

SCREENING ZOLA'S WOMEN

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By

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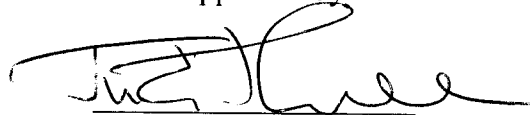
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“Je ne sais pas d’étude plus attachante que l’étude de la femme  
dans les annales de l’humanité.” Emile Zola

(Le Salut public de Lyon—July 7, 1865)

## ABSTRACT

"Screening Zola's Women" examines the sexual politics of the look in cinematic adaptations of nineteenth century novels and how the distribution of that look among male and female characters determines their agency. To demonstrate this, I focus on female representation and sexual difference as two integral components of the study of adaptations. From this base, I examine how cinema manipulates the female image to conform to its own sexual hierarchy and how the transposition of women into film minimizes the agency of their novelistic counterparts.

In this study, sexual difference and female representation provide the framework and methodology through which to compare novels and films. This respects the autonomy of cinema to use novels as source material for original work in film. As a result, each film is regarded as an alternative "reading" of its literary source.

Five novels of Emile Zola form the base of this study. They are: Nana (1880); La Bête Humaine (1890); Au Bonheur des Dames (1883); Thérèse Raquin (1867); and L'Assommoir (1877). The corresponding film adaptations represent four distinct cinematic "genres" of French film and cover a period of thirty years. The films are respectively: Nana (1926) and La Bête Humaine (1938) by Jean Renoir; Au Bonheur des Dames (1943) by André Cayatte; Thérèse Raquin (1953) by Marcel Carné; and Gervaise (1956) by René Clément.



Zola, although consistently charged with the misogynistic representation of women, exposes and highlights communities of women in his novels. As a result, Zola's novels provide extensive documentation on women during the Second Empire in Paris. Zola privileges his protagonists with agency and narrativity, which permits them to express their desires and access the gaze. Gervaise, Nana, Séverine, Denise, and Thérèse Raquin rebel against the established patriarchal order to affect a change in their lives and to escape their oppressive environments. Their voices are heard and their stories are told as they act on their desires. Zola looks through keyholes and records what he sees while cinema, on the other hand, looks through camera lenses and constructs its own *mise-en-scène*.

As one of the last strongholds of patriarchal domination, cinema continues to dominate, manipulate, and matriculate the representation of women as commodified, sexual objects of the male gaze. This results in female icons who have lost their look, their voices, and their ability to affect change. Zola's women escape the confines of their bookbindings only to be imprisoned by the finite edges of the film frame.

This dissertation is dedicated to my father, Joseph Marion Romanczuk, who taught me  
the value of hard work and perseverance and to my mother, Mary Eloise Wade  
Romanczuk, who taught me how to love.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
Abstract .....	ii
Dedication .....	iv
Acknowledgments .....	v
Vita .....	vi
Chapters:	
1. Introduction .....	1
2. <u>Nana</u> —The Lost Look .....	34
3. The “Eyecon” in the Mirror .....	90
4. The Pleasure of Looking—The Gentlemen’s Paradise.....	143
5. The “Eyes” Have It .....	194
6. The Failed Entrepreneur .....	252
7. Conclusion .....	295
References .....	310

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Novels and films tell stories about women, each in their own way, with their own signifying systems. Many films use literary sources as their points of departure and these films are called adaptations. As an adaptation, a film is problematic as a visual interpretation of the written word. Every cinematic interpretation or “reading” of a literary source can distort or compromise the integrity of the original. Female representation and sexual difference are two components of this visualization of literature. This study endeavors to examine the ways that film represents female characters extracted from novels using its own specific code systems.

Taking film adaptations of five novels of Emile Zola, my dissertation examines how cinema manipulates the female image to conform to its own sexual hierarchy and how the transposition of these women into film affects the integrity of their diegetic characters. What, if any, compromises are made in the agency of these literary women? How does a traditionally patriarchal cinema recreate these characters as they move from parchment to celluloid? How is the adaptation achieved, what cinematic techniques are used to reproduce and recreate the literary women and how does the time period of the film and the social problems with which it engages determine the status of these specific women on the screen? If traditional cinema is the arena of spectacle and voyeuristic

pleasure for men, how does the essential binary opposition of subject/object revolve itself when portraying active females with agency?

Laura Mulvey has said that classical cinema puts forth man as the bearer of the look, women as its object (Visual Pleasure 19). If one agrees that the “subject” in film is traditionally identified as male and that cinema is the realm of male patriarchal authority, how does film negotiate the representation of the female “subject” of a novel who espouses agency and female desire? (Mayne, Woman at the Keyhole 17). Since Mulvey’s original “groundbreaking” article appeared, feminist film theory has expanded in scope to include studies of female spectatorship, female audiences, “star images” used as commodities, and differences between women, including race and sexual preference (Erens xx). Looking at the cinematic process in its totality and foregrounding the fact that traditional cinema constitutes men looking at women; I propose that each film adaptation diminishes the agency of each of Zola’s female protagonists. As the scandal that accompanied the publication of each novel diminished with the making of each film, I argue that so did the agency of Zola’s strong, marginal female characters.

This study will examine five novels of Emile Zola, in which the protagonist is female, covering the time period of twenty-three years (1867-1890). The novels are, in chronological order: Thérèse Raquin (1867); Au Bonheur des Dames (1883); Nana (1880); La Bête Humaine (1890); and L’Assommoir (1877). The film adaptations I have chosen represent four distinct periods in the history of cinema. These films are: Nana (1926) and La Bête Humaine (1938) by Jean Renoir; Au Bonheur des Dames (1943) by André Cayatte; Thérèse Raquin (1953) by Marcel Carné; and Gervaise (1956) by René Clément. I have chosen to proceed in this manner as Zola’s novels provide a well-

defined, cohesive time period, that of the Second Empire under Napoleon III, in which these women are portrayed. These novels create the control group, of sorts, for a comparison between novel and film. I have chosen four different film periods to provide a different environment in which to examine female representation, agency, and desire.

This study is not a qualitative study of the merits of literature over film or vice versa. It will examine the change of agency in the female characters and how these films treat sexual difference in the representation of that agency. As one looks at adaptations of novels into films, one must look at what is comparable between the two texts. As Jeanne-Marie Clerc puts it:

Par ailleurs, postuler des interrelations entre les images et les mots, c'est refuser, par là-même, de situer la littérature dans une position privilégiée par rapport au fait iconique. Loin de prendre l'écrit comme critère absolu dans une comparaison qui définirait l'image comme un substitut plus ou moins imparfait, il est indispensable de comparer ce qui est comparable, c'est-à-dire d'établir des relations entre des termes considérés comme analogues et égaux. (3-4)

The two texts, both written and visual, are sign systems. Female representation will be the focus of this study and the term of comparison, which is both analogous and equal. How are women represented in two different systems when extracted from the same narrative story? How does film "read" the same characters that Zola created in the second half of the nineteenth century? This study will research the different "commentaries" on these women in film and how they are portrayed in two similar, yet different mediums.

Zola's literary works were produced over thirty-five years. The films that I have chosen span three decades (1926-1956), which mimics the duration of the totality of Zola's works. During these thirty years, film production was regulated by patriarchal



control and dependent on economic success. Films were produced to appeal to audiences who were willing to pay to see a particular film. During these adolescent years of cinema, men were the masters of technology and production and therefore, most films were produced and financed by men. Film production was an area largely closed to women except as the objects of spectacle.

Zola's novels were intended to be historically accurate and to reflect the times of his own era, which leads to a related question—how does film convert the need for “realism and truth” into its own proper decade and time period? While reviewing the artistic work of Proudhon and Courbet, Zola said: “Une oeuvre d’art est un coin de la création vu à travers un tempérament” (Oeuvres Complètes X 38). Zola thus acknowledges that every writer will bring his/her own perspective to a narrative. On August 18, 1864, in a letter to Anthony Valabrègue, Zola discusses types of “screens” which produce these different “tempéraments.” He postulates:

toute oeuvre d’art est comme une fenêtre ouverte sur la création: il y a, enchâssé dans l’embrasure de la fenêtre, une sorte d’Ecran transparent, à travers lequel on aperçoit les objets plus ou moins déformés, souffrant des changements plus ou moins sensibles dans leurs lignes et dans leur couleur. Ces changements tiennent à la nature de l’Ecran. On n’a plus la création exacte et réelle, mais la création modifiée par le milieu où passe son image. Nous voyons la création dans une oeuvre, à travers un homme, à travers un tempérament, une personnalité. (Correspondance I 375)

Zola describes three typical “screens,” the classical screen, the romantic screen, and the realist screen. He chooses the realist screen for his work which he describes as: “un simple verre à vitre, très mince, très clair, et qui a la prétention d’être si parfaitement transparent que les images le traversent et se reproduisent ensuite dans toute leur réalité” (Correspondance I 379). He continues: “je préfère l’Ecran qui, serrant de plus près la

réalité, se contente de mentir juste assez pour me faire sentir un homme dans une image de la création” (380). However, Zola recognizes that even the “écran réaliste” will distort the original:

La réalité exacte est donc impossible dans une oeuvre d’art. On dit qu’on rabaisse ou qu’on idéalise un sujet. Au fond, même chose. Il y a déformation de ce qui existe. Il y a mensonge. Peu importe que ce mensonge soit en beau ou en laid. Je le répète, la déformation, le mensonge qui se reproduisent dans ce phénomène d’optique, tiennent évidemment à la nature de l’Ecran. (Correspondance I 375)

Perhaps this quote best encapsulates the connection between Zola’s own work and its adaptation to film. Zola’s discussion of the “écran” in 1864 serves to demonstrate his affinity with cinema and cinematic techniques.

In each of the five novels, the female protagonist articulates her desire for a particular goal. Female desire pushes the narrative along its syntagmatic line and it is the repetition of this novelistic format that forms the basis of this study. Each female protagonist will be deconstructed and decoded to observe how Zola accords these characters agency. Then, we will determine what effect this overt representation of female desire has on the evolution of the narrative. Each female character will be examined to see why she is important, how she is portrayed, and how she relates to and interacts with other characters in the novel. This will be accomplished by examining the position of each woman in relation to other characters, both male and female, her lifestyle, her physical characteristics and her family and financial situation. It is important to acknowledge that these are women who own things and who are resistant to the confines of the male order and male ideology. They are proprietors or entrepreneurs engaged in some type of commerce and they have access to money. They own laundries,

hat stores, political or social ideals, or men. These are women who have an active presence in the novels and determine their ending.

To begin, one must examine Zola's problematic attitude and representation of women. Chantal Jennings poses the question:

La question peut paraître incongrue. Zola pourtant s'intéressa de près aux conditions de vie des femmes, comme en témoigne la série des *Rougon-Macquart*, où figure un échantillon assez représentatif des femmes du second Empire, depuis la courtisane jusqu'à l'aristocrate, en passant par la femme du peuple ou de la bourgeoisie, sans oublier la femme d'artiste et la jeune fille. Les problèmes d'éducation et de travail concernant les femmes préoccupèrent même Zola au point qu'en 1881 et 1882, il fit paraître plusieurs articles pour les porter à l'attention du public. ("Zola féministe?" 172)

Zola takes interest in the plight of women and exposes the oppressive conditions under which they live while at the same time positioning them as the malevolent cause of their situation.

Unfortunately, some of Zola's altruistic intentions turn to exploitation. For example, in his attempt to demystify the "glamorous" life of courtesans in the Second Empire, he creates Nana who, according to Jennings is, "métamorphosée en une de ces figures fantastiques qui habitent l'imagination zolienne" ("Zola féministe?" 186). Nana's character is exploited as an object of sexual desire and the social issues of her life diminish in importance. Zola's social commentary on the female condition is found in minor characters who do not have access to agency, for example, Lalie Bijard and her mother in *L'Assommoir*, the women store clerks in *Au Bonheur des Dames*, Tante Phasie in *La Bête Humaine*, and Suzanne in *Thérèse Raquin*. Therefore, Zola's political polemic is still present in the novel but overshadowed by the subjectivity and agency of the female protagonist.

This “coming to subjectivity” of Zola’s fictional female protagonists is an important but under examined subtext of Zola’s work. Through his representation of strong female characters with agency, two parallel movements occur in Zola’s novels and narratives—a move from male dominance to female activity that produces a move from female objectivity to female subjectivity.

As Zola is often accused of misogyny, I wish to show that his view of women is not just the “mangeuse d’hommes” (*Nana* 343) if we read against the grain. Jennings notices the same phenomenon:

Victimes avilies et hébétées par la tyrannie de l’homme de l’Eglise et de la société ainsi que par l’influence néfaste d’une éducation pernicieuse, névrosées, débauchées, prostituées, épouses adultères, telles sont la plupart des héroïnes dont Zola présente la lamentable cohorte. Tableau pessimiste, misogyne même, dira-t-on? (“Zola féministe?” 186-87)

If we answer Jennings’ question affirmatively, we see only the pessimism and misogyny in Zola’s work. However, a different level of understanding and representation of women, which Zola sometimes disguised and muted, posits them as women with agency. This agency is oftentimes derived from sexual desire and prowess but it is, nevertheless, agency. This provides women the opportunity to leave the passive world of object and to assume an active role in the narrative. It is this ascent to and enunciation of desire, especially sexual desire, that causes fear and scandal, not the actual women themselves. The women are simply symptomatic of the underlying patriarchal fear of female domination. This explicit articulation of female desire erupted as scandal when the novels appeared.

Quantitatively, the majority of characters found in Zola’s novels are men but, in numerous novels, beginning with *Thérèse Raquin*, the protagonists are female. This fact

repeats itself with Denise Baudu, Nana, Gervaise Coupeau Macquart, and Séverine Aubry Roubaud. These women serve as the catalysts that drive the narrative forward.

The twenty volume Rougon-Macquart series begins the move to agency of female characters with Zola's creation of Adélaïde Fouque in La Fortune des Rougon. She is the procreative genesis who launches the entire familial series. Zola pays homage to women from the first of his female characters, not necessarily in her description and personality, but in her importance to the family tree. It is not a coincidence that Zola chooses a name for this character that starts with the first letter of the alphabet. Adélaïde is the Alpha character of the series. An examination of the genealogical tree that appears in La Fortune des Rougon records Adélaïde as the trunk. This again references her as the beginning and the foundation of the family. Zola did not provide this information by accident. Women will continue to be an important component of and vital addition to his work. Although she is not the strongest diegetic female prototype of independent women, Adélaïde does possess numerous characteristics of agency, most notably, sexual drive and desire. These will resurface in later characters. In addition to the hereditary link to Adélaïde, many of the other women characters in succeeding volumes will demonstrate character ties to her. Adélaïde survives the entire twenty volume series and dies at the age of 105 in Le Docteur Pascal.

As she is introduced in La Fortune des Rougon, Adélaïde is immediately presented as a marginal character. She is an only child orphaned as a young adult who inherited money and property from her parents and a maternal and protective instinct for family:

Une fille seule resta, Adélaïde, née en 1768, et qui se trouva orpheline à l'âge de dix-huit ans. Cette enfant, dont le père mourut fou, était une grande créature, mince, pâle, aux regards effarés, d'une singularité d'allures qu'on put prendre de la sauvagerie tant qu'elle resta petite fille. Mais, en grandissant, elle devint plus bizarre encore; elle commit certaines actions que les plus fortes têtes du faubourg ne purent raisonnablement expliquer... (36-37)

Zola uses this topos of the orphan with Thérèse Raquin, Séverine Roubaud, and Denise Baudu.

In contradiction to the other diegetic marginal female characters of the novel, Adélaïde acts on her sexual desire for the illiterate gardener, Rougon. This declaration and initiation of desire result in her marriage to Rougon and the birth of one son, Pierre. This is achieved by placing Rougon, not Adélaïde, in the role of object. Adélaïde's possession of the gaze gives her access to agency and produces an active female character capable of making her own decisions. Zola emphasizes *her* choices and *her* subjectivity:

Ce mariage fut un premier étonnement pour l'opinion; personne ne put comprendre pourquoi Adélaïde préférait ce pauvre diable, épais, lourd, commun, sachant à peine parler français, à tels et tels jeunes gens, fils de cultivateurs aisés, qu'on voyait roder autour d'elle depuis longtemps. (37)

Scandal erupts a second time after the death of Rougon when Adélaïde takes a lover:

Une année s'était à peine écoulée que la jeune veuve donna lieu à un scandale inouï; on sut d'une façon certaine qu'elle avait un amant; elle ne paraissait pas s'en cacher; plusieurs personnes affirmaient l'avoir entendue tutoyer publiquement le successeur du pauvre Rougon." (37)

These two examples may be construed as the first example of female desire portrayed in the Rougon-Macquart series. Zola acknowledges that Adélaïde is the initiator of her own choices. He writes: "Ce qui rendit le scandale plus éclatant, ce fut l'étrange choix d'Adélaïde" (37). This desire and her sexual liaison with Macquart create the narrative and produce the family for the nineteen novels to follow.

Zola is to be respected for his observation and exposition of communities of women in the nineteenth century. Zola's novels are examples of "historical fiction." His background narrative is a factual documentary of Paris during the Second Empire over which he layers his fictional stories. His acutely accurate descriptions and observations coupled with his attention to details seem to forge reality and fiction together in the same genre. The developing streets of Paris, the work of Haussmann, the developing political unrest of the working class, the increasing financial rift between the wealthy and the working class, and the unstable political reign of Napoleon III serve as the historically researched backdrop for the fictional Rougon-Macquart family. Zola, as a journalist, art critic, novelist, and proponent of naturalism combined all of these areas into his work.

We know that while preparing his work on L'Assommoir, Zola chose to observe a working-class neighborhood located behind the Gare du Nord on the eastern side of Montmartre. As Zola resided on the Rue St. Georges at the time, the Gare du Nord was in close proximity, as his home was only a half an hour walk from the train station. Before writing Germinal, Zola spent weeks with the miners in Anzin. Zola's preparatory work for his novels is legendary as these detailed investigations were repeated for Nana, La Bête Humaine, and Au Bonheur des Dames. The reader feels as if she or he is reading a truly objective, historical account of commoners' lives during the Second Empire. Zola's insistence on historical accuracy requires him to include women's lives as an important part of this time period as in many instances women and men worked side by side in order to survive. The addition of popular language into Zola's novels, while sometimes shocking, also increased the authenticity of his work and gave a voice to his female characters. Linda Beane Katner suggests:

Through the free indirect style of [Zola's] narration, working-class women actually assume responsibility for part of the novel's narration, as the author/narrator (Zola) steps aside to let them speak, and express themselves. The overall affect of this is that the narration becomes polyphonic, with the characters sharing the narrative duties with the author. (123)

This wide use of female discourse shows Zola's investment in placing women's issues foremost in his novels. Katner believes that this provides the reader "a more instinctive, profound understanding of the working-class women of Paris" (123).

Most important, Emile Zola has left an unprecedented volume of work on communities of women and their public and private lives. From the laundry women in L'Assommoir to the store clerks in Au Bonheur des Dames to the prostitutes and lesbians in Nana, Zola honors these women by giving them names, personalities, responsibilities, discourse, desires and agency. Through his attention to women and their communities, he demonstrates that women's lives are just as interesting and important as men's lives.

At the base of this study then, are Zola's artistic exposition of communities of women and their agency. Another important factor to consider while tracing the evolution of his female characters to the screen is Zola's attraction to the plastic arts. This supplementary layer of information provides additional insight into the progression of Zola's novels to film, and hence, to the "screening" of his female protagonists.

As a young boy in Aix-en-Provence, Zola met and became friends with Paul Cézanne. This friendship gave Zola a deep appreciation for art. As a result, Zola became a staunch supporter of the Impressionists and a well-respected art critic. At Mme Charpentier's salon at 11, rue de Grenelle, he surrounded himself with men and women, such as Berthe Morisot, Artside Bruant and Pierre-Auguste Renoir, who put their



creations onto canvas as Zola placed his onto paper. Later in his life, as new modern apparatuses appeared, he delved into photography. Zola's interest in photography reinforces his belief in capturing the veracity of the image and preserving it. Zola could not resist the visualization of his works and he even adapted his own work to theater. Thérèse Raquin, L'Assommoir, Germinal, Pot-Bouille, and Nana were all adapted to the stage. From here, the next step was the adaptation of Zola's novels to film with the first film adaptation of L'Assommoir, Les victimes de l'alcoolisme, appearing in 1902, directed by Frederic Zecca.

The iconization of Zola's female characters occurred almost immediately after the publication of Thérèse Raquin, Zola's first financially successful novel. Caricatures and cartoons appeared in newspapers immediately rendering the female protagonist in the novel visual. The famous painting of Nana by Manet again visualized his fiction. "When L'Assommoir appeared, Manet painted the Nana of the book, eighteen years old and a slut," wrote Felicien Champsaur, a friend of both Manet and Zola, speaking of Manet's 1877 painting entitled, Nana (qtd. in Brown 419). He continues, "She's essentially a Parisienne, an elegant, exciting woman of delicate build who has become plump from good living . . . Nana has since grown. She's been transformed in the mind of her creator, M. Zola, into a lusty, opulent blond" (qtd. in Brown 419). Otto Friedrich describes the reciprocity between Manet and Zola: "He [Manet] seems to have been inspired not by Zola's novel of the same name, which appeared only in 1879, two years after the painting, but rather by the first appearance of this same girl in Zola's *L'Assommoir* (1876)" (Olympia 158). As a clever affinity grows between Manet's painting and Zola's work, some scholars believe that Zola returned Manet's tribute to

Nana with a tribute to Manet: “just as the painter derived his inspiration from Zola’s *L’Assommoir*, Manet’s portrait of Nana inspired the novelist, in turn, to a clearer image of his own heroine in the new novel that he named after her” (*Olympia* 164). This shot-reverse-shot between Zola’s writing and Manet’s painting foreshadows the visualization of novels into film.

Zola’s novels are replete with examples of “cinematic” writing mimicking directions for screenplays. Sergei Eisenstein was the first to notice Zola’s ability to “transfer from one quality into a new quality.” He says:

For the same resolutions of material in any customary means, examples may be found in the richest abundance among the naturalists of the Zola school and, in the first place, in Zola himself. In Zola, the very description of the surroundings fusing its details with the separate phases of an event in each scene, is always selected and presented in a realistic and physical way, but always as required by the structure of the condition. (*Film Form* 169)

Examples of Zola’s “cinematic” tendencies are found in all five novels of this study.

From Goujet in *L’Assommoir* lying on his bed looking at pictures on the wall, to Jacques Lantier in *La Bête Humaine* watching the murder of Grandmorin in the train, to Mouret watching his customers from his upstairs window, Zola fills his novels with a certain film form and language.

With Zola’s penchant for the “naturalistic” genre based on scientific observation, we see a figurative shot-reverse-shot in relation to adaptation. Zola observes his subjects and their lives and renders what he sees into the written word. The written word is then returned to a visual image via reader imagination, paintings, caricatures, theater, and finally film. This metaphorical cinematic technique gives circularity and reciprocity to the process of writing and film adaptation vis-à-vis Emile Zola and helps to articulate the

relationship between the two. This explains, in part, why Zola's novels are good candidates for film adaptation. Zola's novels, which look through the keyholes of Paris' slums, align him with the machinery of the cinematic process and the probing lens. This partnership/alliance has resulted in over 60 film adaptations of Zola's work.

Adapting literary works to other art mediums existed before the birth of film. The earliest adaptations might be the transferring of biblical stories into frescos, sculptures, paintings and murals for the Christian masses. During the eighteenth hundreds, numerous novels were adapted to the theater. As previously mentioned, Zola participated and dabbled in adaptations as a playwright but he realized the perils and problems of this undertaking when he proclaimed in his preface to his theatrical adaptation of Thérèse Raquin:

J'estime qu'il est toujours dangereux de tirer un drame d'un roman. Une des deux oeuvres est fatalement inférieure à l'autre, et souvent cela suffit pour les rapetisser toutes deux. Le théâtre et le livre ont des conditions d'existence si absolument différentes, que l'écrivain se trouve forcé de pratiquer sur sa propre pensée de véritables amputations, d'en montrer les longueurs et les lacunes, de la brutaliser et de la défigurer pour la faire entrer dans un nouveau moule. [...] Puis, je ne sais, un artiste doit avoir la pudeur et le respect de ses filles aimées, belles ou laides; quand elles sont venues au monde avec sa ressemblance, il n'a plus le droit de rêver pour elles les hasards d'une seconde naissance. (Oeuvres Complètes XV 121)

It is this hazardous "second birth" of Zola's female characters in film that is at the core of this study. Painting, and especially photography and film, provided new ideologies and technologies to observe subjects, specifically women. Deconstruction of the process of representation in the novel and an examination of how women are reconstituted in film will permit us to view different readings of the same characters. How does cinema represent the female Zolian characters of the nineteenth century? How are female agency

and sexual difference preserved in a monolithic patriarchal system? How is the female image manipulated for the screen and the designated male spectator?

Zola's life was consumed with art, literature, writing, and the naturalistic exposition of Paris' working class. He ventured into the field of photography as another medium through which to "show" things. He left behind, as other nineteenth-century novelists did, the aristocracy and the upper class to showcase the bourgeoisie and the working classes. Zola opened the windows of people's homes and looked inside to describe the common lives of common people, most notably women.

Zola accomplishes this task mainly through an intense, detailed observation of the private spaces and private lives of women. Zola no longer just peeped through the keyholes of closed doors, he opens the doors and records what he sees and hears. As Zola brings women into the spotlight, he is commonly referred to as France's "national pornographer" for exposing the previously clandestine lives and loves of women. This type of scandal is one result of what occurs when one accords agency to female characters. He focuses his interest on women and their desires, both material and sexual. He looks into their foyers, their living rooms, their kitchens, and their bedrooms. With a stroke of his pen, he unveils the inner recesses of the cloistered and protected family home. He makes the hidden seen. The reference to pornography places Zola in a domain which elides the literary with the visual and the objective with the subjective. However, Zola denies the accusation of pornography and insists on the necessity of objectivity and realism as the "father" of naturalism and scientific observation. Cinema followed in Zola's footsteps in bringing to the screen exotic landscapes and people that had never

before been seen. With the advent of montage and mise-en-scène, cinema was also able to structure a specific type of image of any given subject.

Zola repeatedly chose women to tell his stories. He exalts them to the status of protagonist and shows the world in which they live through their eyes. This placing of agency with female characters rests important in a world where Zola has oftentimes been accused of being a misogynist. His relationship with women may be tenuous but he does place sexual desire at their doorstep, which provides them with the position of subject and objectifier of men. Becker, Gourdin-Servenière, and Lavielle affirm: “Son attitude devant la femme est complexe. D’un côté, on a pu parler de son ‘féminisme,’ même si on fait des réserves, de l’autre, on est frappé par la peur que trahissent les textes” (148). Zola’s female characters are symptomatic of his own personal fears about the evil of sexuality juxtaposed with his moral conscience. Zola maps women as the site of this dangerous sexuality, which results in their agency but also demonstrates Zola’s misogyny. As a result, Zola seems to align female subjectivity with malevolence.

Critical assessments of theater and film adaptations from literary sources have interested audiences, journalists, writers, and scholars for more than three centuries. Since 1895, and the initial polemic of, which is better the novel or the film, adaptation studies have flourished. Eisenstein’s essay, “Dickens, Griffith and the Film Today” of 1944, advanced these studies by concentrating on the centrality of narration in both mediums. George Bluestone followed by declaring that cinematic adaptations were completely autonomous works derived from literary texts. With the birth of semiotics, numerous theoretical rubrics, taxonomies and analytical labyrinths were formed to decode cinema’s sign system in comparison to the novel’s semiotic system. Returning to

ground zero for a perspective on adaptation, one finds Zola's thoughts about artistic genius, screens, and filters applicable. He states: "l'artiste se met en rapport direct avec la création, la voit à sa manière, s'en laisse pénétrer et nous en renvoie les rayons lumineux, après les avoir, comme le prisme, réfractés et colorés selon sa nature" (Correspondance I 375-76). In summation, Zola provides an extremely viable and highly adequate definition for adaptation studies. He continues:

Certainement, il est permis de préférer un Ecran à un autre, mais c'est là une question individuelle de goût et de tempérament. Je veux dire qu'au point de vue absolu, il n'y a pas, dans l'art, de raison motivée de donner le pas à l'Ecran classique sur les Ecrans romantiques et réalistes, et réciproquement, puisque ces Ecrans nous transmettent des images aussi fausses les unes que les autres. Ils sont tous presque aussi loin de leur idéal, la création, et, dès lors, ils doivent, pour le philosophe, avoir des mérites égaux. (Correspondance I 378)

Just as a painter engages with a model, films engage with literary texts as a point of departure and must be examined on their own merits. Different readings and interpretations of a literary source will result in numerous and varied adaptations, each bringing a different, but equal vision to the screen.

Approaches to film adaptation studies are numerous and extremely divergent, therefore, to investigate the screening of Zola's women, I would like to concentrate on new approaches to film adaptation developed since 1970. According to Judith Mayne, a change in the approach to film adaptation studies occurred in 1970 with the publication of Ropars-Wuilleumier's De la littérature au cinéma. Mayne states:

Ropars' study was published in 1970, just prior to the development of contemporary film studies. Since the mid-1970's, film study has been characterized by a rigorous theoretical framework and a commitment to the analysis of film as a signifying system. While Ropars' approach to film history is somewhat problematic and mechanistic, De la littérature au cinéma occupies a significant shift in writing about cinema and the novel,

and suggests how analogies between film and the novel have been defined in contemporary film studies. For Ropars suggests the necessity of evaluating cinematic adaptations, not in terms of their fidelity, or even (as in Bluestone's analysis) in terms of how the cinematic adaptation functions as an autonomous work of art, but rather in terms of how the encounter with a literary source creates a commentary on the narrative process itself. (Private Novels 5-6)

Mayne continues:

In contemporary film studies, the prominent role accorded the novel in previous decades has been superseded by an emphasis on narration and narrative structure in film. This does not mean that the study of adaptation has disappeared. An alternative approach to adaptation analysis has developed which explores, along the lines suggested by Ropars, how cinematic adaptations function more as commentaries, as readings, as transformations, of literary texts. (6)

Using Ropars' methodology to adaptation as a starting point, all texts will look at filmic "readings" and "commentaries" of original literary sources. Core texts for this study are: Mists of Regret (1995) by Dudley Andrew; New Novel, New Wave, New Politics (1996) by Lynn Higgins; Screening the Text (1992) by T. Jefferson Kline; Private Novels, Public Films (1988) by Judith Mayne; Novel to Film (1996) by Brian McFarlane; Novel and Film (1985) by Bruce Morrisette; and De la littérature au cinéma: Genèse d'une écriture (1970) by Marie-Claire Ropars-Wuilleumier.

The methodology that criss-crosses these approaches to film criticism vis-à-vis the novel is the equality of the two mediums and the study of how the two intersect and divide within a specific framework. I will apply this type of methodology in this study. The specific commentaries that I will be referencing are those that of gender, female representation, and sexual difference.

Chapter Two, "Nana—The Lost Look," begins the series of film adaptation studies through close readings of films looked at through a gendered filter, specifically

looking at female representation. Through the optic of gender, we will examine the ways in which Nana has “lost her look” and agency in the 1926 silent film. This film, used as a star vehicle for Catherine Hessling, appeared 46 years after the novel. Jean Renoir admits: “J’insiste sur le fait que je n’ai mis les pieds dans le cinéma que dans l’espoir de faire de ma femme une vedette” (Ma Vie 44). From the beginning of both the novel and the film, the difference between the two “Nanas” is striking. Nana, a girl born out of wedlock to Gervaise Macquart and Coupeau, has scraped, bullied and bartered her way to the lead in La Blonde Vénus at the Variétés. Hessling, on the other hand, married into this role and is foregrounded as an established actress bringing previous fame and identity with her to the screen. The novelistic Nana is still trying to establish herself.

Nana, the scandalous novel of 1880, was chosen by Jean Renoir to adapt to the screen because of his interest in the question of class, the question of how people meet and form relationships, his interest in theater, and his desire to insert theatrical elements into film (Sesonske 34-35). Renoir also admits that he simply liked the novel: “Pourquoi Nana? Simplement parce que Pierre Lestringuez et moi admirions profondément le roman de Zola” (Ma Vie 71). It is interesting to note that the son of Pierre-Auguste Renoir aligned himself with Zola some 50 years later as Zola had previously aligned himself with the painters of Impressionism.

Renoir’s film, however, as compared to the novel, produced no scandal at its premiere, as the story of Nana was already well known. How does Renoir’s reading or his patriarchal filter used to create the image of Nana, diminish the power and agency that she possessed in the novel? Why were spectators NOT shocked by the film adaptation? Through a detailed examination of cinematic codes, we will examine how Renoir subtly



restricts Nana to produce a less threatening woman for men. The inherent fact that the film is silent may also add to the loss of Nana's "power" as her words are drastically trimmed in the film due to the medium. The other focus for examination in this chapter is to see how Renoir moves Nana from subject to object, an object without agency.

While speaking of La Grande Illusion in Ma vie et mes films, Renoir states: "Mon sujet principal était l'un des buts vers quoi je tends depuis que je fais des films, à savoir la réunion des hommes" (134). He accomplishes this task with cinematic tropes such as bars and dividers between Nana and her lesbian companions and with a subtle change of the crowd that surrounds her at her death. He replaces all the women with men. This patriarchal filter through which Renoir sees Emile Zola's Nana will be explored in his cinematic reading of Nana as Renoir struggles to maintain the homosocial order of men and maintain the integrity of patriarchal ideology.

The novel begins with everyone talking *about* Nana. For almost 12 pages, the excitement of seeing Nana builds. At last she enters the stage:

A ce moment, les nuées, au fond, s'écartèrent, et Vénus parut. Nana, très grande, très forte pour ses dix-huit ans, dans sa tunique blanche de déesse, ses longs cheveux blonds simplement dénoués sur les épaules, descendit vers la rampe avec un aplomb tranquille, en riant au public. Et elle entama son grand air: Lorsque Vénus rôde le soir.... (42)

Nana appears on stage in the Venus costume but laughing back at her audience. Nana, as the signified of the blond Venus in Zola's novel, is immediately established as the object of the gaze at her entrance. This objectification in the novel is deceiving, however, as Nana knows what she is doing. Nana is looking for an entrance into the lifestyle of a courtesan. This production will bring her fame, fortune, and male suitors. It is as if she is making an advertisement of herself.

In the film, Nana dangles haphazardly from the ropes of the theater with a look of fear and concern. This permits Renoir to set the precedent that Nana is pure object and pure spectacle with no agency of her own. All eyes are upon her and all conversations are about her. Renoir does not permit Nana to initiate the gaze or return it. Zola undercuts Nana's presence as a heterosexual temptress by permitting Satin, Mimi and La Comtesse Muffat to also take visual pleasure in seeing Nana. The erasure of Nana's lesbianism in the film reduces her power as subject of the gaze; here, the idea of women looking at women is non-existent. The lesbian relationship that Nana has with Satin will be forsaken in the film version, removing all threats to the patriarchal bonds of men and therefore preserving Renoir's homosocial ideology.

Chapter Three, "The "Eyecon" in the Mirror," explores another female protagonist, Séverine Roubaud, as both a victimized woman and a ruthless creature of intense sexual desire in La Bête Humaine. This film of the 1930's, again directed by Jean Renoir, was produced in between the two wars and belongs to the period of film known as poetic realism. The genre of poetic realism allows for the portrayal of a dark, shadowy, sinister, and illusive woman like Séverine. Dudley Andrew asserts the importance of literature on this genre of filmmaking. He states: "To negotiate this middle zone, [between sophisticated and popular cinema] those responsible for poetic realism adopted a literary demeanor. Its very name referenced literature or, at least, literary ideas" (Mists of Regret 7). Based on Zola's novel of 1890 as the literary source for this 1938 film, we will also explore how the genre of poetic realism affected the treatment and representation of Séverine in the film. In his reference to poetic realism and this film Andrew states:

In the same year and in another, much more complex film, La Bête Humaine, Jean Gabin and Simone Simon would exchange some of the most violent and erotic language and looks the cinema was then capable of, yet they would do so in an equally subdued, whispering tone, letting audiences monitor the incredible pressure underneath the sad routine of ordinary life. (Mists of Regret 6)

It will be important to examine who is the originator and receiver of these erotic and violent looks in the film.

Situated in a commonplace marriage with the sous-chef at the train station of Le Havre, Séverine is an accomplice to murder, if not the silent instigator. The novel opens similarly to Nana with Roubaud creating and building the excitement of Séverine's arrival. Roubaud finds himself in the flat in Paris waiting for Séverine who is running errands. He is placed in the position of passive househusband. While waiting, the slight, light-haired Roubaud, in his desire to please his wife, takes pleasure in setting the table to surprise her: "il s'amuse à ces soins de ménage"(56; ch. I). Also, while waiting, Roubaud looks at himself in the mirror two times to check his appearance: "Comme il avait épousé une femme plus jeune que lui de quinze années, ces coups d'oeil fréquents, donnés aux glaces, le rassuraient" (56). He repeats this look: "Et, comme il passait de nouveau devant la glace, il s'aperçut, les sourcils hérissés, le front coupé d'une ligne dure" (57).

This role reversal of male and female waiting signals the agency that Séverine will take for herself. Roubaud is placed in the traditional female role of attendee; he is light in complexion and very concerned with his appearance. Although she is the object of Roubaud's gaze, he is certainly not the object of hers. She will take her desire for Jacques Lantier and become an active agent in the pursuit of his attention. Séverine

enters the room as if she is entering a stage with Roubaud as her only spectator. Zola records her entrance: “Séverine poussa la porte, parut toute fraîche, toute joyeuse. –C’est moi... Hein? Tu as dû croire que j’étais perdue” (57).

Zola immediately portrays Séverine as exotic and sexual. She is an orphan who never knew her mother and lost her father at the pubescent age of thirteen. Zola presents his description:

Dans l’éclat de ses vingt-cinq ans, elle semblait grande, mince et très souple, grasse pourtant avec de petits os. Elle n’était point jolie d’abord, la face longue, la bouche forte, éclairée de dents admirables. Mais, à la regarder, elle séduisait par le charme, l’étrangeté de ses larges yeux bleus, sous son épaisse chevelure noire. (57)

Her dark hair and strange blue eyes reinforce her exoticness. The reference to “la bouche forte” and “de dents admirables” foreshadows her ability to consume men and echoes Zola’s description of Nana as “une mangeuse d’hommes.” All murders that occur in the novel involve Séverine.

Renoir, as we shall see, negates the agency of Séverine in the re-ordering of the sequence of the novel and by her introduction. After the long train sequence, we see Séverine seated, waiting at the window, in a conservative dark dress with a lace collar caressing a small white kitten while Roubaud attends to his manly work in the train yard. Séverine is framed in the window as a one-dimensional picture as if it were hanging on the wall. Renoir again, uses a well-known femme fatale, Simone Simon, as his female protagonist. Her past work and her baby-like wispy voice add to her role as spectacle.

A secondary female character, Flore, played by Blanchette Brunoy, represents the innocent, naïve virginal figure. She can also be described as a woman who is not overly interested in men. She is portrayed in the novel as an “Amazon,” an awkward girl who

prefers the company of women. Her role, as well as her “manly” and “coarse” persona, will diminish drastically in the film.

Chapter Four, “The Pleasure of Looking—The Gentlemen’s Paradise,” is devoted to a film of the Occupation, Au Bonheur des Dames (1943) by André Cayatte. This film serves as the counterpoint to the other four films in this study as it is based on a novel of love, romance, and happy endings. The novel was considered pivotal for Zola as he decided to leave behind all the pessimism of naturalism and concentrate on success and happiness. Zola explains his vision in the opening explanation to the novel:

Je veux dans Au bonheur des dames faire le poème de l’activité moderne. Donc, changement complet de philosophie: plus de pessimisme d’abord, ne pas conclure à la bêtise et la mélancolie de la vie, conclure au contraire à son continuel labeur, à la puissance et à la gaieté de son enfantement. En un mot, aller avec le siècle, exprimer le siècle, qui est un siècle d’action et de conquête, d’efforts dans tous les sens. (Les Rougon-Macquart III 1680)

This change in venue for Zola’s new novel directly impacts the agency of his female protagonist. Denise stays within the confines of the established patriarchal codes and is rewarded for her obedience and perseverance.

Denise Baudu falls at the opposite extreme from Nana, Séverine, Gervaise, and Thérèse on the continuum of Zola’s female protagonists. She is represented as the saintly, maternal woman, always there to help, struggling to raise her two siblings, and working hard to make a living. Her desire to succeed drives the linear narrative of the text. Her name as the first word of the novel, in addition to the generic title, signals that this is to be a novel about a community of women. However, this novel appears as the antithesis of L’Assommoir and Gervaise’s community of women. In both novels, Zola uses a title denoting a male dominated place, for example one novel is named after a bar,

and the other is named after a department store. In each novel, the female protagonist's name launches the narrative; however, Gervaise is consumed by the "assommoir" of the title while Denise conquers the department store.

Denise arrives in Paris with hopes and aspirations as opposed to the other female protagonists (for example, Gervaise) who are trying to leave the squalor of the city. Her arrival in Paris depicts her in a maternal setting and places the power of the look with her as she surveys Paris "le nez levé sur les maisons." However, this female gaze is compromised as Denise is placed in an inferior position. She must look up in order to see and this places her at the bottom of the hierarchical ladder. Zola explains:

Denise était venue à pied de la gare Saint-Lazare, où un train de Cherbourg l'avait débarquée avec ses deux frères, après une nuit passée sur la dure banquette d'un wagon de troisième classe. Elle tenait par la main Pépé, et Jean la suivait, tous les trois brisés du voyage, effarés et perdus au milieu du vaste Paris, le nez levé sur les maisons, demandant à chaque carrefour la rue de la Michodière, dans laquelle leur oncle Baudu demeurait. (41; ch. I)

This introductory quote represents Denise as determined, maternal, inquisitive, and optimistic. She represents the common girl who falls in love with the handsome prince in a fairy tale story of rags to riches. Zola describes her as weak, pale, childlike, and blond. This signification immediately renders her less menacing and less marginal as compared to the other female protagonists in this study. Not surprisingly, it also makes her representation in film less problematic.

In a world of commerce and newfound capitalism, Denise, the naïve, young, country girl follows a prescribed formula for women to succeed and she is handsomely rewarded with a wonderful husband and marriage. Despite her misery and poverty, she does not have a lover and remains pure. Death will not be an ugly end for Denise who

has lived her life according to the laws of the patriarchy. Denise is the only woman in this study who survives her narrative and does not die at the end of the novel or the film. She and Octave will continue to live in harmony and have two children, a girl and a boy.

This permits the story of Denise Baudu to be one of love, marriage, family and success, the typical “happy ending” film. Denise escapes all the vices, failings, and depravity of the Macquart line of the family genealogy since she is not related to them. She has all the heroic virtues: “n’ayant en elle que de la bonté et de la raison, un amour de la vérité et de la logique qui était toute sa force” that one would expect in a traditional heroine.

This narration of the nineteenth-century nuclear family with Denise in the typical female role of virginal adolescent, then wife, and mother provides an easier “reading” and transposition into film than the two previous heroines, Nana and Séverine. Cayatte’s Denise rests closer to the original Denise as mainstream cinema can more easily portray the “good” girl who stays within the delineated traditional confines of the male dominated cinematic hierarchy.

Chapter Five, “The Eyes Have It,” and Chapter Six, “The Failed Entrepreneuse,” focus on two films made during the era of the “Tradition of Quality.” They are Thérèse Raquin (1953) and Gervaise (1956), both about women imprisoned in their own homes by their environment and their heredity. Beginning with Thérèse Raquin of Marcel Carné we see the continuation in the representation of marginalized women with exceptional sexual desires. We also see, once again, the female protagonist as a murderer, at least an accomplice to murder. Zola’s first novel of importance was extremely scandalous and produced violent reactions when it first appeared. Becker, Gourdin-Servenièrre, and

Lavielle state: “Le 23 janvier 1868, Louis Ulbach publia dans Le Figaro un article intitulé ‘La littérature putride’, qui s’en prenait violemment à l’oeuvre: ‘Ma curiosité a glissé ces jours-ci dans une flaque de boue et de sang qui s’appelle Thérèse Raquin’” (Becker, Gourdin-Serveni re and Lavielle, Dictionnaire 416-17). Zola defended himself by insisting that he was trying to apply scientific analyses to his novel.

Scandal usually erupts when presenting something new and by breaking conventional codes and laws. Did the film create the same scandal at its premiere? In the film version, Carn  updates the novel by placing it in a different place and time period than the literary source and by changing the nationalities of the major characters. Did these changes erupt as scandal and how did the audiences of 1953 receive the film?

Th r se is more marginalized than the other female characters. Zola describes her: “la ch re petite  tait n e   Oran et qu’elle avait pour m re une femme indig ne d’une grande beaut ” (26; ch. II). Because of living with the sickly Camille, Th r se has “l’habitude de parler   voix basse, de marcher sans faire de bruit, de rester muette et immobile sur une chaise, les yeux ouverts et vides de regards” (27). Zola also likens her to a sleeping cat: “on sentait en elle des souplesses f lines, des muscles courts et puissants, toute une  nergie, toute une passion qui dormaient dans sa chair assoupie” (27). Zola hints at Th r se’s suppressed uncivilized heredity: “il lui prit une envie sauvage de courir et de crier; elle sentit son c ur qui frappait   grands coups dans sa poitrine . . .” (27). He continues: “Quand elle  tait seule, dans l’herbe, au bord de l’eau, elle se couchait   plat ventre comme une b te, les yeux noirs et agrandis, le corps tordu, pr s de bondir” (28).



Thérèse's father dies in a battle in Africa and Thérèse, who is orphaned, is carefully raised by her aunt, Mme Raquin. Thérèse's marginalization leads directly to her intense, hidden suppressed sexual desire that surfaces when she meets Laurent. Her original relationship with Camille, who is overtly feminized by Zola by just his name alone, resembles a female friendship rather than a heterosexual marriage. Zola tells us that Camille was "sauvé de la mort, demeura tout frissonnant des secousses répétées qui avaient endolori sa chair," and that "il resta petit et malingre" (25). Zola continues: "Ses membres grêles eurent des mouvements lents et fatigués" and that "Camille resta ignorant, et son ignorance mit comme une faiblesse de plus en lui" (25). Camille's weaknesses will prove fatal as Thérèse renounces him for a "real" man. After Thérèse and Camille's marriage, Zola comments that the only change in the household is that Thérèse sleeps in the room on the right at the top of the stairs instead of the room on the left.

In the film, Thérèse's marginality is replaced by Laurent's marginality and the sexual allure of Riton, the blackmailer. Carné does not dwell on Thérèse's exotic background and his choice of Simone Signoret for the role of Thérèse compromises her on-screen sexuality. Previously known for her "sex appeal" on screen, Carné dresses Signoret in dowdy clothes and shoes, and gives her a conservative hairstyle. Laurent is marginalized as the exotic, virile, good-looking man from Italy. His strong accent throughout the film reinforces his marginalization. Carné adds the sexually attractive character, Riton, to the film and places agency with him. Thérèse, placed between the two active male agents, Laurent and Riton, loses both her agency and her subjectivity.

Chapter Six, “The Failed Entrepreneur,” examines female representation in Gervaise, the 1956 film of René Clément juxtaposed with Zola’s novel, L’Assommoir, written in 1877. Zola and Clément, through two different mediums, both use Gervaise as a cipher to expose the oppressive conditions of the patriarchy. Zola’s harsh and hyper-realist narrative will find a softer voice in Clément’s reading of the novel. Clément takes the name of the female protagonist as the title of his film suggesting a different and more personal interpretation of the novel.

Zola does not title his novel after Gervaise but uses her name to launch the narrative of the novel: “Gervaise avait attendu Lantier jusqu’à deux heures du matin” (9; ch. I). At the beginning of the novel, Zola introduces Gervaise as a passive agent. The use of the past imperfect, *avait attendu*, tells us she has been in the process of waiting before the novel began. We do not know how long on this particular day Gervaise has waited but the connection is made between women and waiting, implying that waiting is a passive activity commonly associated with women.

The object of Gervaise’s waiting is a man, Lantier, and she will wait as long as necessary for him to arrive. From this introduction, we assume that Gervaise is a character that reacts instead of acts, but we will be mistaken as Gervaise assumes a role of agency in the novel. Unfortunately, Gervaise is not able to sustain her rise to agency. The force of men (Lantier) and the effects of alcohol (Coupeau) destroy her. At the end of the novel Gervaise resumes her position as passive agent. She begs for death and expresses her desire but her loss of agency prevents her from taking action. Gervaise is again waiting, but this time she is waiting to die. Through her wish to die and the

repeated expression of that wish, Gervaise struggles to maintain agency but simultaneously verbalizes her sense of futility and failure.

Between the first and the last chapter of the novel, Zola provides a look at a woman's attempt to rise to a position of social status and power. During this portion of the novel, Zola reminds us of Gervaise's desires:

Mon Dieu! Je ne suis pas ambitieuse, je ne demande pas grand-chose... Mon idéal, ce serait de travailler tranquille, de manger toujours du pain, d'avoir un trou un peu propre pour dormir, vous savez, un lit, une table et deux chaises, pas davantage... Ah! Je voudrais aussi élever mes enfants, en faire de bons sujets, si c'était possible... il y a encore un idéal, ce serait de ne pas être battue, si je me remettais jamais en ménage; non, ça ne me plairait pas d'être battue... Et c'est tout, vous voyez, c'est tout . . . (49; ch. II)

Gervaise's desires are simple, honest, and plainly expressed. However, as Zola exposes the plight of women in 1877, he strongly demonstrates that the current patriarchal regime is not prepared to accept female agency.

In order to substantiate Gervaise's credibility, Zola reminds us that Gervaise is not the same as other women: "J'ai quatre sous pour le lavoir . . . Je n'en gagne pas comme certaines femmes" (19; ch. I). Zola adamantly shows Gervaise as a good, honest woman who works hard to fulfill her desires. Oddly however, in the attainment of those desires, Zola's novel creates scandal on its publication because of his use of popular language and descriptions that are too realistic. Léon Deffoux states: "It is well known that the publication of *L'Assommoir* was very controversial, and that Zola was denounced as obscene and insulting to working people for the language and content of the book" (qtd. in Katner 119). Zola addresses this scandal in the preface he adds to the novel:

L'Assommoir est à coup sûr le plus chaste de mes livres. Souvent j'ai dû toucher à des plaies autrement épouvantables. La forme seule a effaré.

On s'est fâché contre les mots. Mon crime est d'avoir eu la curiosité littéraire de ramasser et de couler dans un moule très travaillé la langue du peuple. (7)

Not only was Zola's street language shocking, but his unromanticized narrative of the quotidian lifestyle of working-class women also produced an uproar. Zola responds to the attacks against his novel: "Je ne me défends pas, d'ailleurs. Mon oeuvre me défendra. C'est une oeuvre de vérité. Le premier roman sur le peuple, qui ne mente pas et qui ait l'odeur du peuple" (8). Zola accomplishes his goal of representing the common people but most significantly he represents a strong community of women.

Clément's 1956 reading of Zola's novel appears during a time of social feminism in France and therefore reinforces the political ideals of Zola vis-à-vis women. Clément softens the story of Gervaise's tragic life for the screen and as a result, he compromises Gervaise's agency. However, his deletion of Gervaise's prostitution, starvation, and horrific death suggest a chance for Gervaise to recover and begin again. Clément's open-ended cyclical narrative, permeated with autobiographical voice-overs by Gervaise, and his refusal to screen Gervaise's death reorient the narrative in an attempt to maintain Gervaise's agency. This creates a small fissure through which women can glean some optimism for themselves and their daughters.

