, after having consented to another pregnancy because her husband demands a son even though they already have three daughters. Lucie courageously defends her pregnant, unwed younger

<sup>203</sup> *Les Avariés*, TC, 6: 83.

<sup>204</sup> *Damaged Goods in Three Plays by Brieux*, 248.

<sup>205</sup> *Les Avariés*, TC, 6: 94.

<sup>206</sup> *Les Avariés*, TC, 6: 101.

sister because she can intimately understand sexual subjugation. Lucie's revolt against her husband begins by her shocking defense and aid of her sister against M. Brignac's orders, which leads her to leave her husband altogether in order to support her sister. Brieux's treatment of unwed motherhood surpasses Zola's support of single mothers because *Maternité* directly accuses the institution of marriage and the indiscriminate value of motherhood as forms of women's imprisonment.

The third act sent shockwaves through French society, and was published in its entirety in *Le Journal* the day after its premiere on December 4th, 1903.<sup>207</sup> Set in a lifelike courtroom, the third act debates the criminal status of abortion in the trial against abortionist, Mme Thomas. When charged with the crime of performing illegal abortions for money, Mme Thomas retorts, "Vous me poursuivez, moi, mais les chirurgiens qui font de la stérilité définitive, on les décore!"<sup>208</sup> In contrast to Zola's disdainful representation of midwives and abortionists, Brieux is not only sympathetic, he supports the termination of unwanted pregnancies, which he regards as a serious crime against women. Thus, *Maternité* proposes practical solutions to depopulation—conscientious procreation—whereas *Fécondité's* reproductive reverie perpetuates the problematic proverb, "Dieu bénit les nombreuses familles," leaving aside the question of who feeds them.

*Maternité's* emancipatory message explains its appeal to radical individualist feminists like Nelly Roussel. Roussel praised Lucie's revolt against her husband's cruel insistence on her producing a son for him. For Roussel, and for other radical feminists of the Third Republic like Madeleine Pelletier, women's true emancipation must reject the constraints of marriage because the institution did not offer full legal rights to women over their bodies or their income. Although both militant feminists respected motherhood, they supported a motherhood that women would freely choose and plan. It was on these grounds that they demanded women's right to contraception and abortion because reproductive rights encompass prophylaxis and intervention. Some of the accused women in *Maternité* take up a general revolt against nature, man and nation. Mme Tupin, for example, exclaims, "puisque c'est ce qu'on fait pour les enfants que nous élevons, puisque les hommes n'ont rien trouvé pour changer ça, il faut nous en mêler nous les femmes. Il faut faire la grande grève, la grève des mères, la grève des ventres!"<sup>209</sup> Mme Tupin's cry of revolt is met with cheers from the courtroom, even as her husband repeats, "Les coupables c'est pas nous [les hommes]," and the lawyer declares, "Le coupable, c'est le séducteur [...] et ce sont les mœurs qui infligent la honte à la fille-mère [...]"<sup>210</sup> The play ends in pandemonium, with blame laid alternately on women, men, and society until Mme Thomas exclaims again, that they guilty ones are men, all men, which is the general consensus of the female defendants.

*Fécondité's* glorification of maternity and virile regeneration enacts familial feminist reforms and men's integration in the domestic sphere. While the novel rejects and corrects "errant aberrant" men and women, it bravely aims to reform men's behavior. Its influence on readers was perhaps more persuasive, and certainly more subtle than the polemical tragedies put on by Brieux. A unique effect of Zola's literature is linked to its

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<sup>207</sup> Pedersen, *Legislating the French Family*, 174.

<sup>208</sup> *Maternité*, TC, 4: 350.

<sup>209</sup> *Maternité*, TC, 4: 359.

<sup>210</sup> *Maternité*, TC, 4: 360-362.

biopolitical narrative. Because it has a disciplinary social message (its critique of waste, mutilation and perversion) and a regulating message (its celebration of the responsible, happy family), readers might subconsciously focus on the one they preferred and disregard the other or vice versa. In *Travail* and *Vérité*, Zola's triumphant vision of the family continues to encourage men to embrace happy marriages on which to build healthy families as part of their duty to the nation and humanity. It is logical that repopulation aimed its valiant reform of France at men because the pronatalist cult of life and the decadent cult of death share the patriarchal model of power. With men already as the privileged social agents, it is easy to understand why ideologues of the Third Republic, decadent and reformist alike, used images of women and of the feminine to mediate their cultural ideals, but kept their heroes men. The great male vitality that Zola thought was necessary to transform the young fledgling republic into a strong twentieth-century nation reiterated scientific and social evidence of men's procreative responsibility emerging at the fin-de-siècle. The depopulation crisis was a polarizing issue for the French Third Republic; it divided artists and intellectuals into those who were for progress and regeneration and those who were against it. As Léon Daudet put it, "we need to make sure that [the new century] shall now be on the side of the reconstructors, those who possess good sense and an awakened and active reason."<sup>211</sup> Mathieu Froment is a figure for reconstruction who would lead France's cultural and biological regeneration.

Although feminist critics of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries have rejected Zola's utopian republican family, his feminist contemporaries publicly expressed their appreciation of familial reform in *Fécondité*. For example, the novelist Manoël de Grandfort acknowledged Zola's condemnation of wayward women who refused their biological destiny, yet applauded his efforts to lay equal blame to men and women as enemies of the happy family:

[...] où l'Évangéliste s'indigne avec le plus de véhémence c'est contre les complices de ces tueries; les docteurs qui tranchent, qui châtent, qui tarissent les sources de la vie; contre les sages-femmes « faiseurs d'anges » qui devant collaborer à l'œuvre de maternité l'anéantissent dans l'œuf, « et il n'a pas de profanation plus criminelle, d'injure plus ignoble à l'éternelle fécondité de la terre » et aussi contre celle qu'on nomme « les meneuses » qui emportent les nouveau-nés vers les autres meurtriers où s'éteignent misérablement leurs précieuses et frêles existences; contre tous ceux, ou toutes celles, enfin qui contrecarrent la grande loi de la nature, qui exige la fécondité de la race, sous peine de la voir disparaître dans le néant [...].<sup>212</sup>

Grandfort shares the concern of male republican reformers for familial reform as a means of ensuring national welfare. For Zola and his feminist contemporaries, the right for all women to have healthy children was a key issue in the improvement of women's conditions and the feminist movement in France.

Despite their formal and rhetorical differences, Zola and Brioux's writing engaged in the battle for regulation and education against the dangers of sexual ignorance and censorship in the name of tradition and public decency. Zola's vision of women is more liberal, though still familial. His beautification of the mother acknowledges women's utility in the family and society, and hints at married women's sexual agency, albeit within marriage and motherhood. *Fécondité* condemns fashionable decadent sexuality

<sup>211</sup> Cited in Winock, *Nationalisme, antisémitisme et fascisme en France* (Paris: Seuil, 1982), 238.

<sup>212</sup> « Fécondité, » *La Fronde* Manoël de Grandfort, 11 novembre 1899.

and bourgeois imperatives for contraception, whereas Brieux's plays go even further, criticizing not only individuals, traditions and fashion, but castigating the hypocritical institutions of marriage, medicine and the law. Like Brieux, Zola sought to influence and reform beliefs, attitudes and institutions through an evolutionary, not revolutionary process. This evolutionary strategy was consistent with the moderate feminist strategies at the turn of the century. Keeping in mind Sara Ruddick's comment that "ultimately it is men who will have to tell the story of male procreative feelings and acts," we might actually reinterpret Zola's masculine gospel of procreation as a positive step toward imagining gender equality.<sup>213</sup> Chapter 3 will show how Zola's *Evangelies* rally for social reform of these same institutions to the same egalitarian ends of the majority of fin-de-siècle feminists. With each gospel, Zola's vision of women and men further nuances the theory of separate gender spheres through an increasingly conscientious engagement with fin-de-siècle feminists and feminisms.

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<sup>213</sup> "Thinking about Fathers," 231.

### Chapter 3: Feminist Fellow Traveler

Dans l'ordre de la justice, dans l'ordre du bonheur, certes la femme doit être l'égale de l'homme. Mais, si, physiologiquement elle est autre, c'est que sa fonction est autre, et elle ne peut que s'atrophier et disparaître à tenter de s'en sortir.

Emile Zola sur le féminisme

From its inception, the feminist movement under the French Third Republic quickly developed a wide variety of factions ranging from conservative religious groups to radical anticlerical, pro-abortion ones led by Nelly Roussel who demanded a nationwide “grève des ventres.” Qualifiers such as radical, bourgeois, republican, Christian, socialist, syndicalist, and so on, were attached to the term feminism by the very women who organized and belonged to these various groups. According to Karen Offen and Ann Taylor Allen, the two most prominent types of feminism at the turn of the century were “familial,” also known as “maternalist” feminism and “individualist” feminism, a more radical brand of feminism. The first type is a pronatalist, differentialist discourse that called for increased protection for mothers and wives. Individualist feminism, on the other hand, demanded equal opportunity for women and men regardless of marital status, familial or national concerns, and was not as prominent in France as familial or maternalist feminism.<sup>214</sup> From 1880 to 1914, the face of feminism in France shifted from the violent image of the communards to the more traditionally feminine images of attentive mothers. While radical feminists like Roussel attracted support from militant reformers like Eugène Brieux and his anti-marriage, anti-family plays, as we saw in the previous chapter, Zola's utopian novels earned praise from a wider feminist audience. The republican heroines of his *Quatre Evangiles* show that Zola's reaction to ‘feminism’ was also changing to match the very feminine maternal feminist image cultivated by fin-de-siècle women writers. Beginning with *Paris'* educated atheist, Marie Froment, and culminating in *Vérité's* single schoolteacher, Mlle Mazeline, Zola's heroines evolved into modern women whose work as mothers, workers, and teachers was vital to building a strong Republic in the twentieth century.

Zola's remarks from the epigraph that woman is physiologically different from man is a response to Eugène Montfort's 1897 survey on ‘feminism.’ By stating that woman should be equal to man, but that her body makes her otherwise, Zola implies that woman is not equal. Such remarks are perplexing given the feminist sympathy evident in his *Evangiles*, which he began only two years later. Though Zola seems to imply support of women's emancipation—“la femme *doit être* l'égale de l'homme,” he also explains women's inferior social status as biologically determined.<sup>215</sup> Part of the problem in Zola's

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<sup>214</sup> Offen and Allen both argue that most factions of French feminism during the Third Republic could be categorized as familial (Offen) or maternal (Allen) feminism. See Karen Offen, “Depopulation, Nationalism, and Feminism in Fin-de-Siècle France,” *American Historical Journal* 89, (June 1984): 648-676 and Ann Taylor Allen, *Feminism and Motherhood in Western Europe, 1890-1970: The Maternal Dilemma* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

<sup>215</sup> 1897 represented something of a turning point in the Parisian press's treatment of feminism. Zola's response to this survey might have something to do with the publication of Léopold Lacour's book

understanding of feminism here is that he conflates it with a radical feminist discourse. He fears its undesirable potential to pervert or invert traditional gender roles, describing women's (radical) emancipation as "anormal, dangereux [...] et d'une parfaite vanité."<sup>216</sup> "La femme," he defiantly concludes, "ne sera jamais que ce que la nature veut qu'elle soit," reaffirming woman's identity as defined by her ostensibly natural, heterosexual and reproductive functions.<sup>217</sup> These comments confirm the charges of misogyny in feminist critiques of Zola's polarization of women as either fertile mothers to be worshiped or criminals and perverts, as discussed in Chapter 2. From Thérèse Raquin and Adelaïde Fouque to *Travail's* Fernande, many independent female figures in Zola's fiction are punished by psychological torment, social alienation and death for not following their patriarchal and patriotic duty to perfect the species. Unmarried female characters who manage to avoid stigma through extreme chastity are cast as abject spinsters or, more often, virginal muses.

Yet, for every transgressive Nana there is an Angélique, the very picture of servitude to Zola's heroic men.<sup>218</sup> By contrast to current feminist dismissal of persistent misogyny in Zola's *Quatre Evangiles*, fin-de-siècle women writers applauded what they considered *Fécondité*, *Travail*, and *Vérité's* portrayal of strong, progressive female characters. My original research of responses to the *Evangiles* in the feminist newspaper, *La Fronde*, reveals that women journalists from diverse political positions not only shared Zola's feminine ideals but admired his contributions to women's struggle for emancipation. As we shall see, Zola's views on 'feminism' in 1897 are contradicted by the increasingly emancipated image of republican women in *Paris* and its sequel, the *Quatre Evangiles*. Furthermore, whereas biopower in Zola's *Evangiles* may justify the Republic's management of birth, it also moved problems affecting women's bodies out of the private and into the public sphere, which made the reform of women's health care and education a matter of national concern.

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*Humanisme intégral* which appeared in early 1897. The Bibliothèque Marguerite Durand's on press on feminism is particularly illuminating. The majority of newspaper clippings on 'feminism' prior to 1897 generally contain pejorative usage and constitute bad press for women's rights movements. Articles from 1897 until about 1914 demonstrate a change of opinions about 'feminism' and 'feminists,' and new support from liberal male journalists. See Hippolyte Destrem « Les Ecueils à éviter » Le vrai Féminisme et l'Ultra-Féminisme dans La Femme dans les Temps nouveaux Supplément de la *Rénovation* du 20 février 1890 in DOS 396 FEM Bibliothèque Marguerite Durand.

<sup>216</sup> Monfort's "Sur le féminisme" (1897), appeared in « Nouvelle Campagne, » a collection of Zola's articles published in *Le Figaro*, *Œuvres Complètes*, 14: 844.

<sup>217</sup> Emile Zola, « Sur le féminisme. »

<sup>218</sup> Feminist scholarship has overlooked the many minor female characters whose autonomy is portrayed in a positive light. The fact that emancipated characters do not merely serve as foils in the *Rougon-Macquart* novels reveals Zola's latent sympathy for women's struggle to make better lives, gain more rights, and have a certain degree of freedom. Characters such as the radical feminist intellectual Clémence in *Le Ventre de Paris*, Renée's financially savvy maid, Céleste in *La Curée* who buys her own farm in the provinces, or *Nana's* maid, Zoé who abandons her mistress to run la Tricon's brothel, not to mention the socially minded and enterprising yet chaste Denise in *Au Bonheur des Dames*, and *Docteur Pascal's* intellectual protégée, Clotilde are exceptionally independent women. These examples suggest, at the very least, that Zola acknowledged a potentially happy existence for individuals who challenge women's limited function as supplements to men. While autonomy for the *Rougon-Macquart's* feminist figures generally comes at the price of their sexual freedom, or sense of social belonging, Zola's later novels produce female characters whose independence does not preclude sexual agency.

This chapter examines the relationship between Emile Zola's writing and feminism by situating female heroism in his last four novels in the context of the predominant feminist discourses in France from 1890-1903. I aim to reconstruct a fin-de-siècle feminist lens in order to reevaluate Zola's reputation as a pseudo or anti-feminist writer. Articles in Marguerite Durand's popular women's newspaper *La Fronde* about key issues in women's social and professional reform campaigns, including health care and education, help me to situate Zola's vision of women's reforms within fin-de-siècle feminist discourse. This chapter uncovers new feminist criticism of Zola by women journalists for *La Fronde*, known as *frondeuses*. Their articles responded to Zola's vision of modern republican women as represented by his *Évangiles*. I believe that the reason for much of the feminist frustration with Zola's writing that has emerged since the 1970s is that it is steeped in present-day standards of feminist progress. Such a perspective has caused critics writing from radically different political and cultural realities to overlook the incipient feminist tone of Zola's later novels.

In evaluating how the progressive female figures in these works contributed to fin-de-siècle feminist discourse, it is crucial to understand what exactly was at stake for improving women's domestic and professional status in this era. Regardless of their particular political affiliation or level of activity, Third Republican women's associations were overwhelmingly pragmatic. Like Zola, fin-de-siècle feminists strategically used the secular aestheticization of motherhood to win more civil rights and social justice for women. Whether atheist or Catholic, working-class or bourgeois, women demanded legal, economic and social reform on the basis of their status as mothers, producers and protectors of future French generations. In light of the Third Republic's maternalist feminism, *Fécondité's* image of the happy fecund mother resists interpretation as a simple usurpation of women's reproductive power. As Chapter 2 argued, despite the patriarchal logic of Zola's national repopulation, subjecting women's (and men's) bodies to public debate had positive implications for women's healthcare at a time when the public had little to no information about private matters such as venereal disease, abortion, and nursing.<sup>219</sup> The establishment of welfare institutions during this time such as the national maternity system, including prenatal and postnatal care, child and welfare services explain why France is still regarded today as model for accessible women's healthcare in the world.<sup>220</sup>

Although motherhood dominated a great many feminist campaigns at the turn of the century, it was certainly not the only area of women's lives that Zola and his feminist contemporaries sought to reform. Feminist readers of Zola saw in his late works, a reflection of the their own ideals, the struggle for equal educational opportunity from elementary school to professional teachers' colleges. Implementing a national coeducational school system and technical training for men and women is central to both *Travail* and *Vérité's* fictional reform of the Republic. According to Denise Karnaouch, from the French revolution of 1848 onwards, feminism and *laïcité* were united in the

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<sup>219</sup> Despite its critique of abortion and contraceptive practices, the fact that *Fécondité* gives detailed accounts of both raised awareness that women could have control over pregnancy and their bodies. The law criminalizing abortion and contraception passed in 1922 was a major setback to any advances in public debate about women's social and physical welfare.

<sup>220</sup> Elaine Leeder, *The Family in Global Perspective: A Gendered Journey* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2003), 134.

movement for republican reform. Maria Desraimes and Léon Richer's *Le Droit des femmes* shared the belief that "la transformation de l'école est la clef de toute réforme sociale."<sup>221</sup> Their newspaper and the first International Association of Women that Republican in held in Geneva men and women joined together to fight for the emancipation of women from Catholic education, increased educational and professional opportunity, and establishing equal rights and responsibilities within marriage and the family.

This chapter traces a clear political evolution in Zola's female characterization from *Paris* (1898) to *Vérité* (1903), beginning with Marie Froment, the future mother of *Les Quatre Evangiles*' heroes, and the spiritual godmother of the *Evangiles*' new women. Although Marie's espousal of traditional domesticity may not seem feminist by today's standards, she embodies fin-de-siècle secular and maternalist feminist values. This chapter shares recent claims that maternalism is a genuine form of feminism. Looking beyond these character's maternal status enables readers to see how Zola's narrative negotiated the fraught relationship between women's emancipation and domesticity within the fabric of fin-de-siècle moderate feminism to produce his own brand of new women. As my reading will show, *Paris* (1898) and *Fécondité* (1899) contain the seeds of Zola's feminist interest, which grew into a more radical gender model, and ultimately, an endorsement of moderate feminism in *Travail* and *Vérité*.

Fin-de-siècle maternalist feminism is a neglected stage whose recovery will broaden our understanding of the history of French feminism.<sup>222</sup> The preparatory documents for *Les Quatre Evangiles* and Zola's correspondence with the feminist journalist Harlor not only attest to his serious interest in women's reform movements, they also reveal the explicitly feminist prophesy contained in his social gospels: the possibility for women to be emancipated and modern while remaining attractive to politically conservative male and female audiences. Recuperating the positive reception of Zola's fiction by feminists of his day broadens the scope of feminist approaches to his literature by inviting new appreciation of the relatively progressive heroines imagined in his *Evangiles*. Such a historicization, furthermore, seeks to better understand the different stakes of feminist discourse across historical and cultural boundaries.

### The Fin-de-Siècle Feminist Landscape

The 1890s witnessed an increase in public debate about what was often vaguely called "la question de la femme," an umbrella expression for issues about women's conditions in marriage, the family, and the workplace. As recent scholars have shown, feminism in fin-de-siècle France had nearly the same man-hating, unfeminine stigma in popular discourse then as it does in France today. French, American and British feminists today often consider this era to be a sort of hiatus in the French feminist movement, perhaps because it lacked revolutionary figures like Flora Tristan, Louise Michel, Madeleine Pelletier and Simone de Beauvoir. For feminists today, the Third Republic represents a period of extreme conservatism during which women's rights and conditions were not seriously

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<sup>221</sup> Denise Karnaouch, "Féminisme et laïcité 1848-1914," *Bulletin Archives du féminisme*, n°9 (décembre 2005).

<sup>222</sup> See Elaine Tuttle-Hansen's *Mother Without Child: Contemporary Fiction and the Crisis of Motherhood*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

advanced mainly for religious and patriotic reasons. Reticence about supporting feminism was undoubtedly a reaction to the exaggerated depictions of demonstrations the female Communardes such as André Léo, Paule Mink and Louise Michel, as dangerous anarchists they called *pétroleuses* and *vésuviennes*, which left terrifying images of ‘feminists’ in the French popular imaginary.<sup>223</sup> However, even among the most militant feminists of the fin-de-siècle, motherhood was held as a respectable duty whether to God, or Nature, or to the State whose supposed population crisis at the end of the nineteenth century became a reality during the First and Second World Wars. While the moderate, even conservative character of Belle Epoque feminism might indeed deserve much of the criticism it has attracted from present-day feminists as a half-hearted, bourgeois movement, its bourgeois elements echoed those of Third Republican reform movements. Contextualizing maternalist, feminine feminist texts in this bourgeois republican culture uncovers their subversive potential within their historical moment. As we shall see, emphasizing their domesticity, beauty and elegance was a strategy used by feminists in their writing and public personae to promote women’s emancipation.<sup>224</sup>

Feminism, during the Third Republic, was an ambiguous label at best for supporters of women’s rights and reform movements. It was frequently used to denigrate radical reformers in France, or stigmatize foreign women activists, especially suffragettes, who were arriving in greater numbers on the French intellectual and artistic scene.<sup>225</sup> While the word ‘féministe’ first appears in Charles Fourier’s writing to mean a hermaphrodite, it was Hubertine Auclert who popularized the term in the modern political sense of a militant of women’s reform.<sup>226</sup> From the earliest women’s movements until today, femininity has played an integral, if ambiguous role in the history of French feminism. Unlike feminism, femininity has enjoyed a more stable meaning in French discourse, indicating the quality of a woman who is attractive by conventional heterosexual parameters of desire: synonymous with terms such as *charmante*, *séduisante*, *élégante*. French feminists worked at honing their feminine image, struggling to be beautiful, well-mannered, sophisticated and demure in dress as well as speech; being a mother and wife only increased her femininity. As Mary Roberts explains, cultivating femininity was a crucial part of nineteenth-century feminists’ identity. It was perhaps difficult, but necessary work:

For a feminist, the extreme care of one’s person and a studied sense of elegance are not always a diversion, a pleasure, but rather often excess work, a duty that she nevertheless must impose upon herself, if only to deprive shortsighted men of the argument that feminism is the enemy of beauty and of a feminine aesthetic.<sup>227</sup>

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<sup>223</sup> For more on this earlier generation of French feminists see Carolyn J. Eichner’s *Surmounting the Barricades: Women in the Paris Commune* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), Joan Scott’s *Only Paradoxes to Offer: French Feminists and the Rights of Man* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), and James McMillan’s *France and Women 1789-1914: Gender, Society and Politics* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000).

<sup>224</sup> The seemingly paradoxical feminine rhetoric of feminist discourse, which has been seen as emblematic of a temporary lull in the progress of French women’s movements, still persists today in French feminist discourse, a fact that remains problematic for its non-French critics.

<sup>225</sup> Roberts, *Disruptive Acts*, 25; Bard, “Beauté de Beauvoir”.

<sup>226</sup> Jean Rabaut, *Féministes à la “Belle Epoque”* (Paris: Editions France-Empire, 1985), 102.

<sup>227</sup> Mary Louise Roberts, *Disruptive Acts: The New Woman in Fin-de-Siècle France* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 61.

Elinor Accampo and Rachel Mesch argue that for fin-de-siècle feminist writers, feminine performance was actually a subversive act. Writers and activists, they claim, consciously used feminine rhetoric to communicate feminist messages. They also cultivated feminine public images as elegant ladies as well as loving and beloved mothers, wives and even lovers. Contemporary scholars have demonstrated the very serious and effective feminist agendas accomplished because of rather than despite the *frondeuses*' charming veneer.<sup>228</sup> Rather than bemoan the feminine and bourgeois character of fin-de-siècle feminism, as do many recent feminist scholars who narrowly measure feminist success by progress in the women's suffrage movement, critics Mary Roberts and Christine Bard emphasize the importance of femininity to French feminist strategies. *Disruptive Acts* argues that femininity was not a sign of political disinterest; on the contrary, Frenchwomen adeptly used feminine rhetoric and images to advance their political views. Instead of embracing the particularities of Third Republican women's movements as strategies that were necessarily different from British and American reform, critics of Third Republic feminism tend to pessimistically view this as a period of stasis in feminist history.

Feminism's new positive press at this time suggests that the shifting rhetoric and social demands of French feminism were beginning to appeal to activists with shared secular republican family and educational values. Women's newspapers and associations multiplied, culminating in the first women's congress in France, the Conseil National des Femmes Françaises, in 1901. Despite the semantic ambiguity of the word feminism, women's reform groups were on the rise in the 1890s. The most prominent groups were the Ligue Française pour le Droit des Femmes (1882 founded in 1867 under the name l'Association pour le droit des femmes) led chronologically by Léon Richer, Maria Desraimes and Maria Pognon and Solidarité des femmes led in 1891 by Eugénie Potonié-Pierre, Maria Martin and Léonie Rouzade.<sup>229</sup> According to James McMillan, Richer and Desraimes' moderate feminism set the tone for fin-de-siècle feminism by fighting to raise women's social status, which they called a "stratégie de la brèche." They believed that their strategy would be more effective than the more spectacular and dangerous "stratégies de l'assaut" of earlier radical feminists such as Louise Michel and Hubertine Auclert such as vandalism and trespassing. This organization's primary aim was "l'entretien des enfants par l'Etat, sous le nom de budget de la maternité."<sup>230</sup> Other

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<sup>228</sup> Being perceived as feminine is hardly an outmoded concern for French feminists. Just to mention a few examples, a recent article in *L'Officiel* "Ainsi soit-elle," touts modern Frenchwomen's rare ability to be feminine and feminist and Christine Bard's article "Beauté de Beauvoir," celebrates the role of beauty in Simone de Beauvoir's status as the foremost French female intellectual, reiterating French feminism's special relationship to femininity as a political strategy. According to "Ainsi soit-elle," "Le terme 'féministe' a longtemps résonné comme une injure et convoqué l'image d'une femme laide, hystérique, dans la haine des hommes, évidemment peu épanouie, voire lesbienne. Certaines l'étaient, le sont! Mais la plupart étaient et sont brillantes, pertinentes, intelligentes, élégantes, et le contenu du mot féministe est plutôt réjouissant: il autorise à être autre chose qu'une épouse -, une mère ou une putain et permet de prétendre à l'égalité des hommes!" Rachèle Bevilaqua and Hubert Artus, *L'Officiel*, N° 914, (avril 2007): 132-135; Christine Bard, "Beauté de Beauvoir," *Cinquentenaire du deuxième sexe*, Eds. Christine Delphy and Sylive Chaperon (Paris: Editions Syllepse, 2002), 395-399.

<sup>229</sup> James McMillan *France and Women*, 192.