According women agency under the Second Empire, especially working-class women, was not a common literary practice. However, as the novel gained in popularity in the nineteenth century, a preoccupation with female subjectivity developed, as more and more authors (Balzac, Flaubert, Maupassant) attempted to place agency and subjectivity with their female protagonists. Zola appeared in the forefront of this unorganized attempt to produce novels with strong, albeit malevolent, female

protagonists. In addition to entertaining his literary audience, Zola attempted to educate his readers about the social plight of women through the optic of naturalism.

Zola's interest in social issues regarding women is clouded by his misogynistic representation of women. In his novels, women are depicted as adulterers, murderers, prostitutes, and man-eaters. He also describes them as unhealthy, mentally deficient, incompetent, conniving, hysterical, and weak. His repetitive use of the images "la femme sans tête" and "la mangeuse d'hommes" summarizes his basic understanding and perception of women. However, if we can read against the grain to expose the subtext of his ideology, we still find a man concerned with women's issues.

Explaining the popularity of the novel and its readership during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Judith Mayne suggests: "The reading of novels would become a leisure-time activity pursued, primarily, within the home" (Private Novels 33). Connecting women with the home and private spaces, Mayne's statement implies that women represented the largest segment of the reading public. Not surprisingly then, Zola's novels were perceived as problematic because, although he engaged with women's social issues, his narratives were oftentimes too graphic and sexually explicit for his reading audience.

Cinema developed as a technological form of entertainment and, like the novel, was also designed to fill the leisure time of the working classes. As opposed to the novel however, the accepted audience for this new story telling apparatus was men. Following in the tradition of vaudeville, spectacle, and showgirls, women were placed on display as commodities to attract male spectators. The dark, quiet atmosphere of the theater catered to this masculine audience, mimicking a peep through the keyhole. Women were placed

as the object of the gaze on the other side of the keyhole. Laura Mulvey maintains that this places men as the active controllers of the look, as women are icons, displayed for the gaze and enjoyment of men (Visual Pleasures 21). According to Mulvey this scopophilic instinct (pleasure of looking at another person as an erotic object) acts as one of the mechanisms of traditional narrative film and would mold cinema's formal attributes (Visual Pleasures 25). As opposed to an individual writing a novel, cinema, as a large collaborative enterprise, constructs and manipulates images on the screen. How will Zola's female protagonists survive their transposition to film? How does film screen Zola's women? Laura Mulvey asked, "Is the gaze male?" as she discussed the tradition of using the actual image of woman as (passive) raw material for the (active) gaze of man (Visual Pleasure 25). As we examine Zola's celluloid female protagonists we continue to pose the same question.

After a close reading of each novel and film and looking at the cinematic commentaries and readings of female representation juxtaposed with their literary sources, I, in conclusion, argue that traditional cinema resists and distorts the representation of female desire and female agency. In negotiating this area when adapting women from novels, cinema diminishes the agency of these strong, marginalized female characters and subordinates them to the male protagonist of the film. Camera angles, costumes, discourse, filmic barriers and numerous other cinematic tropes, overtly used or covertly disguised, restructure Zola's female protagonists to adhere to the norm of patriarchal, cinematic representation and sexual hierarchy.

## CHAPTER 2

### NANA—THE LOST LOOK

Si elle [Gervaise] accouchait, n'est-ce pas? ce n'était point une raison pour laisser Coupeau sans manger. Enfin, le ragoût mijota sur un feu couvert de cendre. Elle revint dans la chambre, crut avoir le temps de mettre un couvert à un bout de la table. Et il lui fallut reposer bien vite le litre de vin; elle n'eut plus la force d'arriver au lit, elle tomba et accoucha par terre, sur un paillason. Lorsque la sage-femme arriva, un quart d'heure plus tard, ce fut là qu'elle la délivra. (L'Assommoir 116)

And so, the story of Nana (née Anna Coupeau) begins on April 30, 1851. Arriving in this world on the floor of a small apartment in the rue Neuve de la Goutte d'Or, Nana immediately commands the attention of others. A spectacle to behold, all of Gervaise's relatives and friends come to see the new baby. Through numerous points of view, Zola provides a composite picture of Nana. Her father, Coupeau, is delighted with his first child and tells Gervaise, "Juste! . . . j'avais commandé une fille! Hein! me voilà servi! Tu fais donc tout ce que je veux?" (116; ch. IV). Gervaise is not as happy about the birth of a daughter because she feels that boys "se débrouillent toujours et ne courent pas tant de risques, dans ce Paris" (117). Her aunt, Mme Lerat, predicts Nana's future as "une fameuse femme" (118). She continues her prediction: "comme elle lui trouvait la tête pointue, elle la pétrissait légèrement, malgré ses cris, afin de l'arrondir . . . ça suffisait pour donner tous ses vices à une créature, de la tripoter ainsi, quand elle avait le crâne si tendre" (118).

The most important observation comes from Lorilleux, her godfather. He says: “C’était toute sa mère, avec des yeux d’ailleurs; pour sûr, ces yeux-là ne venaient pas de la famille” (118). Within hours of her birth, it is acknowledged that Nana has a “look” different from the other members of her family. Lorilleux’s reference to Nana’s “yeux d’ailleurs” privileges Nana with the gaze and foreshadows her role as “Other” throughout the novel.

At the age of three, Nana already insists on “looking” as she begins to hone her skills. Nana’s first significant access to the gaze is so powerful that it functions as the catalyst for the narrative of L’Assommoir. As she accompanies Gervaise to find Coupeau who is working on a roof, Nana exerts her agency to access the gaze: “Elle s’était assise sur le trottoir, pour mieux voir là-haut” (132; ch. IV). Her egocentricity demands that she be the center of attention, as she calls out to Coupeau: “Papa! papa! criait-elle de toute sa force; papa! regarde donc!” (132). The power of Nana’s look as an instrument of destruction is posited in this scene as Nana is blamed for Coupeau’s accident.

By the time Nana is six years old, she exerts her role as active agent by bullying the other children of the neighborhood, causing opinions of her to change. After a confrontation with Nana, Mme Boche explains to Gervaise: “Lorsqu’on avait une saloperie de fille pareille, on la tenait sous clef” (176; ch. V). At fifteen and a half, Nana takes a lover; an old man, fifty years old. Zola describes Nana’s errant ways: “Elle était dans le vice comme un poisson dans l’eau” (407; ch. XI). He adds that “à quinze ans et demi, de traîner ainsi des hommes à ses jupes!” (408) is not acceptable behavior. Even her father, Coupeau, changes his opinion of Nana: “Hein? C’était sur le dos qu’elle avait



gagné ça! Ou bien elle les avait achetés à la foire d’empoigne? Salope ou voleuse, peut-être déjà toutes les deux” (410-411; ch. XI). Nana’s sexuality and her refusal to adhere to the patriarchal code of conduct for young women alienate her from her family and neighbors. Refusing to be a passive agent, Nana decides to act and sets out on her own.

Pushing Nana to her decision to leave her home is her increasing desire for money, creature comforts, respect, and social standing. Zola enumerates:

Alors, trotant dans la boue, éclaboussée par les voitures, aveuglée par le resplendissement des étalages, elle avait des envies qui la tortillaient à l’estomac, ainsi que des fringales, des envies d’être bien mise, de manger dans les restaurants, d’aller au spectacle, d’avoir une chambre à elle avec de beaux meubles. Elle s’arrêtait toute pâle de désir, elle sentait monter du pavé de Paris une chaleur le long de ses cuisses, un appétit féroce de mordre aux jouissances dont elle était bousculée, dans la grande cohue des trottoirs. (414; ch. XI)

Within a few days of the revelation of her desires, Nana leaves her family to create her future. She walks quietly as she slips out the door with a simple “bonsoir.”

However, although Nana is physically removed from the Coupeau household, she is not forgotten; she exists as the absent present. Gervaise aches for Nana, Coupeau looks for Nana, and the couple argues about the cause of Nana’s decision to leave. The only person to give his approval of Nana’s decision is Lantier. Present in everyone’s thoughts but physically absent from the home, sightings of Nana are retold with enthusiasm. Virginie recounts her encounter to Gervaise: “Vous ne savez pas, la mère! j’ai vu Nana, l’autre jour” (438; ch. XI). Lantier sees Nana frequently and continues the story:

Elle était en voiture; . . . Oui, elle était en voiture, et une toilette d’un chic...! Je ne la reconnaissais pas, tant elle ressemblait à une dame de la haute, les quenottes blanches dans sa frimousse fraîche comme une fleur. C’est elle qui m’a envoyé une risette avec son gant... Elle a fait un

vicomte, je crois. Oh! très lancée! Elle peut se ficher de nous tous, elle a du Bonheur par-dessus la tête, cette gueuse!...” (438-39)

Nana remains the object of spectacle as her story provokes interest and continues to be told. After her encounter with Virginie, Gervaise returns home and recounts the story to Coupeau. She reiterates: “J’ai eu des nouvelles, murmura-t-elle enfin. On a vu ta fille... Oui, ta fille est très chic et n’a plus besoin de toi. Elle est joliment heureuse, celle-là, par exemple!... Ah! Dieu de Dieu! je donnerais gros pour être à sa place” (439). Gervaise and the readers of the novel crave for more information about Nana, but none is given. The novel concludes without finding Nana and, as a result, she becomes an enigma, a mystery, a character that becomes larger than life.

Zola’s ninth novel in the Rougon-Macquart series, Nana, continues the story of Nana from L’Assommoir. After a three-year interval, Nana reappears as an actress at Le Théâtre des Variétés ready to debut in her role as la blonde Vénus. The novel begins with all the spectators in the theater looking for and talking about Nana. She sustains her position from L’Assommoir as the center of attention, as readers are eager to resume her story. Zola does not disappoint his literary audience. Philip Walker explains:

Like *L’Assommoir*, *Nana* provoked a tremendous uproar. Even before the serial publication began, in *Le Voltaire* of October 16, 1879, the public, its curiosity aroused by articles and posters announcing the event, was discussing it excitedly. (146)

Nana was to become a huge success.

The paradoxical, but powerful nature of Nana’s character, is that she is the subject that orchestrates and defines her role as the object of the gaze. She manipulates her objectification for her own personal gain and pleasure. She chooses who will see her,

when they see her, and what they will be permitted to see. Therefore, Nana is both object and subject, but it is she who is the active agent.

As the novel begins, Zola describes the Théâtre des Variétés, the production of La Blonde Vénus, and all the spectators who are curious about this “Nana.” Hector asks Fauchery: “Et Nana, l’étoile nouvelle, qui doit jouer Vénus, est-ce que tu la connais?” (32; ch. I). Fauchery responds: “Depuis ce matin, on m’assomme avec Nana. J’ai rencontré plus de vingt personnes, et Nana par-ci, et Nana par-là! Est-ce que je sais, moi! est-ce que je connais toutes les filles de Paris!...Nana est une invention de Bordenave. Ça doit être du propre!” (32). Nana turns the tables on Fauchery and the patriarchy to retaliate for her mother’s hardships. Fauchery’s use of *m’assomme* reflects back to the tragic story of Gervaise. Here, Nana “assomme” the men that she subjects to her rules and desires.

Zola credits Bordenave with Nana’s creation and demonstrates how he markets her image. To increase his profits, Bordenave uses Nana as the “star power” of his new production. He publicizes her name, which appears everywhere: “Dans la claret crue du gaz, sur la nudité blafarde de cette sale dont une maigre décoration empire faisait un péristyle de temple en carton, de hautes affiches jaunes s’étalaient violemment, avec le nom de Nana en grosses lettres noires” (33). Bordenave’s advertising is actualized in Jules Laffitte’s (Zola’s editor) marketing for Nana. F.W. J. Hemmings states, “the publication of the novel [Nana] had been preceded by a fanfare of publicity verging on vulgarity” (94). Hemmings continues to make his point:

To get over his simple message: ‘Read *Nana*! Read *Le Voltaire*!’ he [Laffitte] took space in other papers, placarded every available empty wall, and had his posters stuck on the sides of trams and of the

cylindrically shaped urinals which were then so common in Paris. If neon lights had been invented, *Lisez Nana!* would have twinkled in the main square of every town in France from Bordeaux to Nancy. (94)

Placing posters in urinals is a poignant reminder that woman is a commodity generally “sold” to men. Zola understands the effective use of woman as commodity, which he demonstrates through Bordenave’s advertising of La Blonde Vénus. Jules Laffitte’s advertising of the novel, Nana, replicates Bordenave’s diegetic advertising. This layering of Nana’s objectification adds to the suspense of her debut on stage.

At this point, the reader, as well as the diegetic spectators, is anxious to make the acquaintance of Nana. Bordenave’s posters coupled with Zola’s advertising of the novel and the large letters on the novel’s cover conflate the reader with the diegetic spectators as they simultaneously share in the excitement. Conversations continue: “On m’a dit, recommença-t-il, voulant absolument trouver quelque chose, que Nana avait une voix délicieuse” (33). Everyone’s curiosity intensifies: “Devant eux, une queue s’écrasait au contrôle, un tapage de voix montait, dans lequel le nom de Nana sonnait avec la vivacité chantant de ses deux syllabes” (35). Finally, after twelve pages of introduction and suspense, Nana appears on stage:

A ce moment, les nuées, au fond, s’écartèrent, et Vénus parut. Nana, très grande, très forte pour ses dix-huit ans, dans sa tunique blanche de déesse, ses longs cheveux blonds simplement dénoués sur les épaules, descendit vers la rampe avec un aplomb tranquille, en riant au public. Et elle entama son grand air: Lorsque Vénus rôde le soir... (42; ch. I)

Even though Nana is the object of spectacle, she returns the gaze to the audience through her laughter. Nana “sees” and understands the ridiculousness of her costumes and her role but she also comprehends the riches and comforts this exhibition can provide for her.

As the third act begins, Nana appears naked on stage: “Un frisson remua la salle, Nana était nue. Elle était nue avec une tranquille audace, certaine de la toute-puissance de sa chair” (52; ch. I). Nana is not merely just a passive object of spectacle; she delights in the effect that she produces with her shocking appearance. As Nana stands naked on stage in her role of Vénus, she demonstrates her creative use of self-objectification as she plans to reap her rewards: “Nana souriait toujours, mais d’un sourire aigu de mangeuse d’hommes” (53; ch. I). Although initially posited as Bordenave’s invention and commodity, Nana appropriates agency for herself. She assesses her situation and takes action to obtain what she wants. She objectifies herself to increase her “to-be-looked-at-ness” as she creatively attracts the attention of men who can provide her wealth, money, and power. Zola informs us that Nana is no ordinary woman.

At the end of her performance, as everyone is leaving the theater, Zola describes the atmosphere: “cette cohue d’hommes aux lèvres sèches, aux yeux ardents, tout brulants encore de la possession de Nana . . . ” (56; ch. I). However, it is Nana’s desire for wealth, fame, and respect that pushes her, as the active agent, to prostitute herself on stage. She chooses to be the whore and pimp at the same time, which allows her to reap the rewards of her work. Therefore, the “possession” to which Zola refers is deceiving, mythical, and non-existent.

To emphasize Nana’s power and access to agency, she is further marginalized through the adoption of typical “male” actions. For example, after Nana’s performance, she reflects on her acting ability while smoking: “Nana roulait des cigarettes, qu’elle fumait en se dandinant, renversée sur sa chaise” (66; ch. II). Nana’s appropriation of typical masculine habits aligns her with patriarchal agency. She refuses the role of

passive agent as she choreographs her next move. Nana is cunning, manipulative, and controlling, as she effectively uses men to satisfy her appetite for wealth and money. Nana reverses the dominant ideology of woman as commodity.

Zola introduces Nana's problematic and usurious attitude towards men immediately after her performance: "Nana se vengea des ennuis qu'on lui causait, en mâchant des sourds jurons contre les hommes" (73; ch. III). Using the verb *mâchant* creates the fissure through which Nana will come to be known as the "mangeuse d'hommes." Zola reinforces Nana's role as a man-eating debutante during her dinner party where all of her male prospects are present. Nana "montrait ses dents blanches" (121; ch. IV) giving a literal representation to Zola's metaphor. Zola's insistence on Nana's voracious appetite weaves throughout the novel.

After Nana's unveiling to the audience at the Théâtre des Variétés, she is inundated with flowers of appreciation, letters of introduction, and visits of men wanting to see her. Nana blocks her male callers' agency as she decides whom she sees. Acting as the active agent, Nana keeps the men waiting, usurping their agency, and placing them in the role of passive object. Zola describes this line of men as "un carillon à révolutionner le quartier, toute une cohue d'hommes tapant à la file sur le bouton d'ivoire" (79; ch. II). This permits Nana to act on her desires and choose the male suitor that she wishes.

Continuing to emphasize Nana's agency, Zola recounts Nana's delight at her power as she insists on keeping the men waiting. Nana creates a barrier between herself and the men as she locks herself in a room. Refusing to permit these men to cross the threshold, she fetishizes their images:

Et Nana, bien verrouillée, à l'abri, se moquait d'eux, en disant qu'elle les entendait souffler. Ils devaient avoir une bonne tête, tous la langue pendante, comme des toutous assis en rond sur leur derrière. C'était son succès de la veille qui continuait, cette meute d'hommes l'avait suivie à la trace. (79; ch. II)

Nana amuses herself with the metaphorical image of the dogs, an image that reoccurs in the novel as Nana humiliates Muffat.

As Nana chooses a few suitors to receive, the men relinquish their agency and their gaze, acquiescing to Nana's desires: "Le comte Muffat, qui allait parler, baissa les yeux" (74). Nana does not hesitate to take possession of the gaze from these men: "Elle les enveloppait de son rire et de son regard clair" (75). Muffat, unaccustomed to objectification, becomes light-headed: "Le comte Muffat s'inclina, troublé malgré son grand usage du monde, ayant besoin d'air, emportant un vertige de ce cabinet de toilette, une odeur de fleur et de femme qui l'étouffait" (75). Muffat, as if under a spell by Nana, eventually carries out Nana's every desire.

Nana takes advantage of men to amuse herself and to attain money and material possessions. She is adamant and specific about her wishes, desires, and requirements. For example, she receives a home in the country from Steiner, the banker. Wanting to visit the property, Nana plans a trip but Bordenave demands that she stay in Paris for her performances. Although Bordenave tells her she cannot go, Nana does not listen and insists on her departure: "Nana, furieuse, déclara qu'elle serait à la Mignotte le quinze septembre. Même, pour braver Bordenave, elle invitait en sa présence un tas de gens" (176; ch. VI). This voyage to la Mignotte demonstrates Nana's determination and agency. In fact, she changes her plans on a whim and leaves two days early to demonstrate her independence. She sends a letter to Steiner, rents a carriage, sends for

her son, Louiset, and commands Zoé to pack her trunk. Nana again demonstrates that she is capable of managing her own affairs and fulfilling her desires.

While at la Mignotte, Nana flaunts her agency as she entertains numerous lovers. She juggles affairs with Georges Hugon, Comte Muffat, and Steiner. Insisting on control, Nana deals sternly with Muffat who steals a kiss without her approval. Angrily, she turns abruptly and “levait déjà la main” (167; ch. V). Nana remains in control of the situation as she decides who will and will not receive her favors.

Nana is relentless in the verbalization of her insatiable desires, as she demands money for her favors. She manipulates both Muffat and Steiner as they arrive at her hotel bearing cash. Nana’s every wish is their command. Muffat mentions that if Nana “témoignait un désir, tout de suite il le réaliserait. Sa fortune entière était à elle” (229; ch. VII). Nana exercises total authority and control, as she first demands Muffat’s money and then refuses it. She tells him: “Non, c’est trop tard, repliqua-t-elle rageusement. J’aime les hommes qui donnent sans qu’on demande... Non, vois-tu, un million pour une seule fois, je refuserais. C’est fini, j’ai autre chose là... Va-t’en, ou je ne réponds plus de rien” (229).

Nana repeats the same scene when Steiner arrives with his money: “L’avant-veille, elle avait signifié que, s’il ne lui trouvait pas mille francs, pour payer un billet, elle ne le recevrait plus” (230). Nana takes the money, then throws it away, implying her self-sufficiency and ultimate control: “Et, prenant l’enveloppe, elle la lui jeta par la figure” (230). Nana understands the value of her body and the importance of the look and she therefore charges men who want to “see” her.



To add insult to injury, Nana acknowledges her right to refuse gifts that she does not want, telling Steiner and Muffat that if “j’en crève, c’est mon plaisir” (230). No matter what, Nana’s *plaisir* is of the most importance. She plays Muffat and Steiner against each other to get what she wants and she is ruthless in her methods: “Une, deux, vous refusez de partir?... Eh bien! Voyez ça. J’ai du monde. D’un geste brusque, elle ouvrit toute grande la porte de la chambre. Alors, les deux hommes, au milieu du lit défait, aperçurent Fontan” (230-231). Nana humiliates both men at once and they leave.

Entering into a different dimension in her life, Nana falls in love with Fontan. She renounces her luxurious apartment on Boulevard Haussmann and moves in with Fontan on the fifth floor of a small apartment in Montmartre. She creates a new role for herself and pretends that she is a young girl in love: “Dans son coup de tendresse pour Fontan, elle rêvait une jolie petite chambre claire, retournant à son ancien idéal de fleuriste, lorsqu’elle ne voyait pas au-delà d’une armoire à glace en palissandre et d’un lit tendu de reps bleu” (235; ch. VIII). The reference to the limited depth of vision (the mirror in the armoire) signals the temporary loss of Nana’s agency—rendering her vulnerable and without resources. Nana’s idyllic love nest does not last long, as Fontan finds another woman and begins to slap and beat Nana. In a total loss of agency, Fontan locks Nana out of their apartment as he is with another woman. He tells her: “File, ou je t’étrangle!” (265; ch. VIII). Unknowingly, Fontan creates the opportunity for Nana, now alone and on the street, to go to Satin’s apartment for comfort and protection.

From the beginning of the novel, Satin appears sporadically in the narrative. Zola first mentions her after Nana’s performance as Venus. Satin appears and disappears in and out of Nana’s life throughout the novel. For example, during her relationship with

Fontan in Montmartre, Nana unexpectedly runs into Satin: “Aussi, un dimanche, comme elle était au marché La Rochefoucauld en train de marchander des pigeons, fut-elle enchantée de rencontrer Satin . . . ” (243; ch. VIII). This narrative weaving of Satin positions her to be Nana’s savior after the failure of her relationship with Fontan.

After Fontan locks her out, Nana’s first thought is to find Satin: “Sur le trottoir, sa première pensée fut d’aller coucher avec Satin, si celle-ci n’avait personne. Elle la rencontra devant sa maison, jetée elle aussi sur le pavé par son propriétaire . . . ” (265; ch. VIII). Nana stays with Satin who introduces her to female love. Zola describes Nana’s experience as one where “[j]amais elle n’avait senti si profondément la force de son sexe” (324; ch. X).

Satin’s name is problematic as it signifies the soft, silky material associated with wealth and extravagance. Hiding behind a sophisticated name resides a woman of the street, a courtesan, and a lesbian. Although Zola exposes lesbianism, he does not condone it and this could explain why Zola christens Satin with an appellation that resembles “Satan.” Through this name, Zola codes Satin as evil. In the hotel the two lovers are interrupted by a police raid and Satin and Nana are again forced to go their separate ways.

As Satin slips out of Nana’s life, Muffat slips back in. Performing in a new play, Nana sees Muffat. He pleads for her to return but Nana is not interested in him or his money. At last, Nana decides that she wants the role of duchess in Bordenave’s new play. She explains her desire plainly to Muffet: “Je voudrais avoir le rôle de la femme honnête, dans leur machine” (285; ch. IX). In addition, she plans the way for Muffat to attain this role for her. Muffat convinces Bordenave to accept a large sum of money to

replace Rose Mignon with Nana, who triumphantly accepts the role. Unfortunately for Nana, the play is a disaster and foreshadows her failure as “une honnête femme” in real life.

Nana is now involved again with Muffat who buys her a new apartment on the avenue des Villiers. Nana resumes her old ways as she continues to abuse Muffat and to see other men. Georges visits Nana everyday at four o'clock and when his older brother Philippe comes to save him from Nana's clutches, Nana seduces Philippe. This life, however, does not appeal to Nana as she finds herself placed in the role of passive agent. Zola describes her feelings: “Ne sortant qu'en voiture, elle perdait l'usage de ses jambes. Elle retournait à des goûts de gamine, baisait Bijou du matin au soir, tuait le temps à des plaisirs bêtes, dans son unique attente de l'homme, qu'elle subissait d'un air de lassitude complaisante . . . (308: ch X). Nana finds this life of imposed passivity boring as she pronounces her infamous phrase: “Oh! que les hommes m'embêtent!” (310).

Coincidentally, while riding in her carriage, Nana again sees Satin. Nana invites Satin to her apartment and installs her there permanently. With Satin in the apartment, Nana regains her agency. She is able to stand up again to Muffat when he complains about the living arrangements telling him that “si ça ne te convient pas, c'est bien simple... Les portes sont ouvertes...” (312).

Nana, while living in Muffat's house, sleeps with Satin, Georges, Philippe, Steiner, and Vandeuves. These diverse sexual liaisons result in the confusion of Nana's image and her sexuality. The ambiguity of Nana's image resonates during the scene at the racetrack where Nana confuses her popularity with that of the horse, Nana. She loves the adulation, even though it is not for her: “Alors, Nana, debout sur le siège de son

landau, grandie, crue que c'était elle qu'on acclamait. Elle était restée un instant immobile, dans la stupeur de son triomphe . . . (354; ch. XI). Nana is mesmerized by the applause: "Nana écoutait toujours son nom, dont la plaine entière lui renvoyait l'écho. C'était son peuple qui l'applaudissait, tandis que, droite dans le soleil, elle dominait, avec ses cheveux d'astre et sa robe blanche et bleue, couleur du ciel" (354). Nana's image becomes fused with the horse's image and becomes unidentifiable as "l'on ne savait plus si c'était la bête ou la femme qui emplissait les coeurs" (354). This sequence begins the dénouement of the novel as Nana's lovers begin to disappear, beginning with Vandevres who commits suicide.

Nana's agency begins to unravel and dissipate as Muffat returns to his wife and Zoé leaves. In an attempt to regain her agency, Nana somehow recuperates her household and permits Muffat to return. Muffat remains powerless under Nana's spell as she engages in a spending spree of desire that shocks everyone:

Ce fut l'époque de son existence où Nana éclaira Paris d'un redoublement de splendeur. Elle grandit encore à l'horizon du vice, elle domina la ville de l'insolence affichée de son luxe, de son mépris de l'argent, qui lui faisait fondre publiquement les fortunes. Dans son hôtel, il y avait comme un éclat de forge. Ses continuels désirs y flambaient, un petit souffle de ses lèvres changeait l'or en une cendre fine que le vent balayait à chaque heure. Jamais on n'avait vu une pareille rage de dépense. (386; ch. XIII)

Nana's desires and demands escalate to unbelievable proportions: "Elle ne pouvait voir quelque chose de très cher sans en avoir envie . . ." (387). She demands more money from Muffat to satiate her desires. Then, enjoying her power over men, Nana verbally abuses Muffat telling him that she is only interested in his money: "tu n'as pas la monnaie... Alors, mon petit mufe, retourne d'où tu viens, et plus vite que ça! En voilà un chameau! Il voulait m'embrasser encore!... Plus d'argent, plus rien! Tu entends!" (402;

ch. XIII). Nana continues to humiliate Muffat while at the same time demanding money from him:

Ah! ça, regarde-toi donc! Est-ce que tu t'imagines que je t'aime pour tes formes? Quand on a une gueule comme la tienne, on paie les femmes qui veulent bien vous tolérer...Nom de Dieu! Si tu ne m'apportes pas les dix mille francs ce soir, tu n'auras pas même à sucer le bout de mon petit doigt... Vrai! je te renvoie à ta femme! (403; ch. XIII)

Nana's hedonism and her abuse of agency cause her world to collapse. The state of her apartment, which is cluttered and dirty, represents the growing disarray of Nana's life. Nana becomes depressed and she loses her control over the people who surround her. Nana attempts suicide, Philippe Hugon goes to prison, Georges attempts suicide, and Satin dies.

Trying to recapture her former world of extravagance and control, Nana attempts one more play, Mélusine, before she leaves Paris. Her role in the play as "une fée puissante et muette" reinforces her abrupt change of agency and lack of speech. Interestingly, in this last chapter, Nana does not speak, remaining *muette* until her death. As everyone is talking about Nana and fabricating stories about her escapades in foreign countries, Nana again appears as the absent present. She is seen as "une idole chargée de pierreries" (426). This echoes the ending of L'Assommoir where everyone is talking about Nana and her escapades after she leaves her home with Gervaise.

After a few months, Nana returns to Paris. Stories about Nana continue to circulate without validation except for the fact that she has smallpox. In the shortest chapter of the novel, Nana dies in the privacy of her bedroom surrounded by the other actresses. This community of women remains with Nana until her death. As Nana is no longer an object of sexual desire, the men wait outside. Lying in her bed, unable to

peak, Nana loses her control and agency. Nana is too dangerous to survive in a world dominated by men who fear female agency. The strength of men and their role in maintaining order in the world is highlighted as they leave for war shouting, “A Berlin! A Berlin!” (439).

Throughout the novel, Nana is involved sexually with many different men. This “mangeuse d’hommes” as a sexual predator provides Zola with an interesting subject for his scientific study. However, in addition to her sexual liaisons with men, Nana is sexually involved with women. Therefore, as an alternative focal point to Nana’s overt heterosexuality, her lesbianism provides an interestingly different approach to the study of Zola’s infamous character. Zola saturates his novel with stories about Nana’s relationships with Satin, Laure, and Madame Robert. He describes her encounters with the lesbian community of women in Laure’s café, her encounters with the police, and her private moments with Satin. Zola recounts Nana’s lesbian relationships with the same enthusiasm and fervor that he accords her relationships with men.

Emile Zola’s scandalous novel presents the quotidian lifestyle of prostitutes and their relationship to and participation in lesbianism. Before writing, Zola researched his topic as he had done previously in L’Assommoir. Frederick Brown remarks:

Not until 1878, however, did he open a fresh notebook and, in his obsessive way, embark upon an investigation of Paris’s demimonde. Friends who had some acquaintance with the latter found themselves quizzed at length. During the few months that the gestation of *Nana* lasted, every conversation turned to women. (416)

Since Zola describes many of Nana’s liaisons, both heterosexual and homosexual, in detail, Zola’s probing “peek” into Nana’s boudoir resulted in the condemnation of the novel as pornography. Philip Walker says that the novel “provoked a tremendous

uproar” (146) and that critics called it “a ‘sewer,’ ‘a cesspool,’ ‘a quadruped novel’” (146). Walker goes on to explain that the critics also “accused Zola of being a Peeping Tom. They compared him to the Marquis de Sade” (145-47). At one point, it was feared that the novel was to be confiscated and censored. Brown explains the appeal: “Speculation worked very much to Zola’s pecuniary advantage. No one seized *Nana* except readers with three and a half francs to spend, and the demand was phenomenal” (434). Philip Walker reiterates Brown’s statement:

But the public loved the novel. The first edition, consisting of 55,000 copies—a very large number in those days, was gobbled up in no time at all. Before the year was over, ninety editions had been sold out. By the following fall, the number had already surpassed one hundred. (147)

Explaining the curiosity, condemnation, and interest in the novel, Adrienne Rich’s article, “Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence,” offers some insight. She defines the continuum of lesbian desire: “Lesbian existence comprises both the breaking of a taboo and the rejection of a compulsory way of life. It is also a direct or indirect attack on male right of access to women” (24). It is not only *Nana*’s brazen rejection of the patriarchy, but her overt lesbianism, which renders Zola’s novel so “scandalous.”

In Sex Variant Women in Literature, Jeannette H. Foster credits Zola with the introduction of lesbianism in novels and remarks on his privileged look at the interior spaces of women. She says:

With 1880 the steady stream of variant fiction began to flow starting with Zola’s *Nana*. In this well-known life history of a courtesan the reader will recall the gradual progress of the robustly heterosexual heroine from revulsion against an affair between her friend, Satin, and Mme Robert and against the lesbian society of the fat Laure’s cafe, through indifferent tolerance of such activity, to her own final active relations with Satin which end only at the latter’s death. (84)

Zola not only mentions Nana's interest in other women but he describes many of her lesbian liaisons in detail. Exposing the forbidden world of sex, specifically intimate relationships between women, results in unrivaled interest in the novel.

In the first chapter, Zola introduces Nana's female lover, Satin. She is seated at a table in le café des Variétés. This public café is typically gendered as male, and therefore, Satin's appearance here situates her as a marginal, polygendered character. Zola creates this woman with his pen and as the omniscient narrator he gives the details of her physical characteristics. Zola writes:

A l'autre bout de la salle, la nuque appuyée contre le cadre d'une glace, une fille de dix-huit ans au plus se tenait immobile devant un verre vide, comme engourdie par une longue et vaine attente. Sous les frisures naturelles de ses beaux cheveux cendrés, elle avait une figure de vierge aux yeux de velours, doux et candides; et elle portait une robe de soie verte déteinte, avec un chapeau rond que des gifles avaient défoncé. La fraîcheur de la nuit la rendait toute blanche. (51; ch. I)

It is the male journalist, Fauchery, who first sees Satin at the table, imprinting her with the masculine point of view. When Fauchery questions Satin about her presence in the bar, she responds, "Je m'emmerde . . ." (51). The four men near her laugh. Although Satin is initially aligned with a masculine point of view, Nana will eventually appropriate the gaze of Satin for herself. This redirects the point of view as Satin becomes the object of Nana's sexual desire.

In addition to women, Nana finds men dressed as women equally attractive. Her encounter with Georges is indicative of her taste for women. Georges arrives at Nana's apartment soaked by the rain of a torrential downpour. To avoid catching cold, Zoé insists that Georges removes his clothes to dry them. Before this encounter, Nana only looked at Georges as a young child, but once dressed in women's clothing, she finds him



irrésistible: “Lorsque, dix minutes plus tard, elle reparut en robe de chambre, elle joignit les mains de ravissement. – Oh! Le mignon, qu’il est gentil en petite femme!” (181; ch.

VI). Zola describes him:

Il avait simplement passé une grande chemise de nuit à entre-deux, un pantalon brodé et le peignoir, un long peignoir de batiste, garni de dentelles. Là-dedans, il semblait une fille, avec ses deux bras nus de jeune blond, avec ses cheveux fauves encore mouillés, qui roulaient dans son cou. (181)

Reversing the traditional roles of male and female, Nana plays with Georges as a puppet and a possession, but to the literary voyeur, this scene still presents two women interacting sexually. Nana refers to Georges as *ma chère* as she finds herself being more and more attracted to him dressed in women’s clothes.

Unlike the control that Nana exercises in her interaction with men, Nana is not in control of her actions when confronted with this “woman.” She succumbs to her sexual feelings:

Peu à peu, elle se sentait sans force, malgré sa gêne et ses révoltes. Ce déguisement, cette chemise de femme et ce peignoir, la faisaient rire encore. C’était comme une amie qui la taquinait. –Oh! C’est mal, c’est mal, balbutia-t-elle, après un dernier effort. Et elle tomba en vierge dans les bras de cet enfant, en face de la belle nuit. La maison dormait. (184; ch. VI)

As proof of her sexual encounter with and sexual possession of Georges, Nana leaves a “love bite” on his neck, “Qu’as-tu donc là, au cou? reprit madame Hugon, effrayée. C’est tout rouge” (185).

Nana enjoys the female form whether it is the female body of a lover, a male figure fabricating the illusion of a woman, or the reflection of her own body. As she

undresses for Muffat, Nana takes as much enjoyment (if not more!) in her nudity and objectification as Muffat does:

Un des plaisirs de Nana était de se déshabiller en face de son armoire à glace, où elle se voyait en pied. Elle faisait tomber jusqu'à sa chemise; puis, toute nue, elle s'oubliait, elle se regardait longuement. C'était une passion de son corps, un ravissement du satin de sa peau et de la ligne souple de sa taille, qui la tenait sérieuse, attentive, absorbée dans un amour d'elle-même. . . Alors, Muffat se fâchait, et elle restait surprise. Que lui prenait-il? (214-215; ch. VII)

This narcissistic adoration of her body reinforces Nana's preference for sexual objects that reflect her "likeness."

Nana s'était absorbée dans son ravissement d'elle-même. Elle pliait le cou, regardant avec attention dans la glace . . . . Puis, elle étudia d'autres parties de son corps, amusée, reprise de ses curiosités vicieuses d'enfant. Ça la surprenait toujours de se voir; elle avait l'air étonné et séduit d'une jeune fille qui découvre sa puberté. (216)

These long descriptive passages appear to halt the forward movement of the syntagmatic narrative of Nana's story. However, they continue the narrative of Nana's self-indulgence and her seduction and involvement with Muffat and others. Nana continues to enjoy the objectification of her body and the possession of Muffat:

Mais Nana se pelotonnait sur elle-même. Un frisson de tendresse semblait avoir passé dans ses membres. Les yeux mouillés, elle se faisait petite, comme pour se mieux sentir. Puis, elle dénoua les mains, les abaissa le long d'elle par un glissement, jusqu'aux seins, qu'elle écrasa d'une étreinte nerveuse. Et rengorgée, se fondant dans une caresse de tout son corps, elle se frotta les joues à droite, à gauche, contre ses épaules, avec câlinerie. Sa bouche goulue soufflait sur elle le désir. Elle allongea les lèvres, elle se baisa longuement près de l'aisselle, en riant à l'autre Nana, qui, elle aussi, se baisait dans la glace. (217)

This long, sexually charged sequence represents how Nana functions in the role of both subject and object. Nana carefully controls the extent of her objectification as her self-adulation demonstrates. She objectifies her body, assuming the role of the active agent,

the subject. Zola comments on her hedonistic self pleasure which defines Nana's narcissistic position throughout the novel: "Ce n'était pas pour les autres, c'était pour elle" (215).

On stage, Nana is not a very accomplished actress, although she is certainly capable of holding the audience's attention. Her failure on stage pushes her to act out her role in the real world, blurring the boundaries of reality and make believe. Outside the artificiality of the theater, Nana understands the importance of performance art as she plays the role of "honnête femme" better than the real aristocratic women do. Nana also comprehends the "artificiality" of the upper class. The real world and the imaginary, artificial world collide, creating a mediated area to which only she has access. This understanding permits her to navigate between the polarized positions of object and subject.

With Nana in control, she leads a life of playful homosexuality and economic compulsory heterosexuality. She uses her female sexuality to gain money and material possessions. Trying to extend her influence to help other women achieve financial success, Nana convinces Bordenave to hire Satin.

C'était Satin, avec un chapeau et une voilette, prenant des airs de dame en visite. Une jolie roulure! murmura Prullière, qui la rencontrait depuis un an au café des Variétés. Et Simonne conta comment Nana, ayant reconnu Satin, une ancienne amie de pension, s'était toquée d'elle et tannait Bordenave pour qu'il la fit débiter. (142; ch. V)

As Satin waits for Nana to finish her business with Bordenave and the prince, Satin grows impatient and leaves. Nana is surprised at Satin's unwillingness to wait and looks for her. Nana asks, "Où est-elle donc? demanda-t-elle. Elle cherchait Satin. Lorsqu'elle l'eut retrouvée derrière le rideau, attendant sur la malle, Satin lui répondit

tranquillement:” (158; ch. V). Satin is jealously disgusted and shows her displeasure to Nana. She says, “Bien sûr que je ne voulais pas te gêner, avec tous ces hommes!” (158). Nana and Satin have a small disagreement, “Et elle [Satin] ajouta que, maintenant, elle s’en allait. Mais Nana la retint. Etait-elle bête! Bordenave consentait à la prendre!” (158). Satin stays, but she is not comfortable, “Satin hésitait. Il y avait trop de machines, ce n’était plus son monde. Pourtant, elle resta” (158). Satin again waits for Nana to finish with the prince, however this time, she refuses to wait any longer.

When Nana is bored, she visits Satin, who lives in a nice apartment that she has destroyed. The two talk for hours sitting on the bed, smoking cigarettes, and drinking absinthe: “Et Nana se sentait très bien chez elle, assise à ne rien faire, au milieu du lit défait, des cuvettes qui traînaient par terre . . .” (245). The unmade bed implies the sexuality that exists between the two women while at the same time the washbasins imply the impropriety of their actions. Discussing their lives, Nana and Satin always finish their conversations criticizing men: “Toutes les conversations aboutissaient à la saleté des hommes” (245). These shared, intimate conversations unite them in their misery as “Elles devinrent inséparables” (246). However, their reunion does not last long. Satin takes Nana to Laure’s café and leaves her sitting alone at the table as she leaves with Madame Robert. Nana, angry, hurt and jealous, pays, leaves, and returns home. Another brief separation occurs.

Nana and Satin make up and the two walk the streets together looking for work. After an encounter with the police, they are separated again until their lovers throw both the two women out of their homes. They run into each other on the street and decide to take a small hotel room and swear to never be involved with men: “Oh! les cochons, oh!

les cochons!...Vois-tu, n'en faut plus de ces cochons-là! (265). An extremely sexual passage follows as Nana and Satin make love:

Puis, elle [Satin] aida Nana à se déshabiller, elle eut autour d'elle des airs de petite femme prévenante et soumise. . . . Et dans le lit, elle [Satin] prit tout de suite Nana entre ses bras, afin de la calmer. . . . Alors, peu à peu, dans cette étreinte si douce, Nana essuya ses larmes. Elle était touchée, elle rendait à Satin ses caresses. Lorsque deux heures sonnèrent, la bougie brûlait encore; toutes deux avaient de légers rires étouffés, avec des paroles d'amour. (265-266; ch. VIII)

Only together for a short time, the two are separated again by a police raid on the hotel, which represents patriarchal disapproval. Nana escapes through the window but Satin is detained and arrested.

Satin and Nana are again reunited as Nana sees Satin from her carriage. Her re-encounter with Satin demonstrates her propensity for women from whom she receives nothing in exchange:

Dès lors, Nana eut une passion, qui l'occupa. Satin fut son vice. Installée dans l'hôtel de l'avenue de Villier, débarbouillée, nippée, pendant trois jours elle raconta Saint-Lazare . . . Et des après-midi de tendresse commencèrent entre les deux femmes, des mots caressants, des baisers coupés de rires. (310; ch. X)

After four days, Satin disappears again but Nana is determined to win her back. When she finds her at Laure's café, Satin is with Madame Robert. Showering Satin with numerous presents and acts of tenderness, Satin returns and moves into Nana's apartment: "Et, dès lors, Satin fut installée dans la maison, ouvertement, sur le même pied que ces messieurs" (312).

Nana's gaze constantly focuses on Satin now that she is part of the household. At a dinner party, Nana carefully chooses the seating assignments to increase her view of Satin: "Elle avait placé Muffat à sa droite et Vandevres à sa gauche; mais elle ne les

regardait guère, occupée de Satin, qui tronait en face d'elle, entre Philippe et Georges” (315; ch. X). Satin remains the object of Nana's gaze. Nana consummates their relationship as she and Satin share a pear for dessert. In front of all of Nana's heterosexual lovers, the lesbian couple flaunts their desire and their sexuality:

Mais Satin, qui avait pelé une poire, était venue la manger derrière sa chérie, appuyée à ses épaules, lui disant dans le cou des choses, dont elles riaient très fort; puis, elle voulut partager son dernier morceau de poire, elle le lui présenta entre ses dents; et toutes deux se mordillaient les lèvres, achevaient le fruit dans un baiser. (317; ch. X)

Nana intentionally positions herself in the role of object to convey her homosexuality to the men and possibly to titillate them by giving them the opportunity to observe two women.

Nana is very good at deceiving, manipulating, and controlling men, but she seems to lose her agency with “women” as seen in her encounter with Georges in drag. As the dinner party ends, Satin convinces Nana to send the men home. The two women share the gaze as they watch Muffat leave: “Et elles eurent un fou rire, en voyant le dos rond de Muffat, qui s'en allait le long du trottoir mouillé . . .” (323). Muffat is objectified as his shadow appears, “avec le reflet éploré de son ombre, au travers de cette plaine glaciale et vide du nouveau Paris” (323). The two are now alone. Nana is drunk with the beauty of her possessions as she surveys her apartment and Satin:

C'était un élargissement brusque d'elle-même, de ses besoins de domination et de jouissance, de son envie de tout avoir pour tout détruire. Jamais elle n'avait senti si profondément la force de son sexe. Elle promena un lent regard . . . (324; ch. X)

Nana draws strength from her lesbian relationship with Satin and her access to agency increases as a woman replaces the male in Nana's gaze.

Muffat, as a last resort, condones and encourages Nana to develop her relationship with Satin. He believes that if Nana is involved with women then she will no longer be involved with other men: “il laissait Nana et Satin ensemble. Il l’aurait poussée à ce vice, pour écarter les hommes” (405-406; ch. XIII). However, this too is a disaster. Once given permission to associate with women, Nana pushes her desires to the extreme. She cheats on Satin as well as Muffat. In a last attempt to truly partake in agency usually afforded to men, she dresses as a man: “Puis, sous un déguisement d’homme, c’étaient des parties dans des maisons infâmes, des spectacles de débauche dont elle amusait son ennui” (406). In this disguise she solicits as many female partners as possible. As a result of her actions, Nana destroys her relationships with both Muffat and Satin.

As Satin falls ill and Nana’s world seems to be falling apart, Nana tells Satin’s story: “elle conta l’aventure de cette pauvre Satin . . .” (422; ch. XIII). Nana is still able to narrate a story about a woman who is important in her life. Nana explains why:

Je vais à l’hôpital!... Personne ne m’a aimée comme elle. Ah! on a bien raison d’accuser les hommes de manquer de coeur!... qui sait? je ne la trouverai peut-être plus. N’importe, je demanderai à la voir. Je veux l’embrasser. (422; ch. XIII)

The above quote is the last direct quote from Nana in the novel. Zola permits Nana to use her last statement to criticize men and dismiss the sincerity and honesty of their love and affection. Nana’s last four words continue to posit her desire, her agency, and her attraction to women as she adamantly asserts that “Je veux l’ [Satin] embrasser.”

Even before Nana’s retirement from the theater, she begins to renounce her culpability in the destruction of numerous men’s lives. Zola permits the reader to understand Nana’s actions and frustrations. Nana says:

Eh bien! non, ils diront ce qu'ils voudront, ce n'est pas ma faute! Est-ce que je suis méchante, moi? Je donne tout ce que j'ai, je n'écraserais pas une mouche... Ce sont eux, oui, ce sont eux!... Jamais je n'ai voulu leur être désagréable. Et ils étaient pendus après mes jupes, et aujourd'hui les voilà qui claquent, qui mendient, qui posent tous pour le désespoir... (420-421; ch. XIII)

Placing the blame on men's insatiable desire for sex and domination, Nana sees problems with the infrastructure of the entire French society:

Nom de Dieu! ce n'est pas juste! La société est mal faite. On tombe sur les femmes, quand ce sont les hommes qui exigent des choses... Tiens! je puis te dire ça, maintenant: lorsque j'allais avec eux, n'est-ce pas? . . . Ah! oui, ils m'ont assommée! Sans eux, mon cher, sans ce qu'ils ont fait de moi, je serais dans un couvent à prier le bon Dieu, car j'ai toujours eu de la religion... . . . C'est leur faute! Moi, je n'y suis pour rien! (421; ch. XIII)

Nana directly blames men for her fate, placing herself as the innocent and malleable victim of circumstances. The passive sentence, *ce qu'ils ont fait de moi* reinforces her position of victim and exposes the mistreatment of women who are forced to do what men demand of them. The use of the verb *assommer* recalls the fate of Nana's mother, Gervaise, as she too was "beaten up" by the patriarchal society of the Second Empire. Although Gervaise and Nana chose two different paths for their lives, the result for both women is the same. Refusing to succumb to the exigencies of male domination and possession, there is no place for Nana or Gervaise in the male society of the 1880s.

Nana absents herself from the Parisian community after the failure of her last play, Mélusine. After months away from Paris it seems that she is forgotten. However, when someone mentions her name, stories and rumors surface about her whereabouts, her intrigues, and her new social positions. When she returns, news spreads quickly about her illness. Lucy tells Caroline, "Et, tu sais, ma chère, elle est peut-être morte, pendant



que nous bavardons” (426). Caroline does not believe her. Lucy continues, “Au Grand-Hôtel..., de la petite vérole..., oh! une histoire!” (426).

As the novel ends, Nana’s death occurs quickly as the female community from the Théâtre des Variétés surrounds her. Zola insists on feminine images in Nana’s room even though she can no longer draw strength from them. In her room, one continues to find female referents, specifically the clock, “la pendule, les trois Grâces, nues, avec des sourires de danseuses” (432; ch. XIV), that continues to mark time even after Nana’s death. Nana’s life and story cease but there will be other women to take her place and continue her narrative. In addition to the clock, Nana’s room is filled with women—women who adore her and women who are intrigued by her. The men who always wanted to “be” with Nana are now afraid to enter her room: “On ne sait pas au juste si la contagion est à craindre au début ou vers la fin, expliquait Fontan à Fauchery. . . . je regrette ce brusque dénouement; j’aurais été si heureux de lui serrer la main une dernière foi. —Maintenant, à quoi bon? dit le journaliste” (430; ch. XIV). Fauchery’s last comment, *à quoi bon?* demonstrates Nana’s reification and commodification by men—if there is nothing to receive in return for the visit, why should Fauchery jeopardize his health?

Zola’s last description of Nana, alone in her room, with her eyes practically removed from her body, again references Nana’s desire to access the gaze. Zola gives a grotesque description of the horrific disfiguration of Nana’s eyes: “Un oeil, celui de gauche, avait complètement sombré dans le bouillonnement de la purulence; l’autre, à demi ouvert, s’enfonçait, comme un trou noir et gâté” (438; ch. XIV). Nana’s eyes, so powerful since her birth, are almost separated from her body as punishment for her

audacity throughout her life to access the gaze. However, it is fitting that she dies with one eye half open instead of half closed. The beautiful little girl with the golden hair born to Gervaise and Coupeau lies alone in her bed literally eaten up with smallpox. Zola gives his last impression of Nana: “Il semblait que le virus pris par elle dans les ruisseaux, sur les charognes tolérées, ce ferment dont elle avait empoisonné un peuple, venait de lui remonter au visage et l’avait pourri” (439; ch. XIV).

In her life, Nana protects herself from outside forces and attempts to control every situation. Zola predicts however, that Nana cannot survive her narrative as she attempts to make a deal with fate:

Elle se portait parfaitement, elle devrait simplement se bien conduire pour mériter un jour le pardon. Mais elle hochait la tête; sans doute elle ne faisait de mal à personne; même elle portait toujours une médaille de la Vierge, qu’elle lui montra, pendue à un fil rouge, entre les seins; seulement, c’était réglé d’avance, toutes les femmes qui n’étaient pas mariées et qui voyaient des hommes, allaient en enfer. (361-362; ch. XII)

Zola privileges Nana with the gaze but warns that agency for women carries fatal consequences. Nana is a woman *qui voyaient des hommes* and this dangerous act of agency condemns Nana to death. Smallpox renders Nana impotent as the disease ravages her body from the inside out. Nana’s story concludes but she continues to live on as one of the most famous protagonists in literary history. Her story will be told and retold in various mediums from theater to film as the myth of Nana continues to fascinate new generations of readers and spectators. Unfortunately, as the myth aggrandizes so does Nana’s commodification.