<sup>230</sup> *Le Féminisme chrétien* was a Catholic newspaper that signaled its members' growing commitment to women's reform. For more on specific organizations and publications see Jean Rabaut's *Féministes à la "Belle Epoque,"* Florence Rochefort and Laurence Klejman's *L'Égalité en marche: Le féminisme sous la*

notable moderate actors include Juliette Adam and journalist Jane Misme. Though fewer in number, radical feminists who nonetheless enjoyed considerable public exposure include Nelly Roussel, sister-in-law to neo-Malthusian leader Paul Robin, who toured France advocating contraception for marital and extra-marital partners, the theatrical suffragette, Auclert, and her fellow suffragists Caroline Kauffman and neo-Malthusian physician Madeleine Pelletier who were openly hostile to marriage and men. If these feminists are famous today, it is because they were, as Jean Rabaut put it, “plus féministes que les féministes,” pioneers of radical twenty-century feminism, rather than representative of late nineteenth-century feminisms.<sup>231</sup>

Questions of femininity continued to haunt feminist discourse during the Third Republic. The problem with French feminism at the end of the century, it seems, was not that the majority of Frenchwomen were hopelessly apolitical, or blind to their own oppression; rather, they resisted defining their actions and demands in linguistic terms that were unpopular, unfeminine, and perhaps worst of all, un-French. As critic Jean Ernest-Charles jibed, “Auparavant on ne dissertait de féminisme que dans de petites chapelles ouvertes seulement à des femmes mal habillées. Aujourd’hui on commence à discuter de féminisme dans tous les milieux, dans tous les costumes.”<sup>232</sup> Ernest-Charles’ words suggest that, thanks to the increased visibility of feminine feminists, women’s movements were becoming fashionable and gaining clout as a modernizing social force. As articles published in *La Fronde* demonstrate, women writers from diverse political and religious camps employed femininity as a rhetorical and political strategy to make their less-than-feminine views heard by a wide audience. Through their writing and public interventions, Marguerite Durand and her *frondeuses* resisted conventional lives as domestic goddesses, content to serve their families as well as the stigma of frigid spinsters and managed to avoid the stigma of men-hating harpies attached to prior generations of feminists and Durand’s radical contemporaries. The *frondeuses* adeptly infused the masculine endeavors of writing, public speaking and political activism, tempering these transgressive acts with feminine images of themselves as adoring mothers, wives, and lovers, offering French feminism some of its most attractive spokeswomen.

Current feminist scholarship has struggled over understanding the feminist lexicon of Fin-de-Siècle France. Political categories of that era deployed towards women’s issues evade the contemporary categories of liberal and conservative or leftist and rightist. Indeed, even Christine Bard’s careful categories *radical*, *réformiste*, and *modéré* are not always accurate or effective for the primary sources of this study.<sup>233</sup> For this reason, I have chosen to use wherever possible, the labels that French men and women gave themselves and their causes, with special attention given to positive valences of the word feminist or feminism because of their particularly negative connotations in fin-de-siècle French popular discourse.

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*Troisième République* (Paris: Editions des Femmes, 1989), and Chapter 10 of James McMillan’s *France and Women*.

<sup>231</sup> *Féministes à la Belle époque* (Paris: France-Empire, 1985), 120.

<sup>232</sup> Rabaut, *Féministes à la “Belle Epoque,”* 100.

<sup>233</sup> From Bard’s mémoire de maîtrise cited in Paul Smith’s *Feminism and the Third Republic: Women’s Political and Civil Rights in France 1918-1940* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 5.

## Feminizing Feminism in *La Fronde*

Marguerite Durand's newspaper *La Fronde*, which ran from 1897 to 1905, was one of the most famous feminist organizations of this era. Durand's paper is remarkable for many reasons. *La Fronde* was a daily paper whose circulation matched the popular Parisian daily *Le Temps*. It was also entirely produced by women, counting some of France's premier intellectuals and novelists among its contributors. Most importantly, Durand's paper represented a broad range of women's interests and opinions. The very name *La Fronde* conjures the image of Anne Marie Louise, Duchess of Montpensier, and her unparalleled bravado during the seventeenth-century civil war "La Fronde." Montpensier, or la Grande Mademoiselle as she is better known, became one of the first emblems of Republican rebellion, prefiguring Delacroix's famous Marianne. Montpensier's moniker la Grande Mademoiselle further suggests that her independent heroism may have been contingent on her status as an unmarried woman with no duties to prevent her from fully devoting herself to intellectual and political pursuits. For Durand however, it was more likely Montpensier's elegant rebellion, her creative activity in the form of self-published writing that her feminist daily meant to evoke.<sup>234</sup>

Because of its unique all-female staff and broad subject matter, *La Fronde* illuminates the problematic relationship between femininity and feminism during the Belle Epoque in a way that no other single source at that time can. This newspaper was consciously advertised as both a feminine and feminist paper that aimed to educate its audience about women's issues. Although modern readers tend to consider *La Fronde* proof of the pseudo-political reign of conservative bourgeois feminism, writers for *La Fronde*, according to Roberts, were serious feminists who practiced their politics in a distinctly French way: "It was Marguerite Durand who offered the possibility of a truly French version of the dreaded stereotype—a *révoltée* who was both charming and sexual as well as independent and free."<sup>235</sup> In fact, Durand and her reporters consistently relied physically and rhetorically on their feminine privileges in order to transmit progressive, even radical, feminist ideas to a mass audience. The *frondeuses* countered negative stereotypes of feminists and women intellectuals by inventing a new, feminine, French version that Durand referred to as the "éclaireuse," a kind of feminist scout who lit the way for her sisters in the path to emancipation.

During the Third Republic, it was feminine bourgeois women reputed to be as elegant as they were eloquent (well represented in *La Fronde*) who demanded practical social and legal reform. Many women intellectuals and activists of this era were ultra feminine, in both dress and rhetoric. Even radical abortion activist Nelly Roussel, who openly promoted neo-Malthusian Paul Robin's "grève des ventres," conformed to conventional feminine appearances, and like Durand, was known for her great beauty.<sup>236</sup> Sarah Monod, leader of the first Congrès des Œuvres et Institutions Féminines and

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<sup>234</sup> See Joan DeJean's *Against Marriage: The Correspondence of La Grande Mademoiselle* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2002) on the Duchesse de Montpensier's life and writing on marriage and Vincent Pitt's lengthier study *La Grande Mademoiselle at the Court of France, 1627-1693* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002).

<sup>235</sup> Roberts, *Disruptive Acts*, 47.

<sup>236</sup> For more on Nelly Roussel and femininity see Elinor Accampo's "Private Life, Public Image" in *The New Biography: Performing Femininity in Nineteenth-Century France*, Ed. Jo Burr Margadant (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 2000).

founder of the Conseil national des femmes françaises, proclaimed “le meilleur féminisme” to be “le plus féminin.”<sup>237</sup> Women’s public political acts were made more palatable by their well-honed, visibly feminine, domestic personae. Many of Third Republican feminist leaders promoted their dual roles as mothers and activists; they claimed to be dutiful patriots who enjoyed happy marriages, produced fine French citizens and contributed precious time away from their homes to the noble cause of French social progress. To discount these contributions to women’s movements on the grounds of their excessive femininity is to reinforce patriarchal prejudices that conflate beauty and frivolity and mistake strategy for ignorance and incompetence.

Whether consciously or not, Third Republican feminists distanced themselves from the radical acts of their foremothers both in rhetoric and strategy for political action. Feminists of the older generation also acknowledged the changing tides: in the words of Jeanne Deroin, “Maintenant il ne faut plus de pionniers impulsifs et téméraires, il faut joindre le talent au dévouement, orner la vérité par la beauté du style.”<sup>238</sup> Distinguished *femme de lettres* and *frondeuse* Manoël de Grandfort, went further in vaunting the new feminine face of feminism at the turn-of-the-century:

Dans un pays comme le nôtre, la « façade » acquiert une si grande importance, il est évident que les chapeaux ridicules, les robes mal faites, les cheveux coupés courts et la violente combativité des féministes d’avant-garde ont nui au succès de leur cause. Cela est misérablement frivole, j’en conviens, mais il est sage de prendre les gens comme ils sont : c’est un art que de savoir s’arranger de leurs défauts et d’en tirer même un profit. Je crois que le mouvement s’appelle « de la diplomatie ». Les combattantes de la première heure ont manqué de cette qualité ; celles d’aujourd’hui n’en sont point dépourvues.<sup>239</sup>

*La Fronde* proved to be just such a vehicle for joining truth and style in ongoing campaigns for women’s liberation. The newspaper publicized a range of debates on women’s roles in society, and published countless articles demanding social reform for mothers. Its journalists defended the rights of single mothers and working mothers, promoted breastfeeding and new daycare initiatives, and endorsed *puériculture* for its advanced family planning and childcare training. At the time of *Fécondité*’s serialization in *L’Aurore*, *La Fronde* published a lively debate on women’s role in society between Louise Debor, pro-puericulturalist, and Maria Pognon, activist for women’s secular education, Debor argued for an independent and educated woman, whereas Pognon wanted woman to be a mother above all. Though they were sometimes divided on issues like monogamy, divorce and women’s suffrage, most *frondeuses* valued motherhood and fought to protect it.

Nelly Roussel herself promoted birth control by positioning herself as a devoted mother who believed that family planning was vital to individual families’ wellbeing and national welfare. Elinor Accampo has convincingly argued that Roussel’s success as a militant public activist for contraception and women’s reproductive rights was in large part due to the feminine, secularized religious rhetoric of her speeches and the beautiful, maternal feminine image she projected on stage at conferences and the covers of her publications. Unlike Roussel, Louise Debor and Marguerite Durand both explicitly vocalized their feminine strategies. Debor laughed in the face of radical feminist critics, calling them spinsters, and defended her fellow *frondeuses* by saying, “Les femmes

<sup>237</sup> Jean Rabaut, *Féministes à la “Belle Epoque,”* 113.

<sup>238</sup> Scott, *Only Paradoxes to Offer*, n. 102, 203.

<sup>239</sup> “Du Féminisme dans la littérature contemporaine” *La Fronde* 9 décembre 1899.

commencent à sentir qu'elles auraient grand tort de négliger leurs meilleures armes, la beauté et la grâce, armes magiques qui brisent l'obstacle qu'elles effleurent... Ajoutons qu'il appartient même au féminisme de cultiver la féminité et de s'appliquer à parfaire la forme féminine par l'hygiène et l'esthétique."<sup>240</sup> Durand seemed to approve of Debor's statement, having once famously quipped, "Le féminisme doit à mes cheveux blonds quelques succès"<sup>241</sup> Though some of these tactics may seem naïve to modern-day feminist readers, women writing *La Fronde* commonly used their feminine graces in writing and in public to draw audiences to their more masculine political and intellectual endeavors. These peculiar new women writers signal, as Mary Louise Roberts' *Disruptive Acts* shows, the dawn of a new feminine culture in France that was developing in tandem with second-wave feminism.<sup>242</sup>

In her 1899 article "Féministes et « féminines »" Louise Debor aggressively defends women activists and intellectuals against unfeminine stereotypes. Her article also refutes misconceptions about feminist gynocentrism and misandry. Feminism, Debor argues, is women's demand for the same rights and agency as men. "La femme est née, dites-vous, pour être mère et épouse. – Autant et non plus, que l'homme est né pour être époux et père." It is easy to recognize in Debor's reasoning an implicit articulation of Simone de Beauvoir's thesis that gender roles are socially conditioned. She further questions biological determinism by citing a host of strong, brave, intelligent women in history, not as exceptions but rather as evidence of women's untapped intellectual, physical and moral potential.

While Debor's stated goal is to counter essentialist claims of women's servitude, her article maintains strictly egalitarian rhetoric: men and women are not born with intellectual or artistic genius, nor with domestic ambition. Her point is that to prove women's greater potential, they must be allowed the opportunity to develop and express it. Women's domestic experiences and occupations, including childcare, according to Debor, must be simultaneously revalorized and chosen, not imposed:

Oui, la fonction de « ménagère » - si nous refusons à y voir l'unique fonction qui conviennent aux femmes est du moins celle qui, jusqu'ici, convient le mieux à l'immense majorité d'entre elles. Et il est désirable, ajoutons-nous, qu'aucune femme n'y demeure étrangère, quel que soit le mode d'existence par elle adopté, et à quelque profession qu'elle s'adonne. Pour tous les bons esprits, il est entendu que cette fonction n'est à aucun degré vulgaire, médiocre, dégradante. Elle requiert l'emploi des plus heureuses facultés intellectuelles et s'accommode de la plus haute conception du devoir social. Elle n'atteint point la femme en son « éminente dignité. »<sup>243</sup>

Debor demands the foundation of a new liberal and practical educational system for girls "qui permette à la femme des incursions dans tous les domaines, mais l'attire au foyer." Like Zola, Debor sought to reform motherhood through its secular beautification,

<sup>240</sup> "Le Féminisme en dentelles," *La Fronde*, 19 juillet 1899.

<sup>241</sup> Annie Dizier-Metz, *La Bibliothèque Marguerite Durand: Histoire d'une femme, mémoire des femmes*, (Paris: Bibliothèque Marguerite Durand, 1992), 20; Quoted in Mary Louise Roberts' "Acting Up: The Feminist Theatrics of Marguerite Durand," *The New Biography: Performing Femininity in Nineteenth-Century France*, Ed. Jo Burr Margadant (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 173.

<sup>242</sup> Even Nelly Roussel, whose radical brand of feminism Tinayre and other moderate feminists shunned, used her feminine charm to achieve political ends. A comment Roussel proudly made in a letter to her husband about the effectiveness of the "little black dress" she wore giving a speech, and her careful selection of photo portraits with her daughter as covers to her books reveals conscious efforts at feminine marketing. Accampo, "Private Life, Public Image," 225.

<sup>243</sup> Louise Debor, "Féministes et « féminines, »" *La Fronde*, 8 février 1899.

exalting women's contributions to the State or Nature rather than to God. Even neo-Malthusian feminist Nelly Roussel used sacred language to describe and promote her cause, referring to her work as a mission, the work of an apostle.<sup>244</sup> She directly contributed to the making of such a system by devoting a great deal of ink to the campaign for Adolph Pinard's puériculture, training for new parents in prenatal and postnatal care that exists to this day in France.

Protestant schoolteacher and renowned novelist Marcelle Tinayre, also applauded puériculture on the front page of *La Fronde*, October 15, 1899. As Chapter 2 discussed in depth, puériculture was the elaborate new science of prenatal and postnatal care. Pinard's science was a progressive social reform campaign because it addressed the rights and responsibilities advocated family planning and sexual education for boys and girls. In many regards, Tinayre embodied the seemingly paradoxical feminine feminism that was so highly valued in fin-de-siècle French society. Indeed, one female journalist praised her hybrid identity, saying that although "[Tinayre] revendique hautement le titre de féministe, elle sait rester adorablement femme et mère et rendre aimable ce féminisme."<sup>245</sup> Her article "L'Education pour la maternité" praises fellow *frondeuse* Louise Debor's puériculture courses for girls that introduce baby dolls as early childhood developmental toys. Women who do not aspire to motherhood should not be ostracized for their decision, Tinayre nonchalantly writes, "ces femmes demeureront des êtres d'exception qu'on ne peut ni envier, ni blâmer." She maintains that most civilized women do desire children and that this choice is an intelligent, not instinctive one: "Les sauvagesses obéissent à l'instinct: les civilisées obéissent au sentiment." Her distinction between savagery and civilization here evokes a multitude of differential definitions of identity in republican discourse, most obviously, Rousseau's beliefs on education and refinement in *Emile* and *Julie ou La Nouvelle Héloïse* as well as the feminine genre of eighteenth-century sentimental novels without, however, advocating Rousseau's differentialist educational ideals.

Tinayre's article, "L'Education pour la maternité," made the front page of Durand's paper just after *Fécondité* was published in October of 1899. She supported Debor's defense of maternity and puériculture, proclaiming maternity a "belle vocation" to be promoted and protected:

La grande masse féminine ne proclamera pas de sitôt cette « grève des ventres » dont parlait je ne sais quelle féministe un peu... fantaisiste. Il faudrait donc aider au développement de cette belle vocation maternelle qui dort parfois, ignorée, dans nos cœurs adolescents.<sup>246</sup>

Whereas Debor strives to make feminism more attractive, Tinayre reiterates here feminism's pejorative connotation distinguishing her pragmatics from the radical discourse of feminists like Nelly Roussel whose call for a *grève des ventres* she repudiated on the grounds of being "fantaisiste." This is just one example of the enormous tension between the moderate feminist majority and radical outliers. Puériculture, Tinayre asserts, is socially valuable as a kind of vocational training that will teach girls the sentimental value of women's domestic roles. In other words, it is not only

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<sup>244</sup> Accampo, "Private Life, Public Image," 237-239.

<sup>245</sup> Article from *Gil Blas* cited by Rachel Mesch in *The Hysterical's Revenge: French Women Writers at the Fin de Siècle* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2006), 96. For more on Tinayre's fiction and gender, see pages 84-99 in the same work.

<sup>246</sup> Louise Debor, *La Fronde*, 10 octobre 1899.

important to improve public, social roles for women, but also to secure love, affection and unity as well. Although she does acknowledge a woman's rare decision to refuse maternity, she sees motherhood as the common rather than the exceptional desire. Moreover, for Tinayre maternity is a sign of social and intellectual distinction, even of civilization. Though these remarks may be easily disregarded as further evidence of bourgeois ownership of feminism, Rachel Mesch has convincingly shown that Tinayre, like other *frondeuses*, strategically played with this haughty, conservative feminine rhetoric as a means of professional self-promotion, proving her worth as a woman and as an intellectual.<sup>247</sup>

Many other articles promoting maternity as an especially feminine privilege and vocation appeared in *La Fronde* in 1899, for example, "Pouponnières-écoles" and "L'entraînement maternel." These very titles hint at the growing linkage between girls' secular education (instruction and upbringing) and a new valorization of domestic roles for national welfare at the turn of the nineteenth century. Andrée Téry (pseud. Andrée Viollis) was another novelist and outspoken women's activist who adopted a more radical rhetoric in articles like "La liberté de la mère" (May 12, 1901) and "La Guerre des sexes" (March 6, 1902). The latter article refocused the discussion of women's miserable conditions, transforming it from a literary trope to a serious economic problem<sup>248</sup>:

Il ne s'agit plus des menus incidents ou accidents de flirt ou de l'adultère classique, des méprises ou des surprises sentimentales, des mille petits jeux de l'amour et du hasard qui, soit qu'elles les rêvent ou qu'elles les vivent, divertissent les loisirs des Dames romanesques. Non, ce n'est plus l'amour, c'est la faim qui met les sexes aux prises.

Téry rails against Michelet's famous condemnation of the working woman as an indication of French social decline. She argues instead that women who work are the greatest victims of the existing industrial system of production. Her article harangues those who wrongly denounce women's work as the "péril féminin," meaning a sign of socio-economic crisis, rather than the increasingly exploited workforce that it truly is. Women's work, she argues, should not be eradicated but rather revalorized; only radical reform will improve working conditions for women and men, though women's economic inferiority requires special protection.

While Téry repudiated feminine allure as a means of masculine social and sexual domination, she nonetheless valued domestic roles, and in particular, women's choice to become mothers within a diffuse familial context<sup>249</sup>:

Et l'amour maternel? direz-vous. Pour être moins exclusif, moins morbide, plus réfléchi, il n'en sera que plus fort. La mère et l'enfant, n'étant plus rivés l'un à l'autre, s'aimeront mieux aux heures libres où la famille se réunira sous la lampe [...] Plus de sacrifice pour

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<sup>247</sup> Rachel Mesch, "No Such Thing as Bad *Publicité*? Women Writers, Celebrity Culture, and the Case of Marcelle Tinayre," paper given at the 32nd Annual Nineteenth-Century French Studies Conference, Bloomington, Indiana, October 21, 2006.

<sup>248</sup> In addition to male-authored fiction that dealt with women as victims of seduction, infidelity and forced conjugal sex, contemporary female-authored novels reworked this theme for their own political purposes. For example, Louise-Marie Compain's *La Vie tragique de Genviève* (1912) and Lucie Delarue Mardrus' *Marie, fille-mère* (1906) For more on fin-de-siècle women's novels see Jennifer Waelti-Walters' *Feminist Novelists of the Belle Epoque: Love as a Lifestyle* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990) and Alison Finch's *Women's Writing in Nineteenth-Century France* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

<sup>249</sup> Jean Rabaut, *Marguerite Durand (1864-1936: « La Fronde » féministe ou « Le Temps » en jupons* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1996), 61.

la mère, plus de tyrannie pour l'enfant: la maternité ne sera plus une chaîne, mais ce qu'elle doit être, un lien d'amour.<sup>250</sup>

Téry's reasoning is overtly radical by its violent references to sacrifice, tyranny and shackles. She takes issue with the depersonalization of the bond between mother and child caused by putting women's bodies at the service of the state for the good of France's economic status. By her invocation of the happy family hearth, Téry proves that, like Nelly Roussel, her militant journalism was not immune to the traditional feminine rhetoric of sentimentality.

### Zola's New Woman Prototype

Recent feminist critics have attacked attempts to reconsider progressive representation of women in Zola's fiction. In her classic article "Depopulation, Nationalism, and Feminism in Fin-de-Siècle France," Karen Offen expressed dismay at the nationalist antifeminist views present in Zola's *Fécondité*. Because it advocates procreation in the name of the French republic, Offen identifies Zola and his novel as a republican anomaly among antifeminist, nationalistic literature by writers like Maurice Barrès or Charles Mauras. Grouping Zola and Marcel Prévost together, she speculates that they were thought to be progressive "only because they wrote extensively about women," meaning that their interest was essentially gynophilic rather than pro-feminist. On these grounds, she rejects the possibility that Zola actually was profeminist despite the fact that his contemporary women's activists subscribed to the same feminine and domestic ideals glorified by *Fécondité*.<sup>251</sup> Offen's reading puts Zola's views on women even below lesser misogynists such as the male "solidarists," whom she defines as a radical anticlerical republican who supported reform that would specifically aid women, albeit in the name of the family and nation.<sup>252</sup> This critique of women in Zola's fiction is one of many studies that dismiss his work as gynophilic and antifeminist at best, misogynistic at worst.

Recent scholars have made sweeping claims about Zola's gender paradigm, based on the condemnation of women's sexuality and glorification of docile, domestic women in the *Rougon-Macquart* novels without giving much consideration, if any, to shifts in gender representation in his *Trois Villes* and *Quatre Evangiles* novels.<sup>253</sup> Like Offen,

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<sup>250</sup> Andrée Téry, "La liberté de la mère," *La Fronde*, 12 mai 1901.

<sup>251</sup> Karen Offen, "Depopulation, Nationalism, and Feminism in Fin-de-Siècle France," *American Historical Journal* 89, (June 1984): 648-676. This is a curious distinction since one of Offen's major claims is that French fin-de-siècle feminism is correcting the present-day misconception that maternalism precluded feminist reform: "From an individualistic perspective, arguments for women's rights based on their essential social role as mothers are likely to be interpreted as counterrevolutionary. But within the historical framework of the patriarchal nation-state, when women's much-touted moral influence was scant compensation for their lack of economic and political power, such arguments may have provided the sole and most effective means of advancing their cause," 676.

<sup>252</sup> Offen, 665.

<sup>253</sup> In addition to Offen and Noiray's antifeminist appraisals, see Susan Hennessy "Zola's Male Creation: Reproduction in *Les Rougon-Macquart*," and "Bearing the Cross of Sterility: Childless Women of *Les Rougon-Macquart*," *Journal for the Association of Research on Mothering*, Vol 4, No. 2 (2002), 171-179; Michelle Perrot, "Zola antiféministe?," *Un siècle d'antiféminisme*, Ed Christine Bard (Paris: Fayard, 1999); Carol A. Mossman, *Politics and Narratives of Birth: Gynocolonization from Rousseau to Zola*; Catherine Toubin-Malinas, *Heurs et malheurs de la femme au XIXe siècle: Fécondité d'Emile Zola* (Paris: Méridiens-Klincksieck, 1986); Naomi Schor. *Breaking the Chain: Women, Theory, and French Realist Fiction* (New

Jacques Noiray identifies tensions and contradictions in the feminist appearance or Zola's progressive intentions for female characters in *Paris* and *Fécondité*, yet, he does not actually explore the significance of these issues. In his notes for the 2002 re-edition of *Paris*, the prequel to the *Quatre Evangiles*, Noiray warns against reading too deeply into the novel's feminist undertones. Noiray admits that although the novel's atheistic modern heroine, Marie Froment, may appear to be a burgeoning feminist, he argues that Zola's notes resist any such interpretation: "La position de Zola, féministe en apparence, est en réalité, très réservée, ainsi que l'indique ici la restriction fondamentale 'autant que la nature y consent.'" <sup>254</sup> This quotation is reinforced by another footnote referring to Zola's official opinion on feminism in Montfort's 1897 survey. Although Noiray is justified in his concerns about the legitimacy of transhistorical readings, his own reading is also problematic because its contextualization is restricted to authorial intention, which overlooks the actual feminist discourse of Zola's time and the reception of his later novels. According to Noiray's reading, Zola's belief in biological determinism limits Marie's freedom as a woman to her maternal function alone, making most feminist interpretations impossible after Joan Rivière and Simone de Beauvoir's convincing arguments that femininity and womanhood are social constructs. Because Noiray does not clarify what he means by the term feminist, it can only be assumed that his logic operates from a Beauvoirian perspective.

The majority of *Fécondité's* critics have read it as confirmation of this reductive female characterization in Zola's corpus on the whole. Despite his dismissal of feminist interpretation, Noiray's reading raises important questions about *Paris's* heroine and feminist discourse. First, are maternity and feminism incompatible? If so, what about this maternal figure passes as feminist? Finally, is moderate feminism inauthentic feminism? Noiray's caution reveals some clearly transhistorical or ahistorical assumptions about feminism, while simultaneously signaling the ongoing tension between femininity, maternity, modernity and feminism in twentieth-century French culture. Careful textual examination of *Paris* shows that Marie Froment, like her daughter-in-law Marianne Froment (of *Fécondité*), is more modern than she at first seems. These apparent contradictions in Zola's modern heroine Marie actually demonstrate how fin-de-siècle fiction negotiated the problem of feminist discourses and femininity.

Zola's 1898 novel *Paris*, reveals the germination of a new kind of heroine in his fiction, the secular humanist, Marie Froment, the mother of the heroes of the *Evangiles* novels that followed. *Paris* tells the story of how the disillusioned Catholic priest, Pierre Froment, discovers a new sense of purpose when he falls in love with and marries Marie Couturier, a secularly educated young woman. The novel culminates in the birth of their first son, described in messianic terms as the dawn of a new humanistic era in France, in which family, work, and knowledge will reign supreme. Marie Froment represents a turning point in Zola's female characterization: she is the first feminist figure in the evolution of independent female characters culminating in his last published novel, *Vérité*. Marie's place in Zola's œuvre as the mother of the heroic Froment family—Mathieu, Luc, Marc and Jean—cannot be underestimated. Unlike the female figures whose roles were to allegorize decadent sexuality and social degeneration like Nana,

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York: Columbia University Press, 1985); and Chantal Bertrand-Jennings. *L'éros et la femme chez Zola: de la chute au paradis retrouvé* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1977).

<sup>254</sup> Emile Zola, *Paris* (Paris: Gallimard, 2002), n. 1, 401.

Adelaïde Fouque, or Thérèse Raquin, Marie Froment brings new genetic material to the *Quatre Evangiles*' future reformers; she is the godmother of modern republican women in Zola's ideal France of the future.

Although, judging from his preparatory notes, Zola intended to distance Marie's modern beliefs from "feminist" ideology, her unique intellectual and physical vitality represent both republican and feminist values. Physical education is paramount to Marie's fitness as a female member of Zola's new family. An ideal republican mother must be healthy and ensure the health of her family through careful prenatal care and the physical education of her children. Marie's zeal for bicycling represents a positive step towards the improvement not only of women's health, but also the cultivation of women's physical pleasure and independent spirit. When explaining her "pet theory" (*mes idées*) on bicycling to her future husband Pierre, the young Marie touts its particular benefits for girls:

Voyez ces grandes filles que les mères élèvent dans leurs jupons. On leur fait peur de tout, on leur défend toute initiative, on n'exerce ni leur jugement ni leur volonté, de sorte qu'elles ne savent pas même traverser une rue, paralysées par l'idée des obstacles... Mettez-en une toute jeune sur une bicyclette, et lâchez-la-moi sur les routes: il faudra bien qu'elle ouvre les yeux, pour voir et éviter le caillou, pour tourner à propos, et dans le bon sens, quand un coude se présentera. Une voiture arrive au galop, un danger quelconque se déclare, et tout de suite il faut qu'elle se décide, qu'elle donne son coup de guidon d'une main ferme et sage, si elle ne veut pas y laisser un membre... En somme, n'y a-t-il pas là un continuel apprentissage de la volonté, une admirable leçon de conduite et de défense ?<sup>255</sup>

For Marie, bicycling is clearly a means of developing agency and autonomy in girls. By drawing them out of physical passivity, it enables them to confront fear and danger, and thereby become stronger, braver, and more independent creatures.

When Pierre jokingly interprets this idea as "l'émancipation de la femme par bicyclette," Marie insists with conviction that this sport has already made important strides for women's social integration because bike rides "mêlent et égalisent les sexes."<sup>256</sup> Marie's enthusiasm has very practical benefits that extend beyond more mixed socialization and physical hygiene. Jacques Noiray and Sian Reynolds have suggested that the image of a girl or woman bicycling is a sign of intellectual and psychological emancipation. Noiray writes, "La valeur de la bicyclette est d'abord intellectuelle et morale, avant d'être hygiénique et sportive."<sup>257</sup> Reynolds argues that Albertine's bicycle is a clear symbol of women's liberation, heralding the arrival of different, 'new women' in France, whether or not Proust was aware of it. Thanks to the invention of bicycles and sewing machines as well as new educational and professional opportunities, the Third Republic produced a new generation of women who were no longer passively decorative. As Reynolds explains, by becoming more physically active and mobile, women were participating in the growing "second-wave feminism in France."<sup>258</sup> Marie illustrates women's desire for greater physical and intellectual freedom. By referring to her political convictions as "*mes idées*," Marie represents the demands of fin-de-siècle women's activists, while at the same time, like many of these activists, refusing to identify herself

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<sup>255</sup> *Paris*, 450.

<sup>256</sup> *Paris*, 450.

<sup>257</sup> *Paris*, n. 1, 450; Sian Reynolds, "Albertine's Bicycle, or: Women and French Identity during the *Belle Epoque*," *Literature and History*, Vol. 10 Issue 1 (Spring 2001): 28-41.

<sup>258</sup> Reynolds, 37.

as a feminist. In this sense, we are led to consider Marie a feminist sympathizer, but not one of those unfeminine, socially threatening feminists of the past that Zola implicitly reproached in his notes for *Paris*.

For Zola, intellectual regeneration complemented the biological rehabilitation of the French nation. Education in his utopian Republic is the central unifying institution, as we shall see in Chapter 4. Because Marie is strong in body and mind, she engenders these values in her children, the leaders of the strong French Republic of the future. She epitomizes physical health through her athleticism and intellectual health through her sound reason and her explicit promotion of girls' education. Like physical hygiene, girls' education in the late nineteenth century was an overlapping issue in republican and feminist discourse. The victory of the 1880 Camille Sée law, which established a national system of compulsory junior high and high schools for girls, was the first of many educational reform measures during the Third Republic. Sée, like many other educational reformers, viewed girls' education as vital to the massive reform of education that sought to unify the French through a new secular, compulsory and free national school system. While proponents of secular education like Jules Ferry and Michelet hoped that coeducation would mainly serve to unite husbands in wives in common republican beliefs, it was promoted for broader national concerns toward the turn of the century. The director of secondary education in 1880, Pierre Foncin, articulated this republican, patriotic interest in girls' education:

...the absence of secondary education for women maintains intellectual anarchy in the nation. Most women remain unfamiliar with the ideas and the sentiments of modern and Republican France...It's the French female teacher, the French mother, who will form future robust generations of citizens and soldiers.<sup>259</sup>

These laws, James McMillan points out, were not inspired by feminist campaigns but instead were a part of secularizing girls' education which was still considered to be more appropriately accomplished by the Church's moral instruction. As Chapter 4 will discuss more in depth, secular education sought to create a kind of domesticity legitimated by science rather than religion.<sup>260</sup> The question of whether or not to include moral instruction in public schools angered radical feminists like Hubertine Auclert and continued to plague the movement for educational reforms up until World War I. Militant feminists before Auclert's time such as Pauline Roland, Elisa Lemonnier, Marie Pape-Carpantier, André Léo and Paule Minck were staunch supporters of *laïcité* who believed, in the words of Minck, that "l'Eglise n'a fait qu'avilir la femme."<sup>261</sup> Although Auclert insisted that women's suffrage took priority over education, she applauded the creation of professional teaching colleges for women as important step towards emancipation. For the majority of feminist reformers in the Third Republic, emphasizing the utility of girls' education to the state as a means of improving childbirth, motherhood and the population did not alienate feminist support for educational reform. On the contrary, as Denise Karnaouch and Rebecca Rogers argue, feminists relied on the support of male reformers in health care, social services and education, to advance their own agendas despite what

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<sup>259</sup> *L'histoire de la scolarisation des filles*, 1991 quoted by Rebecca Rogers in *From the Salon to the Schoolroom: Educating Bourgeois Girls in Nineteenth-Century France* (University Park: Penn State University Press, 2005).

<sup>260</sup> James McMillan, *France and Women*, 146.

<sup>261</sup> Denise Karnaouch "Féminisme et laïcité 1848-1914" Extrait du bulletin Archives du féminisme n°9 – (décembre 2005).

some feminist critics both then and now reject as nationalistic patriarchal justifications for these reforms. Regardless of whether or not girls' education was inspired by the desire to improve rather than challenge women's traditional domestic roles, by becoming a public issue, educational reform directly increased women's vocational opportunity, at the very least, as professional public educators.

Public educational reform for girls was not, however, uniformly embraced. It raised new questions about the utility as well as the risks of girls' secular instruction. Many girls' education advocates insisted that limitations be placed on the range of subjects to be studied as well as the length of education. While Froncin endorsed teaching as a perfectly acceptable occupation for women because of its nurturing, maternal nature, others feared that too much instruction might interfere with women's domestic duties. Many republican men feared that opening new professional paths to women might lead them to leave the home permanently. Zola adeptly reconciles such a danger for *Paris'* heroine by harnessing her intellectual ability into her role as a caretaker for her younger brothers, and for her future children. Whereas for Marie's classmates, high school inspired professional ambition, for her, it merely occasioned fond memories of her wild younger years:

[Marie] s'y plaisait, évoquait [ses jours au lycée] avec une flamme, où se retrouvaient son ardeur à l'étude, sa turbulence aux récréations, des parties folles avec ses compagnes, les cheveux au vent. Sur les cinq lycées de filles ouverts à Paris, c'était le seul qui fût très fréquenté ; et encore n'y avait-il guère là, affrontant les préjugés et les préventions, que des filles de fonctionnaires, surtout des filles de professeurs, se destinant elles-mêmes au professorat. Celles-ci, en quittant le lycée, devaient ensuite aller conquérir leur diplôme définitif à l'Ecole normale de Sèvres. Elle, malgré des études très brillantes, ne s'était senti aucun goût pour ce métier d'institutrice.<sup>262</sup>

Because she lacks the desire for cultivating her youthful passions into a profession, Marie is far from the independent "femme future" that she vaunts. Though Zola's gender politics would later become a celebration of women schoolteachers in *Vérité* (1903), at the time of *Paris*, his new woman Marie is an intelligent but simple woman, truer to her domestic calling than to a professional one: "Et le miracle, avec toute cette science entassée un peu au hasard, était qu'elle fût restée très femme, très tendre, sans rien de dur ni de viril. Elle n'était que libre, loyale et charmante."<sup>263</sup> Clearly, for Zola's narrator, an educated, curious and capable young woman like Marie, who does not develop her intellectual faculties into a profession is nothing short of a miracle. Yet, why should *Paris'* heroic "femme future" fall short of feminist ideals when she shares so many of the New Woman's independent characteristics? Noiray is right to stress the tension between women's reform and feminist stereotypes in Fin-de-Siècle France. If women's professional and political activities did indeed compromise their sexual desirability, Zola's modern Marie must remain feminist in theory and a mother and wife in practice.

Another moment in *Paris* that might now be dismissed as pseudo-feminist in fact, further illuminates Marie's clever strategies for reconciling her feminist sympathy with her domestic identity. When Marie's younger brother François makes fun of needlework, referring to it as one of the "lovely little things" she learned at the lycée Fénelon, she accuses him of being against women's education. She ridicules her young siblings for their socially retrograde attitudes, launching into a defense of women's education:

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<sup>262</sup> *Paris*, 401.

<sup>263</sup> *Paris*, 413.

D'abord, l'instruction est absolument laïque, ce qui inquiète les familles qui croient, pour les filles, à la nécessité de l'instruction religieuse, comme défense morale. Ensuite, l'instruction s'y démocratise, les élèves y viennent de tous les mondes, la demoiselle de la dame du premier et celle de la concierge s'y rencontrent, y fraternisent, grâce aux bourses qu'on distribue très largement. Enfin, on s'y affranchit du foyer, une place de plus en plus grande y est laissée à l'initiative, et tous ces programmes très chargés, toute cette science qu'on exige aux examens est certainement une émancipation de la jeune fille, une marche à la femme future, à la société future, que vous appelez cependant, de tous vos vœux, n'est-ce pas? les enfants.<sup>264</sup>

Marie justifies girls' education as an integral part of the republican social project of radically secularizing France. The liberation of minds granted by the democratization of knowledge in the new public school system, as Chapter 4 will discuss in greater depth, will be capable of leveling class distinction. Furthermore, if girls are to become proper citizens of the new Republic, suitable wives to new republican men, they must learn the same values as their husbands in order to better raise future republican generations. Despite Zola's reticence to give the republican heroine of *Paris* a career, he acknowledges the new paths that the secular French school system opened to women.

Marie vaunts the secular school's role as a powerful force of social justice and equality, a place for girls to *fraterniser*. Upon closer inspection, her uses of this masculine expression, for which there is no feminine equivalent, signals the irony of her homage, given the more explicitly feminist tone that concludes her speech.<sup>265</sup> It is important to remember that since she is addressing young boys, it is less likely that she is being ironic. On the contrary, she seems to genuinely praise the benefits of education to women who will be modernized and emancipated at least from the foyer, and perhaps in other ways left to the reader's imagination. Women's emancipation, she suggests, will be key to the betterment of French society. Immediately after pronouncing these words, however, Marie abandons her feminist tenor, claiming that her passionate rhetoric is just a joke:

Je plaisante... Vous savez que je suis une simple, moi, et que je n'en demande pas tant que vous. Ah! les revendications, les droits de la femme! C'est bien clair, elle les a tous, elle est l'égal de l'homme autant que la nature y consent. Et l'unique affaire, la difficulté éternelle est de s'entendre et de s'aimer... ça ne m'empêche pas d'être très contente de savoir ce que je sais, oh! sans pédanterie aucune, seulement parce que je m'imagine que cela m'a fait bien portante, d'aplomb dans la vie, au moral comme au physique.<sup>266</sup>

Marie quickly recants her feminist praise by abruptly changing her authoritative tone to one of self-mockery. This sudden tonal shift undermines any straightforward identification of her feminist bent, while at the same time highlighting the social transgression of her quasi-feminist diatribe. Marie's curious apology exemplifies Joan Rivière's notion of the feminine masquerade as a psychological strategy for women who harbor masculine ambition. Women who display masculine interests or abilities, Rivière contends, compulsively seek reassurance of their womanliness as a way to avoid guilt or anxiety caused by their transgressive, masculine behavior.<sup>267</sup> Marie's demand for women's emancipation is therefore defused by her coquettish performance, and thus

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<sup>264</sup> *Paris*, 400.

<sup>265</sup> It was not uncommon for feminists to refer to women's associations and campaigns as "fraternal." One of the major fin-de-siècle feminist associations was called l'Union fraternelle des femmes.

<sup>266</sup> *Paris*, 401, ellipses are original.

<sup>267</sup> "Womanliness as Masquerade," *The International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, vol. 10 (1929): 303-313.

reiterates Zola's essentialist attitude about feminism: "La femme est l'égale de l'homme autant que la nature y consent."<sup>268</sup>

Marie's feminist outburst is nevertheless, powerfully printed on the page in defiant opposition to both her embarrassment and Zola's express intentions for avoiding feminist characterization. The text further demonstrates Marie's awareness of transgression and the words, "je n'en demande pas autant que vous" may even reveal her frustration with the double bind of being progressive in spirit and conventional in lifestyle, a predicament she shares with other "new women" of the Belle Epoque. She is aware of her inequality, and aware that to ask for more than a lovely family life, that is to say, as much as men ask, would be a transgression. Marie also pinpoints an important tension in this position, namely, the conflict between nurturing the mind and body. Too much physical or intellectual stimulation was believed to be particularly dangerous to women whose natural physical and mental frailty were time and again "proven." As we saw in Chapter 2, fin-de-siècle science and medicine strongly urged men and women not to neglect the health of their bodies out of concern for national welfare. For all of Marie's efforts to distract us from her unwomanly political sentiments, the textual depiction of her ambiguously modern character signals a growing problem for socially progressive Frenchwomen: how to be feminist, and at the same time, feminine.

Although in Zola's notes he wished to safeguard *Paris'* heroine from his early notion of feminists, making her "très femme, très tendre, pas une virago surtout, n'est ni bas-bleu ni pour les droits de femme." In other words, although her character is feminine, her values are, without question, feminist.<sup>269</sup> For Noiray, and perhaps for Zola too, Marie cannot be "feminist" in spite of the intellectual and social privileges she enjoys because she is not a political activist. Nevertheless, Marie Froment is a successful product of republican and feminist reform while at the same time, a truly feminine symbol of Zola's bourgeois republican values. She is something inconceivable for most men in Zola's day: a feminine feminist. Marie's liberal behavior—her candor, political zeal, and athleticism—make her an unmistakable, albeit conservative version of the energetic "New Woman" that was emerging everywhere in fin-de-siècle culture. Instead of presenting Marie as a model 'new woman,' Zola makes her a spokesperson for his belief in the role of education as a unifying social motor in his ideal French republic.

Zola's experimentation with modern feminine aesthetics and feminist discourse in the figure of Marie Froment, yielded, possibly quite unconscious connection between feminist activism and national reform. At the time that he planned out his novel *Paris*, Zola had probably not intended to make more of Marie Froment than a fashionable figure of modernity with little regard for women's political discourse. Marie's education is an important rejection of girls' parochial education. *Laïcité* was not recognized as an emancipatory path by all women activists. Catholic groups cherished the Old Regime image of religious life as a refuge for girls and women who rejected marriage and domesticity, and one which in many cases, allowed them the agency and autonomy that secular society denied them as women. Lay female schoolteachers before the Third Republic who included Catholic education in their curriculum such as moral instruction, confession and attendance to Mass most likely did so out of social and financial

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<sup>268</sup> *Paris*, 401.

<sup>269</sup> *Paris*, n. 1, 401.

obligations rather than by choice.<sup>270</sup> Fin-de-siècle secular feminists criticized the so-called freedom of *religieuses*, asserting that the Church was yet another patriarchal society designed to maintain women's submission. Anticlerical feminists believed that priests only partially emancipated religious women to be able to perform inferior services like religious teaching and charity work, while denying them access to higher-ranking occupations.<sup>271</sup> Zola's attitudes towards women schoolteachers eventually evolved to reflect the increasingly publicized solidarity in the 1890s between republican educators and feminist activists in *Vérité*, published only a few years after *Paris*.

### Domestic Rhetoric and Maternal Reform

Zola's sporty and outspoken Marie invokes New Woman clichés while maintaining a traditionally feminine, domestic identity. The author takes great pains to avoid pigeonholing her as a New Woman precisely by emphasizing her traditional femininity. Instead of identifying Marie as a capricious young woman who flirts with feminist thought, *Paris*' narrator focuses on her dynamic nature, alternately active and enlightened, and womanly and demure. The scene in which Marie becomes frightened by a spider makes her virile intelligence and courage virtually disappear. The narrator's description of Marie's scream reveals her shifting avatars explaining, "toute la femme venait de reparaître en elle."<sup>272</sup> Another episode in which Marie and the former priest Pierre go on a bike ride is a pivotal moment in the novel in which Pierre experiences the first blush of love for Marie. This so-called "matinée de fiançailles" revealed to Pierre the power of love to return to him to manhood after leaving the priesthood. Her general lack of self-mastery and reliance on Pierre exposes her incompleteness; she is described as only partially emancipated (by education) and partially independent (by choice). Marie's ambivalence towards women's emancipation is underscored by *Paris*' narrator who depicts her political and physical modernity like a garment to put on or take off at her convenience. Both characteristics enable her to retain the traditional feminine attractiveness so crucial to Zola's foundation of the new republican family. Because of her uniquely modern femininity Marie is able to transform a lost priest into Zola's ideal republican citizen: "elle refaisait de lui l'homme, le travailleur, l'amant et le père."<sup>273</sup> Indeed, only a real woman, however modern in spirit and upbringing, would effectively produce a family of secular evangelists.

By contrast to the representations of new women and feminists that I have examined in literature and the press, *Paris*'s heroine Marie is neither conservative nor radical. However, in *Les Quatre Evangiles* which followed *Paris*, Zola's new republican women increasingly demonstrate greater social, intellectual and financial independence

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<sup>270</sup> By examining the case of Emily Loveday, Caroline Ford discusses the phenomenon of Frenchwomen seeking refuge in religious life and its unique ability to subvert the legal oppression of women during the *Ancien Régime*. The feminist movement for *laïcité* from the 1880s onward would have supported Loveday and her teacher Ernestine Reboul's independence and agency as citizens of the Republic not as children of God. Reboul was a lay schoolteacher who most likely was forced to provide religious instruction to secure her livelihood. The question of agency is one of the most divisive in Third Republican feminist discourse. *Divided Houses: Religion and Gender in Modern France* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005).

<sup>271</sup> Karnaouch, "Féminisme et laïcité 1848-1914."

<sup>272</sup> *Paris*, 453.

<sup>273</sup> *Paris*, 453.

all the while remaining conventionally feminine. *Fécondité*'s prophesy of a balanced republican family, its revision of paternal investment notwithstanding, presents the least progressive roles for women of the *Evangile* novels, and yet this novel received a good deal of feminist acclaim. Zola's first gospel prescribes maternity for all women regardless of marital status and even surrogate maternity in service of women incapable of procreation. As Karen Offen maintains, "[Zola's] vision of women in the new social order was summed up by *La Fronde*'s reviewer: 'les hanches larges et un grand cœur.'" <sup>274</sup> This quote insinuates that Zola's writing participated in anti-feminist discourse that denied women reproductive rights in the name of national repopulation. By citing May Armand-Blanc's review from *La Fronde*, Offen implies that feminist response to *Fécondité* has always been one of disapproval, which bolsters more recent feminist critiques of Zola's fiction and this novel in particular. The problem with such a reading is not only that it confirms a priori assumptions about Zola's writing; it also overlooks a significant turn in Zola's attitude about feminism as well as the feminine strategies of fin-de-siècle feminists.

Blanc's words are actually taken out of context and the tone of her response to Zola's novel is misinterpreted. The fact that Blanc published sentimental novels like *Bibelot* (1899), *Mila* (1900) and *La Maison des roses* (1901) undermines Offen's ironic reading as a critique of Zola's misogynist characters by a contemporary feminist. Through its sincere tone, Blanc's article celebrated rather than attacked Zola's female figures. Alluding to *Fécondité*, Blanc marvels at Zola's organic representation of women:

Sans qu'il soit question de « féminisme » ici n'est pas en deux mots que peut se résumer l'idéal féminin (corps et âme) du maître écrivain Emile Zola? Il veut à la femme « les » [sic] *hanches larges* et un *grand cœur* — c'est-à-dire toute la santé et la joie du monde. N'est-ce pas là un rêve magnifique? Et de l'avoir sans relâche présenté et représenté à la foule sous de simples, si fortes et si douces figures, n'est-ce pas là la plus belle action (en une si grande œuvre) d'un tel rêve... <sup>275</sup>

Once again, feminist commentary seems to complicate the femininity of Zola's heroines, this time, however from the point of view of a contemporary woman journalist and novelist. Blanc clarifies her admiration in a comparative definition, writing that Zola's feminine ideal "n'est pas la grande flamme violente et intermittente qui illumine — mais peut incendier et détruire; — c'est la lumière égale, uniforme et sûre de l'amie muette." It is a more revolutionary figure that Blanc understands to be a "feminist" ideal of women, whereas Zola's women are as equal and constant, albeit silent companions to men. Blanc furthermore commends Zola for his ability to present what she considers a positive feminine character: "C'est là une image de femme forte n'ayant aucune des mièvreries et des séductions subtiles qui attachent et retiennent et cependant elle sait, elle aussi, retenir et attacher." As her letters to her employer and friend Marguerite Durand testify, despite the sentimental tone of Armand-Blanc's fiction, she was conscious of the hard-won emancipation she enjoyed in her life as an independent *femme de lettres*. <sup>276</sup>

<sup>274</sup> Offen, "Depopulation, Nationalism, and Feminism in Fin-de-Siècle France," 664.

<sup>275</sup> May Armand-Blanc, "La Femme dans l'œuvre d'Emile Zola," *La Fronde*, 31 octobre 1899.

<sup>276</sup> In one of her letters, Armand-Blanc provides an autobiographical sketch explaining that she was a happy divorcée dedicated to financial and professional self-sufficiency: "...mais le vrai but et le seul désir de ladite May est d'arriver à l'indépendance absolue, et cela par ce seul travail avant d'entrer dans la carrière j'ai séjourné à Biarritz ou Arcachon, en Italie, etc où j'ai donné des leçons de musique," *Lettres de May Armand-Blanc à Marguerite Durand*, Bibliothèque Marguerite Durand.

Blanc was not the only woman writer to approve of Zola's strong yet feminine republican mothers. By appealing to these widespread feminine concerns, again like the *frondeuses*, his writing sought to reform and revalorize domestic roles for women as well as men. Henriette Lefébure's "L'opinion d'Emile Zola sur l'Allaitement Maternel" connected working women's struggle and maternal pedagogy on *La Fronde's* front page on November 19, 1899, only a few weeks after Armand-Blanc's article. This interview with Zola, Lefébure celebrates *Fécondité's* unique idealization of breastfeeding, emphasizing the particular utility of breastfeeding for working women. For Lefébure, Zola's first gospel confirms the role of authors in the ideological evolution: "En France, la question de l'allaitement maternel préoccupe non-seulement [sic] les médecins et les hygiénistes, mais aussi les grands philosophes qui ont souci du développement et du progrès de notre pays." Zola affiliates his work with that of J.-J. Rousseau, prophesizing the author-philosopher-hygienist role as a new literary paradigm. While the naturalist author clearly favors breastfeeding over wet-nursing or bottle-feeding, he explains how his observations on Englishwomen's use of bottle-feeding inspired him to promote it as a happy and attractive alternative for Frenchwomen who are unable or unwilling to breastfeed their own children. Among its benefits, Zola points out that bottle-feeding's foremost value is to make motherhood more attractive to women, and by extension to men:

J'ai cherché pourquoi la population augmentait en Angleterre tout en ayant le même déshonneur moral que la nôtre: abandon de l'allaitement maternel. J'ai trouvé alors que les Anglaises ne craignaient pas d'avoir des enfants pour deux raisons: La première raison: l'allaitement par le biberon les débarrasse de tout ennui et les laisse libres de leurs loisirs.—Seconde raison: les maris anglais peuvent « assurer » la vie du bébé dès qu'il vient au monde, les parents sont, par ce moyen tranquilles sûrs l'avenir de l'enfant.

Viewed through the lens of mainstream fin-de-siècle feminism, it is possible to see how *Fécondité's* practical beautification of the mother also offers direct benefits for fathers to the extent that they can enjoy their wife's lasting beauty and equally participate in an intimate bond with the child that is typically an exclusive maternal privilege. Moreover, Zola's allusion to breastfeeding as an 'ennui' strikes an important political note, reinforcing his desire that mothers and fathers share childcare duties. Though *Fécondité* does not depict bottle-feeding as a maternal ideal, for Zola, it provides women in the real world with yet another means for Frenchwomen to negotiate the privileges of comfort and feminine beauty with the demands and joys of motherhood. Moreover, as Zola is careful to emphasize, bottle-feeding enabled husbands to share some of the joys (and burdens) of childcare.

By contrast to Andrée Téry, who viewed *Fécondité* as figuring a barrier to social progress, Zola exploited its advantages in popular culture and used his *Évangiles* as a vehicle for ideological reform. In Lefébure's words, *Fécondité* was Zola's genius at the service of republican morality in a broad civilizing mission: "nous sommes touchés de voir le génie d'Emile Zola combattre une erreur morale dont souffre l'humanité entière!" Unlike other novelists, Zola imagined strong, progressive yet bourgeois new women in contrast with more sensationalized revolutionary figures in French feminist history, such as Hubertine Auclert or Madeleine Pelletier. Thanks to their awareness of the complex debates on women's reform at the dawn of the twentieth-century, and their careful analysis of Zola's novels, a handful of journalists from *La Fronde* recognized that the slow transformation of domestic angels into educated, intelligent and skilled citizens was

perfectly consistent with steady institutional reform elaborated in *Les Quatre Evangiles*. *Femmes de lettres* like May Armand-Blanc and Manoël de Grandfort and their fellow *frondeuses* genuinely admired Zola's very feminine feminist heroines.

### Working Towards Emancipation in Zola's *Travail*

Modern feminist critics seem to share the derisive view of recent literary studies of Zola's *Evangiles* which claim that his bravery in the Dreyfus affair clouded the judgment of fin-de-siècle fans of these novels. This praise however, cannot simply be explained as an effect of fin-de-siècle readers' romantic idealism, or socially conservative form of feminism. Zola's contemporary admirers of *Fécondité*, *Travail*, and *Vérité* were able to appreciate his social gospels because they read his fiction differently than scholars today, especially from different feminist positions, whether radical or moderate, suffragist, maternalist, or secularist. The degree of praise, disappointment or contempt in critical reviews of these novels also depends upon whether Zola's readers concentrated on either the broad symbolism of the novels' heroes, or on his prophesy of a progressive, yet realistic egalitarian social system, that is to say, whether their focus was on the *Evangiles* as pure literature or as political discourse, or something in-between. The *frondeuses* who sympathized most with Zola's utopian vision of the France of tomorrow were those who understood *Paris* as a turning point in his œuvre.<sup>277</sup>

The majority of *La Fronde*'s journalists saw in Zola's novels, and his *Evangiles* in particular, characters and stories resonant with the struggles that they sought to expose in their own writing. Zola's admirers in Durand's newspaper included women novelists and self-professed feminists such as Harlor (aka Jeanne Perrot), Louis Marlaud, Parrhisia (aka Blanche Cremnitz) and Manoël de Grandfort (pseud. Mme de Fontenay). Maternalist feminists of course applauded *Fécondité*'s poetic vision of motherhood as well as its call for pragmatic health and daycare reforms. Reaction to his second secular gospel were far more divided. *La Fronde*'s survey on Zola's ideal future women, printed shortly after *Travail*'s publication in 1901, demonstrates the diversity of feminist response to Zola's fictional workers' cooperative.