Nana comes to the French screen in Jean Renoir’s 1926 film by the same name. Zola’s “precinematic” writing style and his preparatory notes, outlines, and character

descriptions supplied many directors with practically “already made” scenarios. Sergei Eisenstein was one of the first critics to demonstrate the affinity between Zola’s novels and filmic writing. Russell Cousins summarizes Eisenstein’s observations, “ses romans [Zola] ont constitué un véritable réservoir de scénarios pour des générations successives de réalisateurs du monde entier” (“Zola et le cinéma” 1). Zola’s narratives were very popular with directors of silent film and almost forty different film adaptations from various novels were made during the silent era.

From 1895-1926, cinema was progressing from a self-referential art to an art foregrounding classic narratives. Zola’s novels were influential in the development of this new narrational genre of cinema. Interestingly, Zola’s novels continue to be a source of inspiration for directors worldwide. Cousins remarks: “Le fait que les oeuvres de Zola se prêtent si facilement à l’adaptation pour la scène se voit dans le grand nombre de pièces adaptées de ses romans au cours de sa vie et même au vingtième siècle” (1). To date, Germinal (1993) by director Claude Berri, is the most recent French adaptation of Zola’s novels. Leo Braudy suggests the reason for Zola’s popularity for film: “it is still the realistic setting or, more recently, the steamy mixture of sex and violence that make Zola’s novels perfect sources for films” (“Zola on Film” 84). Offering proof that Zola’s narratives are timeless is the plan currently underway in Great Britain to screen Thérèse Raquin and the new Broadway production of Thérèse Raquin, titled Thou Shalt Not playing at the Plymouth Theatre in New York City.

In all, four silent versions of Zola’s extremely popular novel, Nana, appeared from 1910 to 1926 making Jean Renoir’s Nana the last silent version. In order to create an acting vehicle for his wife, Catherine Hessling, Renoir personally financed the film,

selling his father's paintings whenever he needed money. Unfortunately for Renoir, his film was not a huge success, as it did not create the interest, scandal, or revenue of Zola's novel. One historical account of the film taken from Le Cinéma Français: Le Muet explains: "Tourné en partie à Berlin, avec de grandes vedettes, comme Werner Krauss, Jean Angelo et Valeska Gert, ce fut un film coûteux qui, malgré une excellente critique, se solda par un échec commercial" (133). Nana was Renoir's second attempt to propel his wife to stardom and numerous sources suggest that it was Hessling who originally convinced Renoir to begin filming: "Selon d'autres témoignages, c'est sa femme, Catherine Hessling, qui brûlait de devenir une star et qui, par son insistance, poussa le fils du peintre illustre à franchir le pas" (d'Hugues, Cinéma Français: Le Muet 133).

Unfortunately, Hessling did not have the "star power" necessary to save Renoir's film.

As a newcomer to the film industry, Renoir hones his ideology in his early films. Alexander Sesonske, in Jean Renoir, the French films 1924-1939, summarizes Renoir's intentions. He says:

But Renoir, in his first attempt at transposing a literary work into film already displays the attitude that marks such efforts throughout his career: he seeks to make a film, not to film a novel. In an interview he explains, 'It was necessary either to reproduce the novel completely, with its innumerable characters, or to condense the subject, conserving only the principal persons while still not misrepresenting the character of the work. It is the latter path that I have taken.' (21)

This is the approach Renoir adopted in order to screen Nana. However, incongruent with Renoir's intention to "conserve only the principal persons" in film adaptations is his obvious exclusion of Zola's lesbian character, Satin. Satin is instrumental to Zola's narrative and occupies a large portion of the novel whereas in the film, her role is reduced to one line.

Renoir, unable to completely erase the scandalous lesbianism found in the novel, leaves traces of Nana and Satin's affair in the film. A careful examination of the film unveils a few residual references. Terry Castle, speaking about spectral lesbians in novels, postulates a definition that seems equally appropriate to film. She says:

The lesbian is never with us, it seems, but always somewhere else: in the shadows, in the margins, hidden from history, out of sight, out of mind, a wanderer in the dusk, a lost soul, a tragic mistake, a pale denizen of the night. She is far away and she is dire. (2)

We will see that Satin is still part of the film, just hidden in off-screen space.

To produce a film of acceptable length, all adaptations condense and summarize portions of a novel's narrative and delete characters and passages. The choices a director makes in these summaries and deletions reflect his or her "reading" of a particular text. George Bluestone constantly reminds us: "Since each film is allowed its own integrity, the novel is considered less a norm than a point of departure" (VIII). However, when a significant character, one who is instrumental to the narrative of the novel, is deleted, it causes one to ask why. In Renoir's adaptation, this occurs with Zola's character, Satin. Bluestone again reminds us: "the film-maker merely treats the novel as raw material and ultimately creates his own unique structure. This is why a comparative study which begins finding resemblances between novel and film ends by loudly proclaiming their differences" (VII).

The difference in Zola's novel and Renoir's film is that, unlike Zola, who penetrates and exposes the realities of the prostitute and her liaisons, Renoir insists on the heterosexuality of his female characters and the maintenance of a homosocial masculine world. In speaking of La Grande Illusion, Renoir states: "Mon sujet principal était l'un

des buts vers quoi je tends depuis que je fais des films, à savoir la réunion des hommes” (Ma vie 134). Renoir reiterates this point of view: “Ce thème du rassemblement des hommes par métiers ou par intérêts communs m’a poursuivi toute ma vie et me poursuit encore. C’est le thème de «La Grande Illusion». Il figure plus ou moins dans chacun de mes ouvrages” (Ma vie 260). For Renoir, the feminine “world” must be contained to retain the patriarchal order. This means that the topos of lesbianism must be expunged from the film. Chantal Bertrand-Jennings, discussing Zola’s novel, supplies an explanation for Renoir’s hesitation to screen lesbianism. She remarks:

on prête aux lesbiennes un commencement de solidarité féminine qui, dans son principe, vise à saper les fondements mêmes de la société patriarcale et fond d’elles des personnages souvent dangereux. (L’Eros et la Femme 41)

The inclusion of Zola’s “dangerous” community of women would impede Renoir’s screening of the “rassemblement des hommes.”

The most scandalous aspect of Zola’s novel is his exposé on lesbianism, which gives Nana more complete access to the gaze and desire, and therefore agency. Renoir’s dismissal of Nana’s lesbianism does not affect the outcome of the novel but it does compromise Nana’s agency. Renoir reorients Nana’s character by subtly filtering out her agency, therefore causing her to “lose her look.”

Two ways in which Renoir filters out Nana’s agency is the omission of Nana’s lesbianism and his choice of actress. Hessling’s dark hair, big wide eyes, and cupid bow lips suggest a frivolous character with no access to agency. Alexander Sesonske describes the ambitions of Zola’s Nana: “Sex incarnate, Zola’s Nana is a goddess, or, as Muffat suspects, the devil. Incapable of fidelity, with an insatiable appetite for men and

luxury, she uses sex as a weapon, a tool, a commodity” (23). In contrast to Zola’s very sexual Nana, Renoir’s Nana is neither sexual nor erotic. Sesonkske compares Renoir’s Nana to Zola’s:

Renoir’s film does not accord Nana the same scope of destructiveness. . . . Yet sexuality seems not at all the key to Hessling’s performance; her postures, gestures, movements are feminine, but seldom truly erotic. This Nana, created by Jean Renoir and Catherine Hessling, becomes neither goddess nor devil, never seems the sheer elemental force of nature that Zola’s heroine does. (23-24)

Hessling’s exaggerated, puppet-like performance immediately undercuts Nana’s sexuality, eroticism, and agency in the film. Renoir’s omission of Nana’s lesbianism and Hessling’s artificial performance drains Nana of agency. However, even though Renoir attempts to erase Nana’s lesbianism in the film, a careful reading against the grain reveals small traces of Nana’s female liaisons.

From the beginning of the film, Renoir establishes Nana as the Other and object, whereas Zola foregrounds Nana as the active agent of her own objectification. To increase Nana’s objectification, Renoir privileges the male gaze by pandering to the nature of voyeuristic sexual pleasure. As a result, the celluloid Nana exists only as a sexual object of spectacle. This change of perspective greatly impacts Nana’s agency and exposes the differences between the novel and the film.

As the film opens, the name of Nana is seen in flaming letters. This signifies the “fire” of Nana’s character and her sexuality but it also serves as a referent to a light that will quickly burn itself out through the course of the film. Immediately after Nana’s name, Renoir posits the gaze as masculine. The first title card, “Bordenave, directeur cynique mais vigilant, surveillait lui-même dans les cintres la descente de Vénus sur la

terre,” aligns the spectator with the masculine point of view. After aligning the gaze with a masculine character, Renoir builds the suspense of Nana’s appearance and increases her objectification by displaying three title cards in succession with the words, “Voici Vénus.” Each card is intercut with a frame showing the chorus; first a male chorus, then a shot of a male chorus followed by a female chorus, and lastly, a female chorus. This scene could be read as a summation of the novel as Nana moves from heterosexuality to homosexuality.

One technical problematic in the representation of Nana as subject for Renoir could be that he has not distanced himself from the “exhibitionist” style of early primitive cinema. Russell Cousins describes this early cinema: “Au début les réalisateurs se contentaient de tourner des films à truquage ou de faire de faux documentaires sur des événements historiques ou des actualités” (“Zola et le cinéma” 2). In its evolution, cinema moves from its self-absorption with “tricks” and circus-like productions to telling stories and developing narratives. Susan Hayward explains: “At this stage, then, cinema displayed its practices to the audience, was a cinema of attractions—to be looked at rather than consumed—quite different, therefore, from the voyeuristic nature of narrative cinema” (73). Renoir’s opening scene of the film reinforces the objectification of Nana and seems to reinvent, parody, or pay homage to early primitive cinema. Judith Mayne notes in The Woman at the Keyhole that:

The “scene” of “primitive” cinema is informed by a fascination with otherness, with the exotic, with all that is seemingly alien to Western culture and subjectivity. It has been an observation of long standing that the early cinema borrowed extensively, both in form and in subject matter, from popular arts of the time—vaudeville, magic shows, cartoons, stereoscope cards, dime fiction. (182)



Renoir's exposure of theatrical "tricks" and gimmicks serves to remind the audience that the medium of film also functions with cinematic manipulation. His frequent use of the closing iris to move from one frame to the next coupled with his overuse of the binocular-type frame reinforce his allegiance to early cinema.

Nana's debut performance in La Blonde Vénus exposes the imperfections of the machinery that produces theatrical illusions. Her acrobatics, while dangling from the stage rope, are reminiscent of the process of vaudeville and expose the machinations of the theater as it ruptures the fourth wall of spectatorial fantasy. This "exhibitionist" style overture lays the framework for Nana's role as pure object. Laura Mulvey in her landmark article, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," explains:

In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its fantasy onto the female figure, which is styled accordingly. In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote *to-be-looked-at-ness*. (19)

Just as Bordenave controls the exhibition of his "actresses" at the Théâtre des Variétés, Renoir directs and controls the objectification of Nana.

Only a few years from sound film, which appeared in the late 1920s and early 1930s, silent film seems to accentuate the heroine's inherent lack of power and agency with its silence. Regardless, this is a film replete with an abundance of titles. However, as we examine the numerous title cards, Nana "speaks" rarely for herself, while the men speak for her. In the opening sequence when Nana is introduced to Muffat (Werner Krauss), no words are exchanged. Instead, a title card is placed that announces from Bordenave: "Ne vous étonnez pas, Monsieur le Comte, elle est un peu timide." The next

card refers to Nana's lack of speech: "Et Nana, de son côté, ne savait trop que lui dire." Bordenave (Pierre Lestringuez) supplies dialogue for Nana as she "performs" for Muffat from behind her dressing screen. Even off stage, Nana is the consummate "actress." As the image of Nana is manipulated from both within and without the diegesis, Bordenave's last statement continues to reinforce her position as a puppet, marionette, or even "dummy."

Another aspect that inhibits the subjectivity of Nana is Renoir's choice of his wife for the leading actress. Catherine Hessling's interpretation of the role diminishes Nana's persona of active agent, as Hessling appears doll-like, or puppet-like. The first scene reinforces the facileness of her ability to be manipulated like a marionette. She is lowered and raised with "strings" just like characters in the guignol. Bordenave and the stagehand decide how far to let her go, and while dangling, leave her in a suspended position, a foot from the floor. A lengthy shot of Nana's feet moving wildly about to touch the ground completes the representation of her as a marionette. The refusal of the two men to put Nana's feet on the ground and the fragmentation of Nana's body in this scene remove her from the real world, which denies her access to the role of subject. Laura Mulvey comments on this technique: "One part of a fragmented body destroys the Renaissance space, the illusion of depth demanded by the narrative; it gives flatness, the quality of a cut-out or icon, rather than verisimilitude to the screen" (20). The effect of this scene then, using Mulvey's analysis, is to demonstrate Nana's dependency, passivity and objectivity.

Tied in ropes, Nana functions as pure sexual spectacle fetishized in the first scene with all eyes upon her. Renoir even admitted that Catherine personified this "puppet-

like” quality: “Nana était voué à l’échec, et cela à cause de la personnalité de Catherine Hessling. J’ai parlé de sa stylisation. Dans Nana, elle poussa à fond cette caractéristique. Ce n’était plus une femme mais une marionnette” (Ma Vie 75-76). In the novel, Nana struggles against manipulation and resists objectification. Therefore, Hessling’s mechanical approach to acting is incongruent with the character she recreates.

Renoir’s reading of Zola’s novel increases the objectification of Nana, while simultaneously diminishing her agency. This is accomplished by removing Nana’s ability to “look” at other women as Renoir forces Nana to renounce her lesbian lifestyle. This serves to maintain Renoir’s point of departure, “à savoir la réunion des hommes.” Therefore it would be easy to read Renoir’s film as a homophobic interpretation of Zola’s novel. Whereas Zola’s novel is inclusive, Renoir’s film is exclusive. Judith Mayne cites Renoir’s Nana as a historical source of homophobic film in her discussion of Clouzot’s Les Diaboliques saying that his film might be seen as “yet another example of explicit lesbianism repressed and/or erased in the cinematic adaptation, hence following in a long homophobic tradition of several versions of *Nana* (1926, 1955) . . . (Framed 43).

By simply removing Satin from the screen, Renoir is able to delete all references to Nana and Satin’s lesbian relationship. For example, Renoir omits: the return of Satin as Fontan ruptures his relationship with Nana; Satin’s move to Nana’s apartment; the police raid; Satin’s disappearance; Satin’s reappearance; Nana’s dinner party; and Satin’s death. Renoir consistently ostracizes Nana from her lesbian friends and associates in order to portray her as the heterosexual “temptress.” Perhaps it is a result of the particular period in which Renoir produces this film (late 1920’s) although, given the

known lesbians circles in Paris during the 1920s, it seems that it would have been “easy” for Renoir to assimilate Nana’s lesbianism into the film!

In the 1880s, lesbianism was an acknowledged segment of the society. Jeannette Foster comments on Zola’s inclusion of this community of women: “In the particular segment of Paris society portrayed, that of the high grade prostitute or courtesan, lesbianism is not only tolerated-Nana’s titled lovers are well aware of her relations with Satin-but taken for granted” (85). Her observation about the lesbian circles of the 1880s seems applicable to the 1920s.

To demonstrate the different ways in which Renoir avoids Nana’s lesbianism I propose a division of the film into three segments: the opening sequence of interior spaces, which contains La Blonde Vénus and all introductions, the racetrack sequence of exterior space, and the closing sequence comprised of interior spaces. In the opening sequence, Renoir negates Nana’s lesbianism, while the racetrack sequence seems to open a small lesbian space. This fissure, which permits us to see a small trace of Nana’s lesbianism, introduces the closing sequence, which seems to collapse Nana’s two worlds together as she tries to mediate between heterosexuality and homosexuality.

Throughout the novel, Nana’s involvement with numerous sexual partners, both men and women, adds to the illusion of her sexual appetite and prowess. Nana’s involvement with more than one partner at a time serves to heighten her role as the insatiable “mouche d’or.” To this end, Zola oftentimes constructs “triangles” of desire to reflect unconventional combinations. René Girard (Mensonge romantique et vérité romanesque) and Eve Sedgwick (Between Men) discuss sexual triangles and how those triangles, usually mediated by a female, resolve themselves. According to Eve Sedgwick,

male homosocial order depends on an erotic triangle comprised of two men and one woman and the rejection of homosexuality. This triangle is in constant struggle to transform itself from a triangle consisting of three people to a couple or twosome. The woman's role serves to strengthen the bonds between the two men. This is demonstrated in Bordenave's use of Nana to ameliorate his "friendship" with Muffat. Muffat, in turn, will use Nana to increase his popularity with Comte Xavier de Vandeuves. In the triangular structure described above either resulting couple will be acceptable—a heterosexual couple or a male-bonded, (not homosexual) homosocial couple.

In the novel, two very important sexual triangles exist between the characters of Satin, Nana and Fontan; and Satin, Nana, and Muffat. These highly unusual and sexually different triangles provide Nana with the role of subject. Zola reverses the typical "two males/one female" structure for its less conventional "two females/one male" structure. For Zola, Nana's public world is male gendered and homosocial but her private world of prostitutes is female gendered and homosexual. In the film, however, Renoir reverses this delineation of space to erase the subplot of lesbianism. Nana's interior, private world is male-gendered and heterosexual while her lesbian space exists, if at all, in the exterior, public world. For example, Renoir never shows Nana alone in a bedroom with another female character. The inner recesses of Nana's apartment are reserved for males only.

The beginning of the film reinforces the objectification of Nana. The name of the film, which appears with Nana written in burning capital letters, the rapid cut to the exterior playbill with Nana's printed name, and the cut to a medium shot of Nana in the theater announce to the spectator that this is a film *about* a woman as spectacle. In addition, the static camera focused only on Nana in medium close-up reinforces her objectification.

Nana's theater performance is sold out; therefore as she performs she becomes the object of the gaze for both the spectator and the diegetic characters, both male and female.

Renoir insists on placing Nana's name everywhere as it appears in numerous scenes in this first sequence. Her name is on her dressing room door, on the playbill behind Muffat in Nana's dressing room, and on the playbills in the hallway where Muffat waits with Vandeuvres and Georges to see Nana. Nana as an objectified icon is posited in this sequence.

While Nana is dangling, the camera cuts to two women in the audience, one of whom is extremely masculine looking. For a spectator familiar with the novel, one can assume that these two women are probably Satin and Mimi, with Satin being the one with the exaggerated masculine traits. This over-masculinization of Satin reveals Renoir's harsh reading of Zola's character, especially when compared with Zola's description of Satin. Zola describes Satin: "ses beaux cheveux cendrés, elle avait une figure de vierge aux yeux de velours, doux et candides;" (41; ch. I). In opposition to Zola's description, Renoir exploits the common stereotype of the butch and femme dichotomy to screen Satin, Mimi, and Nana. The camera cuts back to Nana on stage and then cuts back to another group of women who are enjoying Nana's technical difficulties and laughing at her as spectacle. Renoir presents a woman, Nana, as the object of the gaze for other women but he immediately deconstructs this feminized, lesbian gaze by placing bars in the scene between Nana and the two women, Satin and Mimi.

In contrast to the novel, this form of distancing will be a leitmotif for the entire film; a separation, denial, and disappearance of lesbian desire. Whereas Zola exposes

and examines Nana's interest in lesbianism, Renoir hides it. Jeannette Foster explains Zola's technique:

All the stages of Nana's habituation to homosexuality are presented with the same naturalism which marks Zola's portrayal of her other affairs, and there can be little doubt that his material was drawn from direct observation of the Paris underworld. (84)

Renoir does not appropriate Zola's attitude for his recreation of Nana. Indicating that Nana's lesbianism is unnatural, Renoir excludes it from the film.

Conversely, Renoir does include an example of female voyeurism but from a heterosexual point of view. This occurs when la Comtesse Muffat (Jacqueline Forzane), Sabine, looks at Nana (as Nana is "stripping") through her opera glasses. These glasses give Sabine a privileged and intimate look. Therefore this scene recognizes Sabine's role as the heterosexual, high society female while reducing the possibilities of the female gaze. Sabine is flanked by two men, Muffat and Fauchery, who have a masculine desire to "see" Nana, using "seeing" as a metaphor for wanting to interact sexually with the object. Sabine is permitted to speak, and she remarks: "Cher ami, regardez donc cette fille...quelle vulgarité!" Representing the heterosexual viewpoint, Sabine rejects the lesbian gaze as repulsive. Muffat and Fauchery however, cannot satiate their desire to see Nana. Muffat takes the opera glasses from his wife. As Sabine becomes jealous, she demands that Muffat returns her glasses to block his access to the gaze.

To highlight Nana's heterosexuality, Renoir uses numerous cinematic techniques to give the illusion that men constantly surround Nana. While this appears to be true during the first screening of the film, additional screenings reveal that men only surround Nana in the opening sequence. For example, Renoir privileges the male gaze during

Nana's debut performance. Muffat and Fauchery, mesmerized by Nana as phantasmagoria, continue to look at Nana with opera glasses and a monocle to clarify their view. Here, the gaze is constructed by class and gender, but only the male-gendered gaze is given approval. Representative of lower-class females, the prostitutes laugh at and enjoy Nana's performance, but Renoir denies them access to the gaze as subjects as no point-of-view shot is given. The aristocrats, both male and female, have access to the gaze but Sabine vehemently renounces her opportunity, as she is not interested in Nana as a sexual object.

Certain interior and recessed areas within the theater, for example Nana's dressing room, are only accessible to the male characters. As opposed to numerous scenes in the novel where Satin and Nana are together in the theater, Renoir's butch-like Satin is never permitted to cross the thresholds into these private spaces on celluloid. The only female characters who have access to this space are Nana's servants; her seamstress and Zoé (Valeska Gert), her *camériste*. Zoé is portrayed as rather plain and mannish and the seamstress is short, heavy-set and dowdy, therefore they pose no threat to Nana's role as the sexually alluring courtesan. In fact, Zoé, Francis, and the seamstress function as Nana's support staff and entourage who make sure that Nana is "visible." Their roles as non-sexual servant types permit them to penetrate the inner female abscesses of the theater. The external appearance of these characters is void of any sexual overtones as they seem more like caricatures who have no sexual allure for either males or females as they function robotically in the performance of their duties.



Zola was insistent that Zoé saw all and knew all. But again, her position as Nana's confidante precluded her from discussing Nana's unconventional sexual activities. Zola underscores the importance of Zoé's "eye." He says:

Tout en parlant, Zoé, la femme de chambre, ouvrait les persiennes. Le grand jour entra. Zoé, très brune, coiffée de petits bandeaux, avait une figure longue, en museau de chien, livide et couturée, avec un nez épaté, de grosses lèvres et des yeux noirs sans cesse en mouvement. (60; ch. II)

Zola's paragraph is insistent on the necessity and universality of the gaze. Zoé removes "les persiennes," a type of window covering, to admit the light of day, which mimics the opening of the eye to admit images. To connect this image to the metaphor, Zola describes Zoé's ever moving and surveying eyes. The fact the Zoé's eyes are black seem to suggest that her sight is consumed with Nana's dark world of sexual intrigue, domination, and usury.

Renoir, in many of these interior scenes, draws from Zola's narrative and places the look with Zoé by filming her observing Nana's actions. Zola refers to Zoé as "la camériste" de Nana. It is interesting that the French word, "camériste," translates into lady's maid in English as the word connotes by its appearance, one who takes pictures of another. Regardless, Renoir attributes no power to Zoé's gaze and does not use her look to express feminine desire. Since Renoir seldom, if ever, uses the conventional shot-reverse-shot sequence he does not suture the spectator into Zoé's diegetic world, denying Zoé access to agency and denying the female spectator a cipher to the diegesis. This lack of suturing requires the female spectator to align herself to an omniscient camera or to "put on men's clothing" and appropriate the masculine gaze. Laura Mulvey discusses

this problematic issue in “Afterthought on ‘Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema’ inspired by King Vidor’s *Duel in the Sun* (1946).” She proposes:

[. . .] it is always possible that the female spectator may find herself so out of key with the pleasure on offer, with its ‘masculinisation’, that the spell of fascination is broken. On the other hand, she may not. She may find herself secretly, unconsciously almost, enjoying the freedom of action and control over the diegetic world that identification with a hero provides.  
(29)

In conserving the patriarchal and heterosexual order, Renoir forces the spectators to align themselves with the male gaze.

Renoir does not attempt to represent Zola’s female community but he does leaves traces and references of its existence. Certain objects, in the interior spaces, are infused with meaning and serve as referents to the female community. The overuse of female statues reinforces the function of women as objects of plastic beauty and artificial objects to be possessed but they also impart a sense of female attachment for Nana. As Nana searches for Muffat she sees a man and a woman behind a frosted windowpane in a closed door. The door itself, the frosting on the panes, and the numerous bars in the window, block her look. Nana is determined, however, to see Muffat. As the seamstress exits, Nana sees Muffat and enters the room. Nana crosses the threshold to ask Muffat to secure the role of la Petite Duchesse for her.

While Nana is talking to Muffat, a seamstress’ female mannequin is present in the room. Nana is attempting to be the subject here, as she wants to persuade Muffat to act in her behalf. At one point, Nana takes Muffat’s monocle and looks at him. She is trying to gain power and control. The conversation lasts quite a while but the interesting part of the scene is when Nana says: “Ah! Si on me donnait ce que je désire.” She then walks to

the mannequin and embraces it. Nana seems to draw some metaphysical strength from this female referent and alludes to her sexual attachment to and interest in women; however, she is still not permitted to express feminine desire. If Nana could complete her sentence, it would be interesting to see what the other half of this conditional sentence would contain. Nana is successful with Muffat and receives the role of la duchesse but only because she offers her body as the object of exchange.

Only once, as Bordenave assembles his actresses to choose the female lead in Fauchery's new production, La Petite Duchesse, does Renoir screen the women's community. As Bordenave prepares to announce the new "duchesse," Nana and Rose Mignon are shown in close-up but not as friends, as adversaries. The alternation of shots between Nana and the other characters separates Nana from the other "actresses" and places her outside their circle as she struggles to obtain the role of la petite duchesse. The other women side with Rose Mignon. Even within her own group, Nana is represented as the "other" and the object. Nana says, "Et moi, tu ne penses pas que je vais jouer le rôle de la cocotte?" While the decision is being announced, Nana is shown in the frame with a female statue behind her. After Bourdenave's announcement, Nana is furious and Bourdenave escorts her out of the circle of actresses. Nana's marginalization grows larger.

The third important interior scene in this long opening sequence takes place in Nana's boudoir. She has failed at the duchesse role on stage so she intends to act it out in real life. Vandeuvres comes to see Nana to plead for the soul of his nephew Georges. Female representations are again present in the room. These referents symbolize the feminine power in the bedroom where male power is oftentimes compromised, or in the

case of Muffat, neutralized. The shot opens with a cupid on the top of Nana's bed and another female statue placed in the frame with Nana. Another statue, with a cut-out of a wooden pig bearing Nana's name dangling from its neck, is present in the frame with Vandeuvres. To posit his command of this situation, Vandeuvres swings the pig. He manipulates this female referent as he hopes to manipulate Nana. The inscription of Nana's name reminds the spectator that Nana is still the receiver of the action as object. In addition, before they begin to talk, Vandeuvres places his monocle on his eye to see more clearly and to assert his culturally afforded masculine power. The two talk and the sequence ends with the childish game of changing hands. The importance of the game is that the last hand on top is the masculine hand of Vandeuvres. The man wins. This time, even in her own domicile surrounded by all things female, Nana loses her own game.

The next visitor to see Nana is Muffat who tries to gain access to the apartment but is denied. He asks: "Madame, est-elle visible?" Nana exits her boudoir to talk to Muffat. She tells him: "Est-ce qu'une honnête femme n'est pas toujours visible?" This question is important in its obverse meaning, "une femme qui n'est pas honnête est invisible." Is this, according to Renoir, what happens to Zola's lesbian community? As Muffat is repeatedly denied access to the interior spaces, commonly open to men, a type of feminization takes place.

The second major sequence in the film moves to an exterior space—the racetrack. This section is very small compared to the other two sequences but it is the beginning of the dénouement. This sequence opens immediately with the presentation of the horse, Nana, introduced as the outsider. Her name, NANA, in large capital letters is shown alternately with shots of groups of men. Quickly viewed, Renoir's scene presents the

illusion that Nana is part of this group, but if we carefully read against the grain, this equestrian metaphor, and the separation of shots, again indicate that Nana lives outside the male heterosexual world.

Before the race, shots of three carriages full of women are intercut with shots of groups of men. This exterior space seems to blur the acute delineation of gender previously seen and begins to break down boundaries, especially sexual boundaries. The first carriage that arrives appears to be transporting only women, including Satin. Satin is the first woman to descend from the carriage and arrive at the track. The second carriage brings Bordenave and two women while Nana and Georges arrive in the third carriage. These three carriages, each structured in a sexually different way, represent the different sexual combinations present in the novel. The first carriage brings laughing, giddy women, coded as either actresses or prostitutes. A lesbian reading of this arrival could indicate the arrival of Satin and all her female companions. Since this is one of the few times that Satin is prominent in the frame, it could also be construed as a group of women who reject men. The second carriage highlights the superiority of men who can pick and choose women as they want. The third carriage represents a “courtesan” and her lover. Insisting again, however, on the feminization of Georges, a lesbian reading could interpret this scene as the arrival of a lesbian couple.

Preceding Nana’s arrival with Georges is a fantastical dream sequence with Nana lying on the floor on her stomach playing with money. Vandeuvres tries to keep his illusion of Nana’s heterosexuality intact by emphasizing her role as a prostitute. In this fetishized view of Nana, the horizontal position reinforces Nana’s role as a sexual object and her lack of agency. Soon after, we see Georges, Nana, and Satin in the same frame.

This is the first time Renoir presents a triangle of “one male/two females.” Again, if one accepts the demasculinisation of Georges as a female referent, the triangle could be seen as a totally female gendered triangle.

Zola insists on presenting Georges as one of the main male characters who is repeatedly feminized. As Georges is inexperienced, the Comte de Vandevres usually accompanies him and because of his young age, Georges does not wear a beard or a monocle. In the novel, when speaking about Georges, Vandevres says, “Mais maintenant, il s’agit de Georges, un enfant.” To acknowledge Georges as a child renders his sexuality problematic as adolescents can physically appear asexual. In the film, Renoir deletes Georges’ sexual encounters with Nana and therefore he has no rite of passage into manhood until his suicide. Nana treats him as a child and insists that she has no sexual interest in him. She tells Vandevres, “Je vous jure que Georges est pour moi comme un frère.”

Georges leaves the scene and Nana and Satin are presented together in the frame. Nana’s parasol covers the lower half of their bodies. Nana addresses Satin for the only time in the film and tells her: “Ah! ma pauvre Satin, que les hommes sont bêtes!” Satin has no access to language in the film. Unknowingly; however, Renoir produces a narrow fissure in the film that opens a small lesbian space between these two women. Nana’s affirmation in the film to Satin that “les hommes sont bêtes” initiates the unraveling of her heterosexual world. This conversation and Nana’s appearance with Satin in the same frame, inaugurate the beginning of Nana’s downfall demonstrating the destructive nature of lesbianism.

The third sequence begins with a return to an interior space, Nana's boudoir, and a visit from Vandevres. This sequence seams the two previous sequences together and mediates between them. As Nana's untimely death approaches, she starts to reject the masculine world of heterosexuality and moves towards the female community. This shift in perspective collapses the two worlds together in this sequence and leads to Nana's death.

Vandevres wants Nana to marry him but Nana admits that she cannot be an active agent when he suggests that Nana supports him. She says: "Espèce de panné, tu ne penses pas que je vais t'entretenir?" Vandevres leaves broken hearted. He returns to the stable and starts a fire, killing himself and the horse, Nana. Nana's name again appears in flames as Vandevres lights the horse's name card from the lantern to ignite the fire. Nana takes her first victim.

Georges, who has been in the background, immediately approaches Nana after Vandevres' departure and proposes to her: "Moi aussi, je t'offre mon nom. Je t'aime." Nana rejects him and emphasizes his undeveloped male body. She says: "Toi Bébé, on te tordrait le nez, il en sortirait du lait." Georges moves away from Nana but does not leave the room. He stays in the waiting room and caresses Nana's clothes. This action could be coded in two ways; Georges fetishizing Nana's clothes or Georges wanting to wear these clothes. Excavating deleted passages from the novel, this scene could also be read as a reference to Zola's novel when Georges puts on Nana's clothes and the two sexually interact.

As Vandevres leaves, he encounters Muffat on his way to see Nana. Nana, once again, serves as the vehicle to strengthen the male bond between Muffat and Vandevres.

In a tender scene, Muffat places his hand on Vandeuvres' hand as Vandeuvres warns him about Nana. He says: "Écoutez-moi, j'ai à vous parler de Nana! Au nom de notre vieille amitié, méfiez-vous de cette femme, c'est la mouche d'or qui empoisonne tout ce qu'elle approche." The physical touch, the proximity of their bodies and the length of the shot allude to a deeper relationship between these two men. The heterosexual triangle has resolved itself and produces a male homosocial couple.

Nana rejects three men consecutively, which indicates a change in her interest in, or need of heterosexuality. Her refusal to accept these proposals of marriage propels her to her death. She will not be permitted to remain in the patriarchal system if she refuses to play by the rules. Nana, as a single, unmarried woman is too dangerous a commodity to survive.

Muffat, the third suitor in this sequence, brings Nana chocolates but she does not wish to see him. Nana decides instead to share the chocolates with Zoé. In a rather sexually charged short scene, Nana carefully places the bonbon in Zoé's mouth. The orality between the two women, the proximity of their bodies and their reciprocal look indicate a change in Nana. After Muffat enters, Nana humiliates him before he is permitted to have a chocolate, as she insists that he perform for her. Nana appears to be breaking away from her role as pure object as she demands that Muffat be the object of the look: "—Tu veux un bonbon? Fais le beau, gros toutou. Couche." Zoé continues to watch the performance. This vacillation between subject and object will, however, lead to Nana's death. Zoé is privileged to observe these interior scenes but the spectator is not permitted to share her gaze.



Georges, the feminized man-child, is unable to withstand the watching of this primal scene and commits suicide as his rite of passage into manhood results in his death.

Freud describes the primal scene:

Our attention is first attracted by the effects of certain influences which do not apply to all children, though they are common enough—such as the sexual abuse of children . . . and, what we should not expect, their being deeply stirred by seeing or hearing at first hand sexual behaviour between adults (their parents) mostly at a time at which one would not have thought they could either be interested in or understand any such impressions, or be capable of remembering them later. (68)

He then explains the possible ramifications of this experience on the child:

But if at the time of the threat [castration] he can recall the appearance of female genitals or if shortly afterwards he has a sight of them—of genitals, that is to say, which really lack this supremely valued part, then he takes what he has heard seriously and, coming under the influence of the *castration complex*, experiences the severest trauma of his young life. (72)

This is what happens to Georges. He is unable to mediate his feelings and resolve his crisis creating the “severest trauma of his young life.” The title card informs the spectator: “Georges, témoin de ces turpitudes, s’enivrait de honte et de jalousie.” Georges believes that the only acceptable way out for him is death. The reflexive verb “s’enivrait” foreshadows his suicide. Recalling Nana’s degradation and humiliation of Muffat, Georges’ fear of female castration causes his death. Freud explains:

A residue of his [the child’s] erotic fixation to his mother is often left in the form of an excessive dependence on her, and this persists as a kind of bondage to women. He no longer ventures to love his mother, but he cannot risk not being loved by her, for in that case he would be in danger of being betrayed by her to his father and handed over to castration. (73)

Using the scissors as his instrument of death, Georges kills himself. Nana takes her second victim.

Zoé, a female, and Francis, the feminized coiffeur, are shocked by the complacency of Muffat to follow Nana's orders but are not enraged or scared by the jealousy or fear that affected Georges. If we refer back to the triangle that appeared at the racetrack of Georges, Satin and Nana, we see that the triangle has resolved itself to form a lesbian couple. This couple is not acceptable in this cinematic context.

As the disintegration of Nana's heterosexual world reaches its apogee, she is drawn back into a community of women guarded by Bordenave and the other men. The title card says: "Et les camarades de théâtre de Nana s'en vinrent la consoler." The women want Nana to "come out" and enjoy herself but these women have no voices. Bordenave speaks for them. He says: "Tu es une artiste! Il faut savoir paraître! Viens avec nous, au bal Mabille!" The "nous" in this sentence maintains Bordenave as the leader of this group of women and the "paraître" indicates Bordenave's last attempt to objectify Nana and distance her from reality. Now, Renoir increases the number of scenes where Nana is seen surrounded by other women in order to parade their corruption before the screen. Nana is coaxed to drink and dance by the women as they attempt to draw her back into their community.

At the ball, Renoir neatly tucks Satin into the frame directly behind Nana. Satin tries to entice Nana to drink. Frequently in the scene, Satin has her hand or arm resting on Nana. The physical contact between the two women is a trace of their relationship from the novel but used here to show the malevolent influence of Satin. Nana continues to fluctuate between the female lesbian community and the male heterosexual community. In the dance hall, Renoir visually juxtaposes these two communities.

The women, including Nana, actively engage in dancing the can-can with wild enthusiasm as the men watch. As part of the women's group, Nana demonstrates her role of subject, exercising her agency. In the proceeding shot, however, Nana's agency is compromised, as she becomes the sole object of the masculine gaze. She leaves the exterior circle of women and enters the inner circle of men as she continues to dance. Increasing her objectification, Nana kicks the men's hats out of their hands. This individualizes her role as object for each man.

After Nana's performance, an old woman, (a reference to Madame Robert?) consoles her and tries to steer her back towards the women's community. The older woman says: "Alors quoi, on pleure pour un homme?" She continues: "J'en ai eu moi aussi des hommes, des diamants et des perles, on m'appelait la 'Reine Pomaré.'" This woman represents the empty, unfulfilled life that heterosexuality and prostitution will provide for Nana. When torn between these two communities presented simultaneously, Nana falls ill.

Renoir creates his own ending to the film to solve the polemic of heterosexuality versus homosexuality. As Nana lies on her deathbed, the women, who are so closely drawn around her in the novel, are replaced by Muffat. Zola's last description of the women's community is:

Puis, la porte ouverte avec lenteur, Lucy entra, suivie de Caroline et de Blanche. Mais elles s'arrêtèrent, il y avait déjà cinq femmes dans la chambre. Gaga était allongée au fond de l'unique fauteuil, un voltaire de velours rouge. Devant la cheminée, Simonne et Clarisse debout causaient avec Léa de Horn, assise sur une chaise; tandis que, devant le lit, à gauche de la porte, Rose Mignon, posée au bord du coffre à bois, regardait fixement le corps perdu dans l'ombre des rideaux. Toutes avaient leurs chapeaux et leurs gants, comme des dames en visite; et seule, les mains

nues, décoiffée, pâlie par la fatigue de trois nuits de veille, elle restait stupide et gonflée de tristesse, en face de cette mort si brusque. (431)

Conserving Nana's heterosexuality, Renoir does not permit women to be seen together in the intimacy of the bedroom. Therefore, in the film, only Rose Mignon is permitted access to Nana's boudoir but Renoir again refuses to screen female intimacy as the spectator only sees Rose Mignon exiting the bedroom.

In the novel, Muffat never sees Nana before her death but, in the film, Muffat freely enters the room as Nana is hallucinating about her past liaisons. In another dream sequence, she sees both Georges and Vandeuvres whom she rejected sexually. Nana will reject Muffat by her death. The women must remain outside the interior intimate space of the bedroom. This change from a community of women to a community of men around Nana's deathbed reinforces Renoir's insistence on the male homosocial order.

Renoir, in typical Renoiresque style, draws the film to a close by repeating the opening thematic of the film, Nana as actress and object of the gaze. In this scene, Nana performs her death scene on her bed for Muffat. This will be her last scene. Nana must now die because of her rejection of the heterosexual system, which implies a patriarchal system, and her non-acceptance of the role as an object of exchange for men.

Maintaining the homosocial order, Nana dies as the object of the spectacle for the male gaze, not the female gaze as in the novel. The last scene shows Nana draped across the bed with her feet not touching the ground. Interestingly, her feet are about the same distance from the floor as in the opening sequence where she is dangled by a rope. As subject, Nana has now rejected all the men who pull her strings. Choosing death over continued objectification and commodification, Nana knows that no one will be able to

lower her to the floor to continue her performance. Lying horizontally across the bed, the “mouche d’or” is squashed by patriarchal usury.

Renoir adapted Nana to the screen by choosing the events of the novel that he felt were the most representative and had the most cinematic impact without compromising the essence of the novel. He does, however, suppress and subvert the lesbian aspect of Nana’s personality. Despite Renoir’s efforts, a careful reading against the grain unveils the residual traces of lesbianism that remain in his adaptation. Perhaps this was Renoir’s goal, to leave the faintest of innuendos to signify Satin’s existence instead of overtly screening her relationship with Nana. Terry Castle observes the same technique while comparing James’s novel, The Bostonians, to Zola’s Nana. She explains James’s method throughout the novel:

to insinuate *through* Zola, as it were, a host of provocative effects, while at the same time never breaking with a certain self-appointed decorum. When it came to broaching the taboo subject of lesbianism, Nana provided James with the necessary shorthand, a bag of intertextual tricks, through which otherwise unassimilable connections—literary and sexual—could be made. (170)

Renoir’s film adaptation seems to mimic this technique. Since Renoir does not completely exclude the character of Satin, he creates a miniscule fissure, beginning in the first scene, for the audience to access in order to make the connections between Nana and Satin in the film. However, knowledge of Nana and Satin’s relationship in the novel is required to decipher the few clues left by Renoir.

The syntagmatic path that Renoir has created, from Nana’s debut performance at le Théâtre des Variétés to her death in her apartment, differs greatly from Nana’s diegetic journey in the novel; however, regardless of the change in the narrative and the ending of

the film, the result remains the same. A different reading of the film by Leo Braudy applauds the film as an excellent example of an adaptation following the “spirit” of the novel. He states:

A remarkable and rarely shown film that almost perfectly catches the nuances of Zola’s approach, while it preserves most of his plot and characters, is Jean Renoir’s excellent 1926 version of *Nana*, starring Catherine Hessling, with Werner Kraus as Muffat. (“Zola on Film” 80-81)

Therefore, despite Renoir’s obvious omissions, the film, in its totality, can be said to retain the “essence” of Zola’s novel. Even without an overt depiction of Nana’s lesbian intrigues, Nana dies as a result of her marginality, her sexual difference, and her sexual orientation. Whether Nana’s story is told on paper or on celluloid, whether she is active or passive, subject or object, gay or straight, Nana cannot be permitted to live in a patriarchal system where she adamantly proclaims that she does not need men.

### CHAPTER 3

#### THE “EYECON” IN THE MIRROR

In a letter addressed to Eugène Clisson in L'Événement on March 8, 1889, Zola discusses the theme of his newest novel. In his interview, he says: “En un mot, je veux faire un roman dramatique, tragique, quelque chose de “cauchemardant” comme Thérèse Raquin . . .” (qtd. in Speirs and Signori 41). This “quelque chose de ‘cauchemardant’” resulted in La Bête Humaine, a novel of murder, sex, and intrigue.

Jacques Lantier, the stepbrother of Nana, debuts in this, the seventeenth novel of the Rougon-Macquart series. Although the narrative privileges the story of Jacques Lantier, the tardily invented son of Gervaise Macquart Lantier Coupeau, women characters figure prominently in the novel. The most significant of these female characters are: Séverine, the wife of Le Havre stationmaster Roubaud; Tante Phasie, wife of Misard, the crossing guard, and the godmother of Jacques Lantier; Flore, the daughter of Tante Phasie; la mère Victoire, wife of Pecqueux; Philomène, Pecqueux’s girlfriend; and La Lison, Lantier’s train. As one of Lantier’s love objects, La Lison is included in this group of women. By naming and personifying the train, Zola increases its function, raising its diegetic importance to the level of all the other female characters in the novel.

Of these six female characters, Zola’s most problematic and troubling images of “woman” reside in the constructed images of Séverine, Flore, and the train, La Lison.

Séverine and Flore represent the “worst” of woman while the strongest image that Zola can find for the “perfect” woman is a machine made of steel. Zola presents Séverine and Flore as women possessed with desire, especially sexual desire. Zola’s repeated characterization of women as malevolent and dangerous leads to what Susan Hayward terms the “normalization of misogyny” (178). Transferring a statement from Hayward about the working classes, but certainly applicable to this “normalization of misogyny,” she maintains that the effect of these constant images of malevolent, deranged, violent, and unstable women promotes a stereotype of women, an “otherness that is fetichised into unmistakable icons and morphologies” (178). In other words, they begin to represent the norm for women instead of the exception. Séverine and Flore follow in the murderous and destructive tradition of Thérèse Raquin and Nana, a typology increasingly associated with Zola.

To represent the broad spectrum of female types, Zola physically juxtaposes the bodies of Séverine and Flore. Séverine is svelte with small, dainty hands and feet, which Zola markedly contrasts to Flore, the large and robust “amazon” girl with big features and “boy-like” characteristics. Both of these women reside outside of the norm as their marginalization presents them as anomalies, in other words, the “other.”

In contrast to Séverine and Flore, La Lison, maneuvered by men, is the icon of the “perfect” female companion and wife. Her warm heart, her stability, and her predictability provide Jacques with his most satisfying relationship in the novel. Through this idealized but mechanized “woman,” Zola illustrates how men and women can coexist harmoniously. Complementing Jacques’ relationship with La Lison is his relationship with his fireman, Pecqueux. This comfortable but unconventional “ménage à trois” is the



only successful relationship in the novel, as all other relationships in the novel fail. However, even though this odd, triangular relationship works for Lantier and Pecqueux, it, like all relationships in the novel, ends tragically and horrifically. Even La Lison's heart turns cold as she suffers mechanical problems with her firebox. As the novel continues, Zola attributes the destruction of La Lison and the failure of this seemingly perfect relationship to the intervention of malevolent women. For example, Flore's jealousy of Séverine and Jacques' relationship forces her to place the carriage and five horses on the tracks to cause a mortal accident. Ironically, Flore does not kill the man or the woman that she targets; she instead "kills" her most fierce "female" rival, La Lison.

Zola again questions the sanctity and efficacy of marriage, as there are no positive representations of marriage in the novel. Zola's representation of the image of woman continues to be problematic in this novel, as the gap in sexual difference grows larger and more pronounced. His female protagonist, Séverine, is now an adulteress and a murderer; Flore is an "amazon" woman that lives outside the realm of understanding; Tante Phasie is a miser guarding her money; Philomène is a tramp, sleeping with a married man; and la mère Victoire is a wife who approves of her husband's infidelities. The continual recurrence of these female images in Zola's novels makes them "familiar" to his readers. To represent the feminine ideal, Zola utilizes La Lison as a positive image of "woman" for his novel. Zola's misogynistic female images of Séverine and Flore coupled with his idealized image of La Lison are the focus of this chapter as we examine their transposition from novel to film.

Although Zola posits Flore and Séverine as the embodiment of evil, it is Roubaud who initiates the narrative of jealousy, death, and destruction. The characters here are

poised like dominoes ready to fall. Roubaud topples the first domino when he wrongly accuses Séverine of sexual impropriety with her godfather, holding her responsible for her adolescent sexual abuse. When Jacques witnesses the murder of Grandmorin, he becomes the common denominator to all characters in the novel. Henceforth, the intersection of their lives with Jacques destroys them all, males and females alike.

Zola first introduces Séverine as passive agent, obedient wife, and lover and then carefully details her move to active agent, adulteress, and murderer. Like Thérèse Raquin, who is a product of her ill husband's bed and medications, Séverine is a product of both sexual abuse by her godfather, Grandmorin, and sexual cruelty by her husband. Zola suggests that because of her access to a privileged education provided to her by Grandmorin, her adoptive father, Séverine is able to cope with this abuse. According to Zola, this "privileged" type of education for women serves as nothing more than a way for society to "faire de la femme une marionnette creuse et soumise" (qtd. in Bertrand-Jennings, "Zola féministe?" (181). Later in the novel, Zola describes Séverine's life with Roubaud in retrospect. He describes her prior life as having "une violence telle, que ses beaux yeux bleus, restés naïfs, en gardaient un élargissement de terreur, sous son casque tragique de cheveux noirs" (205). This is the image of Séverine as Zola unveils his new female protagonist.

In a reversal from the beginning of L'Assommoir, which begins with Gervaise waiting at the window for Lantier, Zola places the effeminate Roubaud at the window waiting, primping, and looking for his wife, Séverine. Even though Roubaud is feminized, Zola still places the look with the male character. Zola hints at Séverine's ability to access agency as she is shopping alone in Paris as Roubaud waits at home. Zola

underscores Roubaud's insecurity as passive agent: "Comme il avait épousé une femme plus jeune que lui de quinze années, ces coups d'oeil fréquents, donnés aux glaces, le rassuraient" (56; ch. 1). Zola uses Roubaud's thoughts as a narrative device to objectify Séverine and to introduce her inherent sexuality and exoticness. Zola continues and describes Roubaud as "contenté de la [Séverine]désirer de loin, avec la passion d'un ouvrier dégrossi pour un bijou délicat, qu'il jugeait précieux" (57; ch. 1). Roubaud sees Séverine as an object, a material possession as he aligns her with a "precious jewel." Although married to Séverine, Roubaud admires her from afar as he places her on the proverbial pedestal. This distancing promulgates Séverine's status as an icon, a flat one-dimensional object of desire

As Roubaud continues to wait, he checks himself again in the mirror as he begins to lose his patience. Placed in the traditional female role of object, Roubaud waits impatiently for Séverine and worries because, "Le rendez-vous était pour trois heures" (57). Roubaud asks himself "Où pouvait-elle être?" (57). At last Séverine enters as Zola describes her from Roubaud's point of view:

Dans l'éclat de ses vingt-cinq ans, elle semblait grande, mince et très souple, grasse pourtant avec de petits os. Elle n'était point jolie d'abord, la face longue, la bouche forte, éclairée de dents admirables. Mais, à la regarder, elle séduisait par le charme, l'étrangeté de ses larges yeux bleus, sous son épaisse chevelure noire. (58; ch. 1)

Zola posits Séverine as young, frail, malleable, small boned, and supple. Through this paragraph he also informs the reader that it is her sexuality that renders her desirable. The reference to her large, open eyes foreshadows her future ability to look whereas her black hair casts her as the illustrious "femme fatale."

Zola elaborates on the child-like aspect of Séverine's sexuality noting that she approaches Roubaud "avec une gentillesse d'enfant," and then "elle se jeta à son [Roubaud] cou, en lui posant, sur la bouche, sa jolie petite main potelée" (58). Zola exposes the relationship that exists between the two—a relationship more akin to father and daughter than husband and wife. The description of Séverine continues as Zola describes her as "cette grande enfant passive, d'une affection filiale, où l'amante ne s'éveillait point" (58). It is Séverine's lack of adult passion for Roubaud that forces him to examine himself frequently in the mirror. As a result of Séverine's image of Roubaud as a father figure, she does not return his love, affection, or infatuation: "Il [Roubaud] la couvrait de baisers, qu'elle ne rendait pas;" (58).

As Roubaud attempts to seduce Séverine, Zola's description shifts to the importance of her eyes and her lack of desire to participate in Roubaud's lovemaking. As if bored, Séverine "regardait fixement le vide . . ." (60; ch. I) instead of looking at Roubaud. In the next paragraph, Zola uses Séverine's far away look as a conduit to her biographical flashback: "elle restait les yeux élargis, perdus au loin, cessant de manger. Sans doute elle évoquait les jours de son enfance . . ." (60). Through Séverine's eyes, Zola's paragraph informs us that Séverine Aubry Roubaud is an orphan, who lost her mother in childbirth and later lost her father when she was only thirteen. Zola adopted this same topos, the orphan, with Thérèse Raquin and Denise Baudu.