Those who responded negatively to the question, "Les types de femmes présentés par Zola dans *Travail* réalisent-ils l'idéal de la femme future?" attacked the novel's three main female protagonists: Josine, Suzanne, and Sœurette, seeing them as simplistic fools whose only purpose is to further deify Luc Froment, the mastermind behind the new industrial city La Crêcherie. As respondent "M. Bailly" put it, "Elles ne pensent pas par

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<sup>277</sup> See May Armand-Blanc's "La Femme dans l'œuvre d'Emile Zola" *La Fronde* 31 octobre 1899 and Manoël de Grandfort's "Fécondité" *La Fronde*, 11 novembre 1899. In her review, Grandfort recognized the poetic license Zola allowed himself in his new *Evangile* which she wrote faithfully transmitted his "tendances humanitaires" despite his refusal to formally espouse socialist doctrines. Zola's later work certainly would resonate with the new types of feminist discourse that Grandfort saw emerging in the works of other male writers such as Jules Bois and Jean Reibrach: "Voilà désormais l'homme en face d'une femme, intelligente, instruite, dégagée des préjugés vieillis, ayant répudié l'instinct pour le raisonnement, libre par son droit, par son aptitude à se gouverner, à se suffire à elle-même, désireuse de se créer un nom ; affranchie par son labeur des anciennes servitudes, que va-t-il résulter de ce grave changement ? Au lieu de la jolie poupée, une femme – non point une créature au-dessus, ni au dessous de lui – une égale, ayant les mêmes droits, les mêmes devoirs. "Du Féminisme dans la littérature contemporaine," *La Fronde* 9 décembre 1899.

elles-mêmes et sont encore sous la domination intellectuelle de l'homme, n'existant pour lui qui reste le héros qu'on admire, qu'on aime non en égale mais en élève bien humble, en inférieure." Under the pseudonym "Liberta," Hubertine Auclert herself charged that

Les femmes ignorantes et soumises, placides, apathiques, insouciantes et perverses du livre de Zola ne diffèrent en rien de celles que l'oppression et les vices masculins ont communément façonnées ou déformées jusqu'ici [...] La seule figure de femmes qui vaille en cet ouvrage est celle de Mme Mitaine, la boulangère, et ce type est à peine ébauché.

Radical feminist and abortion rights activist Nelly Roussel recognized Zola's attempt at inventing a progressive, liberated woman, she lamented, nevertheless, that "Zola n'est pas véritablement féministe" because his heroines remain subordinate to men, and are not emancipated in their own right. Invoking *Fécondité's* Marianne, Roussel explains that what Zola's female figures lack most in terms of feminism is agency and individuality. However, as we discussed in Chapter 2, Marianne does express a certain degree of sexual agency; in fact, it was she who demanded sexual intimacy and children from Mathieu, not the contrary.

My analysis of "new women" in Zola's *Évangiles* seeks to articulate the various 'feminist' registers missed by his contemporary and more recent readers. Feminist critiques of *Travail* from the time of its publication and recent decades relies on generalizations of Zola's characterization, often ignoring shifts in textual perspective from the narrator to heroic or morally ambiguous characters which represent a range of different social and political views. Similarly, Michelle Perrot and Karen Offen's analyses of antifeminist discourse in Zola's writing seem to stem from a priori assumptions about female characterization within his entire corpus, missing key narrative shifts and characters' particular roles within the novel and within the context of his literary project. Female characters in Zola's *Évangiles* are more morally and politically ambiguous than they seem at first glance.

Comparing contradictions in fin-de-siècle feminist reactions to *Travail* helps us understand tensions within feminist discourse itself rather than dismissing weak literary or political points in Zola's novel. Nelly Roussel described *Travail's* vision of women as reactionary, yet also admitted that Zola "a dessiné d'admirables caractères féminins." His novel presented a vision of women that was not entirely feminist nor antifeminist. *Travail's* female characters were relatively liberated in that they had greater educational and professional opportunity, though they were still depicted as happy wives and mothers as well as students and workers.<sup>278</sup> Roussel and other feminists who took issue with *Travail's* dubious feminism may have been reacting to passages such as "[Luc] avait une épouse adorée, féconde qui lui donnait des enfants de sa chair, et il allait avoir deux amies, deux compagnes aux mains délicates de femme qui l'aideraient dans les œuvres de son esprit."<sup>279</sup>

Contemporary feminist critics perhaps also took issue with the description of Luc's common-law wife Josine as the "femme du héros aimé de tous, mère de beaux enfants qui grandissaient pour le bonheur."<sup>280</sup> This description is intentionally reductive, but not because Zola's narrator exalts Josine's narrow role as a wife and mother. On the contrary, her role as Luc's auxiliary is perceived here through the jealous and myopic

<sup>278</sup> "Les femmes dans « Travail »,” *La Fronde*, 2 juin 1901.

<sup>279</sup> *Travail, Œuvres Complètes*, 8: 464-65.

<sup>280</sup> *Travail, OC*, 8: 492.

eyes of the miserable old woman La Toupe. Moments of narrative slippage like these, from external description to omniscient indirect discourse blur perspective and open the possibility for misinterpretation of a character's beliefs for narrative "truth." The function of narrated monologues in Zola's *Evangiles* is not entirely consistent. As we saw in Chapter 1, narrated monologues in Zola's later novels (to borrow Dorrit Cohn's term), increasingly confuse one character's innermost thoughts and feelings with narrative judgment.<sup>281</sup> However, whereas such an ambiguous voice invites readers to believe that the character and narrator share the same belief in some cases, it also leads to the misunderstanding that the narrator shares every character's beliefs, and is Zola's voicebox (as is the case in many feminist readings). Like some of the more scathing critiques of Zola's writing made modern feminists, Roussel paid little attention to the shifts in political perspective woven by *Travail's* narrative. Her reading only confirms a preconceived notion about the naturalist ideals of women as supplements to men.

Admirers of the novel focused not on the novel's female trio, but instead on women's roles in the larger social picture that dominates *Travail's* last few chapters. They responded quite favorably to the feasible social reforms upon which Zola's new egalitarian city La Crêcherie was founded. Louise Marlaud, another respondent to *La Fronde's* survey on women in *Travail*, expressed her admiration for *Travail's* female characters, and heartily supported fellow *frondeuse* Harlor. The most sympathetic of Zola's contemporary feminist readers are those who, like Armand-Blanc, de Grandfort and Harlor, express a special sensibility to the lyricism that characterizes his *Evangiles*, which must be emphasized as a departure from the raw social critique of his previous writing. Whereas Zola's *Rougon-Macquart* novels represent a meticulous dissection of all that is wrong with French society, his *Evangiles* offer an almost impressionistic utopian vision of what France should become as a truly modern republic.

My study of women's independence in *Travail* offers a new reading by taking into account the secular, maternalist tone of feminist discourse of French Third Republic. By paying close attention to how the novel's female characters operate within the novel I show how the *Evangiles'* self-consciously promote literature as a vehicle for ideological change. *Travail* recounts the young engineer Luc Froment's struggle to restore dignity to various types of work in the crumbling iron-working town. With the help of his friend Jordan, Luc founds a workers' collective on a school called "la Crêcherie," which totally rehabilitates local commerce, agriculture, and industry through new technology and integral education over the course of about 60 years. While most feminist critics of this novel have focused on female figures such as Jordan's sister, Sœurette, Suzanne Boisgelin, the wife of the iron mill's owner, and Luc's common-law wife, Josine from the Crêcherie's administrative council, my analysis considers the feminist appeal of la Crêcherie's educational and professional opportunities for all female members of Zola's utopian collective.

The particular biblical references that Zola selected for *Travail* have a strong feminist tenor. By making his Luc Froment the hero of his second gospel, the gospel on worker's reform Zola refers the reader to the Bible's Gospel According to Luke. *Travail's* three women disciples resonate with women's special function in the biblical Gospel, and reinforce a pro-feminist reading of Zola's novel. Luke's Gospel has recently drawn new feminist attention for its egalitarian social vision, specifically the inclusion of

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<sup>281</sup> See Chapter 1, 27-29.

women in Christian history because of their unique assistance in spreading Jesus' social message.<sup>282</sup> Josine's subjugation is a symbol capitalist oppression rather than an icon of femininity. She evokes Charles Fourier's claim that oppressed women represent the need to continue the struggle for absolute social equality and justice. This concern for women's special oppression was widely celebrated by feminist labor reformers. Feminist disapproval of Luc's female disciples in *Travail* has overlooked both this specific literary intertext, and the complexity of Zola's multifarious narrative.

Zola's most ardent feminist supporter in *La Fronde* was Thilda Harlor, a committed feminist novelist, activist, co-founder of the Bibliothèque de documentation féministe with Marguerite Durand and member of several prominent feminist associations.<sup>283</sup> Harlor's lengthy review of *Travail* appeared on *La Fronde's* front page just a month prior to the survey on the novel's ideal women of the future, titled "Autour du dernier poème d'Emile Zola" (May 2, 1901). In this article, Harlor defends Luc Froment's abstract heroic leadership as a literary device meant to inspire social change, a poetic emblem of justice rather than a sketch of a real leader to be imitated by activist readers.<sup>284</sup> Just as Luc's Crêcherie is inspired by Fourier's ideal industrial city *Harmonie*, Zola's social gospel likewise paints a liberated egalitarian city in broad strokes, whence vision eclipses method. *Travail* is a concerted attack on bourgeois economics, Harlor argues, the destruction of which paves the way for a new egalitarian industrial community imagined and realized by Luc and his female disciples:

Mais, par l'âme même, abstraction faite des vertus d'intelligence, de méthode et de ténacité auxquelles Luc doit sa victoire, la classe dont il est ne produit plus que de rares exemplaires à lui comparer. L'égoïsme économique bourgeois égale en intensité l'égoïsme de l'homme, en général, contre la femme: et, à ce propos le féminisme doit remercier Zola qui a montré, dans la coéducation, l'éducation nécessaire d'un peuple libre. Le triomphe de Lux serait une grande leçon pour la bourgeoisie, si la fiction d'un poète pouvait ouvrir les yeux aux aveugles volontaires, agir sur une classe, la convertir [...]

According to Harlor, feminism is indebted to Zola for his heroic portrayal of education as the primary means of socially and economically emancipating women of all classes. *Travail's* meticulous representation of la Crêcherie's educational system presents a practical model of reform, which begins with combining girls' and boys' education. Unlike earlier republicans such as Rousseau, Zola imagines new possibilities for social

<sup>282</sup> In Luke's Gospel, according to Jane Kopas "the experience of lowliness and oppression is in no way passive or self deprecatory, but is rather a hymn of human solidarity both with others who have cried for deliverance and with the compassionate God (1:46-56)." For more on women in Luke's Gospel see Kopas "Jesus and Women: Luke's Gospel," *Theology Today*, vol. 43, no. 2, (July 1986): 192-202.

<sup>283</sup> Née Jeanne Fernande Perrot, Thilda Harlor was the daughter of poet and feminist Amélie Hammer. In addition to succeeding Durand as the library's director, Harlor was the president of l'Union fraternelle des femmes, vice president for Le Droit des femmes and member of the Conseil national des femmes. In 1900, she gave a report on coeducation (éducation intégrale) at the Universal Exposition in Paris on behalf of the Bureau du Congrès international de la condition et des droits de femmes. Harlor's literary works include novels, *Le triomphe des vaincus*, 1908; *Tu es femme*, préface de Rosny, 1913; *Liberté, liberté chérie*, 1916; *Le pot de réséda*, 1921; *Arielle, fille des champs*, 1930 (prix George Sand); *Pascal ou l'école du bonheur*, 1955; *Est-ce un crime ?*, 1964, short stories: *Les énamourés*, 1960 and biographies: *Léopold Lacour*, 1914; *Benvenuto Celeari*, 1924; *Gustave Geoffroy*, 1933; *Georges Lecompte*, 1935; *Un ouvrier poète, Gabriel Gauny*, 1962. She was the first to receive the prix George Sand for the whole of her œuvre. Dossier Biographique Harlor Bibliothèque Marguerite Durand.

<sup>284</sup> For more on Harlor's biography and writing see Jennifer Waelti-Walters and Steven C. Hause's *Feminisms of the Belle Epoque*, (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1994), 73-84.

harmony through the cultivation of manual, technical, and intellectual skills in girls as well as boys.<sup>285</sup>

It is here that Halor's particular feminist position overtakes her familiarity with literary symbolism. Like the majority of Third Republican feminists, Harlor's vision of emancipation was more invested in educational reform than women's suffrage, a perspective parallel to the social evolution depicted in Zola's second *Évangile*. The success of *Travail*'s Crêcherie depends on the harmonious and egalitarian upbringing of girls and boys: the two sexes develop alongside of one another, studying the same subjects and skills, according to individual interest. The social and professional camaraderie that coeducation engenders provides the first steps towards social harmony. Harlor is cognizant of the potential misinterpretation of *Travail*, which risks being dismissed as another example of utopian delusion in spite of its clear political message:

Cet esprit, ce but, c'est la libération de l'individu dans l'humanité libérée: et cette libération de tous et de chacun, le poète la veut, je le répète intellectuelle et morale aussi bien qu'économique: comme il la veut pour l'individu féminin aussi bien que pour le masculin.

This praise is reflective of Harlor's Marxist feminist standpoint, one that is powerfully represented in Zola's lyrical novel. Her conception of feminist emancipation associates class inequality with sexual inequality. Despite the fact that Liberta/Auclert and Roussel acknowledge Zola's attempts, however limited in their view, to imagine women's liberation, both regret the minor role that his truly emancipated figures play in the novel. Harlor, on the other hand, reveres *Travail*'s revolutionary social message. She defends Josine, the character most intensely critiqued by Roussel, Liberta/Auclert and M. Bailly. She argues that Josine's transformation from exploited ouvrière—"l'esclave des esclaves...l'ouvrière serve et victime de l'ouvrier autant et plus que du patron"—to protected spouse and mother symbolizes the special importance of lower-class women's working and living conditions in their path toward emancipation. *Travail* is as such, a call to praxis for blasé bourgeois socialists who should follow Luc's enlightened and optimistic reform initiatives, a bourgeois hero who "ne chambarde rien. Il construit, et quand il démolit, c'est pour construire encore, toujours, infatigablement, pour introduire l'air et le soleil où était la nuit, l'ordure, la peste."

Although Harlor appreciates the revolutionary aspects of *Travail*, its demolition of corrupt social institutions and economies necessary to build a new, more equal and just society, her feminist reading overlooks the subtler evolutionary process of literature as a vehicle for social change. *Travail* not only serves to inspire social action, its depiction of

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<sup>285</sup> It is important to point out that Zola's ideal republican education is a far cry from Rousseau's views as elaborated in *Emile* according to which girls are to be educated to become more useful and attractive to their husbands. As J.-J. Rousseau explains, improving girls' upbringing should in fact maintain, if not intensify men's domination over women: "[...] toute l'éducation des femmes doit être relative aux hommes. Leur plaire, leur être utiles, se faire aimer et honorer d'eux, les élever jeunes, les soigner grands, les conseiller, les consoler, leur rendre la vie agréable et douce, voilà les devoirs des femmes dans tous les temps, et ce qu'on doit leur apprendre dès leur enfance." Rousseau's belief in sexual essentialism emphasizes the progressive nature of Zola's views for the author of *Emile* was extremely hostile towards Zola's model of coeducation: "Cultiver dans les femmes les qualités de l'homme et négliger celles qui leur sont propres, c'est donc visiblement travailler à leur préjudice: les rusées le voient trop bien pour en être les dupes; en tâchant d'usurper nos avantages elles n'abandonnent pas les leurs...elles restent au dessous de leur portée sans se mettre à la nôtre, et perdent la moitié de leur prix." *Emile ou l'éducation*, Livre V, *Œuvres de J. J. Rousseau*, Tome deuxième (Paris: Belin, 1871), 370; 369.

the gradual reeducation of French people of multiple generations, suggests that literature will have a gradual but effective influence on changing readers' beliefs and social values to conform to the Froments' faith in love, work and education. As *Travail*'s narrator explains, reading triggers Luc's epiphany and engagement, "Le petit livre avait vécu, aux mains d'un apôtre et d'un héros, la mission serait maintenant remplie, à l'heure marquée par l'évolution."<sup>286</sup> *Travail*'s force is derived from the call for social revolution, the broad symbolism of a violent eradication of old, corrupt society, and at the very same time, the steady march towards social justice through institutional reform. Feminism went hand in hand with the worker's struggle. Unlike Harlor, her fellow *frondeuse* Bradamante valued the novels' evolutionary social function: "le féminisme n'est qu'une lutte parallèle au socialisme contre les puissances d'oppression et de ténèbres."<sup>287</sup> Indeed, though Marianne, Josine, Suzanne, and Sœurette, are clearly complementary characters to the virile Froment brothers, *Fécondité* and *Travail* present a poetic inspiration for implementing practical institutional reforms that over time, would directly enable women's emancipation, namely, state welfare assistance for mothers and children, childrearing technologies, and most importantly, equal-opportunity secular education for boys and girls as well as new professional opportunities for women. The republican ideology disseminated in Zola's *Evangiles* by this technique resonates with long-term feminist goals. Through their literary *mise-en-abîme*, *Travail* and *Vérité* make it clear that lyrical republican novels like the *Evangiles* must play a key role in reeducating the French nation to be a rational, secular, egalitarian society. As we shall see in Chapter 4, Zola's *Evangiles* give literature a privileged position in his republican utopia as a sacred force of social rebirth.

#### *Vérité* and the Apex of Zola's Feminism

*Travail*'s social system fictionalized Zola's interest in the plight of workers and working mothers, yet, unlike *Les Rougon-Macquart*, this was a new kind of fiction that sought to heal the social wounds it exposed. Up until the 1890s, Zola's preoccupation with working-class misery had manifested itself primarily in his naturalist dissection of different working-class milieus in novels like *Le Ventre de Paris* (1873), *L'Assommoir* (1877) and *Germinal* (1885). Indeed, despite Zola's remarks in the press about 'feminism' in 1896, his naturalist curiosity was beginning to transform into a bona fide commitment to social and professional reform for working mothers. Advocacy and education, which had been long been prominent themes in Zola's *Rougon-Macquart* novels, become systematized in these new secular gospels *Travail* and *Vérité*, which strengthened the relationship between fiction and political action in Zola's œuvre.

His 1891 article in *Le Figaro* "Aux mères heureuses," attempts to drum up support for a Société maternelle parisienne founded by Mmes Charpentier (wife of Zola's editor), Sain, and Manuel. Zola takes this opportunity to publicly condemn the conditions of working women whose need to work outside of the home limits their ability to care for their families full-time. At the same time, Zola attempts to entice middle-class mothers to assist in creating childcare for lower class women:

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<sup>286</sup> *Travail*, OC, 8: 176.

<sup>287</sup> Jean Rabaut, *Marguerite Durand*, 74.

Mais, ô mères heureuses, il faut protester, il est mauvais que le travail soit puni, que la femme qui travaille soit par là même frappée dans sa maternité. Et c'est vous, mères heureuses, mères privilégiées, qui devez jeter le cri en faveur des autres mères, les malheureuses que les nécessités de la vie accablent. Tendez les deux mains, aidez le travail. Que, chaque matin, la caresse de vos enfants éveille dans votre mémoire la misère des autres mères, qui vivent seules comme des femmes stériles! Faites-vous pardonner votre bonheur, donnez un peu de ce bonheur aux femmes à qui on le vole, rétablissez la grande égalité des femmes de toutes les classes dans l'amour et dans la joie de l'enfant!<sup>288</sup>

This society should not be confused with charity, as Zola insists; it is instead a necessary social assistance to women who must work. He furthermore applauds the three women responsible for this enterprise, as admirable individuals whose social interests had become real social action. By appealing to maternal empathy and no small dose of middle-class guilt, Zola presents their investment as a model for other privileged women. Such a gesture of women working together harkens to the militant cry for women to help emancipate other women, especially their underprivileged sisters, that marked many of the women's solidarity movements of the 1960s and 70s.<sup>289</sup>

It seems likely that real women like these philanthropic acquaintances inspired Zola's heroic characters in *Travail*. By the end of the novel, Sœurette becomes director of the central Day Care, Josine, director of the clothing atelier, and Suzanne, head music instructor. Like Mme Charpentier and her partners, *Travail's* powerful triad are all privileged women who use their wealth, intelligence and influence to lead future generations of women in the pursuit of more active and integral social roles: "elles formaient, à elles trois, une sorte de conseil, chargé de discuter les questions graves qui intéressaient la femme, dans la Cité nouvelle."<sup>290</sup> *Travail's* social prophesy goes beyond philanthropy, imagining specific institutional methods for effectively emancipating women through domestic and professional education. Marc voices the general republican belief that women needed to be educated in order to be full equal citizens: "Marc vit éclater la vérité, la solution unique: instruire la femme, lui donner près de nous sa vraie place d'égale et de compagne, car, seule, la femme libérée peut libérer l'homme."<sup>291</sup> Moreover, rather than men dictating women's instruction, *Travail's* heroines form an independent, influential female force within a mixed, egalitarian community.

While Zola's preparatory notes for *Paris* may resist a feminist interpretation of his heroine Marie Froment, his notes for *Les Evangiles* conversely demonstrate Zola's positive dialogue with feminist discourse. The notes that span the years during which the *Evangiles* project was conceived and realized attest to Zola's growing admiration for feminism, which was becoming an integral part of his socially engaged literary project. As early as 1898, Zola's preparatory documents reveal his concern for appealing to a specifically feminist audience. In his outline for *Fécondité's* characters he writes of Marianne Froment (Marie Froment's daughter-in-law)

Au moral. La femme, l'épouse, la mère surtout. Et cela au point de vue de la question du féminisme actuel. Les féministes, qui veulent faire la femme l'égale de l'homme, ont

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<sup>288</sup> *Le Figaro*, 18 avril 1891 in Emile Zola, *Œuvres Complètes*, 14: 826-827.

<sup>289</sup> There is an intriguing parallel to be made here between the recent criticism of maternalist fin-de-siècle feminism and the retrospective rejection of the logic of solidarity in 1960s and 70s movements by third-wave feminists on the same grounds of being naïve and sentimental as well as a sign of the white, bourgeois domination of feminist movements.

<sup>290</sup> *Travail*, OC, 8: 530.

<sup>291</sup> *Vérité*, *Œuvres Complètes*, 8: 1249.

raison en justice absolue. Mais la femme doit conserver sa fonction [...] il faut que je montre [Marianne] moralement conditionnée pour bien élever [ses enfants]<sup>292</sup>

Zola imagines a kind of modern woman who, like Marie Froment, would remain feminine, meaning reproductive and maternal, and still promote the egalitarian family model which he perceives to be feminist. His strategy for appealing to feminist ideals is not to destroy feminine domesticity, but instead to revise and expand women's and men's domestic roles in an effort to distribute parental duties equally. Mathieu and Marianne, Zola projects, "mettent tous deux leur effort en commun, s'entendent, s'encouragent et se consolent, ce qui les rend toujours victorieux."<sup>293</sup> Moreover, despite the fact that Zola had planned to conserve the maternal function of modern republican women, his final gospel allows for the possibility of single motherhood.

We see here that, much like the *frondeuses*, Zola's aims are modest: to imagine the modern French woman as one whose intellectual and physical capacities surpass those of the average housewife, and yet, one who lacks the ambition to renounce her traditional role. Even as Zola explores here women's active and equal role in his fantasy of the new republican family, he is unable to articulate any clear method for achieving equality: "Ne pas l'enfoncer dans le ménage seulement, ne pas en faire seulement une cuisinière, une infirmière, une machine à faire des enfants, et à les élever. Prise immobilisée pendant la grossesse, les coucher et les allaiter [...] mais, ensuite, rôle dans le ménage, fonction sociale..."<sup>294</sup> Marianne and Mathieu's domestic roles are unique because of their mutual love and respect for one another; they do not need to become equal, rather they simply *are* equal. Readers would have to wait until *Travail*'s publication to discover exactly what this "fonction sociale" might entail, and more importantly, how Zola would create socio-economic equality between men and women in his utopian industrial city. In his second *Evangile*, Zola builds on Fourier's formula that human liberation must include emancipating women from domestic oppression. *Travail* further suggests that this emancipation can be achieved slowly but surely through secular, free, coeducation of boys and girls. Unlike the other *Evangile* novels, the word feminism does not appear even once in his notes for *Travail*. This oversight might be due to the fact that Zola's utopian society was realizing feminist reform without having to broadcast it, or because for him, women's rights were human rights and did not need to be addressing as its own particular struggle. *Travail* contributes to contemporary feminist campaigns by drawing attention to reform initiatives such as education and daycare systems that would enable mothers to work, effectively expanding the audience of fin-de-siècle bourgeois feminist and feminine discourses.

Finally, in *Vérité*, feminism emerges as an integral part of the novel's ideology. This last installment of the incomplete *Evangile* cycle represents the steady progression of the Republic through social reform. In each previous gospel, spousal love, whether in legal or common law marriages, enables future generations to transcend class difference, but in this last novel, education and personal agency prove to be the most effective means of achieving social equality. *Vérité* is decidedly the most realistic and pragmatic of the utopian *Evangiles*, a fact that critics have attributed to its transparent fictionalization of the events of the Dreyfus affair. Regardless of the extent to which history influenced the

<sup>292</sup> Plan des personnages, Notes préparatoires pour *Fécondité*, Centre Zola, CNRS, 21.

<sup>293</sup> Plan des personnages pour *Fécondité*, 22-23.

<sup>294</sup> Plan des personnages pour *Fécondité*, 27.

novel's verisimilitude, the pace of successful social reform is slower than in the other gospels, the characters are more complex, and the social dynamics of the small French town are more developed and believable.

The most surprising trajectory of social progress in *Vérité* is the explicit emancipation of women from the Catholic Church, economic dependence on men, and even from marriage. In *Vérité* religion is the enemy to social harmony because like real labor structure that Zola assiduously critiqued in *Travail*, the Church oppresses children more than adults and women more than men. Emancipation becomes possible through the adoption of state-funded, secular coeducation, effectively freeing women from the superstitions and ignorance taught by the clergy. Zola presents women's gradual emancipation through five generations of a Catholic family: the strict and pious Madame Duparque, her subservient daughter Madame Berthereau, her agnostic yet practicing daughter Geneviève (Marc Froment's wife) and her baptized yet free-thinking, secularly educated daughter Louise, and finally Louise's atheist daughter Thérèse.<sup>295</sup>

This genealogy of liberation culminates in Thérèse's (Marc Froment's granddaughter) refusal to reconcile with her husband François, who had abandoned his family for his mistress. When *Vérité*'s hero Marc attempts to reunite the troubled couple, explaining that social harmony depends upon familial and marital harmony, Thérèse objects. Addressing Marc, she explains her choice to remain unmarried and happily raise her daughter as a single mother:

Et puis, grand-père, n'avez aucun regret, dites-vous que vous avez fait votre possible, une tâche admirable qui nous donnera du bonheur humain tout ce que la raison peut en attendre. Le reste, la vie sentimentale, c'est l'amour de chacun qui le réglera pour son cas personnel, même parmi les larmes. Laissez-nous, François et moi, vivre, même souffrir à notre guise, car cela ne regarde que nous. Il suffit que vous nous ayez libérés tous les deux, que vous ayez fait de nous les personnes conscientes d'un monde du plus de vérité et de plus de justice possible.<sup>296</sup>

Thérèse asserts here an exceptional degree of agency and autonomy, rarely to be found in Zola's earlier novels. Although Thérèse's case arises from peculiar circumstances, her declaration of free will in love and marriage is a more general endorsement of women's right to decide their own happiness, even if it means dissolving her marriage. Her victory within the family and community, established by the applause following the above speech, dismantles the patriarchal authority and patronizing tone of Marc Froment's formula for social justice: "Il a fallu instruire la femme, afin de lui donner près de l'homme sa place légitime d'égale et de compagne [...] car la femme libérée pouvait seule libérer l'homme [...] enchaîné lui-même, incapable d'une action virile et décisive."<sup>297</sup>

Thérèse boldly and calmly asserts her absolute independence, declaring a new phase for women's rights facilitated by Marc's struggle to create a new educational system, "Comme vous le dites, nous sommes libres, j'entends rester libre."<sup>298</sup> Her rejection of conjugal duty furthermore challenges *Fécondité*'s thesis that love between husband and wife will always triumph over poverty and emotional hardship. Of course, conjugal love remains a core value in the formation of his new republican family; in its

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<sup>295</sup> *Vérité*, OC, 8: 550-551.

<sup>296</sup> *Vérité*, OC, 8: 747.

<sup>297</sup> *Vérité*, OC, 8: 744-745.

<sup>298</sup> *Vérité*, OC, 8: 745.

absence, parental affection and investment are just as valuable if not more so. In this respect, Zola's conception of women's liberation resembles the maternalist-feminist agenda, to protect and honor motherhood. This intention to represent contemporary feminist values is clear in his notes for Thérèse (initially called Rose): "Rose: si elle ne prend pas un autre mari, c'est qu'elle n'aime personne [...] Tout à fait engagée avec sa fille. Il ne faut plus la faire dépendre de l'homme, en faire une créature civile et sociale en soi."<sup>299</sup>

Had Zola been able to make final revisions to *Vérité's* manuscript before his untimely death, the feminist evolution demonstrated by Thérèse and her female elders might possibly have been even more explicit.<sup>300</sup> By 1901 the word feminist, as Zola's preparatory notes attest, was no longer a stigma he wished to avoid in his novels. In fact, the words feminist and feminism appear repeatedly throughout his notes for *Vérité*:

La mère, l'amante, l'épouse. Toute la question du féminisme, telle que je l'envisage : la femme libérée égale de l'homme en droit et en fait, mais forcée de rester dans sa fonction. Cela va être tout le drame intime de Marc... Drame où j'aurai tout le féminisme la femme absolument libérée de l'église. [...] Et profiter de l'histoire pour achever la libération de la femme, le plein féminisme. [...] La femme tout à fait émancipée. [...] Je le répète, toute la libération de la femme, sauvée, sortie de l'Eglise.<sup>301</sup>

Zola's integration of what he referred to as "full feminism" in his last literary work reveals his endorsement of contemporary feminist movements. Feminist ideology is no longer a counter model for characterization as was the case with Marie Froment, as well as earlier "pseudo-feminist" traits in Zola's female characters; it had become the linchpin of *Vérité's* social victory. Unlike his fellow pro-feminist male authors, Zola's vision of women's full emancipation surpassed freedom from patriarchal labor management and the Church, to include their absolute intellectual, marital and sentimental independence. In other words, a woman did not need to rely upon a husband for a gratifying social or emotional existence. *Les Evangiles'* utopia distinguishes itself by imagining women with active social participation through motherhood or public service independent of men, as *Vérité's* notes indicate: "Songer aussi à donner [aux femmes] un métier. Se destinant-elle à l'enseignement. [...] Mlle Mazeline la femme de demain (féminisme) [...] Contre les prêtres, la femme émancipée, travaillant à la délivrance de ses sœurs."<sup>302</sup> Like Luc, Marc benefits from the wisdom of new women like Sœurette, Suzanne, and Mlle Mazeline who becomes Marc's sole confidant and advisor, instructing him on how he should treat his wife.<sup>303</sup> *Vérité's* schoolteacher Mlle Mazeline realized the full professional potential of liberally educated women like Marie Froment's female schoolmates. As a single woman fulfilled by her work, she proves to be a model citizen of the republic: an intelligent and dedicated worker leading women to social, economic and intellectual emancipation.

The *frondeuses'* high praise of Zola's female evangelists and his preparatory documents for *Les Quatre Evangiles* confirm the growing affinity between Zola and fin-de-siècle feminists. In his letter of thanks to *La Fronde's* Harlor, Zola made this mutual admiration clear:

<sup>299</sup> Dossier préparatoire pour *Vérité*, Centre Zola, CNRS, 227.

<sup>300</sup> "Rédaction et publication" de *Vérité*, *Guide Emile Zola*, eds Alain Pagès & Owen Morgan (Paris: Ellipses, 2002), 332.

<sup>301</sup> Dossier préparatoire pour *Vérité*, Centre Zola, CNRS, 65, 226-229, 233, 251.

<sup>302</sup> Dossier pour *Vérité*, Centre Zola, CNRS, 352, 133, 93.

<sup>303</sup> *Vérité*, *OC*, 8: 1260, 1261.

Madame,

Je suis extrêmement touché de la belle et sympathique étude que vous avez bien voulu consacrer à *Travail* dans *La Fronde*, et je vous en adresse les remerciements d'autant plus vifs, que je tiens beaucoup à sentir avec moi les vaillantes combattantes de ce journal.

Veuillez me croire votre bien reconnaissant et bien dévoué.<sup>304</sup>

This letter, written during the writing stage of *Vérité*, signals a pivotal moment in Zola's engagement with women writers and activists with whom he fought for the same rights and reforms in the shared dream of a more just and equal French republic.

### Conclusion: Final Respects

Zola's shifting attitude toward feminism followed the major trends in feminist rhetoric and reform exemplified by writers in the feminist daily paper *La Fronde*. A giant step from his early reactionary remarks in *Le Figaro*'s survey that equated feminists with bas-bleus and man-hating viragos, Emile Zola's socially engaged *Évangiles* demonstrate a remarkable admiration and support for women's movements for social and economic emancipation.

Although Zola has until now been excluded from the category of pro-feminist literature by writers like Jules Bois, Eugène Brieux, and Victor and Paul Margueritte, due to his alleged "gynophilic misogyny," his last few novels echo the moderate and maternalist views dear to the overwhelming majority of *La Fronde*'s feminist novelists and journalists. The Margueritte brothers claimed to be indebted to Zola's socially critical writing. In the preface to their bestselling novel of female sexual emancipation, *La Garçonne* (1922), they paid homage to the man who, in his time, bravely exposed the social oppression of women. Like Bois who declared himself "pour un bon féminisme féminin," the naturalist's utopian works realized the demands of contemporary French women: the right to motherhood, equal educational and professional opportunity, and even sexual and sentimental agency.<sup>305</sup> Emile Zola's death in September of 1902 sparked a wave of grief for the man whose novels exposed women's particular struggles as no other French writer had. *La Fronde* published numerous articles in honor of Zola's special devotion to the improvement of women's situations in the creation of a more just world.

Harlor commemorated Zola's simple yet powerful literary characters: "Si les personnages le plus vigoureusement dessinés par Emile Zola, sont d'âme simple, parfois même rudimentaire, il en est plusieurs dont le relief a bien quelque chose de typique."<sup>306</sup> She ponders how one could not salute "l'apôtre d'un idéal de justice social, de vérité scientifique, l'apôtre de *Paris*, de *Travail* et de ce troisième *Évangile* ... témoigna d'une

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<sup>304</sup> Lettre 242, 3 mai 1901, *Correspondance*, Vol X, octobre 1899-1902 (Montréal/Paris: Presses de l'Université de Montréal/Éditions du CNRS, 1995), 270.

<sup>305</sup> According to Jean Rabaut, Jules Bois declared himself in favor of a women's emancipation that "ne renonce pas aux services que nous rendirent autrefois les dociles aïeules pour la sécurité de la famille et la sécurité de la patrie." *Féministes à la belle époque*, 118. While they admired Zola, *frondeuses* dismissed Marcel Prévost's gynophilia, seeing his admiration as deeply macho: "A vrai dire, le 'charme féminin' se teinte de bien des nuances entre les rédactrices de 'La Fronde.' Voici Marcelle Tinayre qui, rompant les lances, à propos des romancières, avec Marcel Prévost [...] Il ne fait point savoir pourquoi, selon lui, 'les romancières du XXe siècle ne seraient pas femmes tout simplement, sans affectation de cynisme et sans plus de gentillesse qu'il n'est nécessaire.'" *Marguerite Durand*, 62.

<sup>306</sup> *La Fronde*, "Son Œuvre," 3 octobre 1902.

perspicacité aussi admirable que fut l'intrépide son courage civique." Zola's prophetic humanitarian philosophy, she explains, is at once modern and timeless. Parisshia, an older feminist activist, celebrated Zola's unique ability to combine the horrifying truth of social injustice with poetry and idealism in his depiction of women: "S'il fut parfois d'un réalisme saisissant, il faut dire qu'il y a des plaies dans lesquelles c'est un devoir de porter le fer rouge, et Gervaise qui dans l'Assommoir, débute par la poésie de l'amour pour finir dans la dégradation et trouver l'horrible mort par de delirium tremens n'est-elle pas l'exemple le plus frappant des ravages de l'alcoolisme, que l'on puisse offrir aux femmes du peuple ?"<sup>307</sup>

Other women wrote to *La Fronde* to organize tributes to Zola's inspirational *Evangelies*. Henriette Meyer called out to her fellow schoolteachers, to honor "le défenseur de la justice et de la vérité, le glorificateur du Travail et de la pensée."<sup>308</sup> Men and women of their profession, she exclaimed, "nous avons le devoir d'accompagner jusqu'à sa tombe le Poète de génie qui s'érigea en défenseur de l'école laïque." Another *frondeuse* reported the presence of a laundry owner who demanded that she pay her final respects: "Mais puisque je vous dis que je suis la patronne du lavoir et que je réponds de mes ouvrières."<sup>309</sup> According to the reporter, this real-life *blanchisseuse* and her female staff wished to "rendre un dernier hommage à l'écrivain qui prit parmi elle, l'héroïne d'un de ses romans, cette malheureuse et si sympathique Gervaise, dont la silhouette est toujours ressemblante." The radical feminist Caroline Kauffman summarized the extraordinary influence of Emile Zola's writing on the feminist movement:

La solidarité des femmes, groupe féministe mixte, dans sa réunion du 1<sup>er</sup> octobre, tenue à la mairie du sixième arrondissement, a décidé d'adresser à Mme Zola, au nom du groupe, l'expression de sa respectueuse sympathie et ses sentiments de condoléance.

La Solidarité des femmes a la plus profonde admiration pour l'écrivain puissant qui a parlé, sans hypocrisie, dans ses œuvres, des plaies sociales, telles que l'alcoolisme et la prostitution. Toutes les femmes, quelles que soient leurs opinions politiques et religieuses, doivent être reconnaissantes à tous ceux qui, comme Zola, osent dévoiler les causes de l'immoralité actuelle.<sup>310</sup>

These testimonials from women of *La Fronde* acknowledge the exceptional attention that Emile Zola's writing paid to women's conditions in his lifelong effort to educate and inspire French readers to social action. Indeed, it seemed that Zola's fiction had brilliantly transmitted his ideals which would live on in the French social imagination long after his death.

<sup>307</sup> *La Fronde*, "Les héroïnes d'Emile Zola," 3 octobre 1902.

<sup>308</sup> *La Fronde*, "Appel aux instituteurs et aux institutrices," 3 octobre 1902.

<sup>309</sup> *La Fronde*, "Les obsèques d'Emile Zola," 4 octobre 1902.

<sup>310</sup> *La Fronde*, "Zola et le féminisme" 2 octobre 1902.

## Chapter 4: Secular Education and Republican Rites

Une religion nouvelle, la religion de l'homme, enfin conscient, libre et maître de son destin, balayait les anciennes mythologies, les symbolismes où s'étaient égarées les angoisses de sa longue lutte contre la nature.

Emile Zola, *Travail*

[...] bien que [...] la pensée religieuse soit autre chose qu'un système de fictions, les réalités auxquelles elle correspond ne parviennent cependant à s'exprimer religieusement que si l'imagination les transfigure. Entre la société telle qu'elle est objectivement et les choses sacrées qui la représentent symboliquement la distance est considérable.

Emile Durkheim, *Les formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse*

The Third Republic was the first government to establish a national secular school system though educational reform had been a part of republican campaigns in France since the eighteenth century. Republican educational reformers since the Revolution believed that state education was the most obvious and efficient means of strengthening and unifying the nation. Feminist supporters of secular education argued that the enlightenment of women and the lower classes would raise them to the status of rational and responsible, therefore equal citizens. More radical activists saw education as a way to increase professional and economic opportunity for these socio-economically disadvantaged groups. For republican ideologues of the Third Republic like Jules Ferry, Emile Zola and Emile Durkheim, creating a free, centralized school system not only achieved the goal of democratizing instruction, it also symbolized the end of Catholic moral influence over the masses. In the two decades leading up to the legal separation of Church and State in French public life in 1905, the movement to secularize the French school system reached fever pitch. *Laïcité* fueled fin-de-siècle liberal social campaigns, uniting previously disparate anticlerical, socialist and feminist agendas in a singular republican cause. Feminists, radicals and moderates alike fought to make secular education a rational and viable alternative to Catholic schools for boys and girls at all levels and put an end to clerical domination of children's intellectual and moral instruction.

Despite the passing of the 1880s Jules Ferry laws, which made education mandatory and free, a secular curriculum was not adopted everywhere in French public schools, a problem from which government officials averted their gaze. Whether out of fear of retribution of the community or because of personal moral views, many lay teachers were slow to enforce the removal of all types of Catholic presence, such as crucifixes and religious catechism, from the officially secular schools.<sup>311</sup> Likewise, the Camille Sée law requiring the creation of girls' schools did not satisfy the majority of militant feminists who opposed the existing "separate but equal" single-sex system and continued to campaign for coeducation in public schools that would provide a standardized integral curriculum for all children.

At the same time, the Dreyfus Affair reignited republican hostility against the Church and clergy because it revealed the persistent corrupting influence of *Ancien*

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<sup>311</sup> Béatrice Compagnon and Anne Thévenin, *L'Ecole et la société française* (Paris: Editions Complexe, 1995), 34-35.

*Régime* institutions in daily life and, consequently, the need for a more aggressive measure of reform.<sup>312</sup> The overstay of conservative power in the new republic intensified republican resentment of the overly cautious government, especially for its lenience towards religious instruction in public classrooms. Indeed, the classroom was a crucial site of struggle for control over the education of the next generation of French citizens. Emile Zola squared off with conservative nationalists like Maurice Barrès on this ideological battlefield as a prophet of a modern and secular unified France.<sup>313</sup> Whereas conservative writers bemoaned public school's dangerous "uprooting" of the impressionable French youth, militant republicans like Zola were determined to fulfill the Revolution's promise to liberate France through practical and legal reform of its school system. Mandatory republican education was, for republican reformers, the only means of fashioning a truly unified republican in body, mind and spirit. Zola's vision of centralized scientific coeducation in his last two *Evangiles* prophesies the republican victory over religious superstition and ignorance through the full-fledged enlightenment of the French people and the radical separation between Church and State.

Further complicating the debate on school and *laïcité* was the question of secular morality. Religious and non-religious critics of *laïcité* cautioned against removing religious instruction from public school altogether because they feared it would leave a spiritual and moral void.<sup>314</sup> Casting off the influence of the Catholic church over French society, especially women and children, caused serious concerns among reformers about how to replace religious moral authority with a rational one. The concern about providing a properly moral education to girls bolstered support for separate sex schools and parochial education for girls. Emile Zola, however, was a staunch supporter of coeducation and the secular, moral, scientific instruction that was developing in fin-de-siècle republican pedagogy. His utopian vision echoed the more radical views of contemporary educational reformers such as Jules Ferry, Pauline Kergomard, Ferdinand Buisson and Emile Durkheim who believed that only a standardized secular education would unite the French people in their faith in a modern rational morality.

The *Evangiles'* vision of national education builds on the theories of romantic utopian philosophers as well as cutting-edge scientific pedagogy of fin-de-siècle reformers. I suggest that the fact that Zola's educational ideal is far more progressive and optimistic than his contemporaries may be linked to the confluence of artistic, philosophical and scientific discourses in his novels, *Travail* (1901) and *Vérité* (1903). Inspired by the romantic spirit of Saint-Simon, Charles Fourier, Pierre Leroux and Auguste Comte's utopian societies, *Travail* reforms work by implementing a radical system of coeducation that integrates manual, scientific and artistic training within a civic curriculum. Integral education, a term coined by Fourier, combines classical intellectual training with vocational and artistic training to produce well-rounded and multifaceted happy workers according to the Fourierist utopian program. Thanks to his Fourierist curriculum, *Travail's* hero, Luc Froment, establishes a flourishing workers' collective, *La Crèche*, which makes school the heart and soul of a new egalitarian social order.

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<sup>312</sup> Zola's *Evangiles* repeatedly evoke the Army, Church and Aristocracy's triple threat to political and social modernity.

<sup>313</sup> Christophe Charle, "L'affaire Dreyfus en littérature: Bourget et Zola, prophètes et 'sociologues,'" *Paris fin de siècle culture et politique* (Paris: Seuil, 1998), 201-202.

<sup>314</sup> Françoise Mayeur, *L'Éducation des filles en France au XIXe siècle* (Paris : Hachette, 1979), 141.

Zola's last published novel, *Vérité*, presents a more practical course of reform, resituating the events of the Dreyfus Affair in a Catholic primary school rather than the Army. While the novel commemorates Dreyfus' hardship through the wrongful incrimination of Zola's fictional Jewish schoolteacher Simon, *Vérité* is less a condemnation of anti-Semitism than a diatribe against the corrupt Catholic clergy. Marc Froment is Zola's double in the "Simon Affair." Marc is an anticlerical schoolteacher whose outrage at clerical corruption and the government's flagrant injustice spurs him to join the fight to radically secularize public education and strengthen it through the Ecole normale's national teacher training program. By making school the site of clerical corruption in his novel, Zola dramatically pits the Catholic Church against the republican State in the battle for control over national education and moral influence, ultimately heralding the public school as the modern vehicle for twentieth-century rational humanism. Zola's fictional portrayal of public schools is particularly compelling because it reveals both the liberating and repressive functions of this new republican institution for French children.

This chapter analyzes the relationship between religion, education and the state in the *Quatre Evangiles*' conception of the secular humanist religion of the future. As with *Fécondité*, *Travail* and *Vérité*'s narratives blur the boundary between sacred myths of new social heroes and ideological discourse. These novels recount the social messianism of Luc, who rehabilitates labor and economy, and Marc, who rehabilitates education. The narrative resonance of Zola's *Evangiles* with Christian parables, biblical language and symbolism makes it difficult to clearly categorize them as either propaganda or practical reform. In their effort to 'scientize' or secularize morality and education, these secular gospels are as much literary and oneiric as they are political and prophetic. In other words, they blur the boundary between doctrine and art, between science and religion. It is therefore important in this study to distinguish between two levels of discourse in *Travail* and *Vérité*: first, the path of educational and social reform contained within the novels' narrative, and second, the projected didactic function of Zola's secular *Evangiles*.

*Travail* and *Vérité* differ from *Fécondité* in that their sacred figures, symbols and language are derived from the New Testament, rather than the Old Testament. As we saw in previous chapters, the miraculously fertility and longevity of *Fécondité*'s heroes are loosely based on the story of Abraham and Sarah. That novel's spiritual refrains about cultivating life are evocative of Old Testament scripture.<sup>315</sup> *Travail* and *Vérité*, on the other hand, are secularized Christian messianic missions. These novels recount the spiritual conversion of Luc and Marc Froment, and their communities, to new faith in birth, labor, and education, through the redemption of a republican martyr. Luc rehabilitates the working-class young woman Josine, who is a victim of socio-economic and gender oppression and a symbol of the denigration of work. In *Vérité*, Marc sacrifices his social status and career to exonerate the falsely accused public schoolteacher Simon and struggle to secularize the national school system. Both Froments resemble Christ

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<sup>315</sup> Though there are stories of redemption and sacrifice in *Fécondité*, these are clearly Judaic, not Christian in nature. As discussed in Chapter 2, Mathieu and Marianne's incredible propagation in France and colonial Africa redeems Marianne's colonial orphanhood. And as Abraham is called on to sacrifice his son Issac, Mathieu and Marianne do experience a degree of sacrifice in the unexpected death of their young daughter Rose and the emigration of their son Dominique to West Africa.

through the great emotional and material sacrifices that they make for these victims of oppression.

Ideological discourse in *Travail* and *Vérité* has a strong religious force, which is bolstered by Zola's secular transformation of powerful Christian myths. As we shall see, the simple (and familiar) Christian plot structure of Zola's second and third gospels underscores the fact that these novels is a site republican ideological production and suggests that such a process is a secular sacred ritual. In order to clarify the terms of the *Evangiles'* new humanist religion, I begin my analysis by comparing Zola's use of religious language and narratives with similar scientific definitions offered by Emile Durkheim's work *Les formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse* (1912). Durkheim's lectures on education and morality further illuminate Zola's conception of secularism as the appropriate new moral authority for the Third Republic. Here I emphasize the radical feminist tone that Zola lent his fictional school system in light of the history of educational reform in France.

A careful analysis of *Travail's* economics then looks at how Zola adapts Charles Fourier's phalanstery *Harmony* to twentieth-century sociological and philosophical discourse on the relationship between the individual and society. Zola's depiction of education and knowledge is problematic because it reveals an important disjunction between socio-economic theory and practice within the *Evangiles'* fictional republic. Just as the *Evangiles'* portrayal of family reform and women's roles operates through sexist logic, yet has egalitarian, and even feminist social implications, secular education in *Travail* and *Vérité's* republican schools is egalitarian and liberating in theory, but repressive, homogenizing and elitist in practice. This chapter examines the paradox of class in Luc and Marc Froment's modern secular schools and Luc's autonomous workers' collective by likening *Fécondité's* extraordinary colonization of metropolitan and colonial France to the happy contagion of *Travail's* workers' collective and *Vérité's* army of schoolteachers all of which usher in a new generation of healthy and enlightened French citizens. In particular, my study asks whether the allegedly egalitarian social order established by *Travail* and *Vérité's* modern educational programs truly resolves class struggle or invents a new social hierarchy based on intellectual superiority.

In much the same way that religious instruction preserved the social privilege and elite status of French Catholics and conservatives, secular instruction was a class issue for liberal republicans because it promised upward social mobility for the middle and lower classes. Rather than eliminating capital and privilege, Luc and Marc Froment redistribute them according to Zola's scientific humanist religion. Luc's project generates a new community of freethinking, educated workers who enjoy the previously inaccessible privileges of luxury goods and leisure time. Similarly, *Vérité's* middle-class intellectuals constitute a new social elite, an army of patriotic apostles dedicated to the expansion of their cultural mission. Despite the Froments' avowed desire to end class struggle by destroying the aristocracy and the treacherous bourgeoisie, their modern communities reaffirm the bourgeois values of property, leisure, and status, as well as hygiene, regulation, and utility.

My study of Zola's ideal education concludes by reflecting on the relationship between art, literature and education in Zola's scientific humanism as compared to romantic utopian discourses. I will show that both the *Evangiles'* poetic style and their glorification of state art and literature are religious rites that constitute what Durkheim

calls the “positive cult.” *Travail* and *Vérité* exemplify how education and art are Zola’s ideal vehicles for sacralizing science, the French republic and its institutions. In this sense, I suggest that writing the secular *Evangelies* and reading them constitute a modern religious act.

### Redefining the Sacred in a Secular World

As Paul Bénichou has argued, liberal nineteenth-century writers continued to play the role created by their Enlightenment predecessors as spiritual guides for republican citizens. Bénichou claims that writers took on this ambitious new role, since the Revolution, in an attempt to fill the spiritual void left by the Catholic church. Literature, he claims, was “le sacerdoce d’un temps qui ne croit plus aux prêtres, qui n’accepte le divin que sous bénéfice de doute et de liberté critique [...] Le poète et l’écrivain n’ont été promus que parce qu’il n’y avait justement plus place pour une autorité proprement dite dans l’ordre spirituel.”<sup>316</sup> It was not just that the Catholic church’s corruption had become ever more exposed in the century following the Revolution; Christian faith itself was losing popularity in France.

While Emile Durkheim was not an exact contemporary of Emile Zola, (he was professionally active from 1887 to 1917 whereas Zola was active from 1864 to 1902) they are intellectuals whose social optimism stands in stark contrast to the decadent pessimism that dominated fin-de-siècle culture. Zola and Durkheim saw new opportunities for progress during this period of political, ideological and institutional transformation. As heirs to romantic social utopianism, their work represents a new wave of positivism, which sought not just to continue but to improve upon nineteenth-century thought through more vigorously scientific approaches to social reform. Both were deeply committed to creating a new rational education and a secular morality divorced from religion. Like *Travail* and *Vérité*, Durkheim’s lectures on education (1902) identify public school as the ideal force of social cohesion and moral authority in the secular republic. Furthermore, they perceive their respective fields as instrumental to the secularization of French society, claiming that literature and sociology, respectively, cultivate modern republican faith in Science and Humanity. Durkheim and Zola’s final projects demonstrate their conviction that reason and science would replace antiquated religious beliefs and institutions as the new social authorities.

Durkheim’s pioneering scientific study of religion and the sacred, *Les formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse* (1912), provides insight into Zola’s secular sacred paradigm. Durkheim’s scientific definitions of religious phenomena clarify what Zola calls the new religion of man. In *Travail*, Zola calls the republican religion of the future, “la religion de l’homme,” or “la religion de l’humanité,” which are terms clearly evocative of earlier humanist philosophies. The novel’s social vision shares Fourier’s key force of cohesion: “les passions humaines remises en honneur, utilisées, acceptées comme les forces mêmes de la vie, le travail tiré de son baignoire, ennobli, rendu attrayant, devenu le nouveau code social.”<sup>317</sup> What is new in Luc Froment’s twentieth-century humanism is the renewal of scientific faith thanks to the reconciliation of humans and machines, a tension frighteningly depicted by Zola’s earlier novels *Germinal* and *La Bête*

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<sup>316</sup> *Le Sacre de l’écrivain: 1750-1830* (Paris: José Corti, 1973), 473-474.

<sup>317</sup> *Travail, Œuvres Complètes*, 8: 953.