While in the hotel room in Paris, Roubaud forces Séverine to explain why she does not want to spend time with Grandmorin, her godfather. As a commodity, Séverine serves as the mediator between Roubaud and Grandmorin. This relationship protects Roubaud in his profession and assures his success. Roubaud loves Séverine but he also

loves what she can provide for him—status and financial security. As their argument continues, Séverine’s story of sexual abuse as a teenager only sixteen and a half years old surfaces. Angry, but sexually aroused, Roubaud beats her unmercifully until she answers his questions. During this beating, Roubaud awakens the sleeping beast of Séverine’s agency.

Now, bullied, dark-haired, and sexually active, Séverine’s role for revenge is cast. In the Second Empire, the blame of sexual abuse is generally attributed to the female; however, Zola also lays blame on Grandmorin as the perpetrator. Zola underscores this female culpability as Roubaud repeatedly beats, accuses, and condemns Séverine. To punish Grandmorin for his involvement, Roubaud devises a plan to kill Grandmorin. As Séverine begins to recount her story of sexual abuse, her attempt is thwarted and she does not get the chance to tell her story. However, despite Séverine’s difficulty in narrating her story, Roubaud derives an unhealthy, sexual pleasure from her forced and detailed account of sexual abuse.

A child molded by men’s hands, Séverine is now forced to face her aggressors. Since her mother died in childbirth, men have directed Séverine’s upbringing and have formed her character and personality. Raised by her father for thirteen years, she is placed in the care of Grandmorin when her father dies. Unfortunately, Grandmorin’s intentions are less than honorable as he adopts Séverine as a teenage concubine. Eventually, she leaves Grandmorin’s “protection” to marry. But, she marries a much older man, the effeminate stationmaster Roubaud, who appears as a substitute for Grandmorin. Roubaud emulates Grandmorin who adores Séverine and demands sexual favors; however, unlike Grandmorin; Roubaud possesses a legal document that permits

him to sexually abuse his wife. However, when he learns the truth about Séverine's relationship with Grandmorin he is wrought with jealousy and changes his mind about Séverine. Séverine as the innocent, loving, and abused victim does not understand:

Elle, passive, docile, qui toute jeune s'était pliée aux désirs d'un vieillard, qui plus tard avait laissé faire son mariage, simplement désireuse d'arranger les choses, n'arrivait pas à comprendre un tel éclat de jalousie, pour des fautes anciennes, dont elle se repentait; et, sans vice, la chair mal éveillée encore, dans sa demi-inconscience de fille douce, chaste malgré tout . . . (73)

Through this description, Zola prepares the foundation upon which to explain the abrupt change in Séverine's character.

As an orphan, Séverine never experiences the comforts of a female-oriented domicile; therefore she exists as a product of male upbringing and domination. This unusual background posits Séverine as different from other women and as such, she becomes the "other" and the anomaly. Séverine is marginalized further as she is barren, which taints her as a dangerous sexual predator, the unholy "non-mother." Zola records Séverine's progression from an innocent child, to a young wife "avec une gentillesse d'enfant" (58), to a murderer and adulterer.

Perhaps, through this horrific, aggressive behavior by Grandmorin and Roubaud towards Séverine, we can glean a small look into Zola's portrayal of the effects of the patriarchy on women. Considering that Zola's relationship vis-à-vis women is always problematic we must not over-simplify his intentions but, in this case, it seems that Zola creates a small fissure to demonstrate the effects of totalitarian male domination on women. Chantal Bertrand-Jennings summarizes this idea:

La question féminine occupe une place de choix parmi les réflexions de l'écrivain, du critique, du polémiste et du sociologue réformateur que fut

Zola. Ayant été disciple de Michelet au cours de sa jeunesse romantique, il ne renia pas son premier maître et, dans son fidèle prosélytisme, prétendit entreprendre par le truchement de son oeuvre romanesque et polémique de ‘faire revenir l’homme à la femme.’ (L’Eros 7)

Although Zola’s intention to ameliorate the situation of women seems honorable, his path towards that goal is oftentimes problematic, fraught with contradictions, and frustrating to the female reader. Bertrand-Jennings devotes her book, L’Eros et la Femme chez Zola to an exposition of Zola’s polemic of sexual difference. She summarizes:

Tache colossale pour laquelle il imagina un nouveau système d’éducation et d’instruction féminines qui, de concert avec de nombreux projets de reformes dans les domaines de la législation du travail et de la protection maternelle, devaient pouvoir opérer le miracle de la réconciliation harmonieuse des deux sexes. (7)

These contradictions are evident in Séverine as she survives Roubaud’s beatings and accusations to emerge as a malevolent, sexually active woman interested in sex, murder, and revenge. Like Janus, the double-faced god, Zola appears as both woman’s advocate and misogynist representing two opposing viewpoints. Therefore, the best way to read Zola is to be attentive to his contradictions.

As a product of male domination and abuse, Séverine eventually finds her voice. Finally, as the beating subsides, Séverine accesses the gaze. Stunned, as if in disbelief, she looks at Roubaud and “le suivait toujours de ses grands yeux. . . . elle regardait son mari aller, venir, tourner furieusement, comme elle aurait regardé un loup, un être d’une autre espèce” (73; ch. I). The tainted woman is now formed and the groundwork, which provides her the opportunity to meet Jacques Lantier, is laid. The feminine beast is unchained: “Ce qui l’épouvantait, c’était de sentir l’animal, soupçonné par elle depuis trois ans, à des grognements sourds, aujourd’hui déchaîné, enragé, prêt à mordre. Que lui

dire, pour empêcher un malheur?” (73). As Zola records Séverine’s metamorphosis from innocent victim to sexual vixen, the above quote reflects an abrupt change in the direction of Zola’s thought. Instead of the innocent victim, Zola reverts to the misogynistic representation of women as he presents Séverine as yet another flawed woman, inherently dangerous, and destructive.

Chantal Bertrand-Jennings comments on Zola’s novels of passion saying that “[c]haque fois que la passion vient au premier plan de l’intrigue romanesque, elle se trouve être porteuse des maux les plus divers grâce à des prétextes toujours efficaces” (L’Eros 11-12). Here, passion unveils itself in the poisoned, revengeful character of Séverine and later in Flore. Zola’s premise asserts that, like Lantier, Séverine also has a beast lying dormant within her that easily surfaces when provoked. Roubaud’s treatment of Séverine coupled with his accusations create the catalyst that draws the “beast” from its cave. Obviously, this subverts the notion of Séverine’s innocence. Roubaud forces Séverine to participate in the exterior, clandestine world of murder. She now questions her previous life of quiet domesticity and obedience. In the novel, Zola records the eruption of Séverine’s passion and vindictiveness as her “beast” is unleashed and forced to the surface.

Against her will, Séverine is forced by her “father-like” husband to assist him in the murder of her godfather. Séverine has no choice but to partake in this crime of patricide against her adoptive father and benefactor. Roubaud forces Séverine to tell her torrid story of sex and abuse and while Séverine is narrating, Roubaud glares through this metaphorical peephole into Séverine’s past. He then forces her to write to Grandmorin, to entice him with sex, and to board the train with him to be his accomplice to murder.



Séverine is abused for the second time in her life. Roubaud's abuse continues as he pushes Séverine to seduce Jacques to buy his silence. Jacques in turn will abuse her for the third time by killing her. By forcing Séverine to tell her story, Roubaud sets a fateful game of dominos in motion, with Jacques, Pecqueux, and the French soldiers still to fall.

The murder of Grandmorin is committed under the watchful, accidental eye of Jacques Lantier, while waiting for his train, La Lison, to be repaired. The passage of the murder in the speeding train mimics watching an old magic lantern:

[C]'était une apparition en coup de foudre: tout de suite les wagons se succédèrent, les petites vitres carrées des portières, violemment éclairées, firent défiler les compartiments pleins de voyageurs, dans un tel vertige de vitesse, que l'oeil doutait ensuite des images entrevues. (102; ch. II)

As if in a movie theater, the interior lights of the train illuminate the figures in each compartment of the train. With the curtains opened, each compartment, separated by a wall, appears like a frame in a film, cutting from one scene to the next. As in a freeze frame, Jacques is able to see the murder of Grandmorin take place:

Et Jacques, très distinctement, à ce quart précis de seconde, aperçut, par les glaces flambantes d'un coupé, un homme qui en tenait un autre renversé sur la banquette qui lui plantait un couteau dans la gorge, tandis qu'une masse noire, peut-être une troisième personne, peut-être un écroulement de bagages, pesait de tout son poids sur les jambes convulsives de l'assassiné. (103; ch. II)

As the train pulls away, Jacques questions what he saw and refers to the participants in his private film as actors noting that "[p]as un seul trait des deux acteurs du drame ne lui était resté, vivace" (103). Jacques' thoughts become more confused as the train disappears into the darkness:

Mais tout se confondait, s'évaporait, comme en un rêve. Un instant, le profil évoqué, reparut; puis, il s'effaça définitivement. Ce n'était sans doute qu'une imagination. Et tout cela le glaçait, lui semblait si

extraordinaire, qu'il finissait par admettre une hallucination, née de l'affreuse crise qu'il venait de traverser. (103)

Jacques cannot "believe his eyes" as this frightening glimpse of murder disappears like memories of a dream. His dream-like state and self-doubt about past images mimic the effect of a spectator watching a film and then trying to reconstruct the details. However, in real life, Jacques cannot rewind and watch the sequence a second time.

Interestingly, Séverine, described as if in deep focus, appears as an unidentifiable shadow in the compartment. At this point in the novel, she also appears fragmented to the reader, as no one knows how this forced act of murder will affect her. As Séverine's fragmented image is reunited with her identity, she gains access to agency. This metamorphosis occurs when Lantier reunites the memory of the shadowy image from the train with Roubaud's wife, Séverine.

During the investigation of Grandmorin's murder and the interrogation by the judge, Jacques and Séverine's eyes meet. Séverine seduces and shocks Jacques with her look: "Mais, comme il détournait ses yeux du mari, il rencontra le regard de la femme; et il lut, dans ce regard, une supplication si ardente, un don si entière de toute la personne, qu'il en fut bouleversé (151; ch. IV). Séverine's look is expressive and perplexing to Jacques but extremely seductive. Jacques is now placed in the role of passive agent as Séverine objectifies him with her gaze.

Through Séverine's look, she accesses her agency and conveys her desire to Jacques for his discretion. He decides to keep his silence but only because of his sexual attraction to Séverine. Zola describes Lantier's feelings: "Son frisson ancien le reprenait: l'aimait-il donc, était-ce donc celle-là qu'il pourrait aimer, comme on aime d'amour, sans

un monstrueux désir de destruction?” (151). As Séverine becomes the active agent she takes possession of Jacques through her gaze.

As Jacques guards his silence, Séverine begins to understand the importance and the power of the look. Séverine now controls the gaze and therefore she controls Lantier. This transference of the power of the gaze from male to female usurps Jacques’ agency. As Séverine acclimates to this new position of active agent, she uses her gaze more effectively. She places Jacques as the object of her gaze. Under this extreme objectification by Séverine, Jacques struggles to maintain his subjectivity: “Mais Jacques détournait la tête, embarrassé, comme s’il voulait éviter le regard de Séverine, fixé sur lui” (158; ch. IV). Séverine will continue to access the gaze more frequently to fulfill her desires, to manipulate Jacques, and to dispose of her husband.

Séverine now possesses men through her eyes. Zola refers numerous times to the contrast between her blue eyes and black hair. For example, when she goes to see Monsieur Camy-Lamotte, he is seduced simply by her presence in front of him. Séverine, while learning about the power of the gaze, is still naive about her ability to seduce men so easily. She goes to Monsieur Camy-Lamotte to plead for her husband’s safety:

En outre, l’ayant jugée, au premier coup d’oeil, d’une figure médiocre, il commençait à la trouver extrêmement séduisante, avec la soumission complaisante de ses yeux bleus, sous l’énergie moirée de sa chevelure. Et il songeait à son ami Grandmorin, saisi d’une jalouse admiration: . . . (165; ch. V)

When Camy-Lamotte explains that he cannot do anything for her, Séverine stands on the threshold of his home to again plead for his help. She uses her eyes: “Mais elle le

regardait avec de beaux yeux, si ardents de prière, qu'il en fut remué" (167). Séverine now comprehends the power of the gaze.

While waiting for an answer from Camy-Lamotte, Séverine goes to meet Jacques. They walk, talk, and become acquainted, even friendly. By the end of their time together, they declare themselves "camarades" (177; ch. V). After holding hands, Séverine tells Jacques: "lâchez-moi la main, et ne me regardez plus comme ça, parce que vous allez vous user les yeux" (177). Séverine denies Jacques access to the gaze to retain him in the role of passive object. It is at this point that Jacques acquiesces and tells her, "Vous savez que je vous aime" (177). Jacques' fatal declaration of love to Séverine drives the narrative forward and causes the reader to experience an uneasy feeling of doom and immanent death.

After her encounter with Jacques, Séverine returns immediately to Camy-Lamotte's residence. Enjoying his position of authority, he suspends the announcement of his decision. However, as he watches Séverine, he notices that "elle avait un regard si profond, il la sentait élançée toute vers lui, dans un tel besoin de savoir, qu'il fut pitoyable"(178; ch. V). He immediately tells her his decision and again her eyes speak for her: "Ses yeux s'étaient emplis de larmes, et elle ne disait rien . . ." (178).

After the Roubauds' acquittal by Camy-Lamotte, Monsieur Roubaud cultivates a friendship with Jacques Lantier. Seemingly placing the blame on Roubaud, Zola onerously describes the addition of Lantier into the household: "Roubaud venait d'introduire une autre cause de trouble, peu à peu grandissante, en forçant Jacques à les fréquenter" (192; ch. VI). Reminiscent of Laurent in the Raquin household, Roubaud insists that Lantier come to the house for dinner and drinks. Quickly, Lantier is a regular

three nights a week. This male friendship develops as well the friendship between Jacques and Séverine.

Jacques and Séverine share a secret code of looks and glances to speak to one another intimately. They both access this code equally. This coded conversation excludes Roubaud: “il l’interrogeait d’un regard, pour savoir si elle n’avait eu aucun sujet nouveau de tristesse. Elle répondit de même, d’un simple mouvement des paupières” (193-194; ch. VI). After this, the clandestine meetings of Jacques and Séverine begin. The male bond between Roubaud and Jacques grows as well as the sexual relationship between Séverine and Jacques.

After a few clandestine meetings, Jacques and Séverine’s friendship and stolen kisses transform into avid lovemaking. Familiarity develops between the two as they begin to “tutoyer” each other. Séverine’s agency takes shape in silence: “dès la première minute, presque sans paroles, ce fut elle qui l’attira d’une secousse, qui le força à la prendre. Elle n’avait point prévu cela” (204). Séverine’s desires come into focus as she discusses her “envie,” “besoins,” and “désirs.” After her lovemaking with Jacques, Séverine knows that “[s]on cœur, son corps ne vivaient que d’un besoin d’amour, absolu, continu . . .” (205). She concludes: “Et elle était restée vierge malgré tout, elle venait de se donner pour la première fois, à ce garçon, qu’elle adorait, dans le désir de disparaître en lui, d’être sa servante” (205). Séverine considers herself “virginal” as if denying the masculinity of Grandmorin and Roubaud. Unlike Jacques, Séverine does not find these father figures sexually attractive and virile.

Although tiny, small boned, and physically incompetent, Séverine is resilient in her role of wife and lover. She survives the inquisition about Grandmorin and is released

from all responsibility, she survives suspicion from her husband for her infidelity, she survives discovery in the train yard while making love with Jacques, and she survives the horrific train crash caused by Flore.

Her role as active agent increases as she proposes that she and Jacques kill Roubaud. It is this proposal of murder that pushes Séverine across the forbidden patriarchal threshold. It is neither acceptable nor tolerated for a woman to suggest and/or plan the killing of a patriarchal figurehead, specifically the husband. This will be Séverine's undoing. Séverine unveils her plan to Jacques:

Dès qu'il [Roubaud] frappera, je descendrai lui ouvrir. D'abord j'avais l'idée de le laisser monter jusqu'ici, où tu l'aurais attendu. Mais pour le redescendre, ça aurait compliqué encore; et puis, dans cette chambre, c'est du parquet, tandis que le vestibule est dallé, ce qui me permettra de laver aisément, s'il y a des taches... Même, en me déshabillant tout à l'heure, je songeais à un roman, où l'auteur raconte qu'un homme, pour en tuer un autre, s'était mis tout nu. Tu comprends? on se lave après, on n'a pas sur ses vêtements une seule éclaboussure... (343; ch. XI)

Séverine discusses different options for the murder while constantly controlling the gaze, "avec ses grands yeux fixes, [elle] le [Jacques] regardait aller et venir" (345). Zola continues the description of her gaze as she surveys Jacques: "La tête immobile sur l'oreiller, elle le suivait d'un va-et-vient du regard" (345; ch. XI). Séverine's access to the gaze is so powerful that she describes and objectifies Jacques:

Il avait sa tête ronde de beau garçon, ses cheveux frisés, ses moustaches très noires, ses yeux bruns diamantés d'or; mais sa mâchoire inférieure avançait tellement, dans une sorte de coup de gueule, qu'il s'en trouvait défiguré. (347; ch. XI)

This deformity that Séverine sees in Jacques will return to kill her as she becomes more assertive: "Elle n'obéissait pas, elle marchait sur lui, au contraire, avec le sourire invincible et despotique de la femme qui se sait toute-puissante par le désir" (346). With

Séverine's increasingly powerful sexuality, she continues to force herself on Jacques pleading with him over and over to "embrasse-moi, embrasse-moi" (348; ch. XI). However, at the same time, Jacques refuses to be the object of Séverine's gaze. He regains his access to the gaze after being blinded so long by Séverine: "il la regardait, dans la vive clarté de la lampe. Jamais il ne l'avait vue ainsi, la chemise ouverte, coiffée si haut, qu'elle était toute nue, le cou nu, les seins nus" (347). The fragmentation of Séverine's body suggests the death of her agency and her impending murder.

Séverine's overt sexual advances attest to the increase in her agency but Jacques refuses to relinquish his control. He regains his agency and kills Séverine in order to survive: "Il fixait sur Séverine ses yeux fous, il n'avait plus que le besoin de la jeter morte sur son dos, ainsi qu'une proie qu'on arrache aux autres" (348). The possession of Séverine is complete.

After the murder of Séverine, Jacques remains in possession of the gaze: "Jacques maintenant la regardait, allongée à ses pieds, devant le lit. Le train se perdait au loin, il la regardait dans le lourd silence de la chambre rouge" (348). Male supremacy remains intact as the female anomaly is conquered. Jacques is proud of his accomplishment as he maintains the superiority of the patriarchal order:

Il en éprouvait une surprise d'orgueil, un grandissement de sa souveraineté de mâle. La femme, il l'avait tuée, il la possédait, entière, jusqu'à l'anéantir. Elle n'était plus, elle ne serait jamais plus à personne. (349)

However, the last image of Séverine again refers to her eyes: "Les yeux de pervenche, élargis démesurément, questionnaient encore, éperdus, terrifiés du mystère" (349). Even in death, Séverine refuses to relinquish the gaze.

Opposing the “feminine” image of Séverine is the image of Flore, the gatekeeper at Croix-de-Maufras. Although Zola gives her a beautiful name that evokes sweetness and gentleness, he exaggerates Flore’s strength and “masculinity.” He insists on these two traits as he repeatedly likens Flore to a boy. His first description of Flore places her outside doing manual labor: “Dans le jardin du garde-barrière, une fille tirait de l’eau au puits, une grande fille de dix-huit ans, blonde, forte, à la bouche épaisse, aux grands yeux verdâtres, au front bas, sous de lourds cheveux” (82; ch. 1). When she sees Jacques Lantier approaching, Zola describes her as having “[la]tête puissante, dont l’épaisse toison blonde frisait très bas sur le front; et, de tout son être solide et souple, montait une sauvage énergie de volonté” (94). Throughout the novel, Zola repeats this image insisting on Flore’s strength and her large, physical features saying that she is “brave et forte comme un garçon” (227; ch. VII). He specifically details the size of her arms and body. He mentions: “ses bras vigoureux de garçon” (228), “sa haute taille de vierge guerrière” (236), and “son aire farouche et hardi de grande sauvagesse blonde” (230). Her actions also mimic traditional male feats of strength and roughness. Zola tells us that with “ses bras de guerrière, elle soulevait des roues [et] les rejetait au loin” (316; ch. X) and that when “[e]lle s’était redressée, elle jura come un homme” (317).

In addition, Zola underscores Flore’s extraordinary strength by retelling the stories, myths, and rumors that surround her in Croix-de-Maufras. Flore exists as a country legend, which mythologizes her character. This serves to further marginalize her character and place her outside the norm. Zola explains:

Déjà une légende se formait sur elle, dans le pays. On contait des histoires, des sauvetages: une charrette retirée d’une secousse, au passage d’un train; un wagon, qui descendait tout seul la pente de Barentin, arrêté



ainsi qu'une bête furieuse, galopant à la rencontre d'un express. (94; ch. II)

These legends about Flore also encompass stories about her sexual encounters as Flore's representation as the overtly masculine female impacts her sexual relationships with men. Notorious stories circulate about her refusal of male companionship. The first story tells about her encounter at the river:

Mais les premiers qui s'étaient risqués, n'avaient pas eu envie de recommencer l'aventure. Comme elle aimait à se baigner pendant des heures, nue dans un ruisseau voisin, des gamins de son âge étaient allés faire la partie de la regarder; et elle en avait empoigné un, sans même prendre la peine de remettre sa chemise, et elle l'avait arrangé si bien, que personne ne la guettait plus. (94)

This particular scene is not unique in Flore's life as Zola recounts a similar story:

Enfin, le bruit se répandait de son histoire avec un aiguilleur de l'embranchement de Dieppe, à l'autre bout du tunnel: un nommé Ozil, un garçon d'une trentaine d'années, très honnête, qu'elle semblait avoir encouragé un instant, et qui, ayant essayé de la prendre, s'imaginant un soir qu'elle se livrait, avait failli être tué par elle d'un coup de bâton. (94; ch. II)

Zola summarizes Flore's aversion to men as an illness, explaining that "elle a pour sur quelque chose de dérangé, toujours à n'en faire qu'à sa tête, disparue pendant des heures, et fière, et violente!..." (89) and more specifically that "[e]lle était vierge et guerrière, dédaigneuse du mâle, ce qui finissait par convaincre les gens qu'elle avait pour sur la tête dérangée" (94). She repeatedly rejects men sexually as she speaks about her platonic relationship with Cabuche. She says: "non, non! c'est mon ami, je n'ai pas d'amoureux, moi! je n'en veux pas avoir" (94).

Contrasted to Séverine's sensual beauty and lean and supple look, Zola states that "[Flore] n'était pas jolie, elle avait les hanches solides et les bras durs d'un garçon" (82).

While Séverine amuses herself shopping the streets of Paris with a husband waiting at home, Flore prefers risking her life playing in the train tunnel. Zola mentions that in the tunnel she prefers to “galoper dans le noir, avec l’idée qu’on peut être coupé par un train, si l’on n’ouvre pas l’oeil” (94-95). As Séverine enjoys the beautiful home of Grandmorin and her domicile at the train depot, Flore lives outside watching the train from the hedges. Zola successfully makes his point that Flore is the “other,” an aberration, and mentally deficient. Never neglecting his original premise of Flore’s marginality, Zola again repeats his leitmotif about Flore when retelling her story about Ozil. He refers to her once again as “cette sauvage, qui l’ [Ozil] avait battu” (303; ch. X) and reiterates that she is “forte comme un garçon” (303).

These male oriented but ambiguously gendered descriptions of Flore could be read as Zola’s depiction of a “butch” lesbian. Although Flore is obsessed with Jacques’ refusal of her, she is also sexually interested in Séverine. Zola’s representation of Flore is especially problematic in defining her sexuality. If she is so “masculine,” a woman trapped in a male body, then her desire for Lantier can be read as a homosexual desire. Flore is proud of her “warrior” attitude towards men and her ability to fight them off. After a few difficult experiences with males where she has refused them, she feels a type of vindication as she knows that: “Jamais encore un homme ne l’avait touchée, elle battait les mâles; et c’était sa force invincible, elle serait victorieuse” (301; ch. X).

After the train stops at Croix-de-Maufras because of the deep snow, Flore arrives “en grande fille vagabonde. Brave et forte comme un garçon . . . (227; ch. XII). Zola sets up the scene of Flore’s interest in Séverine commenting that “l’ordre naturel était perversi” (227; ch. VII). Zola also emphasizes the uniqueness of this event:

c'était un événement considérable, une extraordinaire aventure, ce train s'arrêtant ainsi à leur porte. Depuis cinq années qu'ils habitaient là, à chaque heure de jour et de nuit, par les beaux temps, par les orages, que de trains ils avaient vus passer . . . jamais un seul n'avait même ralenti sa marche . . . (227)

Misard, Cabuche, Ozil, and Flore go to the train to offer assistance. As the passengers disembark, Flore is privileged with the gaze as she “regardait de ses grands yeux fixes” (228). She focuses her gaze on Séverine and tells her: “Venez, madame, je vous porterai” (228). Next, she acts on her desire and “avant que celle-ci [Séverine]eût accepté, elle [Flore] l'avait saisie dans ses bras vigoureux de garçon, elle la soulevait ainsi qu'un petit enfant” (228). Here Zola's juxtaposition of the bodies of these two women is pronounced as the husky Flore carries the tiny Séverine. A new legendary story about Flore is in the making.

As Flore's attraction to Séverine increases, she wants to “reprendre Séverine dans ses bras” (229) but Séverine refuses, choosing instead to walk with the other passengers. As Flore welcomes these passengers into her home, she owns the gaze: “elle demeura debout, à regarder ce monde de ses larges yeux verdâtres . . .” (230). Flore's look grows exponentially with her desire for Séverine:

Mais ses yeux ne quittaient pas la jeune femme, comme si elle voulait lire en elle, se faire une certitude sur une question qu'elle se posait depuis quelque temps; et, sous son empressement, il y avait ce besoin de l'approcher, de la dévisager, de la toucher, afin de savoir. (231; ch. VII)

The words *toucher* and *savoir* when placed together could be read as Flore's desire to understand female love. When Jacques enters, Flore chooses to sit between him and Séverine, either to separate them or to be close to both of them.

Flore does not succeed in keeping the two apart. She sees them kissing: “Flore, qui avait ouvert la porte, était là, debout devant eux, les regardant” (236; ch. VII). This peek of an implied primal scene between Jacques and Séverine arouses Flore’s jealousy as she swears to avenge her mistreatment by the both of them. Because of her strength, she considers killing Séverine: “D’une étreinte de ses durs bras de lutteuse, elle pouvait l’étouffer, ainsi qu’un petit oiseau. Pourquoi donc n’osait-elle pas?” (236).

At this point in the novel, everything collapses. Séverine and Jacques conspire to kill Roubaud, Misard admits the poisoning of Tante Phasie and Flore wrestles with the ambiguity of her sexual preference for Jacques and Séverine.

Determined to have revenge on Jacques and Séverine, Flore resolves, as the active agent, to kill both of her objects of hate and desire. She pulls Cabuche’s wagon with its five horses onto the railroad tracks as Jacques’ train approaches. Eyes wide open, she watches the horrible train wreck she has planned. Flore stands “immobile, grandie, les paupières élargies et brûlantes, regardait” (310; ch. X). She watches: “Flore les yeux béants, virent cette chose effrayante: le train se dresser debout, sept wagons monter les uns sur les autres, puis retomber avec un abominable craquement, en une débâcle informe de débris” (312). After the wreck, Flore remains in control of the gaze as Zola places the narrative gaze with Flore. She watches the passengers descend from the train. When Flore sees Séverine, she knows that all is lost: “lorsqu’elle reconnut Séverine, ses yeux s’agrandirent démesurement . . . ” (313). As they both attempt to remove debris to find Jacques, Zola still insists on the difference in physical size between Flore and Séverine noting that “les doigts délicats de l’une n’arrivaient à rien, tandis que l’autre, avec sa forte poigne, abattait les obstacles” (314). Flore will be the first to find Jacques and “elle

fut la première à le saisir, à l'emporter entre ses bras" (317). Ownership of the crash is given to Flore as the result of her desire: "C'était fini, c'était bien; et il n'y avait en elle que le soulagement d'un besoin, sans une pitié pour le mal des autres . . ." (313).

The death of La Lison is painful for Jacques and Pecqueux as they openly lament their loss: "Et leur machine, leur pauvre machine, la bonne amie si aimée de leur ménage à trois, qui était la sur le dos, à rendre tout le souffle de sa poitrine, par ses poumons crevés!" (313). Zola's description about the death of La Lison is detailed, extensive, and sentimental.

After the train wreck, Flore sees that she has abused her agency. Therefore, as a result of her marginalization and guilt, Flore commits suicide. She returns to the dark, moist tunnel where she feels safe and waits for the train. She walks towards the eye of the train as a moth flies to light. When they find her body, she is now described as having a "beauté admirable, dans la pureté et la force" (325). Zola speculates that Flore's guilt about the train wreck causes her suicide: "Elle s'était sûrement fait tuer, folle, pour échapper à la responsabilité terrible qui pesait sur elle" (325). One might consider; however, that Flore's suicide results from her doubts about her sexuality.

After examining the two previous disappointing representations of woman, Zola kindly describes La Lison as the perfect "woman." This illustrates Bertrand-Jennings' statement that the best woman is "celle-qui-n'est-pas; elle est la non-femme, l'absence de l'Autre que le moi triomphant aura réussi à annihiler" (115). The relationship between Jacques and La Lison supersedes any relationship he has with a real woman:

il l'aimait d'amour, sa machine, depuis quatre ans qu'il la conduisait. Il en avait mené d'autres, des dociles et des rétives, des courageuses et des fainéants; il n'ignorait point que chacune avait son caractère, que

beaucoup ne valaient pas grand-chose, comme on dit des femmes de chair et d'os; de sorte que, s'il l'aimait celle-là, c'était en vérité qu'elle avait des qualités rares de brave femme. (181; ch. V)

Zola purposefully enlarges this description to apply to all women as he compares the train to “des femmes de chair et d'os.” He underscores three specific qualities that endear La Lison to Jacques: “Elle était douce, obéissante, facile au démarrage, d'une marche régulière et continue, grace à sa bonne vaporization” (181). In a woman, her qualities would be sweetness, passiveness, and consistency.

Zola admits that not every train reaches this level of perfection. He emphasizes, “Mais lui savait qu'il y avait autre chose, car d'autres machines, identiquement construites, montées avec le même soin, ne montraient aucune de ses qualités” (181). These “other,” inferior trains lack the “finesse” and “soul” of the well-constructed trains. This is where Séverine and Flore reside, outside the mainstream of the proper woman with “bonne vaporisation” (181).

However, even the best machines can develop problems and this occurs with La Lison. Jacques laments: “il n'avait qu'un reproche à lui adresser, un trop grand besoin de grassage” (181). Although Jacques does not like this overuse of oil, he tolerates it: “Il s'était résigné à lui tolérer cette passion gloutonne, de même qu'on ferme les yeux sur un vice, chez les personnes qui sont, d'autre part, pétries de qualités . . .” (181). Zola immediately returns this comparison to women, emphasizing the closeness between the two. He notices that “elle [La Lison] avait, à l'exemple des belles femmes, le besoin d'être graissée trop souvent” (181).

Pecqueux, Lantier's chauffeur, also shares Lantier's feelings for the train. This forms the homosocial triangle that Eve Sedgwick discusses in Between Men. La Lison is

the mediator between the two men and forges their relationship together. In this instance, Zola hints at the nature of the relationship as a sexual one: “Eux deux et la machine, ils faisaient un vrai ménage à trois, sans jamais une dispute” (182).

One of the most poignant descriptions in the novel is the “death” of La Lison.

Zola creates this passage with honor, respect, sorrow, and sincerity:

La géante éventrée s’apaisa encore, s’endormit peu à peu d’un sommeil très doux, finit par se taire. Elle était morte. Et le tas de fer, d’acier et de cuivre, qu’elle laissait là, ce colosse broyé, avec son troc fendu, ses membres épars, ses organes meurtris, mis au plein jour, prenait l’affreuse tristesse d’un cadavre humain, énorme, de tout un monde qui avait vécu et d’où la vie venait d’être arrachée, dans la douleur. (319; ch. X)

As Jacques and Pecqueux mourn the loss of La Lison, they know it signals the end of their friendship: “C’était donc fini, leur ménage à trois? Finis, les voyages, où, montés sur son dos, ils faisaient des cent lieues, sans échanger une parole . . .” (319). The deaths of Séverine and Flore lack the admiration and respect present in Zola’s tale of La Lison’s demise.

Zola’s affinity for “film-like” images surfaces in this novel through his use of consecutive, but separate, frames of descriptive narrative. The murder of Grandmorin is one such example. Other similar “cinematic” descriptions present in the novel also evoke the image of the revolving magic lantern. For example, while Jacques is visiting Tante Phasie, he sits, “les yeux levés vers la fenêtre, avait regardé défiler les petites vitres carées, où apparaissaient des profils de voyageurs” (87; ch. II). Jacques then suggests to Tante Phasie that she watch these passing images to fill her time since she complains that she lives in such a desolate area. Zola’s foreshadowing of theaters and film is almost uncanny as Jacques suggests that Tante Phasie sit in the comfort of her chair and watch

the passing images to fill her idle hours. However, at first Tante Phasie does not understand. She says: “on ne les [les voyageurs] connaît pas, on ne peut pas causer” (87). Still, Phasie thinks about what Jacques suggests: “Pourtant, cette idée du flot de foule que les trains montants et descendants charraient quotidiennement devant elle, au milieu du grand silence de sa solitude, la laissait pensive . . . (87). Zola’s cinematic narrative scenes move this novel easily into film but how will the director’s camera screen Zola’s women?

Jean Renoir, interested in filmic adaptations of novels, brings Zola’s story, La Bête Humaine to the screen in 1938 following Nana (1926), Madame Bovary (1933), and Partie de Campagne (1936). According to John Anzalone, Renoir’s adaptations:

punctuate a period of over thirteen years during which time Renoir, with the advent of sound technology, is constantly working through the problems inherent in establishing a filmic equivalent of the realism he so admired in the writers and also in the impressionist painters of the nineteenth century. (584)

Choosing authors such as Flaubert, Maupassant, and Zola, Renoir enjoys the challenge of bringing these authors’ novels to film. Normally choosing a film and then proceeding with the adaptation, the genesis of La Bête Humaine emanates from an exterior source.

According to Anzalone, the Hakim Brothers suggested this film to Renoir:

Superficially, at least, the production of *La Bête Humaine* differs from most of Renoir’s films of the late thirties because it resulted from a commission. Jean Gabin was supposed to start in a film by Jean Grémillon about the railway called *Train d’enfer*. The film was never shot; the producers turned instead to Renoir and convinced him to do an adaptation of the seventeenth novel in the Rougon-Macquart series. (585)

As Zola and Renoir both share a passion for trains, one wanting to write a novel using trains as the backdrop and the other wanting to film the impressive power of trains, this



combination of author and director works well. In his interview with Eugène Clisson, Zola states the goal of his novel: “L’étude des chemins de fer sera donc le principal attrait du livre, c’est celle qui m’a donné et me donnera encore le plus de travail” (qtd. in Speirs and Signori 42-43). Discussing the vastness of his work, Zola continues: “dans un roman qui traite des chemins de fer avec ses télégraphes, ses systèmes, en un mot la *vie* d’une ligne, on est forcé de ‘peindre au fresque’ pour être bien compris” (qtd. in Speirs and Signori 42). This “fresque” will lead Zola’s novel to the painterly camera of Jean Renoir in film. As opposed to Zola’s lofty intentions, Renoir gives a tongue and cheek explanation of his interest in the film stating: “I made La Bête Humaine because Gabin and I wanted to play with trains” (qtd. in Sesonke 351).

Situated in the film genre known as “poetic realism,” La Bête Humaine sits snugly between Marcel Carné’s exemplary poetic realist films, Quai des Brunes and Le Jour se lève. The term “poetic realism” is enigmatic and difficult to define as it originates from a variety of sources and sentiments. Dudley Andrew in Mists of Regret attempts to define the “essence” of poetic realism. Specifically speaking about films of the 1930s, Andrew summarizes:

An outgrowth of a strain of avant-garde silent cinema indebted first to domestic melodrama, and second to the nineteenth-century theatrical sources on which that strain was based, poetic realism displaces ‘the radically expressive editing styles’ of the 1920s onto ‘a distinctive camera style, heavily marked by the use of crane shots, and atmospheric mise-en-scene.’ I would add that reduction of plot makes poetic realism a specifically French strain of a genre whose Anglo-American version hinges on thrilling changes of fortune and sudden disclosure. (238-239)

This definition firmly positions La Bête Humaine in this illusive genre of poetic realism.

Alexandre Sesonke agrees and comments that Renoir’s film “shares with these Carné-

Prévert productions a dark atmosphere, an air of hopelessness, and the presence of Gabin in his classic role of doomed tragic hero—a *film noir* . . .” (351-352). Lastly, Célia Bertin maintains that “[l]es locomotives et la poésie, qui ne sont pas antithétiques, dominant le film que Jean Renoir a bâti, simple comme une tragédie . . . (194).

A successful film with popular actors, Jean Gabin portrays Jacques Lantier and Simone Simon recreates the role of Séverine Roubaud. Gabin, as the doomed Lantier, seems a logical choice for the male protagonist especially after his performance as Jean in Carné’s, Quai des Brumes. Renoir, concerned about the on-screen image of his female star, chooses not to employ the current leading lady of cinema, Gina Manès, but chooses instead Simone Simon. He defends his choice:

Séverine n’est pas une ‘vamp’. C’est une chatte, une vraie chatte, avec un poil bien soyeux qu’on a envie de caresser, un petit museau court, une grande bouche un peu suppliante et des yeux qui n’en pensent pas moins... (qtd. in Bertin 194)

Throughout the film, Renoir subtly refers to this feline description either through images or conversation. After first fetichizing the features of Simon’s face and describing her as a “chatte,” Renoir discusses her acting talent. However, the fact that Renoir prioritizes Simon’s talent into her physical attributes before her acting ability reveals that Renoir’s choice is based largely on Simon’s physical appearance and sexuality. This fragmentation initiates the sexual objectification of Renoir’s female star. Hayward discusses the use of female sexuality as commodity: “Eroticism in the female characterizations of the 1930’ and 1940s comes down to hints of sexual promise and intimacy” (172). When Renoir finally describes Simon’s talent, he alludes to these “hints of sexual promise”:

C'est un talent discret, et c'est pour cela qu'il est fort. Elle glisse sur les effets, elle est modeste, elle n'appuie jamais, et, à cause de cela, elle a su être ma chère Séverine, ce curieux petit personnage passif et pourtant destructeur, ce minuscule centre du monde que sont toutes les femmes qui traînent le malheur derrière leurs talons Louis XV. (qtd. in Bertin 194)

Poised to recreate Zola's heroine, Simone Simon brings her quiet seductiveness to the screen.

Although Simone Simon's presence in La Bête Humaine draws crowds to the theater, the film is hugely successful due to the combination of three men—Zola, Renoir, and Gabin. Inadvertently, this preserves Renoir's intent to "savoir la réunion des hommes." Michèle Lagny refers to these three men as a "constellation" that "stood out brightly against a rather somber sky" (84) during the demise of the Popular Front. She explains that the popularity of the film "reflected both the vigour of the French cinema of the 1930s and a society which contemporary nostalgia had transformed into a stable model" (85).

As frequently occurs in adaptations, Renoir deletes numerous characters and story lines from the novel to produce a film of acceptable length. Dudley Andrew sees Renoir's deletion of characters as a way to respect the "unity of action" that is the central aesthetic of Carné and Prévert's poetic realism (Mists of Regret 305). Therefore, in addition to Jacques and Séverine, the only other significant characters that Renoir preserves are Flore, Pecqueux, Roubaud, and La Lison.

Séverine, as the female protagonist, resides in the center of the film but, after the beginning credits, Renoir announces that this is a film about Jacques Lantier. Choosing a written, narrative introduction of Jacques, Renoir employs a quote that appears to come from Zola himself. With smoke in the dark background, the following citation appears:

“Ce film est l’histoire de Jacques Lantier, l’un des fils d’Auguste Lantier et de Gervaise de la famille Rougon-Macquart.” This quote provides literary credibility to the film and reveals that the film privileges Jacques’ story.

The film opens with a powerful sequence of male camaraderie and agency as Lantier and Pecqueux conduct the train to Le Havre. The forward motion of the train signals to the spectator that this is a film about men’s agency. The movement of the train mimics the forward movement of the narrative, that is, the narrative of Jacques Lantier. Renoir permits us, the spectators, to participate in the diegesis as passengers on the train as we travel the rails with Jacques and the other passengers.

The gaze is immediately placed with Jacques as he looks out the window of the train inspecting the tracks to insure a safe and direct route to Le Havre. Through this camera angle, Renoir emphasizes Jacques’ role as the active agent. From this point forward, the spectator is aligned with Jacques’ point of view. This connection is so strong that as the scene continues, the spectator feels that she/he is present in the train engine with Jacques. Unlike the other passengers; however, we are privileged with a gaze that the diegetic characters cannot share. Jacques, the engineer, carefully escorts us through the film until his death.

In addition to presenting Jacques’ story, this initial scene posits the film as a story of male bonding, a common leitmotif present in numerous films of the 1930s. Zola’s novel provides the perfect basis for this film because the only enduring and important relationship in the novel is the friendship between Lantier and Pecqueux. Any relationship in the novel that involves a woman lacks depth, honesty, and loyalty and ends in death. Referring to the importance of male friendship in film, Molly Haskell calls

these films, “buddy movies.” Laura Mulvey explains that in these buddy films “the active homosexual eroticism of the central male figures can carry the story without distraction” (Visual Pleasure 19).

As a working-class male of the proletariat, the character of Lantier, recreated by Jean Gabin, provides sexuality and excitement for the screen. Gabin’s attractiveness as the confidant, good-looking, and working-class male provides the film with a sexual and erotic protagonist. Speaking about working-class males and their sexuality, Susan Hayward states:

In its idealized representation in the 1930s, the male protagonist is the sign of sexual and physical potency. He has power over his immediate entourage—power to attract, seduce and dominate men and women of his own class. (169)

This is precisely how Jacques Lantier affects everyone he meets as he “seduces” every character. Pecqueux, Roubaud, Flore, Tante Phasie, Philomène, and, of course, Séverine all fall for his mysterious charm.

Reading this film as a “buddy movie,” the initial train sequence shows Jacques Lantier (Jean Gabin) and Pecqueux (Julien Carette) working in perfect harmony and syncopation as they maneuver La Lison through the countryside towards Le Havre. The two men work side-by-side anticipating every need of La Lison, communicating only through hand and eye signals. These gestures emphasize the level of understanding between the two men. The speed and power of the train reinforce the exactness, orderliness, and precision of Pecqueux and Lantier working in tandem. This homosocial relationship is the best representation of a “marriage” in the film, as well as the novel.

The train engine represents a closed, private space for these two men as it is sealed from contamination from outside distractions and most importantly, from women. In this intimate, secluded space, everything is in order. Since *La Lison* represents a woman, this engine with the firebox is located “inside” the woman creating a “womb-like” space, which provides more intimacy for the homosocial relationship between Lantier and Pecqueux. It is only when Lantier and Pecqueux leave the safe nest of the train engine that their worlds fall apart. This reference to homosociality continues as the two men disembark from the train together, wash in the lavatory together, cook together, and eat together. Pecqueux assumes a “mother” type role as he fixes Lantier’s dinner and offers him advice. This male relationship is the only relationship that lasts for the duration of the film. Lantier and Pecqueux begin and end the film together illuminating the strength of male friendship compared to the fragility of male-female relationships.

On Jacques’ voyage through the film, his life intersects with those of Flore and Séverine. Susan Hayward maintains that the “female character may be pivotal to many cinematic narratives” (171) but that she is lacking agency. This is true with Séverine and Flore who are at the center of the film but who do not occupy the epicenter (Hayward x). Jacques’ involvement with these two women serves to advance the narrative and to highlight his agency. Flore and Séverine are the causal and malevolent elements required to move the narrative forward. Renoir insists on this malfeasance of women as *La Lison* rolls into Le Havre.

In the first sequence in the Le Havre train station, two women set the narrative of La Bête Humaine in motion. First, *La Lison* consumes too much oil and burns out its

firebox. This requires Jacques to stay in Le Havre for a couple of days. Second, an anonymous female passenger disembarks from the train and registers a complaint about Monsieur Turlot to Roubaud. After Roubaud (Fernand Ledoux) listens to the woman's complaint, he reprimands Monsieur Turlot about his dog. Afterwards, he discovers that this man is very influential and may cause trouble for him. This forces Roubaud to send Séverine to Paris to use her influence with Grandmorin and to intercede in his behalf. La Lison and the anonymous woman set the plot in motion and the fateful journey begins.

Female representation in the 1930s continues to remain problematic as both Séverine and Flore resist simple explanation. Their characters are commodified, objectified, and eroticized for the screen. For example, both women are first displayed in the film in a poised, static position. Séverine sits framed in a window stroking a cat while Flore is placed in a tableau reminiscent of the artistry of Pierre-Auguste Renoir. By highlighting the edges of the film screen, Renoir draws attention to the cinematic apparatus that controls and manipulates these images. These two flat images of women code these characters as erotic spectacle and objects of male desire.

Zola's novel is oftentimes categorized as a story told in looks and stolen glances very similar to his story of Thérèse Raquin. Renoir must therefore translate these looks into film. Working through the screen of poetic realism, he approaches the gaze of Jacques and the two female protagonists, Flore and Séverine, very differently. Jacques' vision, introduced in the four-minute initial train sequence and located between the two rails of the train track, is posited as clear, accurate, and linear. Following Jacques' gaze on the rails, the spectator experiences the film. The effect of this linear, syntagmatic vision is to progress the narrative to its conclusion and to provide Jacques with agency.

Jacques' vision is well defined with little room for innuendo and misunderstanding. As the train engineer, he watches for dangerous situations on the tracks and reacts immediately to avoid disaster. These automatic responses are emblematic of Jacques' character and they carry him through the novel.

Although Renoir privileges Jacques' vision, he hints at its fragility. While driving the train, Jacques wears eye coverings to protect his eyes. Even as he exits the train, he still appears to be wearing glasses. Soot from the train engine covers his face but his goggles protect his eyes from the black substance. This leaves a residual "mask" on his face that mimics a pair of glasses. These "glasses" indicate that the accuracy of Jacques' vision will decrease, as he needs help to "see." As objects of Jacques' intense gaze, both Flore and Séverine warn him: "ne me regardez pas comme ça."

The female characters in the film do not have access to this linear vision attributed to Jacques. Instead, Renoir associates Flore and Séverine with reflective surfaces and images. Reflections in mirrors, water, and windows permeate the novel in association with women. Through these reflections and shiny surfaces, women's images are multiplied, which in turn, posits them as iconic objects of desire and negates their agency. Reflections are similar to spectacles within a film that stop the linear narrative and suspend time. Since the women are presented in this manner, they cannot advance the narrative. In fact, the "double" image of women produced by these reflective surfaces promulgates the use of women as commodities.

Besides the multiplication and refraction of these female images, mirrors and water block the field of vision for female characters. As Flore and Séverine look into mirrors, the shiny, impenetrable surface restricts the distance of their vision and turns



their gaze back onto themselves. Therefore, they are the objects of their own gaze. Flore, in her brief scene, is outside with access to a large field of vision but she focuses only on her reflection in the eyes of the boys and Jacques. In contrast, Séverine is rarely seen outside but her vision is analogous to Flore's. She resides in the interior, dark spaces of rooms, corridors, and huts with only mirrors to enlarge her spatial surroundings. She too looks into men's eyes to define herself. These reflections outline the characters of Flore and Séverine and challenge the perception of what is "real." This mimetic multiplicity of images exchanges the sign for the signifier and reinforces women as spectacle. Their reflections are metaphoric as they occupy the paradigmatic, static axis of the narrative. The establishing shots of both Flore and Séverine confirm this reading.

Séverine is the first female introduced in the film but Flore is the first woman who arouses Jacques' "*fêlure*." Although Flore occupies two hundred forty-eight pages in the novel, Renoir condenses her novelistic story into one brief cameo scene in the film. Flore, a problematic character in the novel because of her ambiguous sexual identity, her overly masculine traits, and her "savage-like" approach to both men and women challenges the classic cinematic conventions of story telling and female representation. To avoid the necessity to "tell" Flore's story, Renoir chooses only one essential scene from the novel to adapt to the screen, the purpose of which is to offer an explanation of Jacques' illness. Through the use of Flore as a conduit to understanding Jacques, this cinematic condensation exposes and exemplifies Jacques' dangerous "*fêlure*."

In contrast to Jacques' establishing shot in the train and the narrativity associated with him, this scene places Flore in a state of stasis in a hermetically sealed celluloid frame. Since Flore does not reappear in the film, her role as active agent is denied.

Renoir succeeds in removing the necessity to narrate Flore's unconventional and problematic story.

The purpose of this scene with Flore appears to be three-fold. First, Renoir uses this scene to explain Lantier's problematic relationship with women. This provides the spectator with background information that will lead to the murder of Séverine. Secondly, this scene upholds Flore's heterosexuality. Renoir accomplishes this by placing her in the frame as the object of the masculine gaze. The scene begins in a beautiful countryside landscape with Flore in a rowboat. At first glance, the scene has an artistic quality to it as Flore is presented as a one-dimensional icon of a woman in a tableau. The bridge behind Flore reinforces her role as object as the reflection of the bridge in the water resembles a giant pair of glasses. Flore is the heterosexual object of desire and spectacle for both Jacques and the two adolescent boys. As a sexual icon, Flore is dangling her feet in the water, her dress is pulled up to her knees, and her bodice is unbuttoned. Laura Mulvey maintains: "in their traditional exhibitionist role, women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact . . . (19). Through his well-planned *mise-en-scène*, Renoir manipulates Zola's "amazon" image of Flore into a pleasing and sexually interesting image.

Assuming the gaze is masculine, this renders Flore the object of masculine, heterosexual desire. The ogling looks by the boys and Jacques' sexual interest in Flore reinforce her compulsory heterosexuality. As Flore exits the boat, she is briefly privileged with the gaze as she approaches the boys who expect sexual favors from her. The ensuing action however, ruptures the natural order and this idyllic setting. Flore, resisting her objectification, tells the boys: "Moi, je ne veux pas qu'on me regarde. Je ne

veux pas qu'on me trouve belle." To assert her agency she pushes one of the boys in the water breaking the surface of the previous reflection. This is the only instance in the film where a female character disturbs the instrument of her reflection.

After she notices that Jacques is also watching this encounter with the boys, Flore repeats her dislike of his unwanted and unsolicited gaze. She tells him: "Maintenant, tu me regardes comme les autres." She continues to assert her agency and says: "Je n'aime pas qu'on me regarde comme ça." Still trying to preserve her agency and her revulsion for men, she runs away from Jacques but he follows her. As Jacques grabs her and throws her to the ground, he kisses her. In typical "Hollywoodesque" style, the music swells and Flore gives in to Jacques' desires.

Even after her attempted murder, Flore tells Jacques, "Moi aussi. Je t'aime Jacques." She even wants to marry him saying, "Je voudrais être ta femme." The transformation of Flore from a novelistic "savage amazon woman" to a cinematic "normal" heterosexual woman is now complete. To remove any doubt about Flore's sexuality, Renoir also suppresses what Anzalone refers to as "an extended love-rivalry between Séverine, Lantier's adulterous mistress, and Flore, the "amazon" child-woman of Lantier's past" (585). This removes the need to address Flore's inexplicable and unconventional sexual behavior.

Thirdly, this scene is important for Renoir as a cinematic vehicle to explain Jacques' malady, his hereditary "*fêlure*," and his murderous appetite. In addition, this scene highlights the superiority of men and maintains the authority of the patriarchy. Recalling the scene where Flore asserts her power and pushes one of the boys into the river we see that, for a second, Flore is victorious. However, the boys are impotent and

vulnerable because of their youth. Therefore, Jacques, the mature male representative of the patriarchy, appears immediately after Flore's victory to "put her in her place."

Flore's role in the scene is strictly incidental as she is simply an icon of female sexuality for Jacques to devour. Jacques describes his illness to Flore and the screen dissolves to black.

Flore, one of the most interesting of Zola's characters, is practically removed from the film. Her minimal role serves only as a vehicle for Renoir to explain Jacques' problematic sexuality. Flore's agency in the novel does not translate well into film so she is "dissolved" with the scene, never to reappear. Hayward describes what happens to assertive women in film: "women who 'try' to agence their desire (subjectivity, sexuality) will be punished for their 'transgression(s)'—for this is how women's attempts at agencing appear to the dominant, patriarchal ideology" (178). In the novel, Flore commits suicide, an odd and twisted form of agency, but in the film, she is "killed" off by Renoir as he negates the importance of her story and renders her the passive object.

While Renoir decreases narrative and screen time for Flore in the film, he substantially increases Séverine's camera time, positioning her in almost every frame of the film. The effect of Séverine's face seen repeatedly on the screen (in close-up) promotes her status as icon and commodity. Although Séverine is positioned as the "femme fatale" and the devious woman, she has no true access to agency, either benevolent or malevolent. This is due in part to her continual iconization throughout the film. Typically, the "femme fatale" is endowed with agency (albeit malevolent) that results in destructive behavior, but Renoir's casting of Simone Simon renders her character unbelievable and nullifies her agency.

Besides the plastic persona of Séverine paraded on the screen, her lack of agency occurs for three reasons. First, her baby-like, wispy voice renders her character frivolous and weak. Secondly, her tiny, petite, and diminutive body makes her appear as fragile as a bird, easily crushed and annihilated. Thirdly, Renoir's montage, camera angles, and mise-en-scène increase her vulnerability and decrease her agency. And, to reemphasize, Renoir devotes an excessive amount of screen time to Séverine, generally shooting her in close-up, which results in her objectification as a cinematic icon.

Renoir's establishing medium shot of Séverine (Simone Simon) situates her on the left side of her apartment window. At first glance, the window, and Séverine, look like a painting hanging on the wall. The static composition of the frame, and its lack of depth, are emblematic of Séverine's image in the film. She waits passively for her husband, Roubaud (Fernand Ledoux), content with her domesticity. This is an abrupt change from the novel where Roubaud waits patiently at the window, preparing her dinner.

Roubaud solidifies her role as object when she enters the apartment. He opens the door, and stops, his breath taken away at the beauty of Séverine. Renoir sutures the spectator into Roubaud's point of view as we follow his gaze to Séverine. Just as the image of the train announces Jacques' agency, Renoir's window announces Séverine's role in the film as a commodified object and passive agent. Renoir aligns his initial description of Simon as "une chatte, une vraie chatte, avec un poil bien soyeux qu'on a envie de caresser . . ." with this visual image. He recreates his description with a tableau of Séverine holding a white kitten on her lap. If the kitten represents Séverine, then she strokes the cat as if stroking herself, which evokes Hayward's "promise of sexuality."

Renoir associates Séverine with representational and reflective images. During Séverine's conversation with her husband about her childhood, Roubaud asks Séverine if she would speak to her godfather about an incident at work. Throughout the conversation, Renoir displays Séverine in a medium close-up. As Séverine explains that she does not fear Grandmorin, Renoir shoots Séverine in close-up and then pans the camera from Séverine to a picture on the mantle. A close-up of the picture shows Séverine as a young girl posing with Grandmorin. This camera movement between the referent (Séverine) and the sign (the picture) establishes the connection between the images.

This static, quiet introduction of Séverine as the passive agent differs greatly from the loud introduction in the train of Lantier, the active agent. Séverine is associated with plastic images and remains seated in the window while Jacques is associated with action and moves forward in the train speeding towards his destination. Renoir manipulates Séverine's image through close camera shots, enclosed spaces, pictorial images, paintings, photographs, mirrors, and reflections, all which enhance her role as a passive agent.

Acting on Roubaud's demand for her influence with Grandmorin, Séverine pays a visit to her godfather. The scene is shot in deep focus as Séverine enters. As she walks towards the camera she appears to grow larger and is objectified like a model on a runway. When she enters Grandmorin's office, she is again objectified as a sexual object. This time, Séverine walks away from the camera, which emphasizes her sensuous, swaggering walk. Her objectification reaches its apogee as she enters Grandmorin's office, again in deep focus. The first thing that Grandmorin notices is her

body. He tells her “Tu as maigri.” He continues to express his disapproval of her body: “Je n’aime pas beaucoup ça. C’est bien que c’est la mode mais je n’aime pas beaucoup ça.” He repeats his disapproval two times as the pair disappears from the frame as the door closes. Renoir, through understatement, hints that a sexual encounter is to occur behind these closed doors. As Zola does not imply the same encounter, Renoir’s Séverine appears more sexual, manipulative, and cunning.

While Roubaud waits patiently for Séverine to return from her visit with Grandmorin, he sets the table and prepares dinner. Upon her return, Roubaud fixes his gaze upon his “trophy” wife as she presents him with a gift. Séverine unknowingly hands Roubaud the instrument of her death. The referent is ruptured from its signified as a simple knife becomes an instrument of murder. Since Séverine, as woman, is represented by reflective surfaces, this knife exemplifies the inherent danger of these mirror-like reflections. As Roubaud examines the knife, the blade catches and reflects the light, which foreshadows the death of Séverine and therefore her image. Without free will and agency, woman cannot survive as demonstrated in Séverine’s death, literally killed by the knife and her own image.

When she enters Victoire’s apartment, Séverine complains of the heat. She explains that she is so hot because she rushed to return to Roubaud saying, “J’ai couru, j’ai couru.” However, one could also read her intense “chaleur” as residual heat from her encounter with Grandmorin. This scene is pivotal in the development of Séverine’s character as Roubaud jokingly suggests that she might be Grandmorin’s daughter. This idea frightens Séverine as she jumps up from her chair and runs to the mirror. She looks at herself closely saying “Sa fille?” “Sa fille? Est-ce que je peux être sa fille? Est-ce

que je lui ressemble?” This look in the mirror, which serves as the site of recognition, misrecognition, and identification (Mulvey 19) for Séverine, places her subjectivity in question.

Roubaud’s unsubstantiated accusation forces Séverine to look in the mirror and expose her sexual, but seemingly non-consensual, relationship with Grandmorin.

Roubaud’s accusation and Séverine’s reflection shatter Séverine’s quiet life of obedience and domesticity that she shares with her husband, Roubaud. The flatness of the image in the mirror defines Séverine and confines her gaze. She is denied access to vision that extends beyond the four walls of the apartment.

This scene, where the mirror figures prominently as part of the *mise-en-scène* and the diegesis, exemplifies Renoir’s use of reflective surfaces to display women’s images. Roubaud’s discussion of Grandmorin recalls the image of Séverine sitting in the window and the picture on the mantel of Séverine and her godfather. Both of these images allude to past events in Séverine’s life. Placing all of these images together, Séverine sees her cyclical past, present, and future. These representational images of Séverine, conflated with the woman, Séverine, blur the boundaries between “real” and iconoclastic. Even Séverine as the “real” woman seems “flat” like a cut-out. Her extreme slimness and diminutive size emphasize her role as a flat image. On screen, she appears one-dimensional, as her body requires no depth of field.

Renoir’s extensive use of mirrors and reflections sometimes forces his characters to look at themselves objectively. But, in general, Renoir associates mirrors and reflections with women stereotyping their familiarity with reflective, passive images. Whenever possible, Jacques and Roubaud avoid their reflections, as male characters



resist objectification. Since reflective images are historically associated with women, reflections also emasculate the male characters. Once emasculated, their reflections signal the end of their agency and therefore their death.

Roubaud escapes death by denying his reflection. For example, when Roubaud first enters the apartment, there are mirrors in the bathroom, but Roubaud never looks at himself. Again, when he stands in front of the mirror with Séverine, he does not look at his image. Therefore, he cannot see the monster that he is becoming and he is safe from death. Unlike Roubaud, Séverine's fatal look in the mirror foreshadows her eventual death. Renoir repeats this same sequence of events when Lantier looks in the mirror after Séverine's murder. Once his vision is blocked and he sees only his emasculated reflection, Jacques' story is concluded.

After Séverine's admission of sexual relations with Grandmorin, Roubaud is furious that he has "les restes d'un vieux." He beats Séverine until she cowers in the corner between the wall and the bed. Afterwards, he treats her as a puppet that he manipulates. The scene is full of imperatives as Roubaud forces her to be his accomplice. He tells her: "allez," "dépêche-toi," "assieds-toi," and "écris." He slaps her in the head and forces her to write the fateful letter that reunites the trio on the 6: 40 train to Le Havre. Roubaud continues to dominate Séverine as he pushes her into the train compartment. Only Roubaud and Séverine have access to the look during the murder of Grandmorin as the curtains are pulled. This privileged position of agency "opens Séverine's eyes" to the inherent power of the gaze. Séverine emerges from the train compartment a changed woman.

The murder introduces Séverine to agency as she takes control of the situation. She tells Roubaud that Lantier “nous a vus” and she goes to the corridor to speak with this stranger. The murder of Grandmorin creates the opportunity for Jacques and Séverine to meet. Knowing that Lantier is a possible witness, Séverine interrogates Jacques about his intentions. She immediately understands the power and the consequences of his gaze. However, Séverine’s proximity to Lantier seems to affect the clarity of his vision. Golsan remarks that in Lantier’s “first proximity to her [Séverine] he is partially blinded by a cinder in his eye” (112). Séverine’s unexplainable spell on Jacques causes his future “blindness.” After his meeting with Séverine, Jacques’ vision is never as clear as it was in the initial scene.

The next scene, the interrogation of the passengers, acknowledges the primacy of the look but it is a scene of denial of the gaze. Different passengers testify: “Je n’ai rien vu, Monsieur le Commissaire,” “Vous avez dormi pendant tout le trajet? Oui, bien sûr,” and Lantier certifies: “J’avais une escarbille dans l’oeil . . . j’avais du mal pour faire attention.” While all these men are denying their vision, Séverine accepts the gaze and the power that it provides her. Her first attempt at agency is to look at Jacques and plead for his silence. Séverine is successful as Jacques complies with her request.

Séverine’s agency is limited and compromised by Renoir’s sequencing of scenes. Immediately after Séverine’s first real attempt to access the gaze, her agency is undercut as Pecqueux questions Jacques about Roubaud’s wife, as if speaking about a material possession. He asks: “Tu la connais, toi, la femme de Roubaud?” He asks again: “Tu l’as vue, la femme de Roubaud?” He continues: “C’est une belle femme. Elle a du chic et de l’éducation. . . . C’est une belle femme.” Pecqueux only sees her as a “good

looker” which substantiates her continued objectification even after her attempt at agency.

The next scene returns to Séverine, sitting pensively in the center of the frame while Roubaud hides the money and the watch. She contemplates her next act as Roubaud finally asks her, “A quoi penses-tu?” She responds, “A Lantier.” Almost in reverie she proceeds, “Un garçon comme ça doit avoir le pouvoir de persuader et d’influencer.” Séverine is poised to act and constructs a plan. Roubaud approves and gives Séverine carte blanche to win Jacques’ loyalty. The next scene puts Jacques and Séverine together in the park.

In the park, the conversation immediately returns once again to the gaze. Lantier is privileged with the gaze since he is the sole witness to the presence of the Roubauds in the corridor. Séverine questions him asking: “Vous n’avez vu passer personne dans le couloir?” Jacques answers: “Non, j’ai très bien vu vous et votre mari.” They discuss the investigation, as Séverine wants to know why Jacques did not divulge what he saw. He tells her: “Vous m’avez demandé.” Séverine appears puzzled and Jacques explains her non-verbal question. He says that she asks, “pas avec des mots mais avec [ses] yeux.”

The intense sequencing of shot-reverse-shot angles during the conversation indicates the implied equality of the gaze, however, it is Jacques who maintains the gaze. Séverine remains the object as the camera moves closer to her face, fragmenting her body and objectifying her character. Jacques’ gaze at Séverine consumes the majority of camera time in this scene. His authority is underscored as he tells Séverine: “Il n’y a que moi que vous avez vu passer dans le couloir.” He agrees to keep his silence, as his gaze grows stronger. Séverine tells him: “Ne me regardez plus comme ça. Vous allez vous

user vos yeux.” The women keep trying to resist their objectification as both Flore and Séverine utter the same phrase to Jacques, “Ne me regardez pas comme ça.”

After the second interrogation by the judge, Séverine, Lantier, and Roubaud return to their apartment. Renoir places Séverine in between the two men as the men shake hands in front of her. Séverine mediates this homosocial triangle as the bond that ties Roubaud and Lantier together. This ominous triangle foreshadows the impending affair of Lantier and Séverine. Roubaud sets the affair in motion when he insists that Lantier visit often and that he call Séverine by her first name.

Lantier leaves Roubaud’s apartment but returns to profess his love for Séverine when he sees Roubaud leave. Séverine denies his request to be lovers but does agree to be close friends. After this encounter with Séverine, Lantier returns to the safety and security of La Lison. The large crane shot illustrates the intimacy of the engine compartment. As Lantier becomes involved with Séverine, these scenes in the train engine between Jacques and Pecqueux become fewer in number and shorter in length signaling a deconstruction of the hardy male relationship.

The next scene finds Séverine and Lantier in the depot of the train station. After “introducing” Séverine to La Lison, Jacques permits Séverine to enter his safe haven, the train engine. Unknowingly, Séverine breaks the homosocial intimacy of this private space. A long conversation between the two “friends” takes place about seeing and observation. Jacques tells her that from the train: “On voit tout, on connaît tout.” Séverine’s response indicates the opposite: “C’est drôle. Quand nous faisons un voyage et regardons par les portières, on ne voit rien.” Jacques explains his heightened ability to see clearly as he describes the seasons that change, the leaves that fall, and even the ears

of the rabbits hiding behind the blades of grass. Séverine is impressed but still does not understand. Jacques carefully explains the reason that she does not see. He says “c’est parce que tu ne sais pas quoi regarder.” The dénouement of the film begins as Séverine corrupts Jacques’ safe, private, and homosocial world and learns how to “look” correctly.

From this point forward, Jacques’ visual acumen diminishes rapidly while inversely Séverine’s vision strengthens. Back in the depot dining room, Jacques’ vision is blocked as he looks out the window to the dark rail yard in the pouring rain. Lantier waits patiently and passively for his clandestine meeting with Séverine while Pecqueux, like a mother hen, takes him aside to talk. He asks him about his impending date and gives his opinion of Séverine. Pecqueux repeats stereotypical platitudes about women. He tells Lantier: “Moi, je crois que les femmes là sont comme les chattes. Elle n’aiment pas mouiller ses pieds.”

Renoir incorporates this statement by Pecqueux into the film to reinforce the theme of woman as feral and feline. In addition, Pecqueux talks about “women” like Séverine. He admits: “D’abord, les femmes qui n’ont pas d’enfants, moi, je me méfie.” Pecqueux talks to Lantier again about Séverine. He conveys his mistrust of “women like her” to Jacques as he tells Jacques that women without children are dangerous. Renoir has the ability to place or remove any lines in the film that he chooses. His decision to include Pecqueux’s condemnation of not only Séverine, but also all women like her, creates a small fissure for a misogynistic reading of Renoir’s intentions.

Lantier goes to meet Séverine in the small hut in the pouring rain. The interesting part of this scene is that amidst all this rain and water there are no reflections. This scene recreates a Hollywood melodrama as the music swells and the rain barrel overflows.

When the lovemaking ceases, the rain barrel returns to its normal water level. When Jacques and Séverine leave the cabin there is a long sequence focusing on their feet in the mud. At this point, the film reaches its Hollywoodesque apogee as the couple presses their cheeks together and looks up longingly to the sky. A light from an exterior source shines on the couple but no reflections are created in this scene of adultery, as there is no remorse for their actions.

Lantier now replaces Roubaud as Séverine's lover. Renoir underscores this exchange with a scene that mimics an earlier scene between Séverine and Roubaud. While Séverine is out doing errands, Lantier waits in Victoire's apartment for her to return. Like Roubaud before him, he stands on the balcony looking down on the rail yard for a glimpse of Séverine. In this scene however, the two large birdcages present with Roubaud are absent with Lantier. As Jacques returns to the interior of the apartment, Séverine arrives. She expects dinner on the table, but Jacques is not Roubaud and brings her wine instead. The replacement of Roubaud is complete as they make love in the same bed that Séverine and Roubaud usually occupy.

Séverine decides that she and Jacques cannot continue their affair until Roubaud can no longer harm them. Séverine tests her agency and plans the murder of Roubaud as she assumes the control of the gaze. Lantier's access to the gaze continues to diminish and he can no longer see clearly. As Lantier stops to pick up a pipe with which to kill Roubaud he sees his reflection in a large puddle. Shocked, violated, and feminized, he stops for a minute, reflects, and then picks up the pipe. However, when he returns to Séverine, it is as if all of his senses are dulled. He cannot hear or see accurately. In

contrast to Jacques' diminished capacity for sight and hearing, Séverine's senses are acutely intense and accurate.

As Roubaud approaches, Jacques stands behind Séverine squinting as if he cannot see. Séverine becomes Jacques' ears and eyes and recounts to him what she sees and hears. She tells him: "Dans le wagon quelqu'un marche." Jacques does not hear the noise but is convinced it is just rats. Séverine sees Roubaud and tells Jacques: "Le voilà. Il vient droit sur nous." Jacques, still unable to see, squints harder as Séverine says: "Je vois son ombre qui passe sur le mur blanc." Séverine makes a factual statement but Jacques questions her still doubting his vision and therefore his agency. He asks, "Il est seul?" She responds, "Oui, seul." In this scene where Jacques does not have access to the gaze, he is unable to accomplish the murder of Roubaud. His reflection on the shiny surface of the puddle emasculates him and consumes his agency. He goes up behind Roubaud, raises the pipe, but is unable to complete his task. Séverine is disappointed and shocked at his impotency and leaves him. Ashamed and humiliated, Lantier again retreats to the warmth and security of his beloved La Lison.

At the railwayman's ball, a scene that Renoir adds to the film, Séverine is trapped between objectification and subjectivity. She comes to the ball to "look" for a new lover while at the same time she is the object of the gaze and the main focal point of the ball. Mirrors and reflections surround her. Séverine is as much the center of attraction as the huge, glittery cardboard cut-out of the train and the band. Renoir places Séverine in the center of the frame to show her off as pure spectacle. Renoir sequences this scene with an alternation of frames talking *about* Séverine and then looking *at* Séverine.

In the ballroom, surrounded by mirrors, Pecqueux initiates the conversation with Jacques. Jacques listens but his eyes never leave Séverine, as she remains the sexual object of the gaze. Reflections of couples dancing are seen in the mirror located behind Jacques. This includes Séverine and Dauvergne. Pecqueux, with his back also to the mirror, talks about relationships with women and specifically Séverine. Afterwards, he and Lantier look at the object of their conversation—Séverine. This sequence is repeated two more times. Renoir introduces a female on female gaze as Philomène discusses Séverine's beauty and haughtiness. She talks to Pecqueux about Séverine's dress and the way she looks. Philomène tells Pecqueux: "Regarde Madame Roubaud, comme elle est habillée. Une vraie princesse. C'est très bien pour une femme d'un sous-chef." Renoir uses clothes to define the woman, Séverine. Conversations about Séverine are interspersed with visual images of her on the dance floor.

Reflections of Séverine continue to fill the walls of mirrors. The objectification of Séverine continues as she and Jacques go out on the terrace to talk. At the top of the stained glass doors there are two large circles of glass that mimic a large pair of eyeglasses. This is reminiscent of the bridge's reflection in the river before Flore's attempted murder by Jacques. During this scene, Séverine appears to be acting on her desires but Renoir's shot-reverse-shot sequences are again deceiving. Séverine does most of the talking but for the majority of the camera time, Séverine is shown in close-up, which neutralizes her agency. Séverine becomes a desiring icon, in other words, an impotent woman. Refusing to be objectified, Séverine leaves the ball and returns home.

Jacques follows Séverine to her apartment and finds her sitting at her dressing table, brushing her hair and looking in a mirror. As Jacques talks, Séverine continues to



look in the mirror. These elements—the mirror, Séverine’s double image, and her objectification, signal the immediacy of her murder. The purpose of Jacques’ visit is to try and convince Séverine of his love and his ability to kill Roubaud, but Séverine tells him that it is too late. Looking for a virile man, Séverine cannot accept Jacques’ impotence. She accesses her agency and she tells him that she no longer wants to see him. Jacques’ humiliation turns to anger and instead of murdering Roubaud, he murders Séverine.

Séverine’s murder is as much a part of the spectacle of the railwayman’s ball as the band and the dancers. Renoir intersperses Séverine’s murder between scenes of the ball, which promotes her as spectacle. The song, “Le petit coeur de Ninon,” is an intradiegetic voice-over for the murder. The song objectifies the story of the life of the fragile butterfly, Ninon with Séverine now the metaphoric replacement for Ninon. The murder, like that of Grandmorin, again occurs off screen in deep focus. The spectators’ view is blocked, while Jacques’ gaze is privileged. The sounds of the murder are replaced with the song from the ball. The reflection of the knife, the convenient instrument of choice for the murder, flashes in the light and grabs the spectators’ attention. One can only ascertain that Séverine sees her last reflection in the knife immediately before her murder. Literally, she is killed by this shiny, reflective surface that objectifies her image.

After the murder, Renoir presents an overhead shot of Séverine lying dead on the bed with her eyes open. The camera lingers on her hand as the tenor sings “si petite, si gentille, et si fragile.” As the camera moves to her other hand, the song continues, “c’est un léger papillon” as if describing Séverine. The last close-up displays Séverine’s

cinematically severed head with her eyes open as the song continues. With her death, Renoir removes the threat of female agency, as the cinematic Medusa is dead.

After the murder, Lantier leaves the house, but before doing so, he catches a glimpse of an image in the mirror, which forces him to look. Not recognizing the image at first, he does a double take and sees the monster that he has become. The mirror consumes Jacques' masculinity. Jacques leaves the room and shuts the door haunted by his feminized, impotent, and emasculated image.

As if holding a round trip ticket, the spectator returns, in the last scene of the film, to his/her point of departure. On this trip, however, the men are no longer wearing their glasses, as the story is finished and Jacques no longer has access to the gaze. Renoir's insistence on the exterior camera facing Jacques underscores his loss of agency. This objectification of Jacques and his lack of protective glasses signal Jacques' failure. In a twisted act of agency, Jacques jumps from the train and commits suicide. When Pecqueux finds Jacques' body, he closes Jacques' eyes and the film ends.

Séverine's first appearance in the film, framed in the window as the idealized and fetishized image of male desire, codes her as a passive character. As the hyperbole of men's projected fantasies and "eye candy" for the screen, Séverine is a reified object to be consumed and possessed. The window frame, the picture frame, the mirror, and the knife all function to freeze her image and negate her access to agency. Without agency, women are simply mirrors reflecting the images of male desire.

Zola, when speaking about "l'écran," says that he "se contente de mentir juste assez pour me faire sentir un homme dans une image de la création" (Correspondance I 380). Renoir appropriates this attitude in his creation of Séverine as her image reflects

Renoir's reading of Zola's female protagonist. The change in Séverine from active agent in the novel to passive agent in the film demonstrates the manipulative capabilities of cinematic machinery. The repeated reflections of Séverine's image in the film are eventually drained of meaning and agency as Jacques and the spectators consume her as spectacle. Séverine, lying dead on the bed as the object of Renoir's tragic tableau, is condemned to repeated objectification on celluloid.

Throughout the film, Séverine does not close her eyes, insisting on the promise of agency for women. However, women's ability to express desire, to access the gaze, and to gain agency must await another story, another film, another time, and another director. But, if we dare read optimistically against the grain, Séverine's open eyes on her deathbed indicate that the struggle and the story for women are not concluded. Therefore, perhaps the last image of Séverine in the film reflects women's continued desire for subjectivity and agency.

## CHAPTER 4

### THE PLEASURE OF LOOKING—THE GENTLEMEN’S PARADISE

Au Bonheur des Dames (1883) debuts the second half of the Rougon-Macquart series as Zola announces a change in his ideology and philosophy. Following such infamous and sexually malevolent heroines such as Thérèse Raquin and Nana, Zola unveils a new heroine from his expansive collection of female prototypes. He states in his preface that he desires to “faire le poème de l’activité moderne.” Through Denise Baudu, Zola incorporates his new vision:

Ensuite, comme conséquence, montrer la joie de l’action et le plaisir de l’existence; il y a certainement des gens heureux de vivre dont les jouissances ne ratent pas et qui se gorgent de bonheur et de succès: ce sont ces gens-là que je veux peindre, pour avoir l’autre face de la vérité, et pour être ainsi complet; car Pot-Bouille et les autres suffisent pour montrer les médiocrités et les avortements de l’existence. (Les Rougon-Macquart III 1680)

The reading public was appreciative of Zola’s new perspective and intrigued by his innovative subject matter. The reception of the novel was generally favorable and critics applauded Zola’s attempt to abandon his novelistic representations of prostitution, filth, and debauchery. Kelly Bénoudis Basilio summarizes the prevalent public sentiment:

Cependant la presse de l’époque qui, dans son ensemble, a accueilli favorablement le roman, l’a surtout apprécié pour le contraste qu’il formait avec l’ “atroce *Pot-Bouille*”: Zola s’y montrait de nouveau, comme dans *Une page d’amour*, plus rassurant pour l’ordre établi et la morale bien-pensante, avec son “dénouement simple, vrai, attendrissant”,

la vertu d'une fille méritant du peuple y étant offerte en exemple par cette récompense finale qui lui est accordée. (115)

Of course, some critics distrusted Zola's intentions and felt that the novel was too artificial and unrealistic. In a letter addressed to Monsieur Zola, dated March 4, 1883, Louis Desprez writes: "On vous a reproché, non sans raison parfois, de donner trop de relief aux laideurs; je trouve aujourd'hui votre Denise trop idéale, trop lumineuse, je voudrais qu'elle eût, comme toute créature humaine, quelque ombres" (qtd. in Les Rougon-Macquart III 1601).

The artificiality of the protagonist and her story, conflated with the economic realism of nineteenth-century Paris, produce a narrative based in fantasy. Desprez continues his thought: "Elle est, il me semble, plutôt née de la logique que de l'observation; c'est une idée incarnée, bien plus qu'un type pris dans la rue; et par suite, elle paraît vivre plutôt qu'elle ne vit" (qtd. in Les Rougon-Macquart III 1601). Denise, the perfectly constructed heroine and epicenter of the story, serves as Zola's conduit to the fantastic.

To illustrate his new principles and his "siècle de conquête," Zola builds a temple of commerce to seduce, use, and manipulate women. He then disguises his story of female usury as a fairy tale. Desprez concludes that Zola no longer adheres to scientific observation and naturalism: "Quant à votre idée: la femme se vengea de l'exploitation organisée à ses dépens et triomphant à la fin par la toute-puissance du sexe, je vous avoue que je la trouve un peu artificielle. La vie n'a pas souvent de ses logiques" (1601).

Zola replaces his microscopic examination of humanity with a narrative that mimics the conventional schema of a fairy tale. Unlike Germinal, where Etienne's

struggle for the mineworkers at Le Voreux ends in defeat and humiliation for the protagonist, Denise's struggle for the store personnel at Au Bonheur des Dames ends in triumph and adulation. Her rite of passage to womanhood, rewards, and implied agency exists and occurs in a metaphysical world. The store casts a spell on Denise and functions as an element of the fantastic. Zola superimposes a fantasy narrative over the harshness of commercialism and capitalism to humanize the narrative. As a result, the reader must subscribe to the "suspension of disbelief" in order to participate in the story as the diegesis does not conform to logic.

Using Vladimir Propp's classifications (cited in *italics*), the morphology of Zola's fairy tale is easily deconstructed. A young girl (*victim hero*), orphaned (*intensified form of absention by the parents*), whose dead father is bankrupt (*rationalized forms of lack: money*), leaves her provincial home in search of work. After a long journey, she arrives in a new town and is mesmerized by the magical qualities of the department store (*magical agent suddenly appear of its own accord*). She meets the man who owns the magical agent and he assesses her worth (*donor tests the hero*). The girl passes the tests but questions the man's authority and methods (*engages in competition*) and as a result, endures additional arduous tasks (*tests of endurance*). Finally, the man and girl fall in love and get married (*the hero is married and ascends the throne*). Overtly, this new format signals an abrupt change in Zola's representation of the female protagonist.

Covertly, under the veneer of Zola's newfound optimism, Denise acts as a subject under hypnosis. Unlike Gervaise who rejects assistance from the established order and loses her shop, or Thérèse Raquin, who abhors her small, claustrophobic shop, but cannot leave it, Denise collaborates with the patriarchal hierarchy and succeeds. Denise's

agency is circumvented and therefore subverted as it results from a magical spell cast by the patriarchy, which dictates her actions and forces her to succumb to the exigencies of the established patriarchal order.

In the novel, four parallel, but related narratives intersect and intertwine to produce the story of Denise's rise to the commercial throne. This produces four different points-of-view. They are: Denise's story, that of a single female; the story of the masses of females, both workers and clients; the story of Uncle Baudu and the old patriarchal order; and the story of Octave Mouret and the new patriarchal order. Within these four narratives lie two secondary and oppositional narratives divided by gender. Within the feminine narratives, Denise struggles against the established community of women at *Au Bonheur des Dames* and the wealth and sexuality of Mme Desforges. Within the masculine narratives, Octave stands in opposition to the established antiquated patriarchy represented by Monsieur Baudu. These paradoxical narratives problematize the study of Zola's representation of women as his authorial perspective and philosophical intent in the novel vacillate.

Various scholars attempt to define Zola's personal perspective. Both Louis Desprez and Colette Becker propose that Octave Mouret is Zola's mouthpiece. Colette Becker states in her preface to *Au Bonheur des Dames*: "Zola préfère les garçons pratiques et actifs, qui comprennent leur époque, luttent pour la vie, se passionnent. C'est lui qui parle par la bouche de Mouret" (17-18). Zola appears to change his narrative format but his perception of women remains stable as fairy tales perpetuate the misogynistic representation of women. Becker selects the following quote from Mouret to demonstrate Zola's unchanged philosophy: "l'action contient en elle sa récompense.

Agir, créer, se battre contre les faits, les vaincre ou être vaincu par eux, toute la joie et toute la santé humaines sont là!... Crever pour crever, je préfère crever de passion que de crever d'ennui" (340; ch. XI).

The question again begs to be posed. For whom is the reward? *Agir, créer*, and *se battre*, are actions generally associated with males. Denise is manipulated to act, create, and defend herself, as she conforms to the rules of the game to attain her reward. If her actions are a result of a spell cast upon her, then she is not acting of her own aegis but as a woman manipulated by the caster of the spell, in this case Octave Mouret/Emile Zola.

Conversely, Colette Becker also suggests that Denise is Zola's mouthpiece: "Elle est, enfin, le porte-parole de Zola. A la fois indignée et irrésistiblement attirée par la 'mécanique à écraser le monde' inventée par Mouret, elle éprouve les mêmes sentiments mêlés que le romancier" (*Les Rougon-Macquart* III 686). She reinforces this idea in her preface to the novel: "Son attitude [Zola] est celle de Denise"(26). She continues: "Comme Mme Caroline et comme le romancier, elle [Denise] est séduite par cette 'passion qui fait de la vie quand même dans le charnier humain'" (27). And lastly she concludes: "Elle [Denise] représente un côté de la sensibilité de Zola" (27).

Zola's diegesis, as well as his philosophy, exist on two planes, the real, and the ideal. Rachel Bowlby comments on Zola's intent:

Zola wrote down in his preliminary sketch that the book would be "le poème de la vie moderne." There is as much ambiguity in that phrase as there is in the novel he eventually wrote about the transformation of commerce. (82)

Octave Mouret best verbalizes Zola's sentiments when he asks: "Est-ce Paris n'est pas aux femmes, et les femmes ne sont-elles pas à nous?" (332; ch. XI). To reconcile his



conflicting ideologies, Zola creates a fairy tale love story that unites the two protagonists and his paradoxical points-of-view. Colette Becker attempts to explain Zola's dichotomy:

Denise, en particulier, réconcilie le présent et le passé, le Coeur et la raison, les affaires et les sentiments. En traversant la rue pour passer du Vieil Elbeuf au Bonheur des Dames, elle apporte avec elle l'amour et la bonté qui vont justifier l'efficacité du Grand Magasin. (Profil 77)

Adapting a comment from Susan Hayward on the difficulty of defining Marcel Pagnol's attitude towards women in his films, we see that this statement is equally true of Zola's novels: "Pagnol is troubling for feminist critics of today because although on the one hand, these strong representations of women are made, on the other, all the traditional male discourses are equally in place" (168-69). Au Bonheur des Dames exemplifies Hayward's summation. Denise Baudu is the female heroine of the diegesis who wins the heart of Octave Mouret and in turn is awarded the title of Mme Octave Mouret through no direct actions of her own. Perhaps the best explanation is found in Zola's own words in a letter to Frank Turner dated October 10, 1882:

Cet Octave Mouret a basé sa grande affaire sur l'exploitation de la femme: il spéculé sur sa coquetterie, il flatte ses clientes, les installe chez lui comme des reines, pour mieux vider leur bourse. Et le voilà amoureux d'une petite fille qui va venger toutes les femmes. (Les Rougon-Macquart III 1600)

As the solitary protagonist, Denise appears falsely imbued with agency and desire. However, all women in Au Bonheur des Dames, including Denise, are oppressed and condemned to conform to the patriarchal code. The department store serves as a microcosm of nineteenth-century Paris and imposes stringent rules on its female employees. Mouret and his male counterparts closely monitor the women's working

conditions, living quarters, meals, leisure time, and liaisons. Mouret permits certain heterosexual liaisons as they function to fulfill male sexual desire and to supplement the workers income.

However, Zola sequesters the women from each other. Unlike the brothel in Nana, there will be no acknowledged lesbianism in the mansards of Au Bonheur des Dames. Female fraternization is expressly prohibited. The management establishes strict rules about women being in each other's rooms: "Il était défendu aux vendeuses de se recevoir dans leurs chambres" (158; ch. V). Mme Cabin who maintains the propriety of the girls' dormitory strictly enforces these rules. As Pauline enters Denise's room one night just before eleven o'clock, Denise quickly turns her key so that Pauline "ne fût pas surprise par Mme Cabin, qui veillait à la stricte observation du règlement" (158). And again Zola remarks: "il était défendu de remonter dans les chambres, et surtout de s'y enfermer à deux, Denise l'[Pauline] emmena au bout du couloir, où se trouvait le salon de réunion . . ." (293; ch. X).

Leery of Denise's relationship with Pauline, but sexually attracted to Denise, Inspector Jouve interrogates Denise about her relationship with Pauline before he attempts to kiss her: "Je vous ai encore aperçue, ce matin, causant là-haut, derrière les tapis. . . . Elle vous aime donc bien, votre amie Pauline? . . . Hein? qu'avez-vous, toutes les deux, pour vous aimer comme ça?" (200; ch. VI). Zola's fear of the subversive nature of lesbianism is evident as he frequently mentions the closeness of Denise and Pauline. Heterosexual promiscuity is permitted, but lesbianism is not tolerated. To acknowledge lesbianism requires an acknowledgement of female sexuality and desire, to forbid lesbianism indicates a fear of female agency.

To guide the reader through the novel, Zola singles out one woman. Her given name, Denise, uttered as the first word of the novel, implies a certain familiarity with her. But, for those readers familiar with Zola's story of the Rougon-Macquart, Denise Baudu is an unknown as she has not appeared in any of the previous novels. Denise is not a femme fatale, seductress, adulteress or murderer but is introduced as a gentle, naïve, virginal, honest, and plain young woman. In fact, she represents all that is good in women. Likened to Pygmalion and Cinderella, Zola's fantastic rags to riches story revolves around Denise. Near the end of the novel, Zola summarizes Denise's attributes: "Elle apportait tout ce qu'on trouve de bon chez la femme, le courage, la gaieté, la simplicité; et, de sa douceur, montait un charme, d'une subtilité pénétrante de parfum (349; ch. XII). Anna Krawkowski follows Zola's optimism and concludes: "Denise Baudu inaugure la série des femmes idéales. Nous avons là un type assez réel dont le bon sens, . . . est rendu plus saillant par le romancier" (96).

Zola portrays Denise as the ideal woman by severing her hereditary ties. An orphan whose parents die within one year of each other, Denise arrives in Paris from Valognes, near Cherbourg in Normandy, with two younger brothers. Orphans are not a new concept in Zola's tautology, but Denise is an orphan from a family that is not related to the Rougon-Macquart. This places her in a different position of mobility and possibility. Bertrand-Jennings remarks:

Il est particulièrement significatif que la quasi-totalité des personnages féminins idéaux de Zola sont de pauvres orphelines. Certes, ce subterfuge permet au romancier de soustraire le sujet observé à son hérité et à son milieu naturel pour mieux mener à bien l'expérimentation scientifique et littéraire. (L'Eros et la Femme 124)

Zola scripts this heroine in his own likeness to fulfill his desire to find the “perfect” woman. The issue of female representation continues to be problematic. Does Zola genuinely have a change of heart vis-à-vis woman or is Au Bonheur des Dames a carefully masked story of sadism and misogyny?

Zola’s explanation of his intentions is ambiguous: “Là apparaît le côté poème du livre: une vaste entreprise sur la femme; il faut que la femme soit reine dans le magasin, qu’elle s’y rende comme dans un temple élevé à sa gloire, pour sa jouissance et pour son triomphe.” The question that still remains is, who is building and orchestrating this “temple” and who is making all the laws to govern it?

Denise’s name does not appear in the title of the book as Zola’s title encompasses a larger category/group of women. Denise is the “other,” the anomaly among all the other women and salesclerks, who illustrates the moral of the story—live by the rules of chastity, honesty, diligence and perseverance and a woman can ascend to the kingdom, the male kingdom. She cannot own or govern the kingdom alone but she can share it. Men will give you access if you live according to the established rules of the commercial patriarchy. Looked at another way, does Zola permit Denise to access her desire or does he only let her succumb to the rules of the game? I propose that Zola does not stray far from his established ideology of confining women. Here, Denise abides by the rules, where previously Nana, Gervaise, and Thérèse Raquin did not. Their punishment was death; Denise’s reward is money, power, and ascendancy to the throne.

Denise, however, does not have access to agency, even though she receives the keys to the kingdom. As soon as Zola posits Denise’s name as the first word of the novel, he reifies her as a commodity par excellence. Denise’s story functions as a

commodity for Zola and his editors as readers flock to buy the novel. Denise's virginity functions as a commodity for Mouret as he attempts to buy and win her affection. And lastly, Denise's story on film will function as a commodity for Continental Films. Rachel Bowlby makes this point in Just Looking. She explains the importance of marketing:

The process of commodification, whereby more and more goods, of more and more types, were offered for sale, marks the ascendancy of exchange value over use value, in Marx's terms. From now on, it is not so much the object in itself-what function it serves-which matters, as its novelty or attractiveness, how it stands out from other objects for sale. (2)

From the beginning of the novel, Zola separates Denise Baudu from his other heroines and characters. She stands out from the other characters because she is not part of the Rougon-Macquart family. Denise is a novelty with progressive ideas about commerce, employees' rights, love, and relationships. It is this "difference" that Mouret sees in Denise that attracts him to her. His desire to "possess" Denise becomes an obsession as he laments the fact that she "seems" unattainable. Vallagnosc, Mouret's adversary, opens Mouret's eyes to his situation: "C'était lui qui aurait fermé boutique et qui se serait allongé sur le dos, pour ne plus remuer un doigt, le jour où il aurait reconnu qu'avec des millions on ne pouvait même pas acheter la femme désirée!" (340; ch. XI). Mouret is distressed that he, as such a wealthy man, cannot have what he wants, but, nevertheless, he still believes in his ability to seduce women: "Puis, il repartit violemment, il croyait à la toute-puissance de sa volonté" (340).

Denise arrives in Paris, a year after the death of her father, to live with her paternal uncle, Oncle Baudu. She is not seeking her fortune or looking for love, she is merely trying to survive. In reality, Jean, her younger brother, was forced to leave town after a sexual scandal with a noble's daughter. As the loving sister and substitute mother,

Denise accepts the responsibility to escort Jean to Paris. Zola removes all sexuality from Denise. She is a young, unmarried girl with no children, no sexual ties or intrigues. This underscores her virginal purity. She does not subscribe to the practice of supplementing her income as a mistress or confidante. She is a sister/mother and a niece, two non-sexual, non-threatening roles.

Denise is the tabula rasa onto which Zola will imprint his vision of woman.

Bertrand-Jennings explains: “Mais cette entreprise participe également d’un rêve de démiurge, du désir de créer, à partir de rien, un être qui deviendrait un chef-d’oeuvre, un reflet idéalisé du Moi viril” (124). This permits Zola to annihilate the “other.” Chantal Bertrand-Jennings explains:

Exclue en tant que significant du sexe, la femme l’est aussi comme représentant l’Autre. A la limite, la femme idéale est celle-qui-n’est-pas, elle est la non-femme, l’absence de l’Autre que le Moi triomphant a réussi à anéantir. Dans cette entreprise, le Moi s’érige d’abord en sauveur de la femme dont la redemption n’est que le prétexte à sa propre déification. (*L’Eros et la Femme* 128)

Denise’s deification is her role as the virginal mother, the “mother without biological children.” Zola carefully describes her wonderful, maternal qualities without giving her any sexual feelings or libido. In the second paragraph of the novel, Zola paints a madonna-type tableau:

Elle, chétive pour ses vingt ans, l’air pauvre, portait un léger paquet; tandis que, de l’autre côté, le petit frère, âgé de cinq ans, se pendait à son bras, et que, derrière son épaule, le grand frère, dont les seize ans superbes florissaient, était debout, les mains ballantes. (42; ch. I)

Zola continues to apply the role of virginal mother to Denise to deny her sexuality:

“Après la mort de leur père, qui avait mangé jusqu’au dernier sou dans sa teinturerie, elle était restée la mère des deux enfants” (46; ch. I). And again: “prise de terreurs

maternelles, devant ce grand enfant [Jean] si beau et si gai” (47; ch. I). Her uncle questions her, “Et tu es restée avec ces gaillards sur les bras, tu as dû nourrir ce petit monde!” (47; ch. I). They cling together as a family with Denise as the matriarch: “Et, rapprochés encore par cette crainte vague, se serrant davantage les uns contre les autres, le gamin, toujours dans les jupes de la jeune fille et le grand derrière” (47; ch. I). At dinner, Pépé clings to his surrogate mother as he “monta sur les genoux de sa soeur, tandis que Jean, adossé contre une boiserie, se tenait près d’elle” (48; ch. I). Denise puts the children first: “à l’arrivée, elle avait laissé la malle et fait déjeuner les enfants” (49) and she protects them: “Denise avait serré contre sa poitrine Pépé terrifié” (49; ch. I). Denise sacrifices her own happiness and marriage because of her responsibilities exclaiming, “Oh! Mon oncle, me marier! Vous n’y pensez pas!...Et les petits?” (51; ch. I). Krakowski underscores Denise’s tenderness:

[Denise, Caroline, et Henriette Levasseur] éprouvent envers leurs frères une véritable tendresse maternelle; aucun sacrifice matériel ne leur coûtera. Travaillant souvent jour et nuit, elles tâcheront de satisfaire même les menus caprices de leurs protégés. Aux plus durs moments de leur existence, quand tout bonheur personnel semble leur être refusé, elles continuent courageusement la lutte quotidienne et accomplissent avec bonne grâce leur devoir de soeur-mère. (La Condition de la Femme 95)

The role of protectrice propels Denise to Paris as the guise for her arrival and her narrative function. Denise arrives in Paris and serves as the diegetic guide for the reader. As such, she is immediately privileged with the look. A provincial girl, new to Paris and all her surroundings, the reader and Denise experience the wonders of Paris simultaneously: “Oh! dit-elle, regarde un peu, Jean!” (41; ch. I), as if speaking directly to the reader. She indicates and points out what she sees: “Ah bien, reprit-elle après un silence, en voilà un magasin!” (41; ch. I). The exclamation points indicate Denise’s

excitement and “bonheur” at the huge store she sees in front of her. It is at this point that the spell is cast.

The details of the store are problematic and emblematic for the representation of the other women in the novel. Denise is set apart from them. She is female but she is not part of the group of females. This marginalization of Denise provides her the ability to access her desire and access the gaze during her initiation to Paris. Denise’s eyes are wide open as she sees and observes men, women, and their respective exploitation. The store sign appears:

Dans le pan coupé donnant sur la place Gaillon, la haute porte, toute en glace, montait jusqu’à l’entresol au milieu d’une complication d’ornements, chargés de dorures. Deux figures allégoriques, deux femmes riantes, la gorge nue et renversée, déroulaient l’enseigne: *Au Bonheur des Dames*. (42; ch. I)

This sign represents the flat, one-dimensional type of women that Zola portrays in the novel. The smiling faces reinforce the representation of woman as a buffon, characters who have no responsibilities, who are not serious, and who are happy either shopping or working in the store.

Next, Denise is able to see inside the store to witness “ces femmes riantes” working: “En haut, une demoiselle, habillée de soie, taillait un crayon, pendant que, près d’elle, deux autres déplaient des manteaux de velours” (42; ch. I). This commercial monster, “cette chapelle élevée au culte des grâces de la femme,” immediately casts a spell on Denise, as she cannot remove her eyes from it. Denise undergoes a transformation and now becomes aligned with the commercial monster.

As Denise becomes more and more intrigued, Jean becomes bored, representing the male perspective, and tries to release Denise from her trance: “Jean commençait à



s'ennuyer. Il arrêta un passant. La rue de la Michodière, monsieur?" (43-44; ch. I). He is not successful and eventually becomes caught up in the enchantment.

The image of women for sale echoes throughout the novel as reflections in mirrors and windows duplicate their headless bodies. Everything has a price and everything can be bought. Zola posits this position in the first chapter:

La gorge ronde des mannequins gonflait l'étoffe, les hanches fortes exagéraient la finesse de la taille, la tête absente était remplacée par une grande étiquette, piquée avec une épingle dans le molleton rouge du col; tandis que les glaces, aux deux côtés de la vitrine, par un jeu calculé, les reflétaient et les multipliaient sans fin, peuplaient la rue de ces belles femmes à vendre, et portant des prix en gros chiffres, à la place des têtes. (44; ch. I)

Still, at this point, Denise's gaze is objective, informative, and masculinized as she describes what she sees. Her gaze becomes problematic as the question remains, is Denise truly an active agent accessing her desire or is she a constructed icon with manipulated agency? Kelly Bénoudis Basilio poses the same question:

Celui d'abord de ces femmes sans tête où est venu, mine de rien, se loger le thème du roman: la mercantilisation de la femme. C'est là aussi qu'est posée en filigrane sa question cruciale: Denise, dont le regard fascine s'aveugle obstinément sur ces femmes, est-elle donc, elle aussi, une femme sans tête, une de ces têtes folles, une femme qui, elle aussi, va se laisser acheter, une 'femme à vendre'? (22)

When the gaze is passed to Jean, it is transformed into a subjective, sexual gaze: "Du coup, il était lui-même redevenu immobile, la bouche ouverte. Tout ce luxe de la femme le rendait rose de plaisir" (44; ch. I). Jean satiates this sexual pleasure through women at Au Bonheur des Dames. Like Bordenave's "theater" in Nana, Mouret would create and house a community of women who need to supplement their meager income through prostitution. This was a commonly held tenet by the saleswomen: "C'était facile,

on disait que toutes en arrivaient là, puisqu'une femme, à Paris, ne pouvait vivre de son travail" (212; ch. VII).

Denise awakens from her trance and asks, "Et l'oncle? fit remarquer brusquement Denise, comme éveillée en sursaut" (45; ch. 1). When they find Le Vieil Elbeuf, Denise is still blinded from the view of Au Bonheur des Dames, which affects her subsequent impressions. The contrast is striking as she enters Le Vieil Elbeuf: "La porte, ouverte, semblait donner sur les ténèbres humides d'une cave" (45; ch. 1). This description is reminiscent of Thérèse Raquin's trepidation as she entered the new boutique in Paris. Whereas Thérèse's decision to remain in the claustrophobic shop leads to adultery and murder, and Gervaise's decision to remain leads to alcoholism and prostitution, Denise chooses to refute the patriarchy of old and join the new order.

As the story of Au Bonheur des Dames is explained to Denise by her aunt, Zola describes her trance:

Denise, qui écoutait comme on écoute un conte de fées, eut un léger frisson. La peur qu'il y avait, depuis le matin, au fond de la tentation exercée sur elle, venait peut-être du sang de cette femme [Mme Hedouin], qu'elle croyait voir maintenant dans le mortier rouge du sous-sol. (59; ch. 1)

Baudu does not approve of these idealized stories told by his wife: "Mais le drapier haussait les épaules, dédaigneux de ces fables de nourrice (59; ch. 1).

Denise accesses her agency and leaves the old shop of her uncle: "Je le pense bien, mon oncle, murmura Denise, étourdie, et dont le désir d'être au *Bonheur des Dames* grandissait, au milieu de toute cette passion" (61; ch. 1). This decision is instrumental in carving out Denise's future. She chooses to survive as opposed to her aunt and cousin who both die confined to Le Vieil Elbeuf, left behind by progress. Denise chooses to

leave the small, private space of her uncle's store to inhabit the large, public open space of Au Bonheur des Dames. The rest of her diegetic life will be observed as if watching a bird in a cage. In the film, André Cayatte capitalizes on this image as Pépé arrives in Paris carrying a canary in a cage.

Denise cannot erase the wondrous sight and spell of the huge store: "Denise, que ces histoires avaient passionnée davantage pour le *Bonheur des Dames*, au lieu de l'en détourner, gardait son air tranquille et doux, d'une volonté têtue de Normande au fond" (64; ch. I). The brightness of the lighted store draws her to it like a moth: "Mais, de l'autre côté de la chaussée, le *Bonheur des Dames* allumait les files profondes de ses becs de gaz. Et elle se rapprocha, attirée de nouveau et comme réchauffée à ce foyer d'ardente lumière" (64-65; ch. I). She continues walking, the store drawing her nearer: "Denise, cédant à la séduction, était venue jusqu'à la porte, sans se soucier du rejaillissement des gouttes, qui la trempait" (65; ch. I). Baudu understands the spell that Denise is under, as he "sentant bien d'ailleurs que sa nièce était conquise comme les autres" (66; ch. I). Politely, Denise responds to her uncle's questions about her new employment telling him: "Oui, mon oncle, à moins que cela ne vous fasse trop de peine" (66; ch. I).

Unfortunately, the stepping-stones of Denise's ascendance seem to pass through the deaths and misfortunes of other women. Denise's mother, her aunt, her cousin Geneviève, and most important, Mme Caroline Hédouin all give their lives to forge a new path for Denise. Zola explains the store's foundation: "Il y a de son sang sous les pierres de la maison" (59; ch. I). Four women die in order to give "birth" to this new female prototype who seems to encompass all of their qualities but is always seen as a "replacement." After the loss of Mme Frédéric in the store, Mouret promotes Denise to

second. Denise continues to replace women who have gone before her. Her greatest triumph, becoming Mme Mouret, solidifies her position as a replacement for Caroline Hédouin.