*humaine. Travail* and *Vérité* celebrate industrial and educational systems as modern religious forces in social evolution. Luc clearly identifies school and the workplace as central motors of change course of his social reform: “La première maison commune, avec son école, les premiers ateliers [...] étaient nés de l’idée fouriériste.”<sup>318</sup>

Since neither *Travail* nor *Vérité* provide a clear definition of the modern secular religion, merely denoting a shift in the existing sacred paradigm, we may look to Durkheim for clarification about what constitutes the sacred even in its secularized form. *Les formes élémentaires* gives the following sociological definition of religion:

Une religion est un système solidaire de croyances et de pratiques relatives à des choses sacrées, c’est-à-dire séparées, interdites, croyances et pratiques qui unissent en une même communauté morale, appelée Eglise, tous ceux qui y adhèrent [...] en montrant que l’idée de religion est inséparable de l’idée d’Eglise, il faut pressentir que la religion doit être une chose éminemment collective.<sup>319</sup>

Several immediate connections can be made between this definition and Zola’s conception of religion in his *Évangiles*. First, religion is social and collective; second, it brings together people through shared beliefs and practices. The *Évangiles*’ repeated claims to unite citizens in a harmonious republican society indicate the French republic as Zola’s ideal moral community of the future. These novels do not, however, raise the French people to the status of divine beings that replace the Christian god. In *Vérité*, the term religion is anathema, used exclusively to indicate Catholicism and equated with oppression, exploitation, ignorance and superstition. The scientific humanism cultivated by Marc Froment and his flock of lay schoolteachers is a religion in the Durkheimian sense because it supplants Catholicism as a modern moral and social authority. According to Durkheim’s logic, the different cults that traverse the *Quatre Évangiles*—the cult of life, of truth, of science, of work—should not be read as coexisting or competing religions, but as active, visible parts of the greater humanist religion.<sup>320</sup>

Although Zola’s vague use of the term religion in *Travail* may at first seem careless, it resonates with Durkheim’s elementary definition of the sacred. Sacred things, he explains, must not be confused with divinity, nor are they necessarily limited to personifications or living creatures:

[...] un rocher, un arbre, une source, un caillou, une pièce de bois, une maison en un mot quelconque peut-être sacré. Un rite peut avoir ce caractère; il n’existe même pas de rite qui ne l’ait à quelque degré. Il y a des mots, des paroles, des formules qui ne peuvent être prononcés que par la bouche de personnages consacrés; il y a des gestes, des mouvements qui ne peuvent être exécutés par tout le monde.<sup>321</sup>

This explanation is a useful key to identifying sacred beliefs and practices to the extent that it allows us to interpret language used in religious ritual to celebrate faith in sacred beliefs or entities, as sacred itself. Such a definition of the sacred opens up even greater possibilities for understanding how religious metaphors of conversion and martyrdom and the repetition of humanistic refrains and terms such as “religion,” “cérémonie” and “culte” function as sacred secular rituals in Zola’s utopian republic. As we shall see later in this chapter, Zola confers sacred power to a new republican elite comprised of scientists, teachers, intellectuals and artists.

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<sup>318</sup> *Travail*, OC, 8: 953.

<sup>319</sup> Emile Durkheim, *Les formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse: le système totémique en Australie* (Paris: PUF, 1990), 65.

<sup>320</sup> Emile Durkheim, *Les formes élémentaires*, 56-57.

<sup>321</sup> Durkheim, *Les formes élémentaires*, 51.

As noted in previous chapters, Mathieu, Luc and Marc are frequently referred to as apostles of life, work and truth, respectively. *Travail* best illustrates Zola's secular religious model as it contains the most sacred language of the three novels. For example, several villagers are described as undergoing a "conversion" to Luc's collectivist beliefs. More notably, the novel repeatedly alludes to a "new religion of man," which replaces corrupt Catholicism and the authoritarian state—"religion mécanique du progrès, réalisée à coups de loi, et militairement"—with a self-sustaining scientific humanism.<sup>322</sup> The state and the Church are pitted against one another in the priest and the old-school republican schoolteacher's antagonistic relationship. By recuperating the purely humanitarian goals of early Christianity, the birth of secular religion is symbolic of a progressive step in the history of humanity. Marc ponders the degeneration of Christianity as a legitimate social authority: "Ce christianisme si pur à ses débuts, un des plus beaux cris de fraternité et de délivrance, et même ce catholicisme, d'un vol si hardi, machine si puissante de civilisation [...]"<sup>323</sup>

The victory of a modern secular religion in *Travail's* workers' utopia is relayed through the eyes of the local priest who obstinately preaches his last sermon while his Church literally crumbles:

La science achevait de faire brèche, le dogme était finalement emporté, le royaume de Dieu allait être remis sur la terre, au nom de la justice triomphante. Une religion nouvelle, la religion de l'homme, enfin conscient, libre et maître de son destin, balayait les anciennes mythologies, les symbolismes où s'étaient égarées les angoisses de sa longue lutte contre la nature. Après les temples des anciennes idolâtries, l'Eglise catholique disparaissait à son tour, aujourd'hui qu'un peuple fraternel mettait son bonheur certain en la seule force vivante de sa solidarité, sans avoir le besoin de tout un système politique de peines et de récompenses.<sup>324</sup>

*Vérité* includes a similarly climatic scene in which lightning strikes the Catholic church, causing a fire that destroys the building and some of the clergy. Both scenes describe the advent of a modern religion that represents the traditional republican values of fraternity, freedom, and enlightenment. However, the fact that this religion is called a 'new religion' supports Durkheim's observation about the relationship between science and religion: "la pensée scientifique n'est qu'une forme plus parfaite que la pensée religieuse. Il semble donc naturel que la seconde s'efface progressivement devant la première, à mesure que celle-ci devient plus apte à s'acquitter de la tâche." He adds that religion "paraît appelée à se transformer plutôt qu'à disparaître," suggesting that no matter how powerful science becomes, it is not likely to replace religion altogether in society.<sup>325</sup> This scene is another instance of what Dorrit Cohn identifies as the powerfully ambiguous narrative device of narrated monologue. The priest's personal voice (narrated monologue) slips into what

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<sup>322</sup> *Travail*, OC, 8: 658. Paul Bénichou describes well this revolutionary authoritarianism: "La Révolution française, dans son projet régénérateur, est naïvement totalitaire. Elle n'exalte le poète citoyen qu'en faisant de lui un rouage de l'Etat [...] Nous ne pouvons plus lire aujourd'hui sans inquiétude des lignes comme celles-ci : « Ce sont les fêtes qui impriment à la masse sociale un seul et même caractère, qui lui donnent un seul et même esprit, qui basent sa morale, fondent ses opinions, et qui, par conséquent, forment de tous les membres de l'Etat un seul et même tout » [...] Ceux qui écrivent ces choses sont certainement convaincus qu'on émancipe l'homme en donnant à la cité tout pouvoir sur lui. Cette vue surprenante, qui implique une confusion tout à fait hasardeuse de l'Etat avec les valeurs plus hautes, tente les hommes de pensée, toujours enclins à imaginer le gouvernement comme l'incarnation d'une doctrine." *Le Sacre de l'écrivain*, 76-77.

<sup>323</sup> *Vérité*, OC, 8: 1124.

<sup>324</sup> *Travail*, OC, 8: 907.

<sup>325</sup> Durkheim, *Les formes élémentaires*, 613-615.

seems to be the authoritative voice of the omniscient narrator. Both voices express the belief that rational humanism will replace not only Catholic faith and rituals but the need for organized government. This ‘objective’ narrative voice not clearly only disseminates republican ideology; it posits civic humanism as the new spiritual and social authority. Such a move raises questions about the State’s appropriation of sacred functions. In what follows, I will argue that Zola’s secular apostles create a host of new secular sacred practices, or rites, in their reform of republican education.

### The Positive Cult and New Secular Rites

The *Quatre Evangiles* depict a range of secular cults that are part of the positive humanist religion for Zola’s republic of the future. For example, the cult of work, the cult of life, and the cult of science. It must be emphasized that these cults do not result in the divinization of institutions or objects. Though the highest sacred entity in Zola’s new humanist religion is humanity, it is a religion that lacks a true divine being. The cult of birth does not necessarily divinize the human body just as the cult of science does not divinize school or the laboratory. The positive cult, as Durkheim defines it, is simply “un système de rites, de fêtes, de cérémonies diverses qui *présentent toutes ce caractère qu’elles reviennent périodiquement.*”<sup>326</sup> In Zola’s utopian project, republican institutions become sacred through the celebrations and ceremonies of the Froments’ modern secular religion. For the sake of brevity, I will focus only on sacred rites in the positive cult in Zola’s *Evangiles* although there is also ample evidence of the negative cult.<sup>327</sup>

Zola infuses love and marriage, childbearing and education, among other communal activities, with a secular religious force. These rites are not only sacred in and of themselves, they are part of the general sacralizing process which exalts science and humankind.<sup>328</sup> According to Durkheim, sacredness is simply a religious force superimposed upon nature and externalized. Zola’s positive humanist cult originates on a small scale in *Paris*, the precursor to the *Quatre Evangiles*. Love is the first positive secular rite. Through their love for each other and for humanity Pierre and Marie Froment develop a modern scientific humanist spirit in family. The Froment family provides a model for loving unions throughout the *Evangiles*, most obviously in *Fécondité* and *Travail*. Mathieu and Marianne Froment regenerate France and its colonies while the entire population of *Travail’s Crèche* is transformed by the harmonizing effects of inter-class love:

[...] le sang des Delaveau s’apaisa dans le sang des Froment [...] le sang des Froment s’alliait à celui des Morfain, les ouvriers épiques, et à celui des Caffiaux, l’ancien commerce [...] et la bourgeoisie agonisante s’unissait là au peuple aux rudes travailleurs résignés des âges morts, ainsi qu’aux travailleurs révolutionnaires en train de se libérer.<sup>329</sup>

<sup>326</sup> Emile Durkheim, *Les formes élémentaires*, 89. Italics are original.

<sup>327</sup> Some examples of Durkheim’s negative rites are sacrifice and excommunication.

<sup>328</sup> “La force religieuse n’est que le sentiment que la collectivité inspire à ses membres, mais projeté hors des consciences qui l’éprouvent, et l’objectivité. Pour s’objectiver, il se fixe sur un objet qui devient ainsi sacré ; mais tout objet peut jouer ce rôle [...] Tout dépend des circonstances qui font que le sentiment générateur des idées religieuses se pose ici ou là, sur tel point plutôt sur un tel autre. Le caractère sacré que revêt une chose n’est pas impliqué dans les propriétés intrinsèques de celle-ci, *il y est surajouté*. Le monde du religieuse n’est pas un aspect particulier de la nature empirique, il y *est superposé*.” Durkheim, *Les formes élémentaires*, 327-328. Italics are original.

<sup>329</sup> *Travail*, OC, 8: 879.

The last two *Évangiles* exalt marriage and love, including *union libre*, as sacred forces that benefit all of society even beyond French borders, not just one family in the case of Mathieu's brood. Marriages are consistently described in terms of social reconciliation, salvation, peace-making, pardons and alliances, underscoring their status as new sacred secular rites. As *Travail*'s narrator explains, the blood of one family calms the hatred of another, another revitalizes a degenerate one, still another strengthens and ennoble the family. Although, as discussed in Chapter 2, regeneration is more forcefully expressed in *Fécondité* as the growth of the powerful Froment dynasty and the strengthening of blood and genes, it nevertheless makes love through a secular rite in *Travail* and *Vérité* because of its power to erode cultural barriers: "elle la bourgeoise, la fillette du patron, lui le gamin des rues, le fils pauvre du misérable travail manuel...[leur mariage] éteignait toutes les haines, consommait le pacte d'alliance, on voulut le glorifier, en faire une fête qui célébrât le pardon du passé, l'entrée radieuse dans l'avenir."<sup>330</sup> *Travail* and *Vérité*'s finale of whirlwind unions simultaneously signifies and enacts the coming of a new peaceful era. On the other hand, marriage is also a central biopolitical force in Zola's future republic because it strengthens and regulates the French population.

Marie and Pierre Froment's special education fosters their childrens' future social ministry. As children of an ex-priest and an educated, freethinking atheist woman, Mathieu, Luc, and Marc, the *Évangiles*' heroes, are indoctrinated at a young age into the "religion de l'homme." Because they embody their parents' unique moral values, a kind of spiritual humanism, the Froment children are ideologically and spiritually predisposed to republican social heroism. Pierre and Marie are leaders in secular education and instruction through the experimental upbringing of their children. Each of the Froment boys received a modern secular education combining advanced scientific education and practical manual training, intellectualism tempered by practicality. By learning a classical science and its practical application, the Froment children are taught the broader utility of knowledge. Because they enjoy the privilege of higher education, yet learn to respect its financial and social value, the Froments' upbringing is unquestionably bourgeois. Mathieu is a trained draughtsman cum industrial designer of agricultural machinery, Luc, future social visionary, trained as an engineer, stoneworker, architect, and house-builder, and finally, Marc learns cartography and lithography before becoming a primary schoolteacher and educational reformer.

The Froments' secular humanist education is not completed until they embark on spiritual journeys as adults. Mathieu, Luc and Marc's discovery of the social wounds around them spurs them to action. By putting their specialized skills at the service of their communities as well as greater national and international causes, the Froments' bourgeois education becomes a sacred unifying force. The beginning of each *Évangile* tells the story of their self actualization through their heroic conversion to the new secular faith—in fertility, in work, and in truth, respectively. It is this faith that activates their evangelical mission to save France. In the process of the Froments coming to faith, these intellectual, practical beings represent the emergence of a new spirituality based on the valorization of compassion and vitality, as well as human frailty because it indicates the potential for

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<sup>330</sup> *Travail*, OC, 8: 867.

growth. Zola's evangelizing Froments teach that science and truth must be tempered by brotherly love.<sup>331</sup>

Sacred intercultural unions in *Vérité* restore harmony to social order through the forces of love *and* rational secular instruction. In fact, the new generations are created by people from different social backgrounds learning to love one another as equals. Thanks to national public education, young people are freed from blind old prejudices, and empowered to choose mates from a variety of social backgrounds. The renewed republican community witnesses a profusion of marriages, a force which draws the most hostile enemy families together. This, according to Zola, is the proof of education's successful reconciliation of social enmity, its religious force in the creation "cette lignée poussée en pleine raison, en pleine certitude!"<sup>332</sup> This sacred process builds what I read as the republican church by making possible new cultural hybrids who are ideologically pure, happily productive and reproductive citizens. The Froments' celebrations of marriage, anniversaries, harvests, and graduations bring their community together by sharing and increasing their faith. Durkheim identifies this process of contagion as an important part of religious ritual: "La contagion n'est donc pas une sorte de procédé secondaire par lequel le caractère sacré, une fois acquis, se propage, c'est le procédé même par lequel il s'acquiert."<sup>333</sup> In *Paris* as in *Fécondité*, procreation sacralizes the body and the family in the same way that industry makes work and science sacred and education makes working, learning, and teaching sacred in the *Travail* and *Vérité*. By strengthening community ties beyond genetics, knowledge is the core religious force in Zola's *Evangelies*: "Tout allait partir de l'école, elle était le champ fécond des progrès infinis, on la trouvait à la naissance de chaque réforme accomplie, de chaque nouvelle étape vers la solidarité et la paix."<sup>334</sup>

### Scientific Catechism and *Laïcité*

*Travail* and *Vérité* engage with fin-de-siècle movements for *laïcité* which responded to the dilemma about morality by cultivating faith in science, *patrie* and humanity. *Travail* outlines an ideal integral educational system at the heart of the workers' collective. *Vérité* promotes education as valuable national institution, calling for the standardization of public school and the establishment of professional teachers' colleges. Both general education and professional programs in Zola's utopian vision echo the humanist and patriotic doctrines of leading pedagogues of his time, such as Ferdinand Buisson, Emile Durkheim, and Pauline Kergomard. These pedagogues sought to reform education through secular scientific methods. It was not sufficient to provide some schooling only to the bourgeoisie and nobility; they agreed that all levels of education had to be made free and mandatory for boys and girls of all classes in a single standardized national system. Like Kergomard, Zola was more radical in his advocacy of coeducational instruction than other secularists of his day. Zola's "scientific catechism" emphasizes the

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<sup>331</sup> Curiously, each Froment brother accomplishes his own mission as an individual hero. Mathieu, Luc and Marc are spiritual and social leaders of their own distinct communities. Despite their ubiquitous celebration of human fraternity, these visionary brothers never appear together in any of the novels, nor is their existence ever evoked in one another's speech or thoughts.

<sup>332</sup> *Vérité*, OC, 8: 1431.

<sup>333</sup> *Les formes élémentaires*, 463.

<sup>334</sup> *Vérité*, *Œuvres Complètes*, 8: 1404.

new joint moral and intellectual role that French public school attempted to carve out for itself at the turn of the century. Morality would be based on one's duty to others, to society and the nation rather than to teachers, parents or to God. The new curriculum would rely on scientific experience and observation rather than strict disciplinary learning techniques like dictation and memorization. Progressive pedagogues of the Third Republic proposed positivist methods not only for standardizing but also humanizing the education and instruction of future generations.

At the same time that Zola created his fictional educated Republic, Emile Durkheim lectured on the primary role of education in secularizing France. Chair of the department of the Science of Education at the Sorbonne, Durkheim's views echoed his predecessor Ferdinand Buisson's militant advocacy of secular education. Like Zola, Buisson railed against the Catholic church's intellectual domination of the common people: "Il reste à laïciser la religion, et non à la détruire. Il reste à faire dans ce domaine le même travail d'émancipation qui a transformé, en les sécularisant toutes les branches de l'activité humaine dont l'Eglise eut si longtemps le magistère incontesté."<sup>335</sup> His anticlerical stance, evoked in the title for this essay "Laïcisons la religion," resonates strongly with the sacred secular paradigm of Zola's *Evangelies*.<sup>336</sup>

For Durkheim, on the other hand, secular education was not so much an issue of overthrowing the illegitimate and outdated authority of the Catholic church as it was a matter of maintaining France's status as a great modern nation. At the turn of the century, he asserted, "[...] si nous avons senti, avec plus de force que nos pères, la nécessité d'une éducation morale entièrement rationnelle, c'est évidemment que nous sommes devenus plus rationalistes."<sup>337</sup> The father of French sociology shared Zola's concern for France's political modernity and national moral hygiene, and advocated secular education as the means for this great nation to achieve an "état de santé morale."<sup>338</sup> Buisson and Durkheim argued for creating a rational, universal education and a secular morality. They were militant secularists who saw education as central to unifying the French people under a truly enlightened and egalitarian republic. Transforming France's national education system, Durkheim warned, would not be easy, however. It would involve more than a stripping out of religious practices, language and icons, morality and authority would need to be totally redefined in rational, scientific terms:

Il ne suffit pas de retrancher, il faut remplacer. Il faut découvrir ces forces morales que les hommes, jusqu'à présent, n'ont appris à se représenter que sous la forme d'allégories religieuses ; il faut les dégager de leurs symboles, les présenter dans leur nudité rationnelle, pour ainsi dire, et trouver le moyen de faire sentir à l'enfant leur réalité, sans recourir à aucun intermédiaire mythologique [...] Non seulement il faut veiller à ce que la morale, en se rationalisant, ne perde pas quelques-uns de ses éléments constitutifs, mais encore il faut que, par le fait même de cette laïcisation, elle s'enrichisse d'éléments nouveaux.<sup>339</sup>

In these lectures written almost ten years before *Les formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse*, education already has a religious role in the republic, albeit detached from theistic religion. For Zola as for Durkheim, education is the privileged site for cultivating

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<sup>335</sup> "Laïcisons la religion," *Action*, 22 août 1903.

<sup>336</sup> Buisson was a militant anticlerical whose opposition to the Second Empire, which forced teachers to include religious instruction in their curricula, led him to seek refuge in Switzerland.

<sup>337</sup> *L'Éducation et la morale* (Paris: Editions Fabert, 2005), 42.

<sup>338</sup> *L'Éducation et la morale*, 44.

<sup>339</sup> *L'Éducation et la morale*, 42.

a modern French moral community of citizens. The primary socially unifying force of education most certainly qualifies as a religious force by the definition given in *Les formes élémentaires*. Apostles of secularism, the Froments and their disciples work to usher in a new era of humanist spirituality, teaching the moral good of truth, health, progress and community, rather than blind obedience to tradition. Luc and Marc Froment realize the Third Republic's mission to enlighten, filling a spiritual lacuna left in French society from the scientific discrediting of Christian beliefs.

Though there are few detailed examples of *Travail* and *Vérité*'s reformed curricula, their school systems are based on experimental and experiential methods of learning. In *Vérité*, the reform of scholastic programs involves little more than a sudden shift from passive learning and catechism to active learning and critical development. Marc Froment is chosen by Salvan, the director of the *Ecole normale* (Teachers' College), to lead his peers in new educational initiatives as a model instructor, mentor and recruiter. Marc is charged with the daunting task of cultivating logic and intellectual curiosity among the poorest and most ignorant children in a deeply conservative and religious French town. His approach to teaching entails reorganizing social bonds around a common passion for objective truth and the progress of humanity:

Aussi enseignait-il d'abord qu'il n'y avait pas de vérité en dehors de la raison, de la logique, et surtout de l'expérience [...] Toute vérité révélée est un mensonge, la vérité expérimentale est seule vraie, une et entière éternelle. Et de là venait la nécessité première d'opposer au catéchisme catholique le catéchisme scientifique, le monde et l'homme expliqués par la science, rétablis en leur réalité vivante, en leur marche vers un continuel avenir, de plus en plus parfait [...] Mais il ne suffisait pas de savoir, il fallait un lien social, un esprit de perpétuelle solidarité.<sup>340</sup>

Marc's educational vision is called a catechism because it teaches faith in the rational, secular humanist worldview and calls for hands-on learning activities, modeled after scientific methods. The emphasis of experimentation as the key to real knowledge recalls Zola's promotion of similar scientific approaches to writing in *Le Roman expérimental* (1880). In this work, he argues that, like the young student, the naturalist novelist is faced with doubt about unknown truths, unexplained phenomena and experiments with them in an effort to analyze and master the facts: "C'est l'investigation scientifique, c'est le raisonnement expérimental qui combat une à une les hypothèses des idéalistes, et qui remplace les romans de pure imagination par les romans d'observation et d'expérimentation."<sup>341</sup> Such idealistic hypotheses in the context of education, would be religious explanations or superstitions. For Zola's republican apostle of truth, religious beliefs must be exposed as false and replaced by first-hand, scientific analysis. As we shall see, Zola's vision of the scientific domination of knowledge in the *Evangelies'* school system has some disquieting political implications.

Marc, like Durkheim and Kergomard, emphasizes the primary role that modern education must have in local and national community building. Since teaching respect for science and truth alone is insufficient for social progress, the new school must also cultivate respect for humankind. Kergomard wrote that, in order for school to become a humane place of learning and community, "il faut que l'école, dépouillée de son formalisme, se laisse pénétrer profondément par le respect et l'amour de l'humanité."<sup>342</sup>

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<sup>340</sup> *Vérité*, OC, 8: 1146-1147.

<sup>341</sup> *Le Roman expérimental*, cinquième édition, (Paris: Charpentier, 1881), 16-17.

<sup>342</sup> Kergomard, Pauline, *L'éducation maternelle dans l'école* (Paris: Hachette, 1886-1895), vi.

Similarly, Durkheim argued that public school was the only means of teaching a secular morality comprised of both humanism and patriotism. The fundamental axiom of such a morality, he claimed, is that “la personne humaine est la chose sainte par excellence; c’est qu’elle a droit au respect que le croyant de toutes les religions réserve à son dieu; et c’est ce que nous exprimons nous-mêmes, quand nous faisons de l’idée d’humanité la fin et la raison d’être de la patrie.”<sup>343</sup>

As for new pedagogical methods, Luc opposes the disciplinarian model symbolized by the conservative lay schoolteacher, Hermeline, whose goal is to “plier les enfants à la discipline de la liberté, entrer en eux le régime républicaine, par la force s’il le fallait.”<sup>344</sup> Marc rejects the clerical teachers’ authoritarianism in favor of a student-based pedagogy much like what Kergomard described as a “respect quasi religieux pour l’âme de l’enfant.”<sup>345</sup> Luc and Marc believe that children will only learn through more humane, autonomous methods, well stated in *Vérité*:

[...] une sélection naturelle se faisait, selon les goûts, les aptitudes, les facultés des élèves, qui, de l’école primaire, montaient à des écoles spéciales, échelonnées suivant le besoin, embrassant toutes les applications pratiques, allant jusqu’aux plus hautes spéculations de l’esprit.<sup>346</sup>

In the *Evangiles*’ reformed public schools, students participate in their own intellectual development by expressing their personal aptitudes and choices. Secular curricula in the *Evangiles* combines civic lessons and basic reading and writing skills with specialized training in science, industry, fine art and philosophy.

Coeducation is another a key element in Zola’s ideal school system. In the *Evangiles* sexual equality, like socio-economic equality, was one of the foremost goals of the new secular program from the *maternelle* to the *école normale*. *Travail*’s school director, Suzanne, marvels at the liberating power of coeducation:

[...] qui éveillait une sorte d’émulation nouvelle, donnant de la douceur aux garçons, de la décision aux filles [...] on ne constatait pas un cas de l’excitation sensuelle tant redoutée, le niveau moral au contraire se relevait, et c’était merveille de voir ces garçons, ces filles aller d’eux-mêmes aux études qui devaient leur être plus utiles, grâce à la grande liberté laissée à chaque écolier de travailler selon son goût, pour les besoins de son avenir.<sup>347</sup>

Zola’s firm support of coeducation distinguishes him from other republican reformers as a radical feminist visionary. Although the first law mandating the creation of public girls’ schools in France was passed in 1867 (Durury Law), coeducation did not become the norm in secular schools until nearly one hundred years later in 1963 with the Fouchet reform. Even in the first several republican regimes, girls’ education was not made mandatory until 1975.<sup>348</sup> This slow progress is explained by the fact that most nineteenth and early twentieth-century secularists, Durkheim included, opposed the *école mixte* either out of concern for girls’ moral purity or the belief in women’s innate intellectual

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<sup>343</sup> *L’Education morale* (Paris: Fabert, 2005), 150.

<sup>344</sup> *Travail, OC*, 8: 658.

<sup>345</sup> *L’éducation maternelle dans l’école*, vi.

<sup>346</sup> *Vérité, OC*, 8: 1168.

<sup>347</sup> *Travail, OC*, 8: 887-888.

<sup>348</sup> “Girls in school in France over the Twentieth Century: Investigating the Claim of a Double Gender--Class Handicap”, *Revue Française de Sociologie*, English Selection, 44 (2003): 49-77, (Catherine Marry, Marie Duru-Bellat, Annick Kieffer), 53.

inferiority or both.<sup>349</sup> *Travail* and *Vérité* advocate coeducation at all levels because, as Marc puts it, “Il n’y avait de plus sain et de plus fort que l’école mixte.”<sup>350</sup> Because Zola’s educators reject popular theories of women’s moral fragility and their inferior intellectual and physical aptitudes, his *Évangiles* contribute to the radical feminist discourse of his day. According to Denise Karnaouch, coeducation was the main platform for radical fin-de-siècle feminists during the 1896 and 1900 international feminist congresses in Paris.<sup>351</sup> The national secular school system in Zola’s ideal republic creates solidarity between girls and boys of diverse backgrounds by working, living and learning together from an early age. Zola’s “instruction intégrale” or “instruction totale” reinforces Kergomard and Durkheim’s belief that school can and should act as an intermediary between the family and society, anchoring the individual within the collective.<sup>352</sup> Through integral coeducation, children learn devotion to the broad spectrum of human groups from the family to classmates, neighbors, and by extension, the republic and humanity.

New pedagogy also meant that there would be a need for highly specialized teachers, a real demand during the Third Republic which Zola made the theme of *Vérité*. His choice of *instituteur/institutrice* over *maître/maîtresse* already attests to the transformations in teachers’ professional training and social status. Zola would have applauded François Mauriac for praising the word *instituteur*: “celui qui établit, celui qui instruit, celui qui institue l’humanité dans l’homme; quel beau mot!”<sup>353</sup> A good *instituteur* must not simply transmit knowledge, s/he must also awaken students’ intellectual curiosity and civic devotion. The *Évangiles* grant teachers powerful spiritual and social roles as intellectual shepherds, surrogate parents, and mentors who replace the omnipotent and omniscient authority figures and disciplinarians caricatured by clerical teachers.