For Mouret, Denise is a “nouveau” with an unexplainable aura that surrounds her. She mesmerizes Mouret on their first meeting: “Mais, avec son [Mouret] sens délicat de la femme, il sentait chez cette jeune fille un charme caché, une force de grâce et de tendresse, ignorée d’elle-même” (91; ch. II). It is Denise’s charm and Mouret’s attraction to her, not her skills that convince Mouret to hire her. *Nouveautés* intrigue Mouret as they form the basis of his selling and marketing techniques. Rachel Bowlby defines a *nouveauté* in the nineteenth century:

The introduction of *nouveauté* as a value marks the transition from a commercial order based on the supplying of regular, constant demand, to one largely based on saleability: on presenting an object in a novel, desirable light irrespective of any pre-existing need. *Nouveautés*, which can be anything from a piece of lace to a model of the Arc de Triomphe, are pure commodities. They have nothing in common except the price, the fact that they can be bought in a store for money. (67-68)

Later in the novel, Mouret realizes that he must possess this female *nouveauté* at any cost and passionately verbalizes his desire for the young woman: “Je la veux, je l’aurai!... Et si elle m’échappe, tu verras quelle machine je bâtirai pour me guérir” (340; ch. XI). If Mouret loses Denise, he plans to replace her with another material object—a machine. This underscores Mouret’s impression that Denise is an object to possess.

Mouret also leaves an impression on Denise after their first meeting, but Denise does not have any notions of possession. In fact, when Denise realizes that she was speaking with Mouret, she pales:

Denise redevint toute blanche. C'était Mouret. Personne n'avait dit son nom, mais il se désignait lui-même, et elle le devinait maintenant, elle comprenait pourquoi ce jeune homme lui avait causé une telle émotion, dans la rue, au rayon des soieries, à présent encore. (92; ch. II)

Mouret, like the store itself, casts a spell on Denise. Zola describes her feelings:

Toutes les histoires contées par son oncle, revenaient à sa mémoire, grandissant Mouret, l'entourant d'une légende, faisant de lui le maître de la terrible machine, qui depuis le matin la tenait dans les dents de fer de ses engrenages. (92; ch. II)

As Denise commences her employment at Au Bonheur des Dames, her access to the look is denied as she now resides in the edifice that had previously attracted her from the exterior. Denise now becomes part of the spectacle.

When Denise presents herself at Au Bonheur des Dames to apply for a job, she is stupefied and afraid. She finally enters but only after “losing her head” like the first mannequin she saw in the window. Zola writes: “Après avoir hésité près d’une heure dans la rue, en proie à une terrible crise de timidité, elle venait de se décider enfin. Seulement, elle perdait la tête, au point de ne pas comprendre les explications les plus claires;” (85; ch. I). Without her head, she loses her agency as she spends the next ten months surveyed, scrutinized, taunted, ridiculed, “mannequinized,” and objectified.

Denise’s access to agency is now blocked as she endures her situation and makes no declarations of desire or complaints about her treatment. She is frequently the object of ridicule and is oftentimes placed in the center of a circle of lookers. She rarely looks at others and frequently looks out the store windows when she does not know how to cope. Headless, she is total object for the male clerks of the store: “Et Denise, ayant hâte de n’être plus sous les regards de tous ces hommes, disait merci et tournait de nouveau le dos à l’escalier,” (86; ch. I).

Interestingly, she endures the same objectification from women: “ces demoiselles avaient flairé la vendeuse qui venait se présenter, et elles la dévisageaient, elles la déshabillaient du coin de l’œil, sans bienveillance, avec la sourde hostilité des gens à table qui n’aiment pas se serrer pour faire place aux faims du dehors” (87; ch. I). Mme Aurélie completes the once over: “Mme Aurélie la regardait de ses grands yeux fixes, sans qu’un pli de son masque l’empereur daignât s’attendrir” (89; ch. I). Denise’s arrival sparks jealousy and evilness among the established community of women store clerks.

Denise is treated as an object of ridicule, a living mannequin, and a “mal-traitée.” She receives the nicknames of “la mal peignée” and “la désossée.” Treated like a mannequin, everyone feels compelled to try to “dress” her properly: “Et puis, vous ne savez pas vous habiller. Venez donc, que je vous arrange un peu. Et elle l’emmena devant une des hautes glaces, qui alternaient avec les portes pleines des armoires, où étaient serrées les confections” (123; ch. IV). Madame Aurélie constantly reminds her how to dress: “Tirez donc la ceinture par-devant, répétait Mme Aurélie. Là, vous n’avez plus de bosse dans le dos au moins... Et vos cheveux, est-il possible de les massacrer ainsi! Ils seraient superbes, si vous vouliez” (123; ch. IV). Even Mouret arranges her hair: “Il s’était levé, il vint corriger sa coiffure, du même geste familier dont Mme Aurélie avait essayé de le faire la veille. Tenez! rentrez donc ça derrière l’oreille... Le chignon est trop haut” (153; ch. V). Immobile, rigid, impotent, and speechless against Mouret, Denise stands poised as the other mannequins: “Elle n’ouvrait pas la bouche, elle se laissait arranger” (152).

Maliciously, the other clerks use her as a mannequin to model coats to clients: “Servez à quelque chose, au moins... Mettez ça [le manteau] sur vos épaules” (144; ch.

V). She feels compelled to obey: “Pourtant, il lui fallut obéir, elle dut laisser Marguerite draper le manteau sur elle, comme sur un mannequin” (145). While engaging in a conversation about the new exhibition taking place, the clerks leave Denise standing alone, unnoticed. At last, they return to the living mannequin: “Alors, tous les yeux revinrent sur Denise. Elle s’abandonnait aux mains de Marguerite, qui la faisait tourner lentement” (145). This happens frequently: “Mme Aurélie l’appela plusieurs fois, lui jeta sur les épaules des manteaux, afin qu’elle en fît valoir les coupes nouvelles” (156). She poses her telling her: “Mademoiselle peut croiser les bras” (156; ch. V). Denise is ashamed to be treated as an object: “Une honte la prenait, d’être ainsi changée en une machine qu’on examinait et dont on plaisantait librement” (145) but she takes no action to address her situation.

At this point, Denise has no impact on anyone’s life except as a source of conversation and an object of ridicule. Regardless, she is forced to make two decisions; she refuses the amorous advances of Deloche and the lecherous advances of Inspector Jouve. When she refuses Jouve, she is told the next day, “Passez à la caisse.” Indignant, shocked, and hurt, Denise finally accesses the gaze and looks at all of them:

Alors, Denise les regarda tous: Bourdoncle, qui dès la première heure ne voulait pas d’elle; Jouve, resté là pour témoigner, et dont elle n’attendait aucune justice; puis, ces filles qu’elle n’avait pu toucher par neuf mois de courage souriant, ces filles heureuses enfin de la pousser dehors.” (206; ch. VI)

She is poised for acting on her desire and she wants to fight the decision: “Non, elle ne pouvait accepter un pareil renvoi. . . . Elle voulait l’[Mouret] aller trouver, elle lui expliquerait les choses, pour le renseigner simplement; car il lui était égal de partir, lorsqu’il saurait la vérité” (206; ch. VI). However, Denise cannot bring herself to

complain to Mouret. She acquiesces and resigns herself to her misfortune as she packs her belongings. She says to herself: “A quoi bon se débattre? pourquoi vouloir s’imposer, quand personne ne l’aimait? Et elle s’en alla sans ajouter une parole, elle ne jeta même pas un dernier regard, dans ce salon où elle avait lutté si longtemps” (206). In refusing her last opportunity to access the gaze, Denise forfeits her ability to become an active agent and to regain access to the look.

In February, Denise returns to the store. Mme Desforges recognizes her and announces her as the “l’héroïne de l’aventure.” As Denise’s sexual feelings awake, so does her second chance to access agency and authority. Mouret asks to see her in his office at the end of the day where he announces her promotion to second, replacing Mme Frédéric. The description of her hair, which serves as a constant sign of her situation, signals her future fortune: “dans sa robe de soie toute simple, sans un bijou, n’ayant que le luxe de sa royale chevelure blonde” (289; ch. IX). The word *royale* foreshadows her ascendancy to the throne of Au Bonheur des Dames.

Zola’s vocabulary turns to words of victory: “C’était une victoire inespérée: Denise avait enfin conquis le rayon” (296; ch. X) and then to pride: “elle venait en quelques semaines de les dominer, de les voir autour d’elle souples et respectueuses” (296). He continues: “Sa douceur et sa modestie achevèrent la conquête” (296). Denise’s new path eventually intersects with Mouret and results in their marriage. This new position provides her access to more money, power, better sleeping quarters, and additional creature comforts. (291; ch. X) However, if this agency is imposed from without, is it truly agency?



Because of Mouret's infatuation with Denise, she receives a new position and in turn, respect from the other workers. She is embarrassingly aware of the increasing power that she enjoys. Pauline tells her: "Oui, oui, ne prenez pas votre air étonné, on sait qu'un mot de vous révolutionnerait la maison" (347; ch. XII). Denise acknowledges her newfound favor: "C'était vrai, du reste. Elle avait la sensation vague de sa puissance, aux flatteries qui l'entouraient" (347). Everyone notices her influence and the pronouncement is made: "Le règne de Denise commençait" (347; ch. XII).

As Mouret's interest and jealousy increases, he is brought to his knees to please Denise. After a long conversation with her about a supposed lover, Mouret appoints her première in a new department. This action solidifies Denise's importance and influence: "Du reste, Denise était maintenant au sommet. Sa nomination de première avait abattu autour d'elle les dernières résistances" (368; ch. XII). Even Bourdoncle succumbs to her authority as "il s'était incliné, vaincu sous la terreur sacrée de la femme" (368). However, Bourdoncle respects Denise because Mouret respects her: "Toujours il avait cédé ainsi devant la grâce de Mouret, il le reconnaissait pour son maître, malgré les fuites du génie et les coups de coeur imbéciles" (368).

In a type of role reversal, Mouret assumes the role of the love struck woman and he is willing to do anything to win Denise's favor. To win her admiration, he creates a new department of children's wear especially for Denise. As a man, Mouret enjoys the economic and social status to bestow any and all types of gifts and favors on Denise. Mouret's actions mirror those of Count Muffat after his first meeting with Nana. The similarity ends here as Denise is no Nana. Nana knows what she wants and plots devious intrigues to attain her goals, Denise rarely, if ever, demands or asks for anything. In

addition, Mouret does not receive sexual favors from Denise when he follows her suggestions.

In this new department, Denise finds herself very comfortable: “Elle adorait les enfants, on ne pouvait la mieux placer” (369; ch. XII). Zola re-emphasizes her maternal qualities and gentleness as Denise excels in this new environment: “vivait là parmi les petits, comme dans sa famille naturelle, rajeunie elle-même de cette innocence et de cette fraîcheur sans cesse renouvelée autour de ses jupes” (369, ch. XII). As “mother” of this new department, Denise sees her role enlarged to be “mother” of all subordinate employees in the store: “Était-ce humain, était-ce juste, cette consommation effroyable de chair que les grands magasins faisaient chaque année? Et elle plaidait la cause des rouages de la machine . . .” (370; ch. XII).

Denise receives her power because Mouret approves of her and she maintains her power because Mouret stands behind her decisions. It is his support and his sexual interest in Denise that provide her clout and power. Because of Denise’s suggestions, Mouret improves the workers lives. He replaces massive layoffs with planned vacations, he creates a savings account for retirement, he installs a game room for the men, and adds a library, a doctor, maternity care, hair salons, buffets, and various classes including equitation and fencing. Therefore, the respect and adulation that Denise receives emanates from the adoration given to Mouret and the changes that he makes on her behalf. She is associated with the owner and therefore, she must also be respected. However, as this agency does not result directly from Denise’s actions but from Mouret’s support behind the scenes it is not true agency. Rachel Bowlby best summarizes Denise’s agency:

The novel's last word commends the humanitarian reforms in the workers' conditions achieved through the influence of the "omnipotent" Denise (XIV, 442). But though she holds out for a higher price than any woman before her, Denise capitulates in just the same way to Mouret's ultimately irresistible offers. (78)

Denise's power is not a result of a commercial coup or a devious master plan to seduce Mouret. She emphatically denies that she planned her ascendance and marvels at her good luck:

Etait-ce possible, mon Dieu! Elle se voyait arriver en jupe pauvre, effarée, perdue au milieu des engrenages de la terrible machine; longtemps, elle avait eu la sensation de n'être rien, à peine un grain de mil sous les meules qui broyaient un monde; et, aujourd'hui, elle était l'âme même de ce monde. (372; ch. XII)

She insists on the purity of her choices: "Cependant, elle n'avait pas voulu ces choses, elle s'était simplement présentée, sans calcul, avec l'unique charme de la douceur. Sa souveraineté lui causait parfois une surprise inquiète: . . ." (372). Zola explains Denise's lack of desire: "Mais elle ne demandait rien, elle ne calculait rien, elle suppliait seulement qu'on la laissât vivre tranquille, avec ses chagrins et ses joies comme tout le monde" (374; ch. XII). This does not represent agency, it demonstrates the huge influence that Denise has on Mouret because he is in love with her.

Eventually, Denise starts to awake as a sexual being: "sous ces haleines chaudes qui éveillaient peu à peu la femme en elle, gardait encore sa paix d'enfant. Seule, la rencontre de Hutin lui remuait le cœur" (165; ch. V). Interestingly, Denise's sexual desire blooms at the same time that she witnesses the large amounts of money brought to Mouret by Lhomme: "Brusquement, elle comprenait, elle sentait la flame croissante du coup de désir dont il l'enveloppait, depuis qu'elle était de retour aux confections. Ce qui la bouleversait davantage, c'était de sentir son cœur battre à se rompre" (290; ch. X).

Additionally, Denise's sexuality blooms simultaneously with her beauty: "Tout souriait alors dans son visage blanc, ses yeux de pervenche, ses joues et son menton toués de fossettes; tandis que ses lourds cheveux blonds semblaient s'éclairer aussi, d'une beauté royale et conquérante" (349; ch. XII). With her head buried in a pillow, Denise murmurs to Pauline, "Je l'aime" (374; ch. XII). Refusing to access the gaze, she tries to deny her feelings: "Denise, le visage toujours caché, répondait non, . . ." (374).

Pauline accuses Denise of cunningly plotting to win Mouret's love but Denise denies her agency again: "Lui, m'épouser! Oh! Non, oh! Je vous jure que je n'ai jamais voulu une pareille chose!...Non, jamais un tel calcul n'est entré dans ma tête, et vous savez que j'ai horreur du mensonge!" (374). Finally, Denise acts in the last paragraphs of the novel and professes her love for Mouret: "elle se jeta à son cou, sanglota elle aussi, en bégayant: Oh! monsieur Mouret, c'est vous que j'aime!" (442; ch. XIV).

Denise's "règne" must be carefully scrutinized to determine the extent of her power. She does not exercise power on her own but only as Mouret's confidante and fiancée. She does not replace Mouret or take over the store; she merely basks in the glow of Mouret's approval, accomplishments, and power. Because of her immense influence on Mouret and the improvements he has added to the store because of her suggestions, her popularity rises: "Alors, un nouveau mouvement d'opinion se fit en faveur de Denise" and "Et, dès ce moment, elle devient populaire" (371).

In conclusion, Denise does not attain agency or power nor does Zola change his basic ideology. It is Mouret, the representative of the patriarchy, who maintains order, creates, and enforces the rules. Denise enjoys Mouret's attention and as a result she can oftentimes influence his decisions. However, she does not have the power to enact laws.

This power belongs only to Mouret and the male establishment. It is Mouret's acceptance of Denise that permits her to speak freely to him and which produces a fissure through which we see her importance but not her agency.

Octave Mouret's personal rise to success is extraordinary and fortuitous but also planned. Mouret is not afraid to verbalize his desire for wealth. His marriage to Caroline Hédouin gave him access to the store but her untimely death gave him control, ownership, and unbelievable economic success. As a young widower, he meets a new woman and wins her affection and her hand in marriage. In the end, it is Mouret who acquires the treasure he has been seeking as it is assumed that the couple will live happily ever after. Mouret undergoes a metamorphosis from confirmed bachelor to willing husband. He exclaims: "Ecoutez, nous étions stupides, avec cette superstition que le mariage devait nous couler. Est-ce qu'il n'est pas la santé nécessaire, la force et l'ordre mêmes de la vie!..." (441; ch. XIV). Mouret's story exemplifies the power men have when they access their agency to fulfill their desires. In Zola's Cinderella story, it is the story of Octave Mouret as the handsome prince that drives the narrative forward and suppresses Denise's role of active agent. However, for Mouret, phantasmagoria is replaced with hard work, determination, agency, and most important, money.

Zola uses this novel to illustrate the seductive appeal of buying, selling, marketing, presentation, and packaging. However, his story also carries with it a heavy moral tale for young women—be pure, honest, and chaste and you too will marry the handsome prince. Since Denise adheres to the rules of the patriarchy, Zola permits her to survive even though she dissolves the homosocial relationship between Mouret and Bourdoncle. However, remaining close to his basic ideology, Zola continues to show the

simple-mindedness of women who are easily seduced by material objects in pretty packages. Therefore, in this novel of commerce and commodity, Zola does not reinvent a new heroine; he simply repackages his standard female protagonist in gentleness and naïveté to appease a new market of consumers. This small fissure in the homosocial order signals a small, but insignificant change in ideology for Monsieur Zola.

André Cayatte brings Zola's novel to Parisian film audiences in February 1943 at the beginning of the fourth year of German Occupation. Continental Films, a German film company headed by Alfred Greven, produced Au Bonheur des Dames. Although American films were forbidden in France at this time, Continental produced many "Hollywood-like" type films. Evelyn Ehrlich maintains: "For the most part, the company eschewed controversy, preferring subjects that were politically innocuous and assuredly popular" (50). This explains the abundance of comedies and mysteries, in addition to the numerous adaptations of French literature.

Au Bonheur des Dames is one of the thirty films Continental produced, one of the four films directed by Cayatte for Continental, and one of two hundred and twenty films produced during the Occupation. Rarely listed as an important film in cinematic history, Cayatte's film is the fourth adaptation of Zola's fairy tale story. Roger Régent claims: "Le film . . . n'offrait pas le moindre intérêt sinon, toutefois, celui de nous rendre Michel Simon" (177). Other film critics tend to echo Regent's comments when speaking of the film. The most respected adaptation cited by critics is Julien Duvivier's 1929 reading of Au Bonheur des Dames, although no copies of the film exist.

During this period of struggle, oppression, and poverty in France, one would expect that the film industry would shrivel and die. On the contrary, some of France's

finest films were produced under German Occupation, for example, Carné's Les Enfants du Paradis. Pierre Darmon comments on this exceptional phenomenon:

Le cinéma français des années d'Occupation est le cinéma des paradoxes. Au coeur de la pénurie, alors que la disette de matières premières est à son paroxysme, voilà que surgissent à l'écran des superproductions inconnues dans les années fastes. Le château médiéval des *Visiteurs du soir* ou la somptueuse reconstitution du boulevard du crime des *Enfants du paradis* laissent entrevoir une incroyable débauche de moyens. (7)

In addition to the films mentioned above, Cayatte's adaptation of the huge, illuminated department store, *Au Bonheur des Dames*, demonstrates the paradoxical nature of this Occupation cinema. Evelyn Ehrlich discusses the reception of the film:

Whether the enormous success of the film was due to the painstaking recreation of period detail (a department store circa 1850, an outdoor divertissement with hundreds of dress extras, period acrobats, etc.) or to the reappearance of Michel Simon after three years in Italy, the film was certainly one of the best of the historical reconstructions which would become especially popular in France during the occupation. (49)

Cayatte profited from this odd combination of scarcity and filmic opulence to screen Au Bonheur des Dames as he felt the two were intertwined:

C'est pour moi un souvenir inoubliable que ce tournage dont les conditions tout à fait particulières suggeraient en somme le climat du roman de Zola: une vie insouciance, des bals, des toilettes, mais en même temps l'inquiétude d'une société folle menacée par la guerre, d'une société qui marche vers ce gigantesque abattoir de 70... (Cayatte 64-65)

Cayatte sees 1943 as a historical era parallel to the turmoil in France in 1883, during which time readers were introduced to Au Bonheur des Dames. The correlation is that Zola's fairy tale narrative was serialized during the harshness of economic upheaval in nineteenth-century France and Cayatte's fairy tale film premiered during the horror of the German Occupation. Historically, these are periods in France's history where the political patriarchy was threatened.

For Cayatte, the actual production of the film itself proved challenging, juxtaposing abundance with restriction. The conditions of wartime imposed special problems on the film set. In an interview with Guy Braucourt, Cayatte describes the unusual circumstances of the production:

Le tournage de *Au Bonheur des Dames* d'après Zola s'est déroulé dans une ambiance assez extraordinaire. On ne travaillait que la nuit aux studios de Billancourt, car il n'y avait pas d'électricité dans la journée; or pratiquement toutes les nuits il y avait des alertes, et toute l'équipe allait se réfugier dans le cimetière voisin, passant par une brèche du mur, et plongeant dans les tranchées creusées pour la prochaine fournée de morts! Et à cinq heures du matin, au sortir du cimetière, il fallait faire danser tout ce beau monde en grande toilette... (Cayatte 63-64)

The artificiality of the production and the costumes is underscored as Cayatte continues:

Mais le paradoxe, c'était que pour décrire l'abondance, pour raconter la tentation des femmes par les richesses des grands magasins, je ne disposais pour ainsi dire de rien en raison des restrictions: ni de tissus—les pièces étaient de staff avec une mince enveloppe de vrai tissu, et il fallait des "forts des halles" pour manier ça tant c'était lourd--, ni de chaussures—remplacées par des semelles de bois--, ni d'articles de mode... (Braucourt, Cayatte 64)

Cayatte, a lawyer, journalist, and novelist, comes to film at the age of thirty-three.

A novice to filmmaking, he considers his first few films learning tools. Cayatte discusses his initiation to film techniques during the production of his adaptation of Balzac's La Fausse Maîtresse:

Mais je me suis appliqué à cette occasion à apprendre le fonctionnement de tout l'appareil technique dont je disposais, et j'ai fait de même pour les films suivants: puisque je n'avais pas la possibilité d'imposer un choix personnel et que j'étais lancé sur des rails, je me contentais simplement d'écarter parmi ce qu'on me proposait tout ce qui pouvait ressembler à de la propagande—je m'étais même assigné un objectif un peu particulier qui était d'adapter un certain nombre d'auteurs célèbres placés sur la liste noire des interdits de l'époque, et c'est ainsi que j'ai tourné après du Balzac, du Zola, du Maupassant... (Cayatte 62-63)



This quote highlights the fact that Cayatte was politically aware of his cinematic responsibility even though he worked for Continental.

Reminiscent of the mythical Resistance movement in France is the character of Oncle Baudu, always shouting in protest and trying to assemble his fellow shop owners to revolt. As Mouret attempts to annihilate the shop owners' livelihood by purchasing their stores, Baudu attempts to stop him. At the meeting in his shop, Baudu tries to incite an uprising: "Si je vous ai réuni c'est que le moment est venu de réagir contre Mouret." After further discussion and the shop owners' refusal to accept payment from Bourdoncle they chant: "Il faut lutter, il faut lutter." They seal their agreement of unity with a champagne toast chanting: "A la mort du Bonheur des Dames, A la mort du Bonheur des Dames." Although deceived into selling his store, Baudu continues his fight until the end. He tells Mme Desforges: "Entre Mouret et moi, c'est une lutte à mort mais personnel. Je crois à la justice." Baudu never gives up until he is physically carried out from Le Vieil Elbeuf.

As Baudu (Michel Simon) succumbs to Mouret's takeover, his death in the film, added by Cayatte, is especially poignant as he is crushed and trampled by an Au Bonheur des Dames' delivery carriage. Cayatte passes the look to a lone woman on the street who witnesses the horrible accident. Unfortunately, the scope of this study prevents a more detailed analysis of the political implications of the film. However, Cayatte's political reorientation of the film impacts this study's investigation of female agency and sexual politics in the screening of Denise Baudu.

Whereas Zola places Denise's story as the centerpiece of the novel, Cayatte uses Denise's story as the secondary narrative to give priority to "le poème de l'activité

moderne,” in other words, to screen the story of the handsome prince, Octave Mouret and his castle. Mouret’s story encompasses the rise of his financial and economic success and his personal battle with M. Baudu. Evelyn Ehrlich summarizes the primary narrative as a “careful recreation of Second Empire Paris, which showed the death struggle between tradition and progress, represented by small shopkeepers versus modern merchandizer” (49).

Although Cayatte’s political position seems clear, his sexual politics do not. Cayatte’s reading of Zola’s “poème de l’activité moderne” serves to exalt the masculine and diminish the feminine. Cayatte accomplishes this by privileging the male characters with point of view, narrativity, and agency. Women, as the intended objects of the male gaze, are denied these characteristics. To heighten the feminine role as object of the spectacle, Cayatte removes their agency and drapes them in beautiful clothes to increase their “to-be-looked-at-ness.”

The spectator familiar with Zola’s novel immediately notices Cayatte’s reorientation of Denise’s agency while watching the credits. Michel Simon’s (M. Baudu) and Albert Préjean’s (Mouret) names appear respectively in large letters in the opening credits on two separate frames while Blanchette Brunoy’s (Denise) name appears with the rest of the cast as the names roll by in order of importance. Suzy Prim’s (Madame Desforges) name follows next. This groups the two women together as competitive adversaries, the female equivalents of Mouret and Baudu. For Denise, her inclusion among the other actors signifies the diminished importance of her role and her actual screen time. In addition, it deprives her of any implied agency that she held in the novel.

Zola is given even less homage as his name is hidden in a frame filled with the names of the scriptwriters.

Cayatte's choice of Blanchette Brunoy for the role of Denise aligns her again with a Zolian narrative. In Renoir's 1938 La Bête Humaine she played Flore, the young "Amazon" girl who commits suicide by walking in front of the runaway train in Zola's novel. As Renoir's Flore, Brunoy plays the "Amazon" of Zola's novel but her role is so reduced in the film that she appears as an innocent blond void of jealousy and vindictiveness. Five years later, Brunoy again portrays the same role for Cayatte as Mademoiselle Denise Baudu.

While men in the film are able to "agir, créer, et se battre," women serve as objects of the spectacle. Cayatte, as well as Zola, collapses the image of the female consumer onto the very merchandise that she purchases. Kristin Ross notes: "Zola evokes both the condition of the woman consumer and the image she is called upon to purchase: herself as commodity, as superior commodity in the traffic in women" (xvi). The commodification of women as consumer and merchandise occurs through Cayatte's excessive attention to women's clothing. He uses this as a leitmotif throughout the entire film and he unveils it in the first scene of the film.

The film opens with a crane shot over Au Bonheur des Dames, then, the camera descends to focus on the arriving carriage. Interestingly, Cayatte focuses on the departing passengers instead of the arriving passengers. The most important of these passengers is a lone woman departing on a journey. Concerned with her traveling outfit, she is the sole object of the camera lens as she slips her hoop from under her dress and hangs it on the side of the carriage. The other hoops on the carriage signify the

abundance of other female passengers. This particular, unnamed woman appears as the personification of a mannequin form that one dresses and undresses at will. At first, only the audience partakes in this voyeuristic look through the keyhole, but, to augment her role as pure object, Denise's brother, Jean, appropriates and sexualizes the gaze. As he helps this woman into the carriage he gives her a once over, looking down her bustle and back up.

Throughout the film, Cayatte remains close to the original text as he frequently employs exact lines of dialogue from the novel. In the representation of Zola's female characters, Cayatte takes some liberties but seems to remain close to the spirit of Zola's narrative. The most significant alteration pertains to the character of Mouret. Whereas in the novel, Mouret's marriage to Denise appears to cure him of his manipulative use of women, in the film he is still portrayed as the consummate consumer. Anne Friedberg's comments about Zola's novel are applicable for the study of Cayatte's adaptation: "The 'paradise' of the department store relied on the relation between *looking* and *buying*, and the indirect desire to possess and incorporate through the eye" (41). In the film, Mouret appropriates the omnipotent eye and never relinquishes the gaze to Denise. Therefore, his ability to buy and consume increases in the film. This lack of change in Mouret's philosophy impacts the ending of the film and denies Denise the ideological triumph that she attained in the novel.

As for the female characters, the most noticeable change in the film is the omission of Mme Elizabeth Baudu, the aunt of Denise. Although she dies in the novel, her death does not occur until after the death of Geneviève in the last chapter. In the film, no mention of Mme Baudu is made, as she is simply forgotten. Mimicking Zola's use of

the portrait of Mme Hédouin as a referent, Cayatte places Mme Baudu's portrait over the mantle in the Baudu home. However, Mme Baudu's story is not told. Instead, Geneviève tells Denise the story of the tragic death of Mme Hédouin. At the end of Geveviève's story, Denise's uncle gives his approval of Mme Hédouin even though she is aligned with the huge department store. Baudu says that she was "une sainte femme." Geneviève continues her story and tells Denise: "On dit qu'il [Mouret] a un grand portrait d'elle dans son bureau." This statement is followed by a fade-out to the next scene, which opens with a close-up of the portrait. However, unlike Zola, who imbues the portrait of Caroline Hédouin with significance, Cayatte's portrait of Mme Baudu is void of meaning and exists as an empty sign.

While Madame Baudu's death is ignored, Cayatte, in contrast, dramatizes Geneviève's death for the screen. Geneviève's one and only desire is to marry Jules Colomban (René Blancard). Her request is ignored and rejected by her father, Baudu, who wants his store to be economically stable before giving his consent. His hesitation and refusal cost Geneviève her husband and her life as Colomban begins an affair with Mademoiselle Clara Prunaire (Huguette Vivier). Daring to access the gaze, Geneviève sneaks out of the house, pretending to be with Pépé, and hides in an old wooden structure. While there, she sees Colomban and Mlle. Prunaire kiss and embrace. Cayatte follows Geneviève's gaze with a forward traveling shot towards her that ends in an extreme close up of Geneviève closing her eyes. Because of this small peek at the primal scene, Denise loses her life. She returns home and immediately goes to bed. The implied message here is that women may look but be aware of the consequences. For women, the price for access to the look is extremely high.

Soon after the aforementioned scene, as Baudu argues with Colomban, Geneviève again dares to look as she descends the steps of the store to listen to their conversation. On hearing Colomban's hurtful comments, Geneviève drops dead. Whereas in the novel, Zola simply recounts the death: "Le lendemain, à six heures, au petit jour, Geneviève expirait, après quatre heures d'un rôle affreux" (382; ch. XIII), Cayatte shows Geneviève collapsing and falling through the doorway. Geneviève relinquishes her life as punishment for her blatant attempt to access the gaze. In her death scene, Cayatte frames her in the large door as pure object as she is consumed by Mouret's new order and the cinematic need for melodrama.

Trying to imitate the "Hollywood type" film, Cayatte's choice of Brunoy and Suzy Prim to recreate Zola's women posits two well-known and attractive actresses in these roles. Although it was not necessary in 1943 to struggle for audience participation, Cayatte uses these two women and their star power as commodities to attract viewers. René Clair describes the Occupation as "a period when all films were successful because the cinema replaced everything else: meeting place, heated area, means of escape, weekend outings" (188-89). Cayatte commodifies the two female actors, but it was the return of Michel Simon to French cinema after a three-year absence that most attracted spectators to the film.

During the Occupation, spectatorial desire for entertainment, happiness, and optimism brought overwhelming numbers of people to the cinema. For two hours at a time, the cinema afforded spectators the opportunity to leave their hard and dreary lives behind and to participate in lives different than their own. Ehrlich comments:

Movie theaters provided refuge from the uncertainty and hardship of everyday life. The French public flocked to the darkened theaters to see a world they had lost or one that existed only in their dreams. They went to the movies because it was the only outlet they had, and they went in greater number than ever before in history. (x)

In order to supply this type of film for French audiences, Cayatte removes the dark passages of Zola's narrative. In general, these would be scenes related to women. For example, he changes Denise's small, dingy, and cell-like room into a light, attractive, and comfortable bedroom.

In addition to Denise's domicile, Cayatte updates and upgrades Denise's wardrobe, which reinforces his use of clothing as a signifier. To represent women, Cayatte uses clothing to denote position, class, and employment. For example, Cayatte replaces Denise's tattered and worn clothes, with newer and more attractive ensembles. Her traveling outfit, her peignoir, and her Sunday outfit for taking P  p   to the park all exceed the shabby clothes that she wore in the novel. Cayatte's attention to audience's preferences, as well as the artificial importance of Denise's costumes, fulfills the cinematic need for revenue and the spectatorial obsession for beauty. The attractiveness of Denise's costumes perpetuates her role as a commodified object of the male gaze.

In contrast to Denise's attractive but simple costumes, Cayatte hyperbolizes Mme Desforges' (Suzy Prim) wardrobe. He dresses Mme Desforges in excessively ornate costumes, which compromise her agency in her role of influential businesswoman, client, and "acquaintance" of Mouret. Cayatte pays homage to Zola's "fairy tale" narrative through Mme Desforges' costumes.

When Mme Desforges first appears on screen in Mouret's office, she resembles an affluent Little Red Riding Hood. She is wearing a cape with a large hood and holding a

muff. Her cape, hood, and muff are all adorned with fur trim. Like the wolf trying to trick his prey, Mouret is trying to attain Desforbes' commercial properties. Her second appearance occurs in her home where she wears a dress decorated with feathers that appear to form wings on her back and shoulders. This costume is reminiscent of a fairy godmother as Mouret pleads for her assistance. The dress that Desforbes wears on Sunday in the park makes one think of Little Bo Beep, with her large bonnet, covered in ruffled lace. The dark scalloped trim on the dress and her lacy parasol continue the allusion as she and Mouret spend the rest of the afternoon at a male acrobat show.

Treated like a spectatorial commodity, Cayatte clothes Mme Desforbes as a living mannequin. He underscores Desforbes' role as the refracted image of a mannequin during her final appearance in Mouret's office. Octave is designing a new "revealing" swimsuit as he dresses a mannequin located on the left of the frame. To the right of the frame stands Mme Desforbes with a row of undressed mannequin forms lined up behind her. She asks Mouret, "Que faites-vous?" He responds, "Je prépare la saison d'été, oui, j'habite toujours en avance de six mois sur la clientèle." Mouret not only sells clothes to his female customers but he dictates what they will wear as he creates new female images. He tells Desforbes: "J'ai décidé que les femmes montreront la jambe à la plage cet été." Madame Desforbes is convinced that respectable women will not wear these scandalous swimsuits but Mouret, convinced of his ability to sell, tells her: "On verra."

This image of repetitive female forms makes Desforbes indistinguishable from the mannequin dummies. Even though Mme Desforbes has money and connections, these outlandish costumes prevent the spectator from taking her agency seriously. Therefore, both Madame Desforbes and her costumes are commodities to merchandize.



In addition to her outlandish costumes, Cayatte's reading of the character of Mme Henriette Desforges, Mouret's mistress, differs significantly from Zola's description. In the novel, Zola describes her as "brune, un peu forte, avec de grands yeux jaloux" (94; ch. III). However, Cayatte's choice of Suzy Prim for the role is a radical departure from the chunky brunette that Zola describes. Suzy Prim's physical appearance increases the representation of Mme Desforges as a "baby-doll" and perpetuates Cayatte's allusion to fairy tales. With her soft voice and subtle, sensual lisp, she denotes sexuality and playfulness. Roger Régent comments on Suzy Prim's performance as Mme Desforges: "la très savoureuse création de Suzy Prim campant avec une intelligence aiguë et un sens très vif de l'humour le rôle d'une dame qui a peu de scruples, beaucoup d'argent, beaucoup d'audace et beaucoup de sympathie pour les messieurs!" (178). Thus, it is even difficult for Mouret to fear her as a business adversary.

In general, Cayatte's representation of the working community of women in *Au Bonheur des Dames* posits them as "non-human" caricatures, walking mannequins who prostitute themselves to sell merchandise. Cayatte's screening of Mouret's female employees is conventional, repetitive, and static, yet similar to Zola's descriptions. Cayatte does not stray far from Zola's portrayal of women, who appear, not as individuals, but as a collective group without heads and faces. However, unlike the laundry in *L'Assommoir* that serves as an enclave of "women's space," Cayatte's department store functions as a phallogentric sweatshop.

Cayatte again uses clothing to represent the sexual and social difference of these women. One requirement of employment at *Au Bonheur des Dames* dictates that all women employees must wear the same dress. However, Cayatte forces the image of

sameness by giving these women the same hairstyle, the same bow in their hair, and the same voice. Only Mouret seems to be able to tell them apart. These women appear as indistinguishable as the rows of mannequin forms in the store.

To increase their sameness, Cayatte frequently films the female employees in groups of three or more, swarming and buzzing like insects. When Mouret supports Denise after her argument with Mme Desforges, numerous salesgirls come to congratulate her. As they line up to offer their congratulations they appear as objects from an assembly line. Cayatte oftentimes films two salesgirls with a column or pillar in between them that reinforces their mirror image and sameness in addition to reflecting their images in mirrors. The scene in the cafeteria demonstrates the sameness of these women, as rows after row of women all appear as duplicates of the same image. Kristin Ross comments on this “sameness.”

As the image of the mannequins is refracted out onto the streets, consumers and female passersby become indistinguishable from the mannequins; all are soulless but beautiful replicants, “women for sale.” The female image that peoples the street is headless and, by extension, credulous, irrational, lacking in critical judgment and decisiveness. (xvi-xvii)

Even though Denise must wear the same uniform as the other salesclerks, Cayatte, like Zola, singles her out as different because of her disheveled hair and sassy tongue. Denise is the “other” for both men and women in the store.

All adaptations must condense material from a novel in order to produce a film of acceptable length. However, under the direction and scrutiny of Continental Films, Cayatte had especially strict requirements to follow concerning the length of his film. This resulted from a lack of available film stock during the Occupation. Film stock was

difficult to obtain and every effort was made to preserve the available resources.

Therefore, due to the excessive number of characters in the novel, Cayatte had to delete, transpose, and condense numerous intrigues involving the store employees, the customers, and Jean's (Denise's brother) sexual liaisons. For example, in order to "tighten" the narrative and minimize story lines, Cayatte reconfigures Mademoiselle Marguerite Vadon, one of Zola's workers at Au Bonheur des Dames, into Jean's fiancée in the film. His wife from the novel, Thérèse, is deleted.

In addition to reducing the need for additional narratives, Mlle. Vadon's placement in the store makes her a colleague of Denise and provides the explanation for the dénouement of the film. In the basement of Au Bonheur des Dames, Mouret, with his omnipotent gaze, catches Denise with "another man" whom Mouret believes to be Denise's lover. Denise neither confirms nor denies Mouret's accusation. As Mouret returns to his office, Bourdoncle is firing a saleswoman (Mlle. Vadon) for kissing a man in the store. As the story unfolds, Mlle. Vadon explains that she kissed Jean, her fiancé, when she discovered that he was Denise's brother. Mouret now realizes that Denise does not have a lover but a brother. Cayatte uses this character as a cinematic trope to close the narrative.

Another example of condensation is found in the roles of Madame Desforges and Baron Hartmann. To permit the relationship with Mouret and Denise to occur, Cayatte ruptures the sexual liaisons between Mouret and Henriette and increases Desforges' personal wealth. Then, Cayatte conflates the role of Baron Hartmann, Mouret's financial associate and banker, with Mme Desforges. While discussing a future financial transaction with Desforges, Mouret proposes more than just a business relationship. He

proposes: “Une femme intelligente comme vous ne peut pas hésiter. En vous regardant, on arrive à désirer une association plus étroite.” But, Mme Desforges, pretending to refuse to fall prey to his seduction, tells Mouret: “Non, non, non. Ne melez pas l’amour aux affaires.” As a businesswoman with numerous commercial holdings, Desforges becomes even more important as a commodity to possess. In the novel, she was the mistress of Baron Hartmann with access to his money, but in the film, Mme Desforges possesses and controls her own money.

Unlike Denise, who maintains that she has no ulterior motives, Mme Desforges cunningly pretends that she is not capable of making good deals. Although not a novice to business procedures, Desforges uses her sexuality to feign ignorance of the nasty world of business. She repeatedly tells Mouret and Baudu: “Je ne suis pas une femme d’affaires. Les chiffres et moi, nous sommes brouillés.” However, as Mouret discusses his receipts for the day Desforges accuses him of exaggerating. He confides to her that the store had “cent cinquante mille francs de recettes.” She contradicts him and says, “Non, cent treize mille de recettes.” She then expresses her feelings about Mouret’s business acumen. She tells him: “Vous êtes un homme très sympathique, très séduisant, vous me plaisez beaucoup mais ma confiance en vous à des limites.” Determined to attain her goal, she acts on her desires and gives Mouret an ultimatum: “C’est à prendre ou à laisser.” Mouret agrees, kisses her, and says, “Je prends.”

In addition, Mme Desforges convinces Baudu to sell his store to her and she, in turn, sells it to Mouret. Desforges fulfills her business desires and secures the seven-percent interest that she had always demanded, and as a result, her financial status remains constant throughout the film as she maintains her agency. Behind the frilly

façade, silky voice, platinum blond hair, and eccentric clothes, Mme Henriette Desforges is a woman who understands how to access her desire. However, her simplistic goal of seducing Octave Mouret trivialises the necessity and importance of female agency.

If women are the objects of the gaze, then men are the agents in control of that gaze. It is the exaltation of the male gaze that precludes women from gaining access to the gaze. From the beginning of the film, Cayatte foregrounds male desire and agency in order to highlight the economic and sexual desires of Octave Mouret. Heightening the power of the male gaze diminishes the power of the female gaze. Jean initiates the masculine gaze beginning with his longing look at the woman entering the carriage. This look sutures the spectator into the masculine point of view. Like Zola's theory of sexual imprinting, the spectator remains aligned with this masculine point of view throughout the film. This diminishes female agency as access to the gaze is blocked for women.

For example, Denise is privileged with the first line of the film, but she delivers this line hidden inside the carriage where she cannot see or be seen. To break Jean's sexual enchantment and to announce her presence, she tells him: "Dis donc, Jean. Tu peux m'aider aussi, non? Depuis que nous avons quitté la gare Saint-Lazare c'est comme si je n'existe plus." This statement foreshadows Denise's diminished role and lack of agency in the film, as she becomes a cinematic object.

As the trio looks for *Le Vieil Elbeuf*, Cayatte returns the gaze to Jean as he continues to emphasize male desire. When the newly arrived group passes the store window, Jean notices three pretty girls in the window arranging a display as Denise exclaims, "On vend tout. Même des tambours." Jean examines the girls, as well as the merchandise they offer, as if both are for sale. Jean exclaims: "On doit les choisir." Immediately after

leaving the store window Jean stares at a woman who asks him: “Voulez-vous qu’on vous envoie un portrait?” Jean responds, “Dès que j’ai une adresse je vous dirai où.” Cayatte keeps male desire in the forefront of the narrative.

Jean’s access to the gaze paves the way for Mouret to express his sexual desires in addition to his business desires. Cayatte uses male desire to thrust the narrative forward and uses Denise and money as the objects of that desire. In order to filter and refract his representation of the female characters, Cayatte employs Zola’s homosocial triangle in the characters of Mouret, Bourdoncle, and Denise. The two men, Mouret and Bourdoncle, are close friends and business associates. Although Bourdoncle is a subordinate, Mouret trusts and respects him and in return, the admiration and respect of Bourdoncle for Mouret is very strong. Until the arrival of Denise, the two had been very successful in running and managing the store and spending time in each other’s company.

In the past, Mouret had engaged in numerous liaisons with many women, but Bourdoncle had only been amused by his exploits, never threatened. The appearance of Denise, however, threatens this harmonious homosocial relationship. As a result, Denise is represented from two opposing masculine points-of-view. Mouret sees her as a love object and dedicated worker while Bourdoncle sees her as a conniving and cunning young woman. Both positions solidify her position as “other.”

Mouret explains his position to Bourdoncle after Jean, Denise’s brother, is found in the women’s dormitory. Mouret interrogates every woman individually about the young man found there in the morning. Following his questioning of Denise, he separates her from the other women. He adamantly tells Bourdoncle that Denise “n’est pas comme les autres, Bourdoncle. Croyez-moi. Je connais des femmes.” Bourdoncle,

always cynical and skeptical of women, replies: “Mais vous croyez les connaître et dominer mais un jour en viendra une qui vengera les autres.” Since this scene follows the scene of Denise’s interrogation, Bourdoncle’s statement foreshadows the future relationship of Mouret with Denise. She is the “other,” the “une” of whom Bourdoncle speaks.

In his position of owner and surveyor of the store, Mouret is privileged with unlimited access to the look. Cayatte makes this point very emphatically as he demonstrates Mouret’s omnipotent power. During an early conversation with Mme Desforges concerning the enlargement of the store, she asks him: “Et la clientèle, vous les trouveriez où?” Mouret responds by opening a small interior stained glass window located in his office, which is perched high above the sale floors. He says: “Ma clientèle, venez voir. La clientèle? mais là voilà. Les femmes. Toutes les femmes dans le palais que je construais pour elle. Il y aura tout ce qu’il aurait nécessaire. C’est à dire, tout ce qu’il aurait inutile.” Cayatte places the point of view with Mouret forcing the spectator to again participate in the male gaze. Even though Mme Desforges is present, she is not given access to the gaze; she merely shares Mouret’s access with the spectators. What makes Mouret’s gaze so excessively powerful is that not only does he have the ability to see all and know all but he is insulated from the return of the gaze from his subordinates and his customers.

Cayatte seems to almost intentionally refuse the gaze to the female characters as demonstrated above with Mme Desforges. In the next scene, a parallel situation occurs as Denise and her uncle Baudu look out the window towards Au Bonheur des Dames. Even though Denise is looking through a window, she is not privileged with the gaze.

Denise must share the gaze with her uncle as he tells her about Mouret and his store. Since Baudu is the diegetic narrator in this scene, it appears that the actual point of view is attributed to him. The object of Baudu's gaze is Mouret. Cayatte then reframes Denise and her uncle in the window. This objectification of Denise continues to undercut her agency.

Cayatte again refuses the look to Denise when she enters *Au Bonheur des Dames* for the first time. Bourdoncle stops her and asks, "Vous cherchez quelque chose Mademoiselle?" She responds, "Non, non, Je regarde simplement." Bourdoncle's response to her is, "Eh bien, regardez. Regardez tout à votre aise. Au Bonheur des Dames les clientes sont chez elles." What is curious is that Denise has come to look; she states that she is looking, but no point-of-view shot of Denise looking is ever given. This is constantly repeated as most of the female employees are denied access to the gaze. It is ironic that all of these women who constantly help customers to examine and to look at the store's merchandise are never privileged with the look. The look belongs to Mouret.

Denise is consistently denied the look in the film. In her nice and bright bedroom in the women's quarters, Denise gets up from her bed and walks past a very inviting window but refuses to look. She then stands in front of the mirror to examine her skirt but she refuses to look at herself. When Jean comes into her room, she looks at Jean in the mirror but not herself. This refusal of Denise to initiate the gaze signifies her role as passive agent.

Since men are not allowed in the women's dormitory, Denise tells Jean to leave immediately. As Jean is leaving he is caught and goes into another room to hide. The girl pushes him out of the room and Bourdoncle and Mouret see him. All the girls come



out to see what is happening, with Denise the last girl to enter the hallway. As Bourdoncle and Mouret question Jean, Denise watches but Cayatte still does not privilege her with the look. It appears that Denise has the point of view but after careful examination, we see that the origin of the shot does not come from Denise. This pseudo point of view and the total denial of the gaze to Denise continue throughout the film.

Eventually, Cayatte privileges Denise with one point-of-view shot while she is at the park with Pépé. After Pépé rides around the park six times in the goat cart, Denise tells him he cannot go again. To appease him, she starts to tell a story that begins like a fairy tale. She says: “Il était une fois un monsieur...” As Denise continues her story, it appears that this “monsieur” is none other than Monsieur Mouret. When Denise mentions that this man is nice to her, she stops talking because she sees something. In a dizzying fashion, Cayatte quickly pans the camera to the object of Denise’s gaze—Mouret and Mme Desforges walking in the park. A cut follows the couple to the male acrobat show.

Later in the film, Denise is again permitted limited access to the look. At this point, she takes the initiative and decides to dress a mannequin in a store outfit. She enters the frame carrying the mannequin. As she begins dressing the mannequin, Mme Aurélie sees her and asks what she is doing. Denise responds, “Je vais l’habiller. Je pensais que c’est la meilleur façon de montrer le dernier modèle aux clientes.” Of course, Mouret sees what Denise is doing, approaches her, gives his approval, and assists her with the mannequin. He is impressed by her dedication to the job and her marketing ideas. As a result, he gives her carte blanche for her marketing innovations. At the same time, Mme Desforges enters and sees a reflection in the mirror of Mouret and Denise

working together. She questions Bourdoncle, “Qui est cette jeune personne?” He tells her that she is nothing more than “une simple vendeuse.” Mme Desforges inquires about Mouret’s relationship to this girl and insinuates that the girl is “Son dernier caprice probablement.” Bourdoncle tells her, “Oh, je n’ai pas dit ça. Il s’en occupe beaucoup, oui, beaucoup trop.” Mme Desforges’ jealousy prompts her to attempt to humiliate, demoralize, and fire Denise. Mouret, still watching, defends Denise against Desforges’ haughty stare and abusive words.

However, the next scene serves to return women to their “place” as mindless consumers. A woman, with a vase in her hand calls out for Mouret. He approaches and stands in between the woman and the beautifully dressed mannequin. Frantic, this woman, like the mannequin, loses her head because she cannot find the porcelain department. She asks Mouret, “Monsieur, il n’y a plus de rayon de porcelaine?” Mouret reassures her that the department still exists. The woman, relieved, says, “J’ai eu peur . . . c’est pour une échange.” Comforted, she regains her composure and leaves the dress department.

Mouret is always in control of the look and monitors the access to the gaze of the other characters, specifically the female characters. This is demonstrated in the above scene where he chastises Desforges for her abuse of the look. Bourdoncle works in tandem with Mouret scrutinizing the day-to-day activities of the store and shares the gaze with him. If the point of view is not with Mouret it is usually with Bourdoncle. The importance of their access to the gaze is that, as men, they have the power to affect change. This is seen frequently, and manifested as Bourdoncle dismisses staff at the beginning of the slow season. He traverses the store with his hands behind his back,

looking for infractions. Anything that he sees that is not pleasing to his eyes is removed. For example, Bourdoncle tells two male salesclerks: “Il est interdit de s’asseoir. Passez à la caisse!” and “Vous avez une sale tête. Passez à la caisse!” After these two dismissals, Bourdoncle asks Inspector Jouve for the count, “Ça nous fait combien?” Jouve replies, “cent quarante-huit.” Bourdoncle then continues the count as if counting pennies and not lives, “cent quarante . . . il nous faut encore cinquante-deux.”

As Bourdoncle continues to lurk in the shadows of the store, he sees Denise help a fellow employee to lie down. Mademoiselle Prunaire, who is privileged with the gaze, tells him that the young girl is “un tout petit enceinte.” Bourdoncle follows the women into the room to observe. Even though the girl tells Bourdoncle that she is married, he intends to let her go. Bourdoncle shares Mouret’s power as he tells her: “Défense de se marier sans en aviser la direction, article trois du règlement. Passez à la caisse.”

Bourdoncle oversteps his authority as he smugly informs Mouret about the young man with whom he saw Denise enter the basement. Mouret becomes frustrated with Bourdoncle, and his accomplice, Clara Prunaire, for abusing their access to the gaze and for meddling in his love affairs. No longer willing to share his power of the look, Mouret hands Bourdoncle a tablet of paper and says: “Bourdoncle, prenez ce bloc et ce crayon.” Exercising complete and unequivocal authority and power, Mouret demands Bourdoncle to write, “Notez le nom de deux personnes qui ne font plus partie de la maison. Clara Prunaire, vendeuse à la confection; Bourdoncle, Emile, directeur adjoint.” Bourdoncle, surprised, asks, “Qu’est-ce que ça signifie?” Mouret responds, “Ça signifie que vous êtes un joli couple de saligauds.” Chastising both Bourdoncle and Clara Prunaire for their inaccurate and gloating reports about Denise, he fires them both.

As the film reaches its conclusion, Mouret's power increases exponentially as Denise's diminishes. Mouret's constant use of the imperative; *conduisez, ramenez, trouvez, prenez, notez*, etc. underscores his ability to see and then act. He commands that Jouve deliver Denise to him: "Et vous, trouvez-moi toute de suite Mademoiselle Baudu. Ramenez-la-moi morte ou vivre." This request substantiates the premise that Denise is a nouveauté, an object to possess, and a trophy to display. As Mouret's power increases; Denise's power, vis-à-vis Mouret, decreases. She has become the ultimate commodity.

Denise never attains access to the gaze. Even during Mouret's marriage proposal to her she is a passive agent. As Mouret lists his future improvements to the store, Denise is excluded from the frame. As he explains Denise's role in his decisions, he continues to describe himself as the active agent. He says: "si j'étais amener à me pencher sur votre sort . . ." The use of the verb "amener" instead of "convaincre" signifies Denise's lack of substantive influence.

Mouret uses this announcement as a segue to his proposal to Denise. A typically private act becomes public as Mouret commodifies his proposal in order to win the adoration of his employees. As he enumerates his changes, Jouve forcefully leads Denise down the stairs to Mouret. Mouret looks at his employees, not Denise, and continues: "Remerciez donc, Mademoiselle Baudu qui j'espère sera bientôt Madame Mouret." Standing between the two men, each forcefully holding her hand, Denise asks, "Mais, qu'est-ce que ça veut dire?" Mouret turns to her and replies, "Ça veut dire que j'ai l'honneur de vous demander votre main, oui, celle que Jouve tient si solidement."

For the conclusion of the film, Denise is non-verbal as she does not accept or reject Mouret's proposal. The crowd "speaks" for her as they applaud overwhelmingly to

signal her acceptance. Denise simply smiles timidly as Mouret leads her to the balcony. The couple embraces and stands together exuding all the optimism of a new life together and a better life for the store employees. In the role of passive agent par excellence, Denise has transcended from salesgirl to queen, which is the direct result of Mouret actively exercising his agency. Rachel Bowlby describes Denise's implied agency: "'Omnipotent' in appearance, her power in fact extends only to modifications of the existing system" (78).

Cayatte's ending mimics the typical, happy "Hollywood-style ending" at a time in France where Hollywood is verboten. His overly melodramatic finish on the balcony concludes this modern day fairy tale as Mouret places Denise beside him in her place of honor. The energetic and persevering entrepreneur, Octave Mouret, finally possesses the commodity he had pursued so persistently. As the music swells, Denise and Mouret descend the huge stairs and begin dancing. The music that was playing at the beginning of the film is now identified as the waltz of the proposal dance of Denise and Mouret.

Similar to Zola's narrative, Cayatte's reading of Denise Baudu and Zola's other female characters intimates an affinity for masculine desire and female subordination and objectification. These two oppositional components are inherent in the voyeuristic nature of cinema. Hidden in Mouret's proposal to Denise, in a line scripted for the film that does not exist in the novel, Cayatte's ideology crystallizes. As Mouret literally asks for Denise's hand, he implores her to agree to be "Madame Mouret." As such, Denise is no longer a young salesgirl from Valognes but an object who takes shape in relationship to Mouret. Usurping Denise's individuality, speech, and agency, Mouret acquires unequivocal possession of her body, her person, and her identity, as Denise becomes the

ultimate mannequin. Zola's description of Mouret's commercial intent continues to resonate:

Mouret avait l'unique passion de vaincre la femme. Il la voulait reine dans sa maison, il lui avait bâti ce temple, pour l'y tenir à sa merci. C'était toute sa tactique, la griser d'attentions galantes et trafiquer de ses désires, exploiter sa fièvre. (258; ch. IX)

Zola and Cayatte's "poème de l'activité moderne," continues to retell the story of men possessing women as chattel as both novel and film underscore the narrativity of men and their syntagmatic access to agency and domination. Rachel Bowlby's summary of Mouret's relationship with/to women can be simultaneously applied to the film industry where women remain commodities in the economic world of the patriarchy. She states: "Behind the gallantry displayed in the outward honor of women, Mouret whispers that the meaning of true love is a sexual and financial partnership of men, a union of masculine interest based on the manipulation of women:" (79).

After Mouret's proposal, he leads Denise down the palatial staircase to dance among the other employees. When Denise reaches the floor she is consumed by the crowd. As the camera pulls back and the music swells, Denise becomes indistinguishable from the other women. Denise's brief role as the "other," the anomaly with agency that won Mouret's heart, is concluded as she acquiesces to the patriarchal code and accepts Mouret's hand in marriage.

## CHAPTER 5

### THE “EYES” HAVE IT

French cinema experienced a tumultuous period in the post-war decade of the 1950s. French production companies tried to re-establish their spectatorial hold on the French population, to re-create a truly French cinema, and to address the huge influx of American films. In 1949, the Centre National de la Cinématographie started selecting projects deemed worthy of “*primes à la qualité*” or “bonuses for quality.” The resultant cinema was known as the Tradition of Quality. These films featured high profile actors and actresses with star quality, slick “Hollywoodesque-type” production modes, and traditional adaptations of nineteenth-century French literature. Alan Williams describes this type of cinema:

“Quality” meant, first of all, that the films could not be inferior to the best American products, either technically (smoothness of editing, glitchless camera movement) or materially (eye-catching, expensive costumes and sets, appealing stars, “seeing the money of the screen”). Quality cinema attempted to meet the American threat in two ways: by beating it at its own game (making expensive movies with mass market appeal) and by emphasizing its home-court advantage, its Frenchness. (278)

In this context, Williams mentions the importance of adaptations:

Literary adaptation was a particularly prominent way of asserting national or European character. Stendhal, Zola, Maupassant, and other greats of the literary pantheon belong to the national patrimony; films based on their works shared their relation to the national Spirit. (278)

During this time period, four of Emile Zola's novels were adapted to the screen. They are, in chronological order: Thérèse Raquin (Carné-1953); Nana (Jaque-1954); Gervaise (Clément-1956); and Pot-Bouille, (Duvivier-1957). Banking on "star-quality" and sex appeal as an enticement to lure French audiences to French productions, the following female stars headlined these films: Simone Signoret, Martine Carol, and Maria Schell. Where male stars, such as Jean Gabin, had dominated the 1930s a plethora of female stars emerged in the 1950s.

Film adaptations, as opposed to original screenplays, are unique, as they require the director to choose the extent of involvement the film will have with the original text. When a director chooses to screen well-known novels with well-known protagonists the importance of the decision intensifies. Choosing novels of Emile Zola, each of the above mentioned directors must decide how to screen the original novel and how to portray Zola's "classic" female protagonists. Screening Thérèse Raquin, Gervaise Macquart Coupeau and her infamous daughter, Nana, already quasi-mythical figures by the 1950s, required careful planning and consideration by each director in order to create modern "Quality" films while retaining the "Frenchness" of the original novels. Carné, Clément and Jaque had to navigate the area between pre-conceived reader images, star-quality, sex appeal, economic concerns, and artistic restrictions to bring these female images to the screen.

As a result of the frequency of adaptations, scriptwriters were an important, and distinct, part of the Tradition of Quality. The most common names associated with scriptwriting during the fifties are Jean Aurenche, Pierre Bost, Charles Spaak, Henri



Jeanson and Jacques Prévert. These scriptwriters were charged with bringing the narrative, milieu, characters, and dialogues of the novel to the screen. One of the most important challenges, according to Pierre Bost, was the task of character construction. During a lecture at the Institut des Hautes Etudes Cinématographiques on April 26, 1944, Bost remarks:

What counts is less the story than the characters. . . . This is one of the essential tasks of the dialoguist—telling a story is of minor interest. What is of interest is bringing characters to life. Only in this does the scenarist find himself on a level with the playwright and the novelist. Only in this does his job attain a certain worth, a certain nobility. (qtd. in Crisp: 297)

In this context, it was often important that the scriptwriters knew for whom they were writing as the character could change depending on the actor or actress. This idea seems especially pertinent to the “Tradition of Quality” since producers banked on the “star-quality” of a specific actor or actress to ensure the success of the film. Colin Crisp explains this process:

To some extent then, the focus on character as the primary consideration of the script arose from the fact that the industrial system often required the producer to engage a star if he was to ensure the distributor’s financial support, and both distributor and star would only agree if the proposed role was appropriate to their (and the public’s) expectations. (298)

Since film adaptations had become so prevalent, screenwriters became an indispensable part of the cinematic process. Working in collaboration with the directors, scriptwriters not only produced screenplays but they helped to create the female images seen on screen. By conflating the popular heroines of Zola’s novels with the famous actresses chosen to represent them, new female images emerged. One aspect of this new female image, according to Susan Hayward, was a move towards more explicit eroticizing of the female body (171). In Laura Mulvey’s terminology this would be to increase the “to-be-

looked-at-ness.” This is most notably seen in Martine Carol’s portrayal of Nana. Alan Williams describes Carol’s status:

Individual stars’ bodies and personas became fetishes, in some cases to an outlandish extent, almost to the point of self-parody. The actress Martine Carol, whose body was one sort of the 1950’s French ideal, typically appeared in fitted, low-cut gowns often created by her own personal designer. In some of her work, one has the impression that the films have been planned and executed mainly in terms of her costumes and the various ways that they display the Carolian figure. (279)

The huge importance of screenwriters and other specialized workers oftentimes lead to a diminished role for the director in the film production, sometimes relegating him to the role of a simple technician following a completed list of directions. Yet, it was during this time period that the “seeds” of what would become the New Wave were planted. This opposing ideology would emerge to reject old traditions, old directors, formal, narrative conventions, and the Tradition of Quality. François Truffaut and Jean-Luc Godard were at the forefront of this new perspective, which demanded that artistic control be returned to the director. Truffaut’s polemical article ‘Une certaine tendance du cinéma français’ which appeared in Cahiers du Cinéma in 1954, attacked Aurenche and Bost and ridiculed the Tradition of Quality as “le cinéma de papa.” Colin Crisp summarizes Truffaut’s disdain for scriptwriters:

In it he (Truffaut) attacks the “scriptwriters films” that he saw as having dominated the French cinema since the coming of sound, producing a “psychological realism” and a “quality product” which are abjectly artificial. His particular targets were the scriptwriters Jean Aurenche and Pierre Bost, but also Spaak, Sigurd, and Jeanson. (234).

Crisp describes Truffaut’s call for an auteurist cinema:

The classic cinema’s baseness he sees as due primarily to the fragmentation of the filmmaking process under such a production system and to the lack of a single guiding mind behind each film which might

have produced a work that was at once coherent in form and authentic, passionate, sincere in its account of the author's experience. The scenarist's cinema of the past ten years seemed to him on the contrary to have produced nothing but stilted and artificial worlds inhabited by grotesque and abject puppets. (qtd. in Crisp: 234)

Although "artificiality" and "Emile Zola" are diametrically opposed terms and are rarely grouped together in the same sentence, many of these "artificial worlds" and "grotesque and abject puppets" of "le cinéma de papa" can be traced to the novels of Emile Zola. The continued popularity of his characters and stories during the 1950s (which marked the fiftieth anniversary of Zola's death in 1952) fit perfectly into the template of the Tradition of Quality and also helped to resurrect the idea of a truly French cinema.

Of the four film adaptations mentioned, all, except for Jaque's Nana, were produced in black and white, thus resisting the total "Americanization" of French cinema. However, this bold choice to reject Technicolor did not seem to deter or influence the French film audience. Susan Hayward remarks: "By the mid 1950's, only 50 percent of French production was in colour and black and white films were topping the list of receipts: Gervaise (Clément 1955) and La Traversée de Paris (Autant-Lara 1956)" (200).

The popularity of these black and white adaptations during the 1950s, featuring big-name stars, is reminiscent of the popularity of the "poetic realist" films of the 1930s starring Jean Gabin and others. As Alan Williams explains:

There had always been a French cinema star system, of course, since before the days of Max Linder. But mainstream postwar filmmaking depended upon stardom to an unprecedented degree. Stars were the most reliable means of attaining the high box-office revenues required to repay the large investments in quality works. All major films were, to some extent, star vehicles. (279)

Considering the huge star appeal of Martine Carol during the fifties, it seems only natural that she was chosen to play the infamous Nana. Oddly coincidental is the fact that, like Jean Renoir, who placed his wife, Catherine Hessling, in the role of Nana, so did Christian Jaque place his wife, Martine Carol, in the same role twenty-six years later.

In addition to star power, the homosocial thematic present in numerous novels of Emile Zola produces a cinematic resurgence of the male bonding “buddy” film as exemplified by the friendship of Jacques Lantier and Pecqueux in La Bête Humaine. René Girard in Mensonge romantique et vérité romanesque explores this concept when a rival love object is present. He concludes that all desire is triangular in form when two men desire the same female. The interesting result of this desire is that the bond created between the two *vaniteux* becomes as important as the competing desire for the female mediator. However, unlike the friendship between Jacques Lantier and Pecqueux, which does not involve a female mediator, the strong male bond between Camille Raquin and Laurent, and Coupeau and Auguste Lantier, leads to the degradation and demise of the female mediators, Thérèse and Gervaise, who become ciphers. Zola emphasizes this bond in L’Assommoir when speaking of the friendship between Coupeau and Lantier: “On n’en aurait pas trouvé deux aussi solides dans la Chapelle. Enfin, ils se comprenaient, ils étaient bâtis l’un pour l’autre. L’amitié avec un homme, c’est plus solide que l’amour avec une femme” (290; ch. VIII). Zola presents this homosocial masculine behavior as part of the natural order. Gervaise is destroyed by her acceptance of compulsory heterosexuality and the excessive homosociality of Coupeau and Lantier.

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, in her study of male homosociality in British literature, explores Gayle Rubin’s discussion of male traffic in women. Sedgwick accepts Rubin’s

argument that patriarchal heterosexuality can best be discussed in terms of one or another form of the traffic in women: it is the use of women by men as exchangeable, perhaps symbolic, property for the primary purpose of cementing relationships with other men (Between Men 26). Since men generally are signifiers of power and authority, male relationships oftentimes occur to gain or increase power, either financial or familial. This is the case with Laurent and Lantier who both seek a warm and comfortable domicile, food on the table and money in order to socialize with other male friends. Under the guise of friendship and loyalty, Laurent and Lantier use women as currency to attain their goals. Thérèse and Gervaise are simply the conduits. Sedgwick continues to comment on male bonding and its true purpose. She states: “The homosociality of this world seems embodied fully in its heterosexuality; and its shape is not that of brotherhood, but of extreme, compulsory, and intensely volatile mastery and subordination” (66). This is, of course, mastery and subordination of women.

Proceeding from Sedgwick’s discussion, a quick examination of the sexual triangular relationships in Thérèse Raquin and Gervaise reveals that these two women are the “exchangeable objects” used by Laurent and Lantier to pay for their creature comforts. This produces two commodified female protagonists who have no true access to agency. Heredity, patriarchal law and male homosociality block access to agency for Thérèse and Gervaise and confine them to a predetermined path of failure. Laurent forms a male bond with Thérèse’s feminized husband, Camille, and later a relationship with Thérèse. This bond is not to befriend Camille but to steal his wife, his home, and his money. The same is true as Lantier befriends Coupeau in order to have a place to stay

and money in order to eat and drink. Thérèse and Gervaise are merely pawns trapped in the men's plots.

To escape the destructive power of homosociality and the patriarchy, the women choose different alternatives. One (Thérèse) runs towards more interaction with men, leaving her feminized husband, Camille, while one (Gervaise) runs away from it, seeking out the feminized male, Goujet who represents an alternative to patriarchy. Neither of these two options is successful as these women find themselves trapped in a nineteenth-century *huis clos* from which the only escape is death.

Thérèse Raquin, Zola's first financially successful novel, was to be published in La Revue du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle. Fearing reprisal and prosecution due to the scandalous nature of the material, the publisher decided to release Zola from his contract. Shortly after, La Revue lost its sponsor and another prominent literary journal, L'Artiste, serialized the text (Brown 157). The novel was originally titled Un Mariage d'Amour, but as Zola moved to find a book publisher, he decided to change the title to Thérèse Raquin. On September 13, 1867 he writes to Albert Lacroix:

Quant au titre, il sera d'autant meilleur, selon moi, qu'il sera plus simple. L'oeuvre s'intitule dans L'Artiste: Un mariage d'amour, mais je compte changer cela et mettre: Thérèse Raquin, le nom de l'héroïne. Je crois que le temps des titres abracadabrants est fini et que le public n'a plus aucune confiance dans les enseignes. D'ailleurs, la question du titre n'en sera pas une. Je vous avoue que j'ai besoin d'argent et que je préférerais vous vendre la propriété de l'oeuvre pour un certain nombre d'années, si vous croyez pouvoir m'offrir une somme raisonnable. . . . Je tiens à ce que le livre paraisse en octobre. Prenez connaissance de l'oeuvre, laissez-moi choisir un titre bien simple, et faites-moi à votre tour vos conditions. (Correspondance I 522-23)

Choosing the "simpler" title of Thérèse Raquin for economic gain immediately posits Zola's protagonist as a commodity and puts Thérèse's agency in question. Regardless,

Zola legitimizes this woman by placing her name on the cover of his novel. This implies that Thérèse is to be the most important character of the novel, the one around whom the narrative will revolve and whose story will drive the narrative forward.

Emile Zola provoked public interest with many of his novels and, oftentimes, this interest ended in censorship or scandal. The reception of Thérèse Raquin began a long tradition of “shocking” novels by Zola. The most scathing objection to Zola’s novel appeared in Le Figaro on January 23, 1868. The article, written by Louis Ulbach, was titled, “La Littérature putride.” Ulbach comments: “Il semble, pour rester dans les comparaisons de ce livre, qu’on soit étendu sous le robinet d’un des lits de la Morgue, et jusqu’à la dernière page, on sent couler, tomber goutte à goutte sur soi cette eau faite pour délayer des cadavres” (Oeuvres Complètes I 673). Zola takes advantage of the controversy and responds immediately to Ulbach’s attacks using the preface to the second edition of the novel as his rebuttal. He says: “Dans *Thérèse Raquin*, j’ai voulu étudier des tempéraments et non des caractères. Là est le livre entière” (12). As a result, the sale of the novel continued to increase.

Although Thérèse Raquin is not a part of the Rougon-Macquart series, this early novel is replete with numerous characters, narrative threads, and leitmotifs that will resurface again and again in the twenty volume series to follow. Zola’s fascination with the working class, female protagonists, male friendships, male/female relationships, women’s oppression, and genealogical determinism all debut in this novel. For example, Zola’s description of Thérèse Raquin’s cloistered environment will resurface as he describes the confined life of Sabine Muffat in Nana. Zola describes Thérèse’s life in the draper’s shop:

La vie cloîtrée qu'elle menait, le régime débilitant auquel elle était soumise ne purent affaiblir son corps maigre et robuste; sa face prit seulement des teintes pales, légèrement jaunâtres, et elle devint presque laide à l'ombre. Parfois, elle allait à la fenêtre, elle contemplait les maisons d'en face sur lesquelles le soleil jetait des nappes dorées. (27; ch. II)

Zola's description of Sabine Muffat seems to be cut and pasted from a galley for Thérèse Raquin, just reoriented for a different social class. Anna Krakowski paraphrases Zola's description:

Elevée dans un ménage désuni, mariée à dix-sept ans à un grand nerveux, la jeune comtesse allait bientôt se trouver sous la tutelle d'une belle-mère dévote et despotique. La jeunesse de Sabine de Chouard s'écoule morne, entre un mari morose et une belle-mère farouche. Privée de soleil et de gaieté elle fait penser à un oiseau en cage. (175)

The image of a bird in a cage is a recurring theme used by Zola to represent a woman's situation during the Second Empire. This image reaches its apogee in Germinal with the use of caged canaries in the mines to monitor the air quality. Catherine, the daughter of La Maheude and Maheu, like the birds, perishes in the mine due to lack of oxygen and freedom to live her own life.

Krakowski continues her summation that completes the affinity between Thérèse and Sabine:

Cependant, en dépit de son extérieur calme, nous sentons en elle un être passionné. Après dix-sept ans de conduite irréprochable, Sabine Muffat semble s'être résignée à une vie triste mais ordonné; sa belle-mère disparue, elle n'osa rien changer à ses habitudes. Tout, même l'intérieur sinistre, reste tel que l'avait voulu la morte. (175)

Thérèse Raquin begins with a fixed shot of le passage du Pont Neuf as Zola's pen moves the reader from exterior to interior. He physically and temporally situates the novel and moves forward with his detailed description as if moving a camera in for a



close-up. He stops on a specific boutique where the name of the novel's protagonist is displayed:

Il y a quelques années, en face de cette marchande, se trouvait une boutique dont les boiseries d'un vert bouteille suaient l'humidité par toutes leurs fentes. L'enseigne, faite d'une planche étroite et longue, portait, en lettres noires, le mot: *Mercerie*, et sur une des vitres de la porte était écrit un nom de femme: *Thérèse Raquin*, en caractères rouges. A droite et à gauche s'enfonçaient des vitrines profondes, tapissées de papier bleu. (21; ch. I)

Here, Zola reemphasizes that this is to be a novel about Thérèse despite the objectification of her name on the door window. The red letters foreshadow the violence associated with Thérèse Raquin—the murder of her husband, Camille, his mother's stroke and paralysis, Laurent's bleeding wound, and the suicide of the two lovers. Thérèse Raquin is a name that will be remembered.

The large windows on each side of the door serve as a transparent screen through which to view the affairs of the Raquin household while the blue paper coverings on the windows represent the clandestine and horrific nature of these affairs. For those of a superstitious nature, the choice of a thirteen-letter name for the protagonist augments the dark mysteriousness associated with her.

Zola introduces the reader to Thérèse slowly in a long, carefully constructed paragraph that increases the mystery and the suspense of the narrative as well as heightening the sexuality of the protagonist. Zola's description mimics a long shot in shallow focus. In order to penetrate the shadows, he slowly moves his "camera" forward to unveil a face in close-up: "Vers midi, en été, lorsque le soleil brûlait les places et les rues de rayons fauves, on distinguait, derrière les bonnets de l'autre vitrine, un profil pâle

et grave de jeune femme. Ce profil sortait vaguement des ténèbres qui régnaient dans la boutique” (22; ch. I).

The beginning of this paragraph reveals the existence of a nameless woman confined to a room of horrifying shadows and whose body is simultaneously engulfed and effaced by the oppressive nature of these ominous shadows. Adding to the suspense, Zola leaves the significance of these unexplained, pervasive shadows in doubt, using them as phantasmagoria. Zola best describes this fog as “quelque chose de ‘cauchemardant’” in his interview with Eugène Clisson printed in L’Événement on March 8, 1889 (qtd. In Speirs and Signori 41). These haunting shadows become so important in the novel that they seem to have a life of their own: “Au front bas et sec s’attachait un nez long, étroit, effilé; les lèvres étaient deux minces traits d’un rose pâle, et le menton, court et nerveux, tenait au cou par une ligne souple et grasse. On ne voyait pas le corps, qui se perdait dans l’ombre. . .;” (22; ch. I). Here, these mysterious shadows block the trajectory of the gaze, forcing Zola to eradicate the body from his description.

The corporeal body is figuratively severed from the head as the frightening, lugubrious shadows have consumed it and hidden it from view. This visual fragmentation of the body adds to the eroticism of the narration and the female character. Laura Mulvey explains the use of the cinematic look and the effect of this type of narration: “One part of a fragmented body destroys the Renaissance space, the illusion of depth demanded by the narrative; it gives flatness, the quality of a cut-out or icon, rather than verisimilitude, to the screen” (Visual Pleasure 20).

Zola specifically mentions that the body is not visible, after which he describes each part of the face separately, the nose, the lips, the chin, and the neck. His use of the

adjectives “souple” and “grasse” to describe the neck evokes the sensation of touch, which adds a tactile dimension to the visual description: “le profil seul apparaissait, d’une blancheur mate, troué d’un oeil noir largement ouvert, et comme écrasé sous une épaisse chevelure sombre” (22; ch. I). Upon conclusion of this paragraph, the significant detail that Zola brings into focus, despite the shadows, is the woman’s eye. This eye, open widely, foreshadows this female character’s access to the gaze while at the same time alludes to the difficulty of this access since the eye is covered by a thick head of hair. However, this reference to the eye functions to introduce an important leitmotif for the entire novel—the power of the look. The eye, and more specifically, the control of the look, assumes paramount importance throughout the course of the novel. Whoever has control of the look controls the narrative and wins the game.

Still, at this point, the only referent for this woman appears to be the red, thirteen-letter name of Thérèse Raquin painted on the door of the boutique and inscribed on the cover of the novel. In addition to the description of her fragmented body, this referent serves to further destroy “the Renaissance space of the character.” It depersonalizes the figure in the shadows reducing her to a flat, one-dimensional, iconographic door sign. Finally, four pages later, Zola enunciates the name of the character and unites his description with the bearer of the look, Thérèse Raquin.

Chapters II and III of the novel function as a narrative flashback, which provides the reader with pertinent background information. This is necessary in order to return the reader back to the diegetic present. During this flashback, Thérèse’s story is told: “Thérèse allait avoir dix-huit ans. Un jour, seize années auparavant, lorsque madame

Raquin était encore mercière, son frère, le capitaine Degans, lui apporta une petite fille dans ses bras. Il arrivait d'Algérie" (26; ch. II).

Thérèse was two years old when she arrived at the Raquin household in Vernon after the death of her mother. Captain Degans gives his sister very few details about the child, which only adds to her "exoticness:" "Voici une enfant dont tu es la tante, lui dit-il avec un sourire. Sa mère est morte . . . Moi je ne sais qu'en faire. Je te la donne" (26; ch. II). Captain Degans gives Thérèse to his sister as a souvenir of his travels in Algeria. Zola provides only a few additional, sketchy details about Thérèse's exotic "foreignness:" "Elle [Madame Raquit] sut vaguement que la chère petite était née à Oran et qu'elle avait pour mère une femme indigène d'une grande beauté" (26; ch. 1). Thérèse's marginality begins with her birth in Africa.

Zola repeatedly returns to the description of Thérèse's eyes, which are usually wide open. She owns the look in numerous passages:

Pendant des heures, elle restait accroupie devant le feu, pensive, regardant les flammes de face, sans baisser les paupières. Cette vie forcée convalescente la replia sur elle-même, elle prit l'habitude de parler à voix basse, de marcher sans faire du bruit, de rester muette et immobile sur une chaise, les yeux ouverts et vides de regards. (26; ch. 1)

As a young orphan, Thérèse is obedient and dutiful while observing all actions in the Raquin household. This freedom of the look contrasts ironically with her confinement and inability to escape the entrapment of her home. As she matures, she learns how to effectively utilize and manipulate her access to the look.

Playing on the image of the watchful eyes of Thérèse, Zola gives her numerous "cat-like," animal qualities, while at the same time humanizing the cat François. The cat's typical name underscores his personification. Considering Thérèse's heritage, it is

interesting to note that François is described as *le chat tigré*. Is this possibly a reference to Thérèse's African origins where one might expect to find a *tigre*?" Thérèse is represented in this animal/human dichotomy as feral while the cat is domesticated: "on sentait en elle [Thérèse] des souplesses félines..." (27) and "elle [Thérèse] couchait à plat ventre comme une bête, les yeux noirs et agrandis, le corps tordu, près de bondir" (28). On the other hand, Zola says of François: "on dirait qu'il comprend et qu'il va ce soir tout conter à Camille... Dis, ce serait drôle, s'il se mettait à parler dans la boutique, un de ces jours; il sait de belles histoires sur notre compte..." (60; ch. VII). Thérèse's animal instincts permit her to "see" and understand François' human-like characteristics: "Cette idée, que François pourrait parler, amusa singulièrement la jeune femme" (60; ch. VII), and to imitate his movements: "elle mimait le chat, elle allongeait les mains en façon de griffes, elle donnait à ses épaules des ondulations félines" (60; ch. VII). Zola suggests that it is Thérèse's African heritage that enables her to understand *le chat tigré* and to resist being "tamed."

Thérèse lives with her cousin/husband, Camille, and her aunt/mother-in-law in the small confines of the boutique in Vernon. Although Thérèse is presented as a passive participant in the Raquin household, it is Camille who displays the most typical feminine characteristics. As indicated by his name, used commonly for women, Camille is an ambiguous, impotent, and non-sexual character. Frail, weak, sickly, and always under his mother's care, Camille represents the feminized male:

Plus bas, assis sur une chaise, un homme d'une trentaine d'années lisait ou causait à demi-voix avec la jeune femme. Il était petit, chétif, d'allure languissante, les cheveux d'un blond fade, la barbe rare, le visage couvert de taches de rousseur, il ressemblait à un enfant malade et gâté. (23; ch. I)

Portraying Camille as a mere wisp of a man, Zola reemphasizes Camille's femininity by his thin, blonde hair and his inability to grow a beard.

Another aspect of Camille's character that adds to his weakness and his affinity with females is his lack of education: "Camille resta ignorant, et son ignorance mit comme une faiblesse de plus en lui" (25; ch. II). In order to try and educate himself, Camille adopts a typically feminine hobby—reading. Camille enjoys reading while his wife, Thérèse, despises it: "Des son arrivée, il mangeait, puis il se mettait à lire . . .chaque soir, il se donnait une tâche de vingt, de trente pages..." (35; ch. III).

Despite her "savage-like" origins, Thérèse lives the same convalescent life as her cousin, Camille, sharing his bed, his medicine, and his illnesses. Underneath the calm, passive exterior of Thérèse rages emotions and feelings of hopelessness and confinement. Zola continues: "elle resta l'enfant élevée dans le lit d'un malade; mais elle vécut intérieurement une existence brûlante et emportée" (27; ch. II). When she leaves the confines of the household her suppressed desires surface. A reminder of her basic and primal origins, soil and water awaken Thérèse's animalness and sexuality:

Quand elle vit le jardin, la rivière blanche, les vastes coteaux verts qui montaient à l'horizon, il lui prit une envie sauvage de courir et de crier: elle sentit son coeur qui frappait à grands coups dans sa poitrine: mais pas un muscle de son visage ne bougea, elle se contenta de sourire lorsque sa tante lui demanda si cette nouvelle demeure lui plaisait. (27; ch. II)

Thérèse is adept at concealing her emotions. She maintains a static expression on her face in order to hide her true feelings and deny the Raquins, mother and son, the ability to know what she is truly thinking.

The introductory chapter refers to Camille and Thérèse as husband and wife, which is now explained as a pre-arranged marriage of convenience: "Elle [Madame

Raquin] avait résolu de les marier ensemble” (28; ch. II). Thérèse is again “given” away as a present for Camille: “Elle [Madame Raquin] l’avait vue à l’œuvre, elle voulait la donner à son fils comme un ange gardien. Ce mariage était un dénouement prévu, arrêté” (28; ch. II). This gives Madame Raquin senior comfort in knowing that her son will have a nursemaid to take care of him for the rest of his life. Neither Thérèse’s feelings nor her desires are considered to be important. Since Thérèse functions as a caretaker for Camille and a helper in the store, this marriage continues to use Thérèse as a commodity: “On parlait de cette union, dans la famille, comme d’une chose nécessaire, fatale” (28; ch. II). The resulting relationship is cold and loveless, as neither Camille nor Thérèse has sexual feelings for the other:

Il était resté petit garçon devant sa cousine, il l’embrassait comme il embrassait sa mère, par habitude, sans rien perdre de sa tranquillité égoïste. Il voyait en elle une camarade complaisante qui l’empêchait de trop s’ennuyer, et qui, à l’occasion, lui faisait de la tisane. Quand il jouait avec elle, qu’il la tenait dans ses bras, il croyait tenir un garçon; sa chair n’avait pas un frémissement. Et jamais il ne lui était venu la pensée, en ces moments, de baiser les lèvres chaudes de Thérèse, qui se débattait en riant d’un rire nerveux. (28-29; ch. II)

The only sexual desire that Thérèse has for her first cousin, this feminized masculine anomaly, is a non-desire. In other words, Thérèse has no interest in Camille and does not see him as a sexual being. Zola describes the night of their wedding: “Le soir, Thérèse, au lieu d’entrer dans sa chambre, qui était à gauche de l’escalier, entra dans celle de son cousin, qui était à droite. Ce fut tout le changement qu’il y eut dans sa vie, ce jour-là” (29-30; ch. II). Camille’s lack of sexual desire is again mentioned: “Ce garçon débile, dont le corps mou et affaîssé n’avait jamais eu une secousse de désir . . .” (45; ch. V). Even Camille’s friend, Laurent, gives his opinion of Camille’s sexual

prowess, “Il faut dire que Camille est un pauvre sire” (49; ch. VI). And lastly, Thérèse explains in her own words why she married Camille:

Je ne sais plus pourquoi j’ai consenti à épouser Camille. Je n’ai pas protesté, par une sorte d’insouciance dédaigneuse. Cet enfant me faisait pitié. . . . Et j’ai retrouvé dans mon mari le petit garçon souffrant avec lequel j’avais déjà couché à six ans. Il était aussi frêle, aussi plaintif, et il avait toujours cette odeur fade d’enfant malade qui me répugnait tant jadis. . . . Une sorte de dégoût me montait à la gorge; je me rappelais les drogues que j’avais bues, et je m’écartais, et je passais des nuit terribles... (57; ch. VII)

Eight days after the marriage of Thérèse and Camille, Camille decides the family will move to Paris. As usual, Thérèse is not consulted and is treated as a non-person:

Thérèse ne fut pas consultée; elle avait toujours montré une telle obéissance passive que sa tante et son mari ne prenaient plus la peine de lui demander son opinion. Elle allait où ils allaient, elle faisait ce qu’ils faisaient, sans une plainte, sans un reproche, sans même paraître savoir qu’elle changeait de place. (32; ch. III)

Thérèse immediately fears her new home: “Quand Thérèse entra dans la boutique où elle allait vivre désormais, il lui sembla qu’elle descendait dans la terre grasse d’une fosse. Une sorte d’écoeurement la prit à la gorge, elle eut des frissons de peur” (33; ch. III).

Her surroundings are macabre and take on spectral characteristics:

Et Thérèse ne trouvait pas un homme, pas un être vivant parmi ces créatures grotesques et sinistres avec lesquelles elle était enfermée; parfois des hallucinations la prenaient, elle se croyait enfouie au fond d’un caveau, en compagnie de cadavres mécaniques remuant la tête, agitant les jambes et les bras, lorsqu’on tirait les ficelles. (39; ch. IV)

As Thérèse tries to acclimate to her new prison, the non-human dimension of the dry goods store augments her feelings of confinement and desperation.

For three long years, Thérèse endures her marriage, her confinement, and her boredom while at the same time her “non-desire” for her husband increases daily:



Pendant trois ans, les jours se suivirent et se ressemblèrent. Camille ne s'absenta pas une seule fois de son bureau: sa mère et sa femme sortirent à peine de la boutique. Thérèse, vivant dans une ombre humide, dans un silence morne et écrasant, voyait la vie s'étendre devant elle, toute nue, amenant chaque soir la même couche froide et chaque matin la même journée vide. (36; ch. III)

These shadows of oppression and possession continue to reign in the boutique and to smother Thérèse. Regardless, Thérèse, the exotic feminine woman of Algerian descent and the granddaughter of a tribal chief, suppresses and displaces her sexual appetite in this *ombre humide*. Thérèse controls her emotions and her looks as she is adept at concealing her feelings and controlling her facial expressions.

After the move to Paris, Camille runs into an old school friend at work and invites him to dinner. Camille is immediately enamored of his long lost friend and proud of his new “manly” companion. This working-class male friendship, so prevalent in Zola’s novels, brings this handsome stranger into the Raquin household. Camille enthusiastically introduces Laurent to Thérèse.

After twenty-four years of suppressed sexuality and overt passivity, this chance meeting with Laurent releases Thérèse from her carnal imprisonment and serves as the fissure that permits Thérèse’s exotic origins to surface. Zola returns to the “oeil noir largement ouvert” and places the power of the gaze with Thérèse as she objectifies Laurent and eroticizes his body. Laurent is the antithesis of Camille. He embodies all that Camille is not:

Thérèse, qui n’avait pas encore prononcé une parole, regardait le nouveau venu. Elle n’avait jamais vu un homme. Laurent, grand, fort, le visage frais, l’étonnait. Elle contemplait avec une sorte d’admiration son front bas, planté d’une rude chevelure noire, ses joues pleines, ses lèvres rouges, sa face régulière, d’une beauté sanguine. (42; ch. V)

As Thérèse lustfully admires Laurent's body she admits that she never considered

Camille a man, "Elle n'avait jamais vu un homme." She continues her examination:

Elle arrêta un instant ses regards sur son cou: ce cou était large et court, gras et puissant. Puis elle s'oublia à considérer les grosses mains qu'il tenait étalées sur ses genoux; les doigts en étaient carrés; le poing fermé devait être énorme et aurait pu assommer un boeuf. Laurent était un vrai fils de paysan, d'allure un peu lourde, le dos bombé, les mouvements lents et précis, l'air tranquille et entêté. (42; ch. V)

As she visually examines Laurent she fragments his body into different body sections reducing him to a sexual object: "On sentait sous ses vêtements des muscles ronds et développés, tout un corps d'une chair épaisse et ferme. Et Thérèse l'examinait avec curiosité, allant de ses poings à sa face, éprouvant de petits frissons lorsque ses yeux rencontraient son cou de taureau" (42; ch. V).

Thérèse's gaze is so powerful at this juncture that she is able to undress Laurent with her eyes to imagine the look of his nude body. In this paragraph, Laurent is the pure object of female sexual desire. This reversal of the pleasure of look from active/male to active/female creates an uneasy tension in the reading of this description. It is this placement of sexual desire with the female protagonist that gives Thérèse access to the gaze and agency, and which, in turn, explains the scandalous nature of the novel.

Laurent, the hyper-masculine male, struggles against objectification. To regain his position as subject, Laurent immediately accesses the look and returns Thérèse's gaze. The intensity of his gaze is so powerful that Thérèse leaves the room to escape her own objectification

From here, the novel proceeds like a chess game of looks and glances. Laurent immediately returns Thérèse's glare when Camille asks him if he recognizes his wife:

“J’ai parfaitement reconnu madame, répondit Laurent en regardant Thérèse en face” (43; ch. V). Now, with Laurent in control of the gaze, Thérèse is at checkmate and leaves: “Sous ce regard droit, qui semblait pénétrer en elle, la jeune femme éprouva une sorte de malaise. Elle eut un sourire forcé, et échangea quelques mots avec Laurent et son mari; puis elle se hâta d’aller rejoindre sa tante. Elle souffrait” (43; ch. V).

This sexual game of looks and glances continues through dinner. During a discussion about artists’ models, Camille is intrigued: “Il songeait à ces femmes qui étalent leur peau nue” (45). He then asks Laurent if “il y a eu, comme ça, des femmes qui ont retiré leur chemise devant toi?” Laurent happily answers Camille’s questions about the models’ nudity. He tells Camille: “[m]ais oui, répondit Laurent en souriant et en regardant Thérèse qui était devenue très pâle” (45; ch. V). At the end of his answer, Thérèse regains control of the gaze: “La jeune femme le regardait avec une fixité ardente. Ses yeux, d’un noir mat, semblaient deux trous sans fond . . .” (45; ch. V). This repartee of glances and looks at their first meeting illustrates Thérèse and Laurent’s relatively equal but adversarial agency. Their struggle to possess the look continues until the two conspire to dispose of Camille.

Despite this cat and mouse game of furtive glances, Thérèse is not the object of sexual desire for Laurent. In fact, he initially finds her repugnant: “C’est qu’elle est laide, après tout, pensait-il. Elle a le nez long, la bouche grande. Je ne l’aime pas du tout, d’ailleurs” (50; ch. VI). It is not a sexual attraction that draws Laurent to Thérèse but an economic one. Zola continues the explanation: “Pour lui, Thérèse, il est vrai, était laide, et il ne l’aimait pas: mais, en somme, elle ne lui coûterait rien: les femmes qu’il achetait à bas prix n’étaient, certes, ni plus belles, ni plus aimées. L’économie lui

conseillait déjà de prendre la femme de son ami” (50; ch. VI). Thérèse is now a valuable commodity for Laurent as his literal meal ticket. In other words, his relationship with Thérèse gives him greater access to the Raquin household, their family gatherings, and their family meals. This provides Laurent the opportunity to spend his evenings after work in the company of friends without spending any money. Laurent is then able to save the rest of his money for personal entertainment.

Thérèse’s gaze is a powerful tool that forces others to submit or react. Laurent feels the intensity of Thérèse’s gazes and acts to escape his objectification, to reaffirm his “maleness,” and to dominate Thérèse: “Puis, d’un mouvement violent, Laurent se baissa et prit la jeune femme contre sa poitrine. Il lui renversa la tête, lui écrasant les lèvres sous les siennes” (51-52; ch. VI). Laurent reacts to Thérèse and ingrains himself into the lives of the Raquin family: “il était devenu l’amant de la femme, l’ami du mari, l’enfant gâté de la mère” (63; ch. VIII).

After Thérèse’s meeting and affair with Laurent, Zola conflates two opposing feminine images, the virgin and the whore. From the information provided about Camille’s lack of masculinity, the reader understands that sexual relations between Thérèse and her husband are nonexistent. This concretizes Thérèse’s role as the virginal wife. After Laurent releases Thérèse’s sexuality, Thérèse assumes the role of the adulterous whore. The explanation for this overt feminine sexuality is found by tracing Thérèse’s maternal heredity:

Au premier baiser, elle se révéla courtisane. Son corps inassouvi se jeta éperdument dans la volupté. Elle s’éveillait comme d’un songe, elle naissait à la passion. . . . Tous ses instincts de femme nerveuse éclatèrent avec une violence inouïe; le sang de sa mère, ce sang africain qui brûlait

ses veines, se mit à couler, à battre furieusement dans son corps maigre, presque vierge encore. (54; ch. VII)

Thérèse's marginality makes her actions believable and gives her the ability to drive men to murder. Colette Becker discusses the extent of Thérèse's power over men:

Avec ses “rires sauvages” et son “impudeur souveraine”, elle est la primitive, l'instinctive. Une fois réveillée par son amant, sa sexualité explose avec violence, d'où la multiplication des superlatifs et des oxymores pour rendre cette étrangeté sauvage. Elle est, enfin, un poison qui s'infiltré en Laurent. Ses baisers lui donnent la fièvre. (Thérèse Raquin 8)

The hypnotic effect that Thérèse has on Laurent is disturbing to the patriarchy, and men in general, as women with this type of power are dangerous and threatening. Becker continues: “Quand il [Laurent] la quitte, il est comme un homme ivre. Il devient l'esclave de cette femme qui, toute à la satisfaction de ses instincts, se moque de la morale et de la justice, le rend lâche et le mène au crime” (Thérèse Raquin 8). *La morale* and *la justice* symbolize patriarchal order, which Thérèse has undermined. In order to minimize masculine fears about the power of this outwardly normal, but intrinsically demonic woman, Zola marginalizes Thérèse.

To reinforce Thérèse's “otherness,” Zola adds a final dimension to her character as he refers to her “man-like” qualities. This highlights her marginality and offers another explanation for her sexual appetite. Zola states: “il [Camille] croyait tenir un garçon . . .” (28; ch., II) and “Elle [Thérèse] devenait curieuse et bavarde, femme en un mot, car jusque-là elle n'avait eu que des actes et des idées de l'homme . . .” (113; ch., XVI). If Thérèse does possess certain masculine characteristics her actions can be understood because she is not totally “all” female and therefore not totally “normal.” This places Thérèse outside of that which can be defined. This “masculinization” of

Thérèse, combined with her “sang mêlé” and her foreign birthplace, certifies that Thérèse is unlike any other woman in le passage du Pont-Neuf. The result of this extreme marginalization and representation of Thérèse as the “other” removes the possibility that any woman could be so ruthless.

After eight months of sexual involvement with Laurent, Thérèse’s desires are all fulfilled: “Pendant huit mois, dura cette vie de secousses et d’apaisements. Les amants vivaient dans une béatitude complète; Thérèse ne s’ennuyait plus, ne désirait plus rien . . .” (66; ch. VIII). Fulfilling a desire is a narrative technique used to advance a narrative from point A to point B. However, when that desire is satiated the narrative dies and along with it the diegetic lives of the characters. Unable to totally fulfill their desire, Thérèse and Laurent decide to murder Camille. This decision precipitates the end of their relationship and foreshadows their deaths.

The “look” figures so predominantly in the novel that “it” (or the lack of “it”) precipitates Camille’s murder. After eight months, Laurent’s boss tells him that he can no longer take a long lunch hour, which prevents him from being with Thérèse. Laurent immediately tries to find a solution to his exteriorly imposed “blindness.” He tells Thérèse: “Nous ne pouvons plus nous voir . . .” (67; ch. IX). The irony and symbolism of the phrase “not to see a person” in a dating or sexual sense is not lost in this story of looks and glances. Thérèse’s immediate reaction to the news is: “Je ne veux pas!” (69; ch. IX). A simple, straightforward but very direct statement of desire by Thérèse announces her displeasure. She will not accept the “lack” of sight. Laurent’s statement leads to a *nuît blanche*, a sleepless night for Thérèse, as she is not able to close her eyes. Thérèse’s desire to “see” is so strong that she affirms that she will see Laurent “à tout

prix” (70; ch. IX). When the look is denied, the obstacle must be destroyed. As a result, Camille’s murder must occur. This mutual decision cements the relationship between Thérèse and Laurent. Henceforth, the glances between the two will be conspiratory instead of adversarial and the glances will remain equal. Laurent’s statement, “nous ne pouvons plus nous voir” turns the focus of both of their gazes to one single object, Camille. The reciprocity of the look between the two becomes stronger but the loss of the gaze eventually causes their suicide.

At this point, Laurent and Thérèse equally share in their desire for one another and for the death of Camille. Zola does, however, continue to place directive agency with Thérèse. Laurent hints of disposing of Camille but it is Thérèse who suggests his death:

Je ne lui en veux pas, dit-il enfin sans le nommer; Mais vraiment il nous gêne trop... Est-ce que tu ne pourrais pas nous en débarrasser, l'envoyer en voyage, quelque part bien loin?

Ah! oui, l'envoyer en voyage! reprit la jeune femme en hochant la tête. Tu crois qu'un homme comme ça consent à voyager... Il n'y a qu'un voyage dont on ne revient pas... Mais il nous enterrera tous: ces gens qui n'ont que le souffle ne meurent jamais. (71; ch. IX)

At the end of the chapter, it is Thérèse who considers physically harming Camille:

“Thérèse regarda longtemps cette face blafarde qui reposait bêtement sur l’oreiller, la bouche ouverte. Elle s’écartait de lui, elle avait des envies d’enfoncer son poing fermé dans cette bouche” (74; ch. IX). Colette Becker best summarizes the extent of Thérèse’s agency: “C’est elle qui, à tous les moments où le récit peut se développer selon plusieurs possibilités, le fait basculer dans un sens précis ou le fait rebondir. Ce n’est pas Laurent, même si c’est lui qui accomplit le meurtre” (Thérèse Raquin 6).

The decision is made to take Camille boating. After three hours reposing under the shade of the trees, the three arrive at the restaurant at Saint-Ouen. Once the restaurant is in sight, Thérèse is given the point of view: “Quand elle était restée en arrière, elle s’arrêta et regardait de loin son amant et son mari” (84; ch. XII). She continues to describe what she sees: “Thérèse, appuyée contre la balustrade, regardait sur le quai. A droite et à gauche, s’étendaient deux files de guinguettes . . .” (84). At this point, the point of view shifts from Thérèse to the narrator until the actual murder of Camille. Horrified, but absorbed, Thérèse regains the point of view as Laurent begins the murder. She never closes her eyes until she describes the entire murder from her perspective. She watches Camille’s drowning and her silence signals her approval:

La jeune femme regardait, se tenant des deux mains à un banc du canot qui craquait et dansait sur la rivière. Elle ne pouvait fermer les yeux; une effrayante contraction les tenait grands ouverts, fixés sur le spectacle horrible de la lutte. Elle était rigide, muette. (88; ch. XI)

After Camille’s last cry, Thérèse faints and closes her eyes as she falls from the boat. Laurent plays the role of the hero in this intradiegetic “sinistre comédie.” He finishes the scene by himself as he “tries” to rescue both Thérèse and Camille. Thérèse, once rescued, is reborn and debuts as the grieving widow.

The witness to this “accidental drowning” is a man who never actually sees the murder. He believes Laurent’s story and repeats it as if he saw it with his own eyes. This gives the sailor power. As the witness, the man corroborates Laurent’s story, which releases him from suspicion. This small, but important addition to the novel, reinforces the power of the look. In this case, even the mere appearance of having the look, saves Laurent from prosecution.



Despite the death of Camille and the marriage of Thérèse and Laurent, the two criminal lovers are not free and find their relationship strained. Their initial desire to be together has now transgressed to a desire to be away from each other as they find each other repulsive.

Les deux amants ne cherchèrent plus à se voir en particulier. Jamais ils ne se demandèrent un rendez-vous, jamais ils n'échangèrent furtivement un baiser. Le meurtre avait comme apaisé pour un moment les lèvres voluptueuses de leur chair; ils étaient parvenus à contenter, en tuant Camille, ces désires fougueux et insatiables qu'ils n'avaient pu assouvir en se brisant dans les bras l'un de l'autre. (111; ch. XVI)

The bleeding wound on Laurent's neck serves as a constant reminder to them of their crime, their evilness, and their selfishness. Although Laurent tries in vain to hide the large, gaping hole in his neck, he is unsuccessful. This wound, that refuses to heal, evokes Laurent's objectification and possible feminization, as he slips into paranoia signifying his eventual death: "Laurent ne perdit pas une seconde. Il releva le collet de son paletot pour cacher sa blessure. . ." (89; ch. XI).

Unable to hide the wound, it remains in sight as neither Thérèse nor Laurent is able to escape its haunting presence. It is at this point, that the two accomplices realize that the "look" that they sought to control will be cause of their deaths. Seeing the wound, the ghoulish specter of Camille, the constant stare of the cat, and the incessant, all-knowing glare of Mme Raquin drive the two to suicide.

Laurent's paranoia and fear of the gaze drives him to kill again as he can no longer support Francois' stare: "Le chat le regardait avec des gros yeux ronds d'une fixité diabolique. C'étaient ces yeux, toujours ouverts sur lui, qui exaspéraient le jeune homme; il se demandait ce que lui voulaient ces yeux qui ne le quittaient pas; il finissait

par avoir de véritables épouvantes, s'imaginant des choses absurdes" (232; ch. XXX). Laurent hurls the cat against the wall and finds peace and pleasure in listening to the dying cat's wails. Trying to escape the judgmental gaze of others, Laurent has now committed murder twice, killing both Camille and François. At this point, Thérèse and Laurent have lost the ability to access and initiate the gaze and they are incapable of supporting the return of the gaze. Even their combined strength as a couple cannot sustain them. Ironically, in the end, the gaze that they so desired, will destroy them.