As Emile Durkheim and Pauline Kergomard argued, sociology and child psychology were imperative to turn-of-the-century the educational reform. Both pedagogues emphasized the urgency of creating specialized teacher training programs.

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<sup>349</sup> “As one republican educator commented in 1907, the American penchant for coeducation simply did not suit French mores,” Linda Clark, *Rise of Professional Women in France: Gender and Public Administration Since 1830* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 45. Ferdinand Buisson clearly admired coeducation in the US but there is disagreement among critics about whether or not he advocated this model in a Catholic country like France for moral reasons. See Buisson’s article “Coeducation” in *Éducation et République*, Paris: Editions Kimé 2003 and Denise Karnaouch’s “Féminisme et laïcité 1848-1914,” *Extrait du bulletin Archives du féminisme* n°9 – (décembre 2005).

<sup>350</sup> *Vérité*, OC, 8: 1175. *Travail* also celebrates coeducation: “[...] l’instruction, l’éducation nouvelles, en réunissant les deux sexes, en leur donnant les mêmes connaissances, les avaient lentement acheminés à une bonne entente [...]” *Travail*, OC, 8: 958.

<sup>351</sup> “Féminisme et laïcité 1848-1914.”

<sup>352</sup> Kergomard writes, “Mon but initial a été de faire pénétrer dans l’école les procédés éducatifs de la famille; Aujourd’hui que je connais mieux les familles, celles que la lutte pour le pain quotidien absorbe et entraîne, celles dont l’ignorance entretient les préjugés, celles que la misère dégrade, celles que le vice déprave, je rêve de faire pénétrer les procédés de l’école dans la famille; plus encore de faire envahir la famille par l’école,” *L’éducation maternelle dans l’école*, vi. For Durkheim the issue was more urgent: “[...] s’il est un pays où le rôle de l’école soit particulièrement important et nécessaire, c’est le nôtre [...] Il se trouve, en effet, que, l’école mise de côté, il n’existe plus chez nous de société intermédiaire entre la famille et l’Etat, j’entends de société qui vive d’une vie qui ne soit pas artificielle et de pure apparence. *L’éducation morale*, 289.

<sup>353</sup> *Le Sagouin* (Paris: Seuil, 1981), 139.

Their pedagogical studies show that effective learning comes from building a nurturing relationship with children that builds on their interests and skills rather than enforcing a rigid curriculum on all students. Although many republicans, even Jules Ferry, resisted the idea of women taking on more public roles in society, the Ferry laws created hundreds of jobs for women as public schoolteachers. The segregated French school system operating on the belief that men were the best teachers for boys and women for girls actually caused a boom in women's professional opportunity, resulting in parity among men and women in the field of teaching.<sup>354</sup> While some female schoolteachers and administrators claimed that they worked out of necessity—personal or familial economic obligations—other women working in the new secular schools began to openly express professional ambition.<sup>355</sup> Particularly in *Vérité*, Zola strongly supports women's entry into what has become one of France's most prestigious professions.<sup>356</sup> The *Évangiles* glorify teachers like Suzanne, Sœurette, Joulic, Mignot, Mlle Mazeline, Marc Froment, his daughter and granddaughter, Louise and Thérèse, all of whom realize the project of intellectual and patriotic regeneration, achieving solidarity in their classes through coeducation and teamwork, which translate the respect for classmates to a broader respect for their country and humanity.

Like *Vérité*, *Travail* describes school as a humane place of learning in tune with Kergomard and Durkheim's new child-centered pedagogy. It awakens energy and talent in young students while promoting extreme reverence for teachers: "Le maître n'a pas d'autre tâche que d'éveiller les énergies. C'est un professeur d'énergie individuelle, simplement chargé de dégager les aptitudes de l'enfant, en provoquant ses questions, en développant sa personnalité."<sup>357</sup> However, while *la Crèche*'s teachers follow Marc Froment's method of raising individual intellectual curiosity in order to foster solidarity, knowledge, and patriotism in young students, education satisfies a wide range of social needs. School is the primary site of social change, acting as a new mold in which diverse groups melt together and are remade rational, freethinking, and happy workers. It is where they cultivate their intellectual and professional talents but also where they learn their civic duty to their community and respect and love for their fellow citizens.

Education in Luc's *Crèche* shares Marc's experimental and experiential approach though his a more expansive vocational system than in *Vérité*, which is limited to teaching. Under Luc's guidance, Sœurette Jordan creates a progressive coeducational system that introduces students to a wide variety of academic subjects, recreational activities, and professional training. Sœurette's system is designed to correct the segregation and strict disciplinarianism prevalent in parochial and public schools. The old republican teacher Hermeline opposes Luc and Sœurette's liberal view of children's education as naïve, claiming that children are naturally antisocial and egotistical, in his

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<sup>354</sup> "Segregation also created parity in the teaching profession in France whereas women dominated American and English schools making up 70% of the teaching corps and in Germany women were outnumbered by men, representing only 18%." Linda Clark, *Rise of Professional Women in France: Gender and Public*, 46.

<sup>355</sup> Jo Burr Margadant, *Madame le Professeur: Women Educators in the Third Republic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 184-185.

<sup>356</sup> Louise and Thérèse Froment incarnate education's power of emancipation. *Vérité*, OC, 8: 1485-1486.

<sup>357</sup> *Travail*, OC, 8: 659.

own words “un jeune arbre qu’il faut redresser et corriger.”<sup>358</sup> Hermeline’s educational mission is far from Luc and Sœurrette’s humanist individualism: “Son rêve était de faire de chaque élève un serviteur de l’Etat, esclave de l’Etat, sacrifiant à l’Etat sa personnalité totale.”<sup>359</sup>

On the contrary, *la Crèche* promises children absolute agency in a pleasure-oriented learning environment, based on the Fourierist belief in harnessing individual human passions in order to achieve social harmony. Through his daily tours of *la Crèche*, Luc observes the success of the naturalist teaching methods:

[...] leur effort tendait aussi à éveiller en lui [l’enfant] le besoin de l’ordre, à le doter d’une méthode, par l’usage quotidien de l’expérience. Sans méthode, il n’est pas de travail utile, c’est la méthode qui classe, qui permet d’acquérir toujours, sans rien perdre des acquisitions déjà faites. Et la science des livres se trouvait [...] remise à son plan de moindre importance car l’enfant n’apprend bien que ce qu’il voit, que ce qu’il touche, que ce qu’il comprend par lui-même [...] L’instruction n’était plus une torture, elle devenait un plaisir toujours renouvelé.<sup>360</sup>

The variety of lessons and training provided prevents boredom in students who cultivate a broad set of skills and are not subjected to any measure of success other than individual pleasure. While this system does not lack order, school is depicted as a personal, freely chosen and practical life experience, and furthermore one that is endlessly entertaining to children. From the earliest age, children are educated in science and the arts, with an emphasis on how work mutually pleases the individual and benefits the community. *La Crèche*’s schools represent a perfect balance between liberal individualist and socialist doctrines: girls and boys alike receive instruction in fine arts, fitness, and practical sciences. Sœurrette and Luc’s pedagogy is summarized as “renouveler l’instruction et l’éducation, ne plus les baser sur la paresse de l’homme, mais sur son inextinguible besoin de savoir, et rendre l’étude agréable, et laisser à chacun son énergie individuelle, et réunir dès l’enfance les deux sexes qui doivent vivre côte à côte.”<sup>361</sup>

### Educating Workers

While Zola’s *Evangelical* novels are all utopian to a degree, *Travail* has the most classically utopian social vision as it is based on Charles Fourier’s phalanstery, *Harmonie*. His *Crèche* is a more sober version of Fourier’s extravagant, pleasure-oriented workers’ society in which workers happily spend exactly half a day at work, performing a variety of personalized tasks leaving the rest of their time to leisure.<sup>362</sup> At the age of forty, a member of *La Crèche* is no longer obligated to work, and is free to work “à sa joie personnelle.”<sup>363</sup> The absence of manual labor in *Travail* implies that in the future, all difficult, dangerous dirty work will be performed by machines. Despite the

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<sup>358</sup> *Travail*, OC, 8: 660. Durkheim argued that it was necessary to “domestiquer l’enfant, être égoïste et asocial,” Béatrice Compagnon et Anne Thévenin, *L’école et la société française*, 40-41.

<sup>359</sup> *Travail*, OC, 8: 658.

<sup>360</sup> *Travail*, OC, 8: 691-692.

<sup>361</sup> *Travail*, OC, 8: 790.

<sup>362</sup> The importance of sex-work Fourier’s utopia was unsurprisingly lost in Zola’s naturalist adaptation. As we saw in Chapter 2, Zola believed that monogamous love and procreation were the only legitimate justifications for sex.

<sup>363</sup> *Travail*, OC, 8: 656, 917.

altruistic, humanistic aims of *La Crêcherie*, Zola's portrayal of the secular republican school, in fact, reveals its repressive mechanisms.

In *Travail*, children theoretically have agency and autonomy in their education but the school system depicted has a clear totalitarian dimension. Zola scholar, Brian Nelson, considers this fact a problem of political unconsciousness, and perhaps, of hypocrisy:

Although *Travail* describes the collapse of the old bourgeois order and the abolition of economic privilege, the principles of bourgeois leadership and authority are both retained and reaffirmed. Zola sees the ideal bourgeois as a leader and an organizer, as a kind of inspired technocrat seeking to organize and rationalize rather than to bring about violent revolutionary change. The propertied bourgeoisie of the capitalist variety is eclipsed by a new managerial elite.<sup>364</sup>

The communist infrastructure of Luc's collective does not hide what Nelson identifies as the novel's underlying bourgeois values: "work, moderation, and order," and Zola's "faith in the natural forces of fecundity, scientific progress, and a liberal education."<sup>365</sup> For Nelson, it is hypocritical, if not disingenuous of Zola to claim that his heroes eradicate class difference and class privilege when they actually maintain and strengthen the very social order that they critique. This unconsciously bourgeois education in these novels is even more intriguing than Zola's hypocritical class position because it exemplifies the operation of what Louis Althusser calls the dominant ideological state apparatus in modern society. Education it is not just one of many forces, it is the central social force in *Travail*, instilling bourgeois values in young generations and initiating them in the cults of love, science, work and truth. As in *Vérité*, education serves to enlighten, but its primary function is to resolve economic iniquity by radically reorganizing labor and capital. The regulation of capital and labor in Luc's collective, as its very name, *la Crêcherie* (nursery-maker), suggests, is a process that begins by educating children to be active workers and consumers who, in turn, produce more active workers and consumers. A close comparison of Luc and Marc's intentions and the actual schools they erect shows a consistent disjuncture between Zola's liberating educational/industrial vision and his portrayal of school and management powerful as repressive state institutions. Althusser and Michel Foucault's critiques of education illuminate the troubling implications of Zola's utopian public school as the all-powerful sacred state institution in the French republic.

*Travail's* city planners understand that because labor in and of itself is not a natural inclination, the joy of work must be learned. Despite their altruistic speeches about the satisfaction of a job well done, the *Crêcherie's* teachers and administrators alike utilize a system of repeated exposure to diverse types of work for short durations, according to Fourier's theory that variety of task and short intervals are essential to a pleasurable work experience. By imposing mandatory public education, Luc confers greater power to the state. Moreover, the *Crêcherie's* educational system contradicts Luc's faith in children's autonomy. His pedagogy ironically resembles Hermeline's view that children must be molded, or in his words "acted upon" so that they share liberal, republican values: "on agit sur les enfants, en les libérant des idées fausses, en les aidant à croître et à progresser."<sup>366</sup> Luc's harmonious society is created through a socialist

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<sup>364</sup> "Zola's Ideology: The Road to Utopia" in *Critical Essays on Emile Zola*, edited by David Baguley (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1986), 171.

<sup>365</sup> "Zola's Ideology: The Road to Utopia," 171.

<sup>366</sup> *Travail*, OC, 8: 881.

school system whose totalitarian leanings are justified by Science's irrefutable 'truths' and devotion to the state which protects them. *Travail's* education, as A.A. Greaves notes, "is a restricted system which does not even conceive that a child might have interests lying outside the somewhat narrow exigencies of the state."<sup>367</sup> The utopian status of Luc's autonomous collective is seriously undermined by the fact that School is an aggressive socializing mechanism, controlling its members (children) who do not enjoy political or legal agency.

*Travail* exemplifies exactly how, as Louis Althusser claims, School becomes the dominant Ideological State Apparatus in liberal capitalist nations.<sup>368</sup> Just as Marc's school builds the authority of secular morality in generations of future citizens, Luc's school cultivates the cooperativist work ethic. In this way, School ensures the continued adherence of existing members of this emergent modern community, as well as the growth of the new labor force and the secular social order in the world:

[...] les générations nouvelles, instruites, refaites par les écoles, par les ateliers, la poursuivaient d'un pas allègre, atteignant les horizons déclarés jadis chimériques. Grâce au continuels devenir, les enfants, les enfants des enfants semblaient avoir d'autres cœurs et d'autres cerveaux, et la fraternité leur devenait facile, dans une société où le bonheur de chacun était pratiquement le bonheur de tous.<sup>369</sup>

The development of critical and creative faculties, physical fitness and manual skills has long-term economic and political benefits for Luc's utopian cooperative.

School "remakes" French people into productive workers, enlightened and rational voters and community members. With each new generation in *Travail*, education is no longer transformative in its embourgeoisement of *le peuple*, rather, it is self-sustaining to the point of obsolescence. Younger generations are biologically transformed and regenerated, endowed with minds compatible with cooperative work. Learning to enjoy work claims to destroy the historic "slave labor mentality" of the laboring classes, by replacing it with the pleasurable "cooperative ethic" taught by what the secular School presents as a politically neutral education. This supports Althusser's argument that the quieter the ideological apparatus is, the more effective and the more hypocritical and potentially violent:

Les mécanismes qui produisent ce résultat vital pour le régime capitaliste sont naturellement recouverts et dissimulés par une idéologie de l'École universellement régnante, puisque c'est une des formes essentielles de l'idéologie bourgeoise dominante: une idéologie qui représente l'École comme un milieu neutre, dépourvu d'idéologie (puisque... laïque), où des maîtres respectueux de la « conscience » et de la « liberté » des enfants qui leur sont confiés (en toute confiance) par leurs « parents » (lesquels sont eux aussi libres, c'est-à-dire propriétaires de leurs enfants) les font accéder à la liberté, la moralité et la responsabilité d'adultes par leur propre exemple, les connaissances, la littérature et leurs vertus « libératrices ». <sup>370</sup>

The joint labor and educational apparatuses in *Travail's* utopia reveal the secular School's surreptitious exercise of power to create economic, political and ideological hegemony.

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<sup>367</sup> A.A. Greaves, "The Danger of Optimism," *Pacific Coast Philology*, Vol. 4 (April 1969): 37-40.

<sup>368</sup> Louis Althusser, "Idéologie et appareils idéologiques d'État, notes pour une recherche" *La pensée*, N° 151, juin 1970: 3-38.

<sup>369</sup> *Travail*, OC, 8: 952.

<sup>370</sup> "Idéologie et appareils idéologiques d'État," 24.

Zola displacement of the Fourierist competitive instinct further reveals the French republic's surreptitious movement toward economic and cultural hegemony.<sup>371</sup> Of Fourier's three "mechanizing passions," the composite (spiritual and sensual enthusiasm), butterfly (variety), and cabalist (rivalry), the latter is the only one not explicitly integrated in *la Crêcherie's* labor system.<sup>372</sup> Because it is a cooperative association, any opposition to Luc's system becomes irrelevant: non-adherents either disappear or die off because they unwilling to accept Luc's policies, or unable to sustain themselves financially as independent workers. Luc himself meets no opposition whatsoever in his leadership of *la Crêcherie*. Competition is relocated in the *Crêcherie's* implicit rivalry with the Ancien Regime and the antiquated economies of neighboring nations. Zola's narrative externalizes the cabalistic passion, obscuring the aggressive force of international rivalry by exalting the benevolent forces of curiosity, fraternity, and patriotism.

Over time, the cooperative becomes so powerful that neighboring communities have no other choice but to join Luc's expanding conglomeration: "Comment nier la force de cette association du capital, du travail et de l'intelligence, lorsque les bénéfiques devenaient plus considérables d'année en année et que les ouvriers de la Crêcherie gagnaient le double de leurs camarades des autres usines?"<sup>373</sup> This manifestation of capitalist pride questions whether *la Crêcherie's* expansion owes to mediating citizens' desire for change or its engendering of absolute economic dependency. Zola's contemporary, economist and Nobel Laureate Frédéric Passy questioned the logic of *Travail's* "capital-free" cooperative, suggesting that Zola "se fait une illusion singulière, s'il croit pouvoir se passer de capital. Il serait peut-être plus vrai de dire qu'il ne se rend pas bien compte de ce que c'est que le capital."<sup>374</sup> For capital, as Passy reminds us, is not only currency but also goods, services and energy exchanges which are used to ensure the operation of any community, a fact which *Travail* conspicuously ignores. The economic naivety of Zola's vision is succinctly proven by Passy's reiteration of the immutable interdependence of work, capital and talent. To get rid of salaries and capital, Passy explains, would be illogical: "ce serait supprimer le travail, qui ne vit que de capital, qui n'est animé que par l'intelligence et qui n'est mis en action que par la perspective d'une rémunération, c'est-à-dire d'un salaire." Even if such a capital-free system could be achieved, it would be at the cost of the very force that is supposed to animate it. In light of Passy's rational ideological perspective, Zola's high optimism is not only problematic as a naïve formula for socioeconomic justice, but also a dangerous oversimplification of the relationship between labor and privilege.

Despite the narrator's declaration of the end of capital at the end of *Travail*, Luc expresses an acute awareness of the important role of capital in his city. Likewise, the emphasis of Luc's messianism reaffirms his uniquely privileged status as founder and chief of the collective. The fact that he, too, works unsuccessfully attempts to divert attention away from his real political, financial and social privileges. Luc sees himself as

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<sup>371</sup> The fact that Zola did not research Fourier's writings for the novel, but referred instead to Hippolyte Renaud's synthesis of Fourierist social doctrines in *Solidarité* (1869) may account for some of the missing Fourierist elements in his adaptation.

<sup>372</sup> Jonathan Beecher, *The Utopian Vision of Charles Fourier* (London: J. Cape, 1975), 283.

<sup>373</sup> *Travail*, OC, 8: 790.

<sup>374</sup> "Travail," *Journal des économistes*, T. XLVII, N° 2, août 1901.

the queen bee of *la Crêcherie*, who works like everyone else, but whose superior status is unrivaled:

Le constructeur de ville qui était en lui, goûtait une joie à chaque bâtisse nouvelle, s'ajoutant aux premières, agrandissant le bourg né de la veille. N'était-ce pas sa mission? Les choses et les êtres n'allaient-ils pas se lever, se grouper à sa voix? Il se sentait la force de commander aux pierres, de les faire monter, s'aligner en logis humains, en édifices publics, où il logerait la fraternité, la vérité, la justice.<sup>375</sup>

Such a disjuncture suggests that democracy and autonomy, like the abolition of capital, are part of Luc's ideological mechanisms, functioning only as illusions to satisfy the citizens individual desires. Like education and work, Luc Froment and his cooperative administration also regulate privilege and pleasure. Through education, *Travail* fuses Fourieristic hedonism and technocratic utilitarianism that Althusser describes as essential to capitalist societies.<sup>376</sup> Shared affluence, pleasure and luxury in *la Crêcherie* obscure the lack of autonomy that is the price of Zola's social harmony.

*Travail* presents an ideal society made possible through the sustained illusion of democracy and autonomy, satisfying only limited and superficial needs of its citizens and simultaneously concealing its real technocratic totalitarian government. Zola's adaptation of collectivist and socialist doctrines to a capitalist consumer economy, results in a modern technocratic barter economy – promising satisfaction of individual needs in conjunction with those of a growing industrial conglomeration. Citizens are allowed the right to choose in superficial matters, for example, each family has ample domestic space and is able to chose the specific location of its home and the details of home décor.<sup>377</sup> Children are encouraged to voice their own interests in intellectual, artistic and technical training, though their work is ultimately determined by the needs of the community. This small degree of agency effectively distracts from the fact that what the students actually learn in school is nevertheless predetermined by the state through the school directors and the ministry of education.

### Public School and Modern Technologies of Power

Zola's *Evangiles* clearly support the fin-de-siècle movement to secularize French public schools and specialize the teaching profession. While leading pedagogues such as Buisson, Kergomard and Durkheim all use religious language to describe the ideal relationship between secular school and the republic, Zola's novels do so most explicitly and most forcefully thanks to the seductive power of literature. Novels are perhaps more effective in disseminating ideology than sociological works because they are entertaining and informative. *Travail* and *Vérité*'s panegyric of the national secular school is more than metaphorical: it elevates education to a sacred status in Zola's ideal republic. By fusing the modern cults of science, truth and knowledge, the Fromentian religion of man effectively supplants the antiquated and pessimistic Christian religion. Marc and Luc's project to rationalize instruction and education leads to education taking on an increasingly sacred role and by the end the *Evangiles*, becomes the supreme authority in the republic.

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<sup>375</sup> *Travail*, OC, 8: 699.

<sup>376</sup> "Idéologie et appareils idéologiques d'État."

<sup>377</sup> *Travail*, 922-923.

Zola's utopian narrative reveals both the sacred benevolent and the repressive state forces of public education. While its outlandish praise of education's sacredness may, in some ways, divert attention away from the troubling social consequences of state education, this grandiloquence is also exactly what points out its ambiguous political implications. Indeed, the *Évangiles*' utopian school system is an excellent example of Foucault's pouvoir/savoir theory of social control. According to Foucault, knowledge and power not only share the same goals but are inextricably linked:

Il faut plutôt admettre que le pouvoir produit du savoir (et pas simplement en le favorisant parce qu'il le sert ou en l'appliquant parce qu'il est utile); que pouvoir et savoir s'impliquent directement l'un l'autre; qu'il n'y a pas de relation de pouvoir sans constitution corrélatrice d'un champ de savoir, ni de savoir qui ne suppose et ne constitue en même temps des relations de pouvoir. Ces rapports de « pouvoir-savoir » ne sont donc pas à analyser à partir d'un sujet de connaissance qui serait libre ou non par rapport au système du pouvoir; mais il faut considérer au contraire que le sujet qui connaît, les objets à connaître et les modalités de connaissance sont autant d'effets de ces implications fondamentales du pouvoir-savoir et de leurs transformations historiques.<sup>378</sup>

Zola's ideal republican school is a social service that enables the state to have greater control over the population and in a less obviously disciplinarian fashion. The emphasis placed on the benefits of secular school, such as the positive learning environment and cooperative pedagogy, overshadows public school's increased influence on professional choice and its appropriation of the moral authority formerly allocated to the private domain of the family and religion. Furthermore, the insistence of *Travail* and *Vérité*'s narrators on education's power to intellectually emancipate the underprivileged and unify society downplays repressive features like mandatory attendance and standardized curriculum.

Both Luc and Marc Froment invest public teachers with an unprecedented degree of social and political influence. Teachers are the primary figures of modern secular authority in Zola's utopia, because they regulate morality and mediate individual wills and behavior within the collective. They are the chosen ones through whom the power of science and rational thought acts. Marc Froment is described as a messiah who leads his teacher-apostles in delivering France from the intellectual obscurity and political oppression of the Catholic church.<sup>379</sup> Marc's enthusiasm for spreading "truth" suggests a more forceful agenda behind the enlightenment of young minds. Education justifies the destruction of the Catholic church and its followers, and raises up a new intellectual force that replaces the brute military force of the *Ancien Régime*: "Puis, c'était encore, dans sa passion de la vérité, dans son besoin de la conquérir, de l'imposer à tous, le malaise intolérable de voir ainsi triompher le mensonge, de ne pouvoir le combattre et le détruire en la criant tout haut, cette vérité tant cherchée!"<sup>380</sup> The goal of education expressed here is a far cry from the gentle cultivation of rational freethinking in the minds of young children. Zola's militaristic language makes the repressive nature of education transparent. Like his need to "conquer" truth, Marc's mission is nothing less than imposing it on all and debunking republican enemies as illegitimate sources of truth and justice. Such a noble passion for 'objective' truth legitimates the republican victory over French minds.

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<sup>378</sup> *Surveiller et punir* (Paris: Gallimard, 1975), 32.

<sup>379</sup> *Vérité*, OC, 8: 1115.

<sup>380</sup> *Vérité*, OC, 8: 1109-1110.

In *Vérité*, secular education quickly goes from being a humble form of community service to a forceful weapon in a cultural civil war. In its depiction of the secular school as a scythe sweeping away archaic Catholic churches, making way for republican teachers to cultivate the new secular generations, *Vérité* shows the secularists' successful seizure of intellectual as well as political power in France. Despite his stated goal to empower students in their individual quests for knowledge and meaning, Marc's classroom is clearly the realm of the benevolent yet powerful teacher. His professional genius is the raw material of a hero, a greatness which he instills in his protégés. The following passage describing Marc's ministry to his subordinate Mignot is a clear indication of the pedagogue's exalted social status:

[...] chez Mignot, personne autrefois n'aurait soupçonné l'étoffe du héros qu'il devenait aujourd'hui [...] Marc était venu et, dans la tragique histoire, il s'était trouvé l'homme, l'intelligence et la volonté, qui devaient décider de cette conscience, l'embellir, la hausser à la vérité et à la justice. Ainsi la leçon éclatait, lumineuse, certaine; il suffisait de l'exemple, de l'enseignement d'un héros, pour faire lever d'autres héros, du sein obscur et vague de la foule moyenne.<sup>381</sup>

The teacher's enthusiasm and expertise are essential to a good republican education.<sup>382</sup> Marc's privileged point of view expressed in the undeniably patronizing and sanctimonious tone of the above passage suggests that it takes a hero to shape future heroes, a resolute leader to form a triumphant battalion.

The growth of teachers' social value in *Vérité's* fictional republic leads to a regeneration of epic proportions in France's secular schools, a religious force reminiscent of *Fécondité's* biological proliferation in France and colonial Africa. He is the high priest of education in the new secular religion who creates "le bataillon sacré des instituteurs primaires qui devait instruire tout le peuple de France...pour le délivrer des ténèbres séculaires."<sup>383</sup> Intellectual contagion is yet another Durkheimian sacralizing mechanism.<sup>384</sup> Marc believes the nationalization of education to be no less than the modern apostolate raising the masses to the apex of intellectual and moral strength:

Désormais, l'unique salut était dans le peuple, dans cette force nouvelle, cet inépuisable réservoir d'hommes, de travail et d'énergie. Il le sentait monter sans cesse, comme la jeune humanité renouvelée, apportant à la vie sociale une infinie puissance, pour plus de vérité, plus de justice, plus de bonheur.<sup>385</sup>

Marc Froment's intellectual imperialism is reiterated in the narrator's description of the Froment teaching family as a new race of middle-class intellectuals, "bons semeurs de la vérité" who are "comme une amicale colonie."<sup>386</sup> During the Froment family reunion in the final pages of the novel, one younger member points out that everyone present is a teacher, delighting in the fact that "nous faisons déjà un beau bataillon."<sup>387</sup> Thus, for all of Zola's humanistic efforts to destroy social and economic iniquity through education,

<sup>381</sup> *Vérité*, OC, 8: 1272.

<sup>382</sup> The importance of Zola's instituteur is more reminiscent here of the older generation of pedagogues like Ferdinand Buisson who asserted that "Pour nous, laïques, ce n'est pas le livre qui fait la valeur et le caractère de l'enseignement. C'est le maître. Tant vaut l'éducateur, tant vaut l'éducation. C'est son influence personnelle, sa parole, son exemple, son esprit, qui animent la classe, qui éveillent les intelligences.", "Une question de livres scolaires," *Le rappel*, 5 décembre 1909.

<sup>383</sup> *Vérité*, OC, 8: 1115.

<sup>384</sup> *Les formes élémentaires*, 463.

<sup>385</sup> *Vérité*, OC, 8: 1377.

<sup>386</sup> *Vérité*, OC, 8: 1430, 1431.

<sup>387</sup> *Vérité*, OC, 8: 1451.

the rapid multiplication of the heroic teachers ironically represents the formation a new social elite. Towards the end of *Vérité* the goal of centralized, mandatory education is amplified. Marc endeavors to raise an army of teachers, one that will replace the military because, as Zola explains in the same effusive terms with which he closes *Fécondité*, “Ce n’était plus par les armes que la France devait rêver de conquérir le monde, mais par l’irrésistible puissance de l’idée, par tant de liberté et d’équité, qu’elle délivrerait toute les nations et qu’elle aurait la suprême gloire de fonder avec elle la grande confédération des peuples libres fraternels.”<sup>388</sup> The Froment family heralds a new reign of middle-class intelligentsia echoing René Rémond’s observation about the Third Republic’s “grande armée” of schoolteachers. The teacher, he claims, was an “apôtre de la religion nouvelle, un desservant du culte de la raison et de la science [...] un militant de l’idéologie anticléricale.”<sup>389</sup>

When projecting the certain benefits of education to France’s international status, *Vérité*’s narrator uses even bolder language. Knowledge is celebrated as the ultimate modern weapon against moral, intellectual and political corruption in France and in the world. The new public school teaches new generations to live by the self-righteous mantra, “heureux ceux qui savent, heureux les intelligents, les hommes de volonté et d’action parce que le royaume de la terre leur appartiendra,” instead of the humble Christian “heureux les pauvres en esprit.”<sup>390</sup> As discussed in Chapter 1, Zola’s use of narrated monologues intensify the emotional register of the narrative and blur the the boundary between the character’s subjective or personal voice and the narrator’s objective or neutral voice. In this passage, the elision of Marc’s narrated monologues and the omniscient narrative voice heighten the sanctimoniousness of republican intellectual domination by fusing the character’s passionate tone with the ‘objective’ narrative voice.<sup>391</sup> Anticlerical intellectual discourse that reaches fever pitch towards the end of the novel:

Des génies sortaient journellement de cette fertile terre populaire enfin défrichée, une grande époque allait naître, comme une renaissance d’humanité. Cette instruction intégrale, si longtemps refusée par la bourgeoisie maîtresse, parce qu’elle la sentait destructive de l’ancien ordre social, était en effet en train de le détruire, mais pour mettre à sa place le plus sage et le plus magnifique épanouissement de toutes les forces intellectuelles et morales qui doivent faire de la France la libératrice, l’émancipatrice du monde.<sup>392</sup>

The hyperbolic intellectual regeneration of this passage reveals the simultaneous work of the internal ideological social mechanism, which creates a nation of happy geniuses, and the external repressive mechanism, which dominates world politics. As Althusser has shown in his classic essay, “Ideological State Apparatuses,” the relationship between repressive and ideological force schools is a complicated one. The *Évangiles*’ scientific catechism is at the core of social reform and spiritual renewal because through it, the School reproduces the new bourgeois, republican value system and technocratic social order. Zola’s utopian vision of the republican School foreshadows class tensions in the

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<sup>388</sup> *Vérité*, OC, 8: 1386.

<sup>389</sup> *L’anticléricalisme en France de 1815 à nos jours* (Paris: Fayard, 1976), 173.

<sup>390</sup> *Vérité*, OC, 8: 1131.

<sup>391</sup> As Dorrit Cohn argues, “Precisely because they cast the language of a subjective mind into the grammar of objective narration, [narrated monologues] amplify emotional notes.” *Transparent Minds: Narrative Modes for Presenting Consciousness in Fiction* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), 117.

<sup>392</sup> *Vérité*, OC, 8: 1468.

real French public school system that have provoked political critiques of republican pedagogy in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

Instead of a peaceful society based on tolerance and diversity, Marc Froment and his disciples tirelessly erect an all-powerful state school designed to destroy the Church, its schools and its believers, and for that matter, any opposition to secular, scientific law. *Vérité* ultimately reverses the maxim “might makes right” as its narrator proclaims: “tout peuple ignorant est incapable d’équité, la vérité seule le met en puissance de justice.”<sup>393</sup> By teaching the scientific superiority of secular pedagogy and civic morality, Zola’s army of secular schoolteachers declare war on the Catholic church influence in public life. In his vision of the republic, secular school has rightfully taken over the educational, spiritual and protective functions once performed by *Ancien Régime*’s church and military. The triumph of secularism renders any trace of theistic religion in republican life absurd. The conservative, religious French who continue to resist secularism are now seen as more ignorant than the *peuple* they had once disdained. Their superstitious beliefs and idol worship are likened to African religious savagery in *Fécondité*, whereas Catholic churches are likened to theaters “entretenuës par les spectateurs payants, les derniers amateurs des cérémonies qu’on y représentait.”<sup>394</sup> *Vérité* and *Travail* create a new homogenous republican nation of bourgeois consumers and intellectuals. What Zola calls a rehabilitated “people” who enjoy equal intelligence, skill, education, opportunity and property is in fact not a “people” at all, but rather a bourgeois nation. Both novels imagine French national regeneration through the systematic production of intellectual and cultural capital, positioning France as the social and political leader among modern industrial nations. *Travail* and *Vérité* announce the birth of a new republican elitism that belies the egalitarian dream of French Enlightenment and anticipates the consumerist technocratic democracy of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

### Conclusion: The Rites of Art

Universal education and professional training engender secular rites celebrating Zola’s utopian republican communities. The tremendous material, intellectual and artistic wealth of Luc Froment’s workers’ association and his brother Marc’s battalion of teachers creates new opportunities for annual and daily collective celebrations. Such occasions are secular rites that deepen the intimacy of the community across generations. Pleasure experienced from art and literature is a daily rite in that it fosters both individual and community pride.

Productivity is so great by the end of *Travail* that members of *la Crêcherie* reap the benefits of its agricultural bounty, fine fabrics and precious stones, goods so plentiful that they lose their commercial value while retaining their natural aesthetic value. Luc’s collective recuperates luxury goods and leisure time for a new kind of social utility:

Rien n’était d’un charme plus gai, on sentait là une floraison renaissance de la beauté populaire, un peu déjà de cette beauté à laquelle le peuple avait droit et que son génie épanouirait de plus en plus, en moisson des chefs-d’œuvre. Puis, sur les places, aux carrefours des larges avenues, se dressaient les monuments publics, d’immenses constructions où le fer et l’acier triomphaient en charpentes hardies [...] Tout le peuple devait y être chez lui, les musées et les bibliothèques, les théâtres, les bains, les

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<sup>393</sup> *Vérité*, OC, 8: 1119.

<sup>394</sup> *Vérité*, OC, 8: 1118, 1431.

laboratoires, les salles de réunion et de divertissements, n'étaient que des maisons communes ouvertes à la nation entière, où se vivait librement, fraternellement, la vie sociale.<sup>395</sup>

Luc's democratization of material goods, even luxuries, is not only a strong incentive and reward for work; it is also a sign of the community's fantastic prosperity which makes all of its citizens rich. Aesthetic pleasure is another secular sacred rite according to Durkheim's definition: "La force religieuse n'est que le sentiment que la collectivité inspire à ses membres, mais projeté hors des consciences qui l'éprouvent, et l'objectivité. Pour s'objectiver, il se fixe sur un objet qui devient ainsi sacré."<sup>396</sup> Beauty and art simultaneously honor and strengthen the community, thereby gaining an even more sacred status.

Music and dancing as well as fine arts like painting, sculpture and literature are arts appropriated by the workers' commune as Public Art. It is for spectators, a pleasurable, spiritual force of cohesion; for artists, it is vital facet of self expression through which one may display his/her particular talents and training. By fusing passion and logic, self-interest and public utility, spirituality and technology, Public Art is a privileged product of the successful, new educational system. It is furthermore a public pedagogical too and an endless source of inspiration and pleasure for the community. Lange, *Travail's* anarchist potter cum public artist and art teacher, exemplifies art's new sacred role in the Cité:

C'était sa théorie, il fallait de la beauté au peuple, pour qu'il fût sain et fraternel [...] la croyance à la supériorité de l'art aristocratique était imbécile, l'art le plus vaste, le plus émouvant, le plus humain, n'était-il pas dans le plus de vie possible? [...] c'était toujours du peuple que l'art fleurissait, pour l'embellir lui-même, lui donner du parfum et l'éclat, aussi nécessaire à son existence que le pain de chaque jour.<sup>397</sup>

Art alone enjoys a special status in Zola's utopian collective because, as the narrator suggests here, it is the most important kind of work in *la Crèche*. It is no coincidence that the renegade artist Lange becomes the premier public artist. His transformation signals the chaotic nature of creativity, which in an attenuated form (possibly meaning his students' work), provides a significant aesthetic contribution to Luc's regenerated and purified society. Art becomes a symbolic frenetic force in the otherwise orderly utopia; it energizes citizens without threatening social unity. Moreover, by celebrating yet transcending individual work, art is the privileged vehicle for maintaining harmony and pride in the community beyond time and space. Through their works of art, generations gone remain a living part of the collective.

Quite unsurprisingly, literature is the deemed the most sacred form of Public Art. As a means of recreation and education, both *Travail* and *Vérité* announce the secular sacred status of socially-engaged literature in Zola's ideal republic. The consecration of literature is exemplified in Luc Froment's discovery of Fourierist doctrine:

Luc, qui avait ouvert la bibliothèque, voulut choisir un de ces livres [...] Le titre: *Solidarité*, venait de l'émouvoir; et n'était-ce pas ce qu'il lui fallait, les quelques pages de force et d'espoir dont il avait besoin? [...] Il savait déjà toutes ces choses, il les avait lues dans les œuvres mêmes du maître, mais jamais elles ne l'avaient remué à ce point,

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<sup>395</sup> *Travail*, OC, 8: 923.

<sup>396</sup> Durkheim, *Les formes élémentaires*, 327-328.

<sup>397</sup> *Travail*, OC, 8: 930.

conquis si profondément [...] Le petit livre s'animait, tout prenait un sens nouveau et immédiat, comme si des faits vivants surgissaient, se réalisaient devant lui.<sup>398</sup>

Luc's realization of social equality is divinely inspired by his reading of *Solidarité*. In the final pages of *Travail*, Luc reminisces about the power of this "petit livre bien modeste" to change the world, underscoring utopian literature's power to educate and inspire change. The reiteration serves to reinforce *Travail*'s suggestion to prospective readers that Zola's own "petit livre" might have a similar influence.

In their celebration of an educated republic and their instruction of readers about social reform movements, *Travail* and *Vérité* operate as literary meta-education. *Travail*'s explicit praise of literature's patriotic roles self-consciously alludes to the *Quatre Evangiles*' aestheticization of social utopianism. Like the romantic utopian works by Fourier, Saint-Simon and their disciples, Zola posits his secular *Evangiles* as something between realism and romanticism, a social dream meant to inspire and to instruct republican citizens of the future. As novels about the pleasure of labor and education, *Travail* and *Vérité* both celebrate literature's unique status as socially useful art. In this sense, these novels make reading and writing the ultimate secular religious act.

Together, the *Evangiles* propose a beautiful, truly French utopia, which protects and promotes the freedom of individual expression and pleasure, cultivating art as a spiritual, sacred and fecund force within a secular industrial society. The importance of art and literature in Zola's workers' utopia helps avoid the trap of what he considered sterile socialist and communist literary projects.<sup>399</sup> The concluding pages of *Travail* present the height of *Les Quatre Evangiles*' self-awareness as a socially-minded literary project:

Et surtout des écrivains donnaient à ce peuple innombrable, à la nation entière qui les lisait, des œuvres fortes, puissants, vastes, nées d'elle-même et faites pour elle. Le génie où s'amasse l'énergie intellectuelle des générations, s'élargissait, à mesure que des forces nouvelles lui venaient d'une humanité plus instruite et plus libre. Jamais encore le génie n'avait eu cette splendeur. Ce n'était plus la serre chaude d'une littérature bornée, aristocratique, c'était la pleine humanité, des poèmes où débordait la vie de tous, que tous avaient aidé à faire de leur sang, et qui retournaient au cœur de tous.<sup>400</sup>

This moment in his utopian vision of the French republic leaves the space of narrative plot, acting as a call to action by which Zola invites writers and readers to contribute to first steps toward the creation of a new genre: regenerative and republican naturalist literature. This gesture confers a utopian realist writer, such as Zola, with the honor of transcending the title of mere novelist. In doing so, the artist-writer-social-visionary is elevated to the status of super-intellectual. The naturalist writer who instructs and indoctrinates readers in secular republican humanism is not only a teacher, he is a spiritual

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<sup>398</sup> *Travail*, OC, 8: 171-172.

<sup>399</sup> Zola deliberately sought to distinguish his work from other contemporary communist and socialist fictions. His notes for *Travail* reveal his adamant disapproval of Marxist utopias like Bellamy's *Looking Backwards*. The major flaws of these works was to imagine egalitarian societies that were sterile, devoid of pleasure and aesthetically unappealing, even if politically attractive. Zola criticized this march toward "le nivellement des conditions et des intelligences," a counter model which inspired him to invent a more appealing French version: "Il faut que je garde la vie, le progrès, la liberté, toutes nos idées chères dues à la Grèce, à Rome, à la Renaissance et à la Révolution française."<sup>399</sup> France's cultural affiliation with Ancient Greek and Roman civilizations is tacitly juxtaposed with Anglo-Saxon, perhaps even Germanic and Russian cultures. Utopias issued from non-French, non-classical traditions sacrifice individuals' right to pleasure and beauty to the egalitarian social ideal.

<sup>400</sup> *Travail*, OC, 8: 956.

leader. As Paul Bénichou argues, this figure emerged out of nineteenth-century romantic utopian discourse positioning the utopian writer himself as the modern sacred social agent:

[...] la catégorie des savants, si honorée dans l'Utopie moderne, est toujours transcendée, inévitablement, par un type intellectuel supérieur, qui est celui de l'Utopiste lui-même. Mais cet utopiste est une sorte de super-savant, un philosophe des sciences, non un artiste ; et une fois la doctrine devenue religion, c'est lui qui, en tant que créateur et dépositaire de la synthèse utopique, prendra naturellement figure sacerdotale. Il n'empêche qu'étant donné l'identité que leur source sentimentale commune établit entre la religion et l'art, l'artiste apparaît comme ayant lui aussi des titres au sacerdoce, et assez convaincants, pour qu'aussitôt ébauchée la mutation religieuse de la doctrine, le premier rang lui soit reconnu.<sup>401</sup>

It is the “Third Zola,” the natural writer in his visionary avatar, who heralds the coming of a new kind of artist and a new kind of intellectual. In the new secular republic, this figure would be just the sort of priest that enlightened new generations of French citizens that the technocratic twentieth century would need.

The religious force of art and literature in Zola's *Évangiles* explicates the very title of this project: the beautiful reorganization and regeneration of French republic. By their ability to beautify, the works of art in *la Crèche*, like the *Évangile* novels themselves, consecrate secular republican institutions including the family and home, school and workplace. The secular *Gospels* effectively blur the boundaries between intellectual and spiritual activity, work and pleasure, public and private lives while simultaneously forging a French national community across time and space through the celebration of Zola's naturalist republican social vision.

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<sup>401</sup> Paul Bénichou, *Le Temps des prophètes* (Paris: Gallimard 1977, 2004), 717.

## Conclusion

Though some critics contend that Emile Zola was a better historian than prophet of the future, the present study has shown that he was a good historian and social critic of his time as well as an unsung visionary.<sup>402</sup> Zola's faith that technology and industry would enable social progress played a key role in the modernization of the French republic as well as nearly everywhere that France exercised political and cultural influence. The *Quatre Evangiles* participated in movements since the French Revolution to reform and unify the nation as a Republic and to accomplish global peace through the spread of French republican ideals such as militant secularism, labor cooperativism, and secular coeducation.

Over the course of this study, I experienced a tremendous amount of confusion and ambivalence about the contradictory political implications of Zola's naturalist utopia. At times, the *Evangiles'* ideal Republic seemed more socially progressive than anything Zola had ever written. At others, it seemed more reactionary, discriminatory and totalitarian than anyone has ever dared to admit. Many of the social reforms accomplished by Zola's fictional republican government are still considered progressive from today's historical standpoint. Mathieu's defense of maternity and childcare, Luc's defense of workers' rights and Marc's defense of girls and boys' equal educational opportunity are all echoed in contemporary social reform platforms. However, in Zola's imagined world, mothers and fathers, children and workers are protected because their productivity is essential to the survival of the Republic. The rights of Zola's ideal republican citizens are granted and protected in the interests of the state rather than those of the individual. Recognizing the tension between the interests of the state and those of the individual led me to understand that the contradictory implications of Zola's utopian republic were actually rooted in the paradoxes inherent to French republicanism. My transhistorical analysis of Zola's strong naturalist republic has revealed problematic elements of modern governance that can be instantiated in policies such as family allocations, or mandatory centralized education, producing the illusion of democracy and autonomy rather than their reality. I would like to reflect here on what our present historical perspective reveals about some of the ambiguous implications of the *Evangiles'* ideal modern government. Specifically, I will meditate on its fantasy of a propertied, consumerist workers' collective and its heteronormative and discriminatory paradigm of health.

Zola's utopian vision of democratized luxury as the primary labor incentive resonates with the role of material consumption in modern Western societies. The importance of luxury and individual self-expression in the *Evangiles'* fictional republic seems to be at odds with the egalitarian cooperativist society constructed by *Travail*. Like his brothers, Luc Froment ironically reconstructs a system of privilege and power to replace the corrupt one that he destroys. His "capital-free" cooperativist society masks the new system of commodity exchange by promoting the symbolic power enjoyed by consumers. Like modern American consumers, *la Crêcherie's* workers believe in their equality because they have equal access to property, clothing, art and so on. Allowing

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<sup>402</sup> Schalk, David L. "Zola et l'histoire. L'historien et Zola." *Cahiers naturalistes* 67 (1993): 47-55.

individuals the choice of how to decorate their homes and how to dress promotes their sense of individuality and autonomy.

While the paradox of democratic consumerism may be dismissed as an effect of utopian discourse, Zola's vision is remarkably prescient of post-industrial consumerist society. In the twentieth and twentieth-first centuries, consumerism has attracted the attention of a wide range of social, political and philosophical critiques.<sup>403</sup> My study of the tension between ideology and politics in Zola's fictional republic suggests that consumerism functions as a complex corporate ideological apparatus. What is apparent in much of the recent scholarship on consumerism is that the boundary between (private) corporate power technologies and (public) state ideological apparatuses like education and health care is increasingly blurred. According to this logic, the danger of consumerism is that it creates a sense of individual power which sustains the illusion of autonomy and democracy. By satisfying peoples' desire for equal rights and equal privileges, commodity consumption produces a surplus of symbolic power that distracts consumers from the shortage of real power.

The *Évangiles*' eugenic vision of racial progress is perhaps the most disturbing part of its ideological fantasy because of the terrifying crimes committed in the name of eugenic social progress after Zola's death, such as the Holocaust, other genocides and aggressive forms of biological discrimination. In no way do I wish to imply that Zola himself was racist, nor do I mean to undermine the extreme courage of his defense of Dreyfus. Rather, my study suggests that racist discourse in Zola's fiction is emblematic of the racial exclusion and erasure inherent to French universalist visions of social progress since the Enlightenment. Pierre Bourdieu, Michel Foucault, Tzvetan Todorov, Albert Camus, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Pierre-André Taguieff have criticized the disconcerting repressive potential of utopianism, positivism, secularism, and assimilationism in liberal republican ideology.<sup>404</sup> These are the same forms of repression that I have identified in the ideological fantasy of Zola's *Quatre Évangiles*. While some studies of this series have hinted at the repressive features of its utopian vision of government, none has seen the link between its positivist technocracy and the sanctification of ideological mechanisms of control.<sup>405</sup>

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<sup>403</sup> The ubiquity of consumerism allows thinkers of radically different political perspectives to promote their own ideological agendas through the critique of consumerist culture. See for example Slavoj Žižek's *Il ne savent pas ce qu'ils font, le sinthome idéologique* (Paris: Éditions Point hors ligne, 1990); Jean Baudrillard's *La société de consommation; ses mythes, ses structures* (Paris: Denoël, 1970); Alain Badiou's *Court traité d'ontologie transitoire* (Paris: Seuil, 1998); Gilles Lipovetsky, *L'ère du vide: essais sur l'individualisme contemporain* (Paris: Gallimard, 1983) and *Le bonheur paradoxal: essai sur la société d'hyperconsommation* (Paris: Gallimard, 2006).

<sup>404</sup> See Bourdieu, "Deux impérialismes de l'universel" in *L'Amérique des Français*, Ed, François Bourin (Paris: Fauré et Bishop, 1992); Foucault, "Il faut défendre la société," *Cours au Collège de France (1975-1976)* (Paris: Seuil/Gallimard, 1997); Todorov *Le jardin imparfait: la pensée humaniste en France* (Paris: Grasset et Fasquelle, 1998); Camus, *L'homme révolté* (Paris: Gallimard, 1951); Sartre, *Réflexions sur la question juive* (Paris: Gallimard, 1954); Taguieff, *La Force du préjugé: essai sur le racisme et ses doubles* (Paris: Découverte, 1988).

<sup>405</sup> Studies by A.A. Greaves, Béatrice Laville, Sophie Guermès, David Meakin, Carol Mossman, Brian Nelson and Carmen Mayer-Robin have all evoked various disturbing aspects of Zola's utopian social vision, such as Mathieu's republican imperialism, Marc and Luc's elitist technocracy, and the ideological state apparatus of the School. However, none of these studies has linked these problems to the consecration of the republic or the consecration of naturalist literature.

Under the long reign of French liberal governments over the past fifty years or so, racial, class and intellectual discrimination have been taboo subjects in France because of the specter of the Holocaust and France's intense civil rights movements of the 1960s and 70s. It seems that the conservative government of Nicolas Sarkozy has reignited shame surrounding less glorious republican moments in the history of France, particularly the pro-colonial Third Republic and the Vichy government's collaboration with Nazi Germany. Anxiety about new and future reactionary policies may have something to do with the surge of inquiries into the discriminatory logic inherent to French republican discourse and evident in colonial discourse and policies developed and disseminated by heroic figures including Voltaire, Victor Hugo and Jules Ferry.<sup>406</sup>

By the same token, the fear that extreme social conservatism will reemerge in French republican government presents an opportunity to acknowledge France's legacy of domestic and international imperialism. The persistent taboo about discussing this legacy reveals a residual unwillingness among French thinkers to acknowledge France's history of economic, political and intellectual hegemony, which is itself a sign of ongoing imperialist longings in the postcolonial world. The delicate treatment of repressive features of republican universalism in political and philosophical debates raises the question of whether or not we should confront the mistakes of the past and bury the shame they cause so that we might reconcile that part of history with the current liberal politics of diversity. While Zola's particular fantasy of a unified republican nation may be compromised by its dangerous eugenic implications, it also reminds us that the preservation of cultural and ethnic diversity is a fairly new value in the Western history.

I have discussed racism and biopower at length in previous chapters of this dissertation. Now, I would like to consider how Camus' linking of liberal visions of government might illuminate the curiously repressive aura of Zola's utopian republic that I have observed. As Camus argues, Comte's positivist and Marx's communist social visions necessarily lead to the deification of the state:

On sait que [Comte] espérait voir, dans les cathédrales, « la statue de l'humanité divinisée sur l'ancien autel de Dieu ». Il calculait avec précision qu'il aurait à prêcher le positivisme dans Notre-Dame avant l'année 1860. Ce calcul, n'était pas aussi ridicule qu'il le paraît. Notre-Dame, mise en état de siège, résiste toujours. Mais la religion de l'humanité a été effectivement prêchée vers la fin du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle et Marx, bien qu'il n'ait sans doute pas lu Comte, fut l'un de ses prophètes. Marx a seulement compris qu'une religion sans transcendance s'appelait proprement une politique. Comte le savait, au demeurant, ou du moins il comprenait que sa religion était d'abord une sociolâtrie et qu'elle supposait le réalisme politique, la négation du droit individuel et l'établissement du despotisme.<sup>407</sup>

The social reform imagined by Zola's *Quatre Evangiles* integrates the very same communist and positivist strategies for emancipation that Camus critiques. We have seen how technology and hyperconsumerism reinforce the state's already considerable power over individuals. Despite the repressive features of Zola's utopian vision, his *Evangiles'* spiritual humanism resists the dangers of totalitarianism by exalting literature as much as, if not more so than, humanity. My critique of these novels should not mask their unique self-conscious ideological discourse on literature and national identity. As Chapter 4 has

<sup>406</sup> See, for example, *Petit précis de remise à niveau sur l'histoire africaine à l'usage du président Sarkozy* sous la direction de Adame Ba Konaré, préface d'Elikia M'Bokolo (Paris: Découverte, 2008).

<sup>407</sup> *L'homme révolté* (Paris: Gallimard, 1951), 235.

shown, Zola's *Evangelies* consecrate naturalist literature as the primary sacred republican ritual.

Although the atrocities committed in the name of national socialism and scientific progress have tainted our perception of a sacred nation-state, the transfer of sacred power from a deity or religious figure to the secular state and its institutions has been a significant turn in modern culture. It is important to recognize the religious functions that the modern state has been obligated to assume after the separation of church and state in most of Western society. History has demonstrated that the moral authority of the modern state is not necessarily totalitarian, and yet, we have learned to remain vigilant about abuses of this sacred power. Given Zola's arduous defense of the rights of artists in society, the *Evangelies'* consecration of the writer as a secular priest of the future suggests that artistic autonomy might one day trump patriotic duty. As social gospels, these novels mark a turning point in Zola's conception of literature as the interplay of sacred and critical social forces. Literature is not only sacred *and* critical; it is sacred because it is critical. Through its social critique, naturalist literature educates and unites readers about French national values. In this sense, for Zola, literary social critique is sacred.

Modern mechanisms of power function effectively because they combine highly visible disciplinary forms of control such as laws, with subtler ideological forms of control. As Louis Althusser has argued, the less visible power is, the greater its force can be. Literature, like other ideological mechanisms of control, is among the most silent forms of power. Whereas works of fiction like Zola's utopian *Evangelies* have contributed to ideology discourse that bolstered modern biopower regimes, twentieth-century literature has also made a vital contribution to their critique. Over the past century, dystopian novels such as Yevgeny Zamyatin's *We*, Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*, Orson Wells' *1984*, Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* and Kurt Vonnegut's *Breakfast of Champions* have exposed the very serious psychological and ethical consequences of modern technologies of power including the state regulation of women's bodies, the elimination of the biologically or morally unfit, the selection of "ideal genetic traits" and the psychological dependency caused by hyperconsumerism. The comparison of republican writers in Zola's utopian France and the state poets of Zamyatin's totalitarian Soviet regime would provide the basis for a fascinating study of the politically ambiguous relationship between literature, the sacred and the modern state. Fiction-writers today continue to participate in ideological formation and critique. In the twentieth century, science fiction seems to continue the socially critical, sacred social experimentation that Zola had envisioned as the Naturalist project. As detectives, police officers, doctors or priests, Zola recognized that fiction-writers enjoy a privileged status through their social, moral, and spiritual influence in the modern world.

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