As the novel concludes, the two become more distant from one another but more alike in their actions and desires as evidenced in the last two pages of the novel. The narrative continues as if only one person is acting, as all actions are simultaneously and reciprocally produced: "Ils se regardent," "Ils s'examinèrent," "Ils comprenaient," "Et brusquement Thérèse et Laurent éclatèrent en sanglots," and "Ils échangèrent un dernier regard . . ." (248; ch. XXXII). In this last look, Zola forces the two lovers to stare into each other's eyes. They see nothing except the dark abyss of blackness. Under the intense scrutiny of Madame Raquin's paralytic stare and Zola's scientific magnifying glass, Thérèse and Laurent's objectification becomes unbearable and their death inevitable.

It is the power of the look that comes back full circle to claim Thérèse and Laurent. No longer able to control the gaze, and therefore their lives, the two lovers succumb to death. It is their last act of agency. Unwilling to relinquish her agency, Thérèse continues to initiate the action and decide her fate. She does not permit her execution to be imposed from the outside: "Thérèse s'était accroupie devant le buffet: elle avait pris le couteau de cuisine et cherchait à le glisser dans une des grandes poches

qui pendaient à sa ceinture” (248). From beginning to end, Thérèse drives the narrative forward and she will also bring it to its conclusion. Thérèse orchestrates the last act and asserts her agency for the last time: “Thérèse prit le verre, le vida à moitié et le tendit à Laurent qui l’acheva d’un trait” (248). Unable to be together in life, the two are forced together in death: “Ils tombèrent l’un sur l’autre, foudroyés, trouvant enfin une consolation dans la mort” (248; ch. XXXII).

External forces, outside of Thérèse and Laurent’s control, silently control every aspect of the narrative from start to finish. It seems then, that the mysterious shadows that encased Thérèse at the beginning of the novel were the omnipotent shadows of Fate, confinement, social milieu, and the nefarious exigencies of the patriarchy. Zola clarifies his intentions and defends his methodology in the preface to the second edition: “Quelles que fussent leurs conclusions, ils admettraient mon point de départ, l’étude du tempérament et des modifications profondes de l’organisme sous la pression des milieux et des circonstances” (16). Thus, Thérèse and Laurent erroneously thought they had free will and agency. Unknowingly, their lives had been pre-determined.

The novel recounts the struggle between agency and objectification, seeing and being seen, and attests to the power of agency provided by the gaze. The ending of the novel recounts the pleasure of Madame Raquin as she victoriously and judiciously witnesses the triumph of good over evil: “Et, pendant près de onze heures, jusqu’au lendemain vers midi, madame Raquin, roide et muette, les [Thérèse et Laurent] contempla à ses pieds, ne pouvant se rassasier les yeux, les écrasant de regards lourds” (249; ch. XXXII). Madame Raquin, as the loving mother figure, lives to see her son’s

death avenged. Paralyzed and speechless, she alone retains control of the gaze and remains the sole survivor of Zola's twisted plot of love, adultery, and murder.

Zola's 1867 representation of the female, Thérèse Raquin, appears to posit a strong woman acting on her desire. In reality, he subtly usurps her agency through heredity and the social pressures of nineteenth-century provincial bourgeois life. Marcel Carné will reshape Thérèse's life and again usurp her agency through different methods—deterministic ideology and the cinematic machinery of the 1950s.

Marcel Carné, an extremely influential and well-respected director of the 1930s, found success with Drôle de Drame (Corniglion-Molinier, 1937), Le Quai des brumes (Ciné-Alliance, 1938), Hôtel du Nord (SEDIF, 1938), and Le Jour se Lève (VOG-Sigma, 1939). During the 1940s, Carné found his strongest directorial voice in Les Enfants du Paradis (Pathé, 1945), which catapulted him into international fame. Edward Baron Turk makes this point in Child of Paradise:

Les Enfants du Paradis marks the culmination of France's Golden Age of moviemaking. Never again would the French cinema produce a film so unashamedly literate and lavish. Among postwar fiction features it remains unsurpassed in the quality of its star acting and the richness of its plot, psychology, and period reconstruction. The French regard Marcel Carné as a national institution because of the six motion pictures he directed between 1937 and 1945. (219)

Unfortunately, the 1950s were not as kind to this prolific director who found himself without his favorite screenwriter, Jacques Prévert, and trapped between his success with poetic realism and the looming oppression of the Tradition of Quality. Turk continues: “Les Enfants du Paradis is also Carné's last great work. It is, at once, a realization of his artistic vision and an indicator of his subsequent inability to revitalize that vision” (219).

Turk's last comment does not extend much optimism for Carné's work during the 1950s but nevertheless, Carné continued making movies.

Previously finding success with numerous film adaptations, Carné finally accepted Robert and Raymond Hakim's proposal to screen Emile Zola's, Thérèse Raquin. However, before his final acceptance, Carné outlined his demands and expectations. Michel Pérez summarizes: "Après réflexion, il accepte la proposition des frères Hakim en précisant que l'adaptation à laquelle il songe sera peu fidèle et que le film, simplement 'inspiré' du roman, n'aura rien d'un irrespectueux remake de l'oeuvre de Feyder" (116). Although Carné greatly admired Jacques Feyder's silent film adaptation, according to Pérez, he remembered that the second half of the film did not keep the spectators' interest. Pérez states:

Carné, dans un premier temps, juge l'affaire impossible. Le roman de Zola a déjà été adapté par Jacques Feyder qui l'avait très scrupuleusement traduit au temps du muet en un film d'une durée de près de trois heures. Carné, qui l'avait beaucoup admiré, se souvient néanmoins que sa seconde partie, après le meurtre de Camille Raquin manquait d'un ressort dramatique suffisamment fort et que le public s'y était quelque peu ennuyé. (116)

Carné's alterations to the novel proved successful. Jean Néry's article for Franc-Tireur on November 11, 1953 celebrated Carné's tenacity:

Il y a décidément deux Marcel Carné. Celui des Visiteurs du Soir, qui se prolongea en s'étiolant dans les Portes de la Nuit et dans Juliette. Celui du Jour se lève que l'on retrouvait souvent dans La Marie du port et qui donne à nouveau toute sa mesure dans Thérèse Raquin... Pour ma part, mes préférences vont au second. Thérèse Raquin vient de me prouver encore sa vigueur, son humanité et son exceptionnelle maîtrise. (qtd. in Pérez 125)

After Turk's initial skepticism, he echoes Nery's praises:

Thérèse Raquin (1953) gave evidence of Carné's resilience. Produced with extremely limited funds by Robert and Raymond Hakim, this adaptation of Zola's novel was a French entry in the fourteenth Venice Biennial, where it won a Silver Lion. (376)

Thérèse Raquin echoes the hopeless depression and fateful ambiance of the 1930s, but Carné leaves behind the tropes of poetic realism in exchange for a new direction. Turk describes the overall feel of the film:

Less concerned with correspondences between scenic detail and characters' states of being, Carné focuses on the empty spaces between beings. Erotic gazes, accidental glances, intimidating peerings, and petrified stares constitute the film's dramatic essence. (377)

Thérèse Raquin, already adapted to film three times, demonstrates Zola's narrational affinity with cinematic tropes and permits his psychologically intense thriller to translate well into film. Zola's extensive use of looks, glances, stares, and sinewy shadows as descriptive devices to advance the narrative, function as a schematic screenplay for the film. Based on a novel of looks, which emphasizes the importance of the visual, Carné's film, the first sound version of Thérèse Raquin, pays homage to Zola through his extensive use of eyeline matches, shot-reverse-shots, close-ups, and carefully articulated mise-en-scène.

Discussing the "faithfulness" and fidelity of an adaptation to the original is oftentimes a departure point for film analysis, but fidelity comparisons forge a dangerous path to travel for very long. After the opening of Thérèse Raquin, Carne's filmic changes caused much discussion. According the Michel Pérez:

La question de l'infidélité à Zola a beaucoup préoccupé la critique. On s'accordait, en général à justifier les libertés prises avec l'oeuvre originelle, allant même, dans une surenchère d'éloges dont Carné avait sans doute perdu l'habitude . . . jusqu'à juger le film supérieur à un roman

dont il n'avait pas hérité les vices naturalistes. Les libertés prises, en fait, sont extrêmes. (116)

Never forgetting George Bluestone, we must keep in mind that every adaptation must be evaluated as an autonomous work on its own terms and its own merit. However, for the purpose of this analysis, it is necessary to begin with a brief introduction about Carné's "faithfulness" or lack thereof to the original text.

The third silent film adaptation of Thérèse Raquin in 1928 by the Belgian born director, Jacques Feyder, was a three hour long film, reconstructing Zola's novel in its entirety while updating the film to the current time period. Carné, who worked as Feyder's assistant, wanted to approach the film differently. Therefore, not afraid of experimenting with new and alternative venues, Carné makes almost every possible change in his film. He changes the location, the historical time period, the nationality of Laurent, and removes the history and exoticness of Thérèse's background in addition to her hair color. Carné changes the name and color of the cat, the location of the murder, and the type of murder. He displaces the intrinsic guilt felt by Thérèse and Laurent for Camille's murder to an external force, and adds a new character, Riton, the blackmailer. And lastly, Carné removes the unsettling suicide and death scene of Thérèse and Laurent. Regardless, this 1953 re-make with its numerous changes might have appealed to Zola. Frederick Brown speaks of Zola's idea of "faithfulness:" "Aesthetically speaking, faithfulness for Zola implied something else—a creative exchange between nature and temperament, or between the observable world and the artist's imaginative life" (160).

After a screening of Thérèse Raquin on May 1, 1982 at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Carné offered his vision of Thérèse and Laurent. He said, "The

lovers in my film are more idealized than in the novel, and I also wanted the murder to be much less premeditated” (qtd. in Turk 378). Turk explains how this vision translates into film: “Carné ‘idealizes’ Zola’s protagonists by de-emphasizing the sordid character of their liaison; by eliminating Laurent’s pecuniary motives for murdering Thérèse’s husband, Camille; and by transforming Thérèse from a ‘brute’ into a sympathetic victim of bourgeois mores” (378). In turn, this “sympathetic victim of bourgeois mores” loses her gaze and therefore her agency.

This philosophical change in direction manifests itself in the film through the significant but subtle filtering out of feminine desire. Carné replaces all feminine desire with masculine desire. Whereas Zola places Thérèse as the bearer of the look, the initiator of action, and the agent of desire, Carné displaces all agency and sexual desire to Laurent and Riton. By privileging Laurent and Riton with the look, Carné objectifies Thérèse and reduces, if not destroys, her agency. In contrast, Zola tends to “masculinize” Thérèse whereas Carné plays upon the frailties of her femininity.

Throughout the film, instead of initiating action, Thérèse waits for it to happen. From the first scene in the film where Thérèse is waiting for Camille and his mother to the last scene where Thérèse watches Lantier try to revive Laurent, she is placed in the subservient position.

Carné redirects the attention away from Thérèse as object through the “Herculean attractiveness” of Laurent (Raf Vallone) and the “Adonis-like” youth and beauty of Riton (Roland Lesaffre). These two men with exceedingly good looks and charisma eclipse Simone Signoret’s beauty and static character. Carné’s camera, filtered with a homosexual lens, provides insight into this decision. Two “peeping tom” type scenes are



emblematic—the lengthy close-up of Laurent lying on his bed and Riton looking at himself longingly in the mirror while shaving.

With only the camera “looking,” Carné creates two extremely homoerotic scenes. Clandestinely peering through the keyholes of both Laurent and Riton’s hotel rooms, Carné eroticizes both men. Seen lying down, the close-up and fragmentation of Laurent’s dark, curly hair and pensive eyes forge a highly sexual character in a submissive position.

In the words of Laura Mulvey, this fragmentation/objectification of the body (male or female) increases its “to-be-looked-at-ness.” However, Carné negotiates the representation of Laurent and Riton’s good looks and objectification without sacrificing their agency. This is accomplished because no diegetic character in the film objectifies them. Thérèse is unable to access the gaze; therefore the objectification of Laurent and Riton comes from an extra-diegetic source. In other words, the objectification of these two male characters does not emanate from female characters within the diegesis, but rather from the eye of Marcel Carné.

Despite the numerous changes Carné makes, he follows Zola’s lead in titling his film after the female protagonist. The anticipation here is that Thérèse will have at least as much agency as she had in the novel, if not more. Unfortunately, this does not prove to be the case as Carné’s decision to render Thérèse more of a victim than a vixen negates her ability to manipulate her attractiveness. His choice of Simone Signoret to portray Thérèse also impacts the heroine’s agency on celluloid. In her role as Thérèse, Simone Signoret brings with her a certain preconceived persona to the screen, as she was already known in French cinema for her allure and her sex appeal. This increases the possibility

that Thérèse (Simone Signoret) will be used more as a sexual commodity than a viable protagonist. Leahy and Hayward comment:

Signoret's roles conflicted with the images of femininity that were being privileged elsewhere in the media: those of marriage, motherhood and sacrifice. Her onscreen presence was marked by a mixture of sensuality, vulnerability (the lisp) and vulgarity, but above all by the intelligence and realism which she brought to her often excessive roles and which she managed to counter through her minimalist performance. (87)

Judith Mayne refers to Signoret as an "icon of hyper-heterosexuality and popular symbol in France of the 1950s . . ." (Framed 46). Carrie Tarr refers to her as "the dangerously sexual Simone Signoret. . ." (67). According to Catherine David the role of Thérèse Raquin was a change from Simone's past roles:

It [Thérèse Raquin] was the first leading part in which Simone Signoret abandoned her usual character, the tart with a heart of gold. With her grey cardigan and black dress, her hair severely pulled back, her pale face and smouldering passion in her eyes, Simone Signoret's Thérèse Raquin is fascinating—a volcano under ice. (73)

When Carné conflates the diegetic Thérèse with the onscreen personality of Simone Signoret, a hybrid protagonist results, therefore creating the "volcano under ice." Carné employs the good girl/bad girl paradox to increase the erotic persona of Thérèse.

The dichotomy of giving the title of the film to the female protagonist but taking away her agency occurs frequently during the 1950s. Susan Hayward studies this paradox in French films made between 1930 and 1958. She concludes:

Whilst the female character may be pivotal to many cinematic narratives, the representation of women remains by and large unchanged over this thirty-year period. Certainly, in the 1950s there was a move towards a more explicit eroticising of the female body. Indeed, Simone Signoret, Martine Carol and Brigitte Bardot are not the same women as Michèle Morgan, Arletty or (especially) Gaby Morlay. However, this change in representation does not necessarily mean that women were represented as having any greater control over their destiny. (171)

Hayward's use of the term "destiny" translates into "agency" in this study.

In addition, while discussing films of poetic realism, Susan Hayward makes an interesting point concerning the centering of a female protagonist in a film. She says: "woman is central *to* the narrative, but is never *at* its centre" (173). This is especially true in Carné's Thérèse Raquin. Thérèse is the passive catalyst of the action but she does not drive the narrative, as Carné gives that role to Laurent and Riton. Zola initializes the power of Thérèse's gaze from the beginning of the novel, while; in contrast, Carné immediately negates her access to agency. The mere allusion of female agency does not substantiate its existence.

Carné situates the location of the film with a long, high angle shot of Lyon, which serves as the backdrop for the opening credits. Four frames then precede the title card. The first card is dedicated to the producers, Raymond and Robert Hakim while the second and third cards announce the actors, Simone Signoret and Raf Vallone, respectively. The next card announces: "Un film de Marcel Carné." At last, the title card, Thérèse Raquin, appears, suggesting that Thérèse is a constructed image formed as the sum of the four previous cards. The huge block letters announcing both the title of the film and the name of the female protagonist consume the entire screen. This card is a microcosm of Thérèse's representation throughout the film. She appears no more life-like than the flat, one-dimensional card that bears her name. The next card, "Un Film Inspiré d'un Roman d'Emile Zola" warns the spectators not to expect the Thérèse Raquin of the novel but, for those familiar with the novel, it is impossible not to bring the image of Zola's Thérèse to the screen.

After the credits, a crane shot of the town square, with bells ringing in the distance signal that it is Sunday. Families are out walking and spending time together. Carné advances the camera inward with a shot of a long row of men's backs engaged in looking. He sutures the spectator into the film at this point, privileging the male point of view, as the spectator sees what the men are watching—a game of “boules.” Camille and Madame Raquin are also watching the game, but from a different angle. At first viewing, it is impossible to identify them from the other spectators. Carné then provides a close-up of the mother and son spending a Sunday afternoon together discussing the intricacies of the game.

At this point, the spectator, as well as Camille and his mother, wonder where “Thérèse Raquin” is as Camille asks, “Où est Thérèse?” Mme Raquin responds, “Elle ne s'intéresse jamais à rien. Elle regarde donc encore couler l'eau.” She appears to be waiting for something or someone which initiates her passive role in the film.

Seen from Camille and Mme Raquin's point of view, Thérèse appears staring at the river with her back to the camera. In addition to Camille and his mother watching, the two large arches of the bridge appear as a large pair of heavy eyebrows also watching Thérèse. Carné's initial mise-en-scène bursts with signs. The river evokes the two nature signs, earth and water, signifying Thérèse's simpler origins, her affinity with nature, and her “animal-like-ness” as homage to Zola's Algerian Thérèse. The water also serves as a referent to Thérèse's domestic restlessness and to Camille's fatal boating accident in the novel. The placement of Thérèse on the left of the frame, separate from the others, suggests that according to social mores, she is not in the “right place,” which emphasizes her marginality and placement outside of the norm. It also denotes her physical and

emotional distance from Camille and Mme Raquin. This frame negates the bond between husband and wife while the previous frame emphasizes the bond between mother and son.

Thérèse's static, standing position occurs consistently throughout the film as she is used more as a statue placed in the *mise-en-scène* than a "real" woman. Thérèse's weakly developed character is symbolically repeated in mannequins, cutouts, tattoos, and title cards. Carné uses Thérèse's commodification, being given to Mme Raquin who in turn gives her to Camille, as the basis for his reading of her character.

With Thérèse intentionally turned away from Camille and Mme Raquin, Camille calls out for her as if calling for the family pet. She turns and slowly approaches without saying a word as Camille asks her, "Qu'est-ce que tu fais?" Her first word of the film, as she responds is: "Rien." Camille then continues: "Et rien c'est plus passionnant que la partie?" She responds, "C'est toujours la même chose." Camille retorts, "Et le Rhône, c'est toujours différent?" Thérèse does not respond as Mme Raquin starts to fuss about returning the sickly Camille to the house: "J'ai peur que tu prennes froid. Il faut rentrer." Thérèse agrees meekly with her eyes lowered, "Comme vous voulez," as she acquiesces and gives her agency to Camille and his mother.

Completing the *mise-en-scène* of this frame is Thérèse's clothing. Zola, rarely, if ever, mentions Thérèse's apparel, therefore Carné must construct a visual appearance for Thérèse. In contrast to the "gypsyesque," sexually repressed woman in the novel, the "vixen" who exerts immense power over men, Carné chooses ultra-conservative attire for his Thérèse. She wears a drab, plaid coat, buttoned up to her neck, a small hat that fits snugly on her head, hiding most of her hair, dark gloves, and a purse. She walks with her

shoulders curved and her eyes usually lowered to the ground. Zola's exotic, sexual brunette of Algerian origins is converted into a seemingly matronly unsexual blonde.

The implication here is that this is a submissive woman with no agency or desire, who responds to conversation but does not initiate it, who follows but does not lead, and who is bored with her mundane lifestyle but refuses to leave it. Thérèse does not wear provocative clothing, she is not looking for a lover, and she does not plan to kill Camille. Carné traps Thérèse between her obligations to her adoptive family and her desire for love and sexual fulfillment. He confines Thérèse to the store, which places her in a position of stasis and commodifies her as an object for sale like the other neatly packaged products on the shelves. Her first word of the film *rien* as the response to the question, "Qu'est-ce que tu fais?" indicates that she has no agency and/or initiative.

Thérèse is simply a woman, imprisoned in a sick, dark, oppressive, and non-loving household. She is a threat to the patriarchy not because of what she does, but because of what she "is." Her "otherness" as "not male" renders her dangerous. Leahy and Hayward reflect on this type of female representation, "The image of femininity was, then, in considerable flux and the 1950s marked a period when great efforts were made to return woman to the home-to re-feminize her, as it were" (86).

In many ways, Carné does re-feminize Thérèse. She does not dress in provocative clothing, she is the dutiful wife and daughter-in-law, she is cognizant of Camille's faults but not critical, and she accepts her fate in life as the wife of her sickly cousin. Even after her pivotal meeting with Laurent, she does not want leave her home and her husband. Unfortunately, the covert misogyny demonstrated in the representation of Thérèse is that even a good duty-bound woman can be dangerous. Carné's film

demonstrates the consequences of interaction with a passive woman even though she is “re-feminized.”

The additional misogynistic tenet explicit in Carné’s representation of Thérèse is her perceived evil passivity. Although Thérèse does not appear intentionally evil in the film, the known malevolence of her novelistic character surfaces as filmic residue as one watches the film. The mere nomenclature of Thérèse Raquin connotes her as an evil totem imbued with nefarious agency. Burch and Sellier discuss the polemical problems of evil and passivity in post-war French films:

Films of the period resort to a duality in the figures of the evil women, which derives its phantasmal effectiveness from its ability to combine two logically contradictory ideas: evil and passivity....for the most part the young women in these films-those who fascinate men-are passive: their seductiveness operates without their being conscious of it and their bodies act, so to speak, without the intervention of their minds. (54)

With Thérèse repeatedly reified as a headless mannequin, this description fits well.

To summarize, Carné’s opening sequence accomplishes two things; first, it posits Thérèse as object—refracted, reified, and duplicated from the title card, and it negates her access to the gaze, therefore denying her agency. Just as Zola removed Thérèse’s agency through fate and bourgeois mores, Carné’s cinematic reading of Thérèse Raquin displaces and removes the protagonist’s agency through the reorientation of her character from brute to victim. The cinematic devices used in the initial frames to block Thérèse’s agency serve as leitmotifs for the entire film.

Once the family returns home, the hostile Mme Raquin continues to berate Thérèse and to thrust orders at her. Throughout the film, the other characters frequently use the imperative tense when addressing Thérèse. She does not object; she follows

orders, and only speaks when spoken to. The dark, gloomy interior of the house and the closed doors and shutters wrap Thérèse in total confinement. She is granted no access to the outside, as even interior doors are kept closed. Carné makes this point by having Mme Raquin retrace her steps specifically to close a bedroom door.

Returning to the kitchen for the hot water bottle, Mme Raquin scolds Thérèse for being so slow and for taking Camille outside on such a day. Thérèse responds, “Il faisait beau” but Mme Raquin immediately retorts: “Mais il y avait des nuages. On a chaud et tout d’un coup, on a froid. Tu devrais savoir.” During this sequence Thérèse keeps her eyes lowered, as she does throughout most of the film, as she is not the dominant female in the house or the active subject in the diegesis. Unable to convince Mme Raquin of the importance of fresh air, Thérèse suggests an alternative method of escape, the movies. She says: “Je vais proposer qu’on allait au cinéma.” Mme Raquin immediately disagrees telling her: “Merci, respirer des microbes en regardant les gens qui s’embrassent . . . ne valait rien.” Thérèse leaves the kitchen, carrying the hot water bottle as Mme Raquin continues to yell instructions to her. This self-reflexive look at film foreshadows the sexual intrigue of the narrative.

Thérèse delivers the hot water bottle to Camille, and as she begins to close the shutters, she looks out the window to catch a last glimpse of the day she has left behind. First, Carné frames her in the window as the object of the camera’s gaze. Then, Carné privileges the spectator with a point-of-view shot from Thérèse suturing the spectator into Thérèse’s world and the world she would like to inhabit. Interestingly, she sees two lovers in the street kissing as if watching her own private movie. Carné then frames



Thérèse in the window again as object. This sequence of shots concretizes Thérèse's position as object rather than subject.

With Thérèse imprisoned in the boutique, a cut occurs to the large open space of the warehouse where Camille works, just as Laurent arrives in his noisy, loud truck. His "physicalness" is apparent as he jumps out of the truck and onto the platform in his black, leather jacket. He immediately commands the spectators' attention. Carné uses this scene to economically illustrate the differences between the two men. Besides their physical appearance and their clothing, they are frequently centered in the frame with a beam visually separating them. Carné leaves the sickly and effeminate character of Camille untouched in his adaptation. After an antagonistic first meeting, the two somehow become friends. This accidental friendship will introduce Laurent to Thérèse and seal the fate of Camille.

Male friendship functions as a unifying thread through many of Zola's novels and a cinematic theme that spans numerous decades and film genres. Examining the consistency of this narrative thread in film, Susan Hayward sees male friendship as a bridge between the films of the 1930s and 1950s. She says: "what remains as a constant from the 1930s tradition is the representation of male friendship. The more dominant trend is that by which the working-class hero becomes assimilated into another class . . ."

(170). Here, the working-class hero, Laurent, becomes a friend of Camille the first day they meet. Their clothing, Camille in a suit and tie and Laurent in work overalls and apron, marks the difference between the two. However, during the same week, Laurent is admitted to the Raquin household as a friend and an equal.

Carné illustrates this friendship as Laurent drives the inebriated Camille home after work. The new friends are now speaking using the familiar “tu” form as Laurent helps Camille descend from the truck. As the pair enters the shop, Laurent has Camille slung over his shoulder as if carrying a large bolt of material. This, of course, underscores the weakness of Camille and strength of Laurent. Similar to the passage in the novel, this scene in the film occurs from Thérèse’s point of view. However, Carné dissolves Thérèse’s sexual interest in Laurent and redirects her attention to Camille. This subtle change results in the diffusion of Thérèse’s agency in the rest of the film. In the novel, Thérèse lustfully examines Laurent from head to toe when she first sees him, but in the film, her first glimpse of Laurent with Camille frightens her. Concerned for her husband’s welfare she asks, “Il y a eu un accident?” Laurent jokingly responds, “Oui, un petit verre de trop.” He immediately returns the gaze and then proceeds to examine Thérèse and to initiate a personal interest in her asking, “Et, vous êtes sa soeur?” Contrasting this scene in the film with the passage from the novel demonstrates the alternative reading that Carné provides of Zola’s novel as Carné denies Thérèse the ability to access the gaze.

Thérèse, poised as the passive, virginal wife, the “child-like” bride, who needs to be seduced, is introduced as the object of male desire, fragmented, and imprisoned behind the counter. In the frame, a headless mannequin, draped with material, stands near the front shop window. It is placed in the same location in the frame where Thérèse stood at the river implying an affinity with the river scene as it functions as a substitute for Thérèse. The tailor’s mannequin, like the title card, concretizes Thérèse’s role as a rigid, speechless, and non-acting protagonist. In the back corner of the store is a fully dressed

and coiffed cutout of what appears to be a young girl. The board is flat, as if painted on wood, and is leaning on the wall. These iconic representations of women are only present when Thérèse is in the frame. Thérèse's rigidity, stature, and lack of speech place her easily with the mannequin and the cut-out as part of the window dressing.

Regardless, Laurent is intrigued and interested. Expressing disbelief, and embarrassed because of Thérèse's answer about being Camille's wife, Laurent follows Thérèse upstairs with Camille draped over his shoulder. Laurent helps undress Camille and gives instructions to Thérèse as Mme Raquin had done previously: "Il faut lui mettre de l'eau sur la figure." Camille's preference for his new friend is seen when he grabs Thérèse's hand and thinks that it is Laurent. He says: "Oh, c'est toi." Camille then cries out about his new friend: "Laurent, c'est mon ami, C'est mon vrai ami."

In the sexually charged space of the bedroom, with Camille physically and visually situated between the two, Thérèse and Laurent exchange glances, with Thérèse sneaking a peek at Laurent from the bathroom. Laurent catches her looking at him as Carné's camera lingers on Laurent looking at Thérèse. This quick exchange of glances alludes to their future affair. Thérèse tries to remove this frighteningly handsome and sexually dangerous man from her life. In close-up she tells him: "Allez-vous-en! Je vous en prie. J'ai honte." Laurent laughs and replies: "Et moi, je trouve que l'important c'était de s'enrencontrer, non?" He again looks at Thérèse and remains looking at her until the cut to card game on Thursday evening.

Carné recenters the story to be a "man's" story instead of a "woman's" story, as the "femme fatale" becomes the "homme fatale." This is manifested in Carné's choice to cast a dark-skinned, brunette actor with brown eyes—physical characteristics generally

reserved for the “femme fatale.” In contrast, he chooses a blond actress. Thérèse and Laurent are the photographic negatives of Simone Simon and Jean Gabin in La Bête Humaine. Thérèse is not the vixen that Renoir portrays in Séverine and Laurent is not the same victim as Jacques Lantier.

In Carné’s adaptation of Thérèse Raquin, it is Laurent’s desire, not Thérèse’s that drives the narrative forward. Carné indicates this change in agency as he immediately sutures the spectator into Laurent’s point of view. From the beginning of Laurent’s arrival at the warehouse, the spectator’s curiosity is piqued, wanting to know more about Laurent’s story, his profession, his tenuous rapport with Camille, and his future plans. At the same time, the spectator, through Laurent’s point of view, enjoys the interest that Laurent shows in Camille and Thérèse. Carné’s decision to change Laurent’s profession from an office worker confined to a building to a delivery truck driver who travels around Europe enhances the interest in this character. In addition, Laurent’s foreign accent adds to the intrigue as Carné highlights Laurent’s “exoticness” but erases Thérèse’s.

Paradoxically, Thérèse’s immobility as she stands at the river and behind the counter of the store arouses little, if any, interest in her character. Mary Ann Doane explains this component of classic cinema: “For the figure of the woman is aligned with spectacle, space, or the image, often in opposition to the linear flow of the plot. From this point of view, there is something about the representation of the woman which is resistant to narrative or narrativization” (5).

This appears to be the case for Carné as he places Thérèse in the background while he privileges Laurent with narrativity, mobility, and the gaze. As a result, Laurent is the first character in the film to narrate his story. This occurs on Laurent’s first visit to

the Raquin household to partake in the Thursday night board game. The players take turns and finally it is Laurent's turn to roll the dice. However, before his roll, he tells a small anecdote from his childhood. Thérèse listens attentively while Camille waits impatiently for the story to finish. The narrative revolves around Thérèse but she is not the narrator. Doane continues:

the male character is allowed to inhabit and actively control its illusory depths, its constructed three-dimensional space. . . . the male figure seems more compatible with processes of narrativization than the female figure. While the man comfortably adopts "natural" poses of activity and agency, the "plotting" of the female body is more difficult. (5)

From this point forward, the diegesis recounts Laurent's story of infatuation, love, and struggle to win Thérèse. Later, the narrative shifts to Riton's story of blackmail.

During the Thursday night board game, Carné constantly places Thérèse and Laurent together in the same frame, separate from all the other guests. When Carné does integrate them into the entire frame, especially when getting the wine, Camille is placed in front of the couple physically but between them visually. As a toast is made to Camille for winning the game, Laurent toasts Thérèse. The double entendre of his toast frightens Thérèse as he says: "A la femme du vainqueur."

Thérèse's role as an active participant accessing her desire is diminished with Laurent in control. It is he who comes to the shop to see Thérèse, to ask her to run away, and to respond to his constant prodding, questions, and suggestions. It is Thérèse, like the mannequin in the window, who remains confined behind the counter while Laurent comes and goes at will. She cannot explain to Laurent why she cannot leave the store, but she is as grounded in this environment as the mannequin is. Carné does not totally annihilate Thérèse's agency, however. After Thérèse leaves the Thursday night game,

Laurent follows her up to her room, takes her hand, pulls her towards him, and kisses her. A long pause follows and then Thérèse passionately returns the kiss. The two lovers fall to the ground and the affair is consummated. Thérèse now incurs blame in the affair.

When her repressed sexuality is aroused, Thérèse is given limited access to her desire. However, she is only permitted access to her sexual desire. In this pivotal scene, Thérèse returns Laurent's kiss and becomes the headless dress form in the shop, as her sexual being is now disassociated from her intellectual being. Laurent, the "homme fatale" is the catalyst for Thérèse's metamorphosis. Just like the mannequin, Laurent dresses and "forms" Thérèse into the sexual fetish of his fantasy.

The returned kiss is emblematic of Thérèse's approach to life and Laurent. She reacts, but she does not act. Thérèse does not initiate the kiss, but reacts to Laurent's desire and the feelings he arouses in her. Her repeated use of "moi aussi" throughout the film, as she echoes Laurent's feelings, perpetuates Thérèse's status as object. Moreover, Thérèse's lack of significant discourse throughout the film also reinforces her iconic status. If we layer the fact that Simone Signoret recites lines created for her by Spaak and Carné, Thérèse emerges as the manipulated female par excellence.

To be fully integrated as subject, women must have access to all types of agency, most specifically, cognitive agency. Unlike a "femme fatale," who accesses both intellectual and sexual agency, albeit malevolent agency, Thérèse is reduced to her biology and emotionalism. Mary Anne Doane states: "feminist film criticism has consistently demonstrated that, in the classical Hollywood cinema, the woman is deprived of subjectivity and repeatedly transformed into the object of a masculine

scopophilic desire.” (2) Carné’s film represents this prevailing attitude in the representation of Thérèse.

Throughout the entire film, certain tendencies emerge in the representation of male and female characters. Laurent and Riton look, act, and make decisions. They express desire, both sexual and monetary, they electrify the screen with their presence, and they tell Thérèse what to do. Thérèse, on the other hand, melts into the dark background of the frame, she does not speak, she keeps her eyes lowered, and she follows directions from everyone, including Camille and Mme Raquin. These are the cinematic tropes that place agency with Laurent and Riton and remove it from Thérèse.

The affair has begun. A cut to a city tram shows Thérèse leaving the oppressiveness of the city. Thérèse is outside, walking through the woods, with her hair down, shining in the sun as she goes to meet Laurent. She approaches the Moulin Brulé restaurant and dance hall. Her walk, demeanor, and appearance are distinctly different from her walk on the river and indicate a newfound freedom. Free of the chains of the Raquin household, Thérèse flourishes. Her entire personality, as well as her clothing, looks brighter. As Thérèse enters, an old woman sits poised in front of the window as decoration, she does not speak.

Thérèse first sees Laurent when she enters the restaurant but it is Laurent who makes the first move. He reaches out his hand for hers, a gesture that mimics his gesture in the bedroom scene before the kiss. Laurent appreciatively looks at Thérèse’s chest and body and says, “Tu es jolie comme ça” as he touches her again. When discussing the size of the dance hall he tells her: “Tu as un corps fait pour danser, pour aimer.” This separation of Thérèse’s body from her mind maintains her objectification. When it seems

that Thérèse will not run away with him, Laurent strongly states: “Ce nest plus possible. J’ai trop envie de toi, Thérèse.” Again, Thérèse does not initiate the declaration of desire; she merely echoes Laurent’s sentiments: “Moi aussi, j’ai envie d’être avec toi.” Thérèse suggests: “Ecoute, Laurent. Il y a un moyen.” The offer is to meet clandestinely in Mme Raquin’s boutique.

As Laurent sneaks up the back stairs to see Thérèse, he is impatient and uncomfortable with the situation. He repeatedly expresses his desire: “Thérèse, je voudrais que nous soyons libres, que nous puissions dormir ensemble, manger ensemble, et sortir ensemble.” Again, in agreement, Thérèse repeats Laurent’s statements.

During this scene, the most sexually constructed image of Thérèse appears as she lies on the bed gripping the collar of her blouse. This is the image used in many of the advertising posters for the film. The irony of this “sexual Thérèse” is that she is object of the gaze of Mme Raquin as she returns Monsieur Pom-Pom to the bedroom. Laurent remains hidden behind the door worried that the glaring eyes of Thérèse’s mother-in-law will catch him.

After a confrontation with Camille, Thérèse is coerced into a trip to Paris, where he plans to imprison her with Tante Henriette. During Camille’s inquisition, Carné permits Thérèse to access the gaze. Camille demands that Thérèse look at him during his questioning as she remains silent with her eyes lowered: “J’exige que tu me regardes.” Thérèse slowly turns, faces Camille and looks at him directly in the eyes. Camille immediately recoils as if he has seen the devil incarnated. This demonstrates the power and the evil within Thérèse. Thérèse incurs blame for the extinction of the Raquin household.



Immediately, Thérèse phones Laurent to let him know she cannot meet him. Thérèse arrives at the train station in the same dark, dreary apparel she wore in the first scene at the river. Thérèse continually stares out the window but we never see what she sees. In contrast, Laurent boards the train at Maçon and searches all of the train compartments until he finds Thérèse. Carné overemphasizes Laurent's capacity for looking as he travels the length of the train looking in the window of every compartment. The spectators see what Laurent sees.

Unlike the novel, Thérèse never suggests killing Camille, an appropriation of agency that would be impossible for Thérèse to exhibit in the film. Again, Laurent takes the initiative. Carné foreshadows this as we see the sign "Porte donnant sur la voie" numerous times. Laurent purposefully opens the door and throws Camille from the train. Thérèse is horrified and reacts as she immediately covers her eyes with her hands. She tells Laurent to descend at the next station.

Thérèse must now identify Camille's body and tell her story to the train officials and the police. Uncomfortable in this position of narrativity, she denies her ability to look and to narrate. Her fear of agency is repeated in her scripted line: "je dormais." She repeats this phrase to the conductor, the train officials, the police, Monsieur Grivet, Monsieur Michaud, Mme Raquin, and Riton. Conversely, Riton feigns sleeping but gladly accepts the power of the look and the ability to tell and use the story about Camille and Laurent.

When Thérèse returns home and learns about the paralysis of Mme Raquin, her reaction, again, is to cover her eyes. Thérèse keeps denying her capacity to see. She tells Laurent that she no longer wants to see him, as it is inappropriate. After thirty-seven

days they meet in the cab of his truck and Thérèse expresses her non-desire: “ne me touche plus, surtout, ne me touche plus.” The sexual fire that had previously existed between the couple now seems extinguished.

With the murder of Camille, Jacques Duby’s role in the film, as well as Thérèse’s role as narrative catalyst, ends. The dénouement of the film revolves around men and their issues. An attractive replacement, the “pretty boy” sailor Riton, replaces the sickly, sniveling Camille. The second half of the film now focuses on Riton as both the subject of the diegesis and the object of the extra-diegetic camera lens.

First, Riton appears as a passive subject in the train scene where he has no dialogue but has access to the gaze. He lies as he tells the conductor: “je dormais.” Second, in his hotel room in Paris, he is sexually objectified as Carné devotes large amounts of camera time to him. As previously mentioned, the point of view comes from the camera as no diegetic character is looking at him. This scene is highly homoerotic and posits Riton as object, with his tattered undershirt torn specifically at the nipple so that it can be seen. Turk notes: “in the film’s second half, as the libidinal fiber of the Thérèse-Laurent rapport mollifies, erotic interest shifts to the sailor” (382). This statement is problematic as it begs the question, erotic interest for whom? Since Riton is not a sexual object of desire for either Thérèse or Laurent the objectification must come from outside the diegesis. That extradiegetic source is Marcel Carné.

Carné first met Roland Lesaffre on the set of his film, La Marie du port in 1949. Carné, at Jean Gabin’s request, immediately hired Lesaffre as an extra. Immediately afterwards, Carné befriended Lesaffre and encouraged him to study acting. Then, in 1953 after numerous small roles, Carné provided Lesaffre with his first major role as

Riton in Thérèse Raquin. Their friendship continued to evolve. Edward Baron Turk describes their relationship: “To the extent that he served as Lesaffre’s mentor and protector, Carné’s relationship to the young actor bears comparison with Cocteau’s to Jean Marais and Visconti’s to Alain Delon” (384). In retrospect then, one sees that this sexually charged bedroom scene in Thérèse Raquin is a precursor to Carné’s interest in homoerotic cinema. Turk describes this cinema:

As the films of the Carné-Prévert era gave way to those of the Carné-Lesaffre era, there occurred a shift from women’s iconization toward a celebration of the male body. A boxing and track-and-field champion in the navy, Roland Lesaffre had an exquisite physique. Carné exposed and glorified it in their next picture, *L’Air de Paris* (1954). (384)

Although intrigued by themes relating to homosexuality, Carné was unable to truly explore those themes in the 1950s.

The longing look in the mirror, codified as a reference to Narcissus, hints at Carné’s homosexually filtered lens. However, in the diegetic story as the witness, Riton is “heterosexualized” by the tattoo of a woman on his left arm and is now in charge of the gaze. Carné justifies this “peep show” by having Riton see the announcement of the investigation into Camille’s death in the paper. Even in death, male characters drive the narrative. This is repeated with the death of Riton. Therefore, Riton functions as both object and subject, within and without, the diegetic watcher watched extra-diegetically.

Riton arrives in Lyon and gazes in the store window at Thérèse. She sees him watching her and she again reacts to his dangerous gaze with fear. She cannot endure his gaze and closes the shop window. Theatrically, this resembles a curtain closing at the end of a play, but this story is far from over. Thérèse climbs the stairs to tend to Mme. Raquin, opens the windows, and observes Riton still watching. Again, she closes the

window. Unable to support the fixed gazes of Riton and Mme Raquin, she tells Mme Raquin: “Fermez les yeux ou je ne peux plus occuper de toi.” As Thérèse has no power, neither Mme Raquin nor Riton comply with her requests. Riton knocks at the door and continues to stare at her. The camera remains focused on Riton while he recounts what he witnessed. He hypothesizes that Thérèse did not commit the murder alone as he denies the agency of women: “Ce n’est pas un travail de femme, d’accord.”

The visit by Riton forces Thérèse to see Laurent in his hotel room. As they are leaving, they see Riton in the hotel bar. He has been following Thérèse. As Riton confirms his intent to blackmail Laurent and Thérèse, Laurent reacts violently to Riton’s intrusiveness. Laurent, like Thérèse, cannot tolerate objectification. This scene of violence and physicality between Riton and Laurent is emblematic of Carné’s lack of interest in the representation of woman as he almost totally cuts Thérèse out of the frame.

During this scene, the point of view again originates from the extra-diegetic eye of Marcel Carné. He visually demonstrates that Thérèse, the object that has brought these two men together, is no longer the essential component of the story and unworthy to maintain the point of view. Carné devotes this highly charged scene to men’s violence and physicality as Riton demands money from Laurent in exchange for his silence about the murder of Camille. There is no place for Thérèse in this scene as Carné focuses on the homoerotic elements. The violent strikes to Riton by Laurent and Riton’s lion tamer pose to protect himself from Laurent’s bestiality, suggest a man’s world. In addition, the public space of the hotel restaurant reinforces this as man’s space. Therefore, this is not a world for Thérèse to inhabit, as all of this is “men’s” business. In this scene, Carné

sustains Thérèse's role as the headless mannequin as he uses her merely as part of the mise-en-scène.

Riton returns to the shop to make the transaction. As he enters, the dress store mannequin is partially present in Thérèse's trajectory. Once upstairs, Thérèse, placed in the same location as the downstairs mannequin, stands still until Laurent thrusts orders at her. The imperative tense is again stressed: "donne l'encre et du papier," "dicte-lui," and "donne-le à lui." Thérèse dictates an admission of guilt and receipt for the money for Laurent to copy and sign. She parrots the rehearsed passage while at the same time mindful of his spelling: "Caché, sans 'r'." Under the watchful eye of Laurent, she hands the money to Riton and orders that he count it. She tells him two times: "Contez" and "Contez d'abord," but he refuses. Thérèse has no agency and no authority.

As Riton tries to start his motorcycle, a truck swerves to miss a young boy in the street. The truck fatally hits Riton and drags him into the store "Au Petit Gourmand." The irony of the shop title is evident. Trapped as subject of the diegesis, but the sexual object of the camera, Riton cannot survive. Thérèse, in her passive role of observer, watches Laurent run to the street to save Riton and recover the money. It is Laurent who carries Riton inside to revive him. For the last time, the mannequin stands quietly and half-dressed on the left of the frame. As the film concludes, Thérèse stands watching, like the headless mannequin, until Laurent gives her instructions: "Vite, appelle un docteur."

As Riton lay dying, Laurent tries to ascertain the significance of *la lettre*. The diegetic spectators, the townspeople, looking in the huge uncovered windows, are conflated with the spectators in the theater as both groups watch Laurent simultaneously.

His attempts to elicit the important information seem to be attempts to save Riton's life. As Riton keeps uttering something about *la lettre*, Thérèse and Laurent look at each other for the last time as the clock strikes five. Riton dies with his eyes wide open as the witness to the affair, the murder, and the impending imprisonment of Thérèse and Laurent.

Except Riton, who is dead, none of the diegetic characters have access to the information that will conclude the narrative. Only the theater audience knows that Thérèse and Laurent will be accused of murder and punished. The young, naïve hotel maid, Georgette, literally seals the fate of the two lovers when she hands the letter to the postman. She is not acting however with agency, but as a puppet following the orders she was given (use of the imperative). In the end, it was not the power of the gaze that condemned the couple, but fate and an accidental car crash. Mme Raquin still sits in her room with her eyes wide open, impotent, and without knowledge of the accident. The narrative closure of the film brings retribution and punishment to all the guilty parties.

To summarize, Carné's representation of women rests in four characters, Thérèse, Madame Raquin, Georgette, the hotel maid, and Françoise, Thérèse's helper. Georgette and Françoise are easily identified as stereotypes of two young girls. Georgette, the cute, perky, and petite hotel maid, infatuated with Riton's politeness and generosity, does as he asks without any questions or rebellion. Françoise, the dowdy, drab, slumped shouldered helper for Thérèse, vows her help at anytime, as she is always available. The other incidental women in the film, the bar maid, the old woman at the Moulin Brulé, the bride, the aunt, etc. are nothing more than flat cardboard cutouts of different types of characters.

Madame Raquin is caricaturized as the doting mother, trying to protect her son and the classical, overly critical mother-in-law who does not like her daughter-in-law. Once paralyzed, the overly protective, possessive, and intrusive Mme Raquin becomes a petrified statue placed in the set decoration of the upstairs living quarters. Carné removes her as the witness to the unraveling of Thérèse and Laurent's lives and to their suicide. Title cards, mannequins, cardboard cutouts, statues, and tattoos are the dominant figures of women found in Carné's *Thérèse Raquin*.

The most representative image of Thérèse in the film as the condemned and objectified woman occurs as she exits the courthouse after the trial for Camille's murder. As she stands on the steps, surrounded by mammoth columns of stone, she appears as a tiny figure encased in light. The shape of the light vaguely resembles a light forced through a keyhole. Carné hyperbolizes the early origins of film and the pleasure of subjecting others to a curious, controlling gaze through this imitation of the peephole. Women have and will continue to be the object of scopophilic desire as Thérèse appears in the camera's trajectory as the object of the gaze. Dwarfed by the huge columns as she leaves the courthouse, Carné foreshadows the patriarchal oppression that will eventually persecute Thérèse for her infidelity.

Even though Thérèse is legally exonerated in the death of Camille, the Law does not forsake him. In death, the patriarchy retaliates, avenges Camille's murder, and returns the patriarchy to order. Camille's recurring phrase, "*La loi est pour moi*," poignantly intimates that "*la loi*" is not for Thérèse. She remains silent and statue-like among the columns.

According to Russell Cousins, Carné's adaptation, despite the divergences and transgressions, remains an interesting and original interpretation of Zola's novel and succeeds as a cinematic rendition of its literary antecedent (Thérèse Raquin 78).

However, it is evident that the numerous digressions from the original text greatly impact Thérèse's agency. As opposed to the novel, where Thérèse could not satiate her desire to see and to control the narrative, she repeatedly avoids having access to the gaze and narrativity in the film. Fearful of all looks, especially those of Laurent and Riton, and of accessing the gaze, Thérèse resists being an object and struggles not to be a subject.

Caught between the polarized extremes of object and subject, Thérèse resides in the enigmatic, commercial, public space of the draper's shop. Carné's refeminized Thérèse exists as a commodity among the neatly folded bolts of material, drawers of buttons, mannequins, and cutouts. Her "mannequinization" removes her as a threat to man's conception of order and agency as she can be placed, dressed, decorated, carried, and manipulated to maintain the homosocial order. The spectral tentacles that haunted Thérèse in the novel reach out to confine her in Carné's representation of the draper's shop. The modern Thérèse Raquin of 1953 still remains window dressing in a man's world.



## CHAPTER 6

### THE FAILED ENTREPRENEUSE

L'Assommoir, the seventh novel in the Rougon-Macquart series, appeared in 1877 and immediately created scandal and controversy upon its publication. Colette Becker describes the extent of the scandal: "Notons que le ministère de l'Intérieur, service de la presse, refusa le 14 mai 1877, l'autorisation de vendre *L'Assommoir* dans les bibliothèques de gare pour «obscénité grossière et continuelle des détails et des termes» et «immoralité des situations et des caractères»" (Les Rougon-Macquart II 604). As frequently happens, the censure of this novel only increased its sales.

The character of Gervaise Macquart, first introduced in La Fortune des Rougon, reappears as the female protagonist in this novel of expired hopes and shattered dreams. From Plassans, she arrives in Paris with her two illegitimate children and her lover, Auguste Lantier. For those readers unfamiliar with her character, Gervaise provides background information:

J'avais quatorze ans et lui dix-huit, quand nous avons eu notre premier. L'autre est venu quatre ans plus tard... c'est arrivé comme ça arrive toujours, vous savez. Je n'étais pas heureuse chez nous; le père Macquart, pour un oui, pour un non, m'allongeait des coups de pied dans les reins. Alors, ma foi, on songe à s'amuser dehors... On nous aurait mariés, mais je ne sais plus, nos parents n'ont pas voulu. (24; ch. I)

This autobiographical paragraph privileges Gervaise's story and highlights her agency. René Clément will adapt this autobiographical format in his film by the use of voice-overs narrated by Gervaise.

The representation of power and agency in Zola's L'Assommoir vacillates between the preconceived parameters of masculine and feminine domains and eventually resides in the polygendered gray space between the masculine title, L'Assommoir, and the feminine first word of the novel, Gervaise. Trapped between these two spaces, the novel begins with Gervaise, as agent of the gaze, looking out the window of her cramped room waiting passively for Lantier to return.

Zola demonstrates Gervaise's contradictory position as both subject and object in the initial paragraph of the novel. While Gervaise looks out the window searching for Lantier, she sees nothing, but at the same time, Zola recounts Gervaise's previous observations of Lantier in le bal du Grand-Balcon with Adèle: "derrière lui, elle avait aperçu la petite Adèle, une brunisseuse qui dînait à leur restaurant, marchant à cinq ou six pas, les mains ballantes, comme si elle venait de lui quitter le bras pour ne pas passer ensemble sous la clarté crue des globes de la porte" (9; ch.I). Although Gervaise cannot see Lantier from the window, she "sees" his infidelity. Gervaise and Lantier's unsanctioned "marriage" is doomed to failure.

In the home that she shares with Lantier, Zola noticeably undercuts Gervaise's agency and vision. Even without the legality of marriage, Zola places power and agency with Lantier and places Gervaise in the passive position of object. Gervaise is denied access to the gaze. Tears repeatedly cloud her vision, reducing the power of the look and negating Gervaise's agency. In the fourth line of the novel Zola mentions her "joues

trempées de larmes” and again on the same page her “yeux voilés de larmes” (9; ch. I). Gervaise tries to see but is left in doubt of the veracity of her vision. Numerous references to her inability to see clearly and to understand what she sees are presented: “elle croyait l’avoir vu entrer,” “comme si elle venait de lui quitter . . .” (9; ch. I), and “lorsque Gervaise, parmi tout ce monde, croyait reconnaître Lantier, elle se penchait davantage, au risque de tomber . . .” (11; ch. I). This blurred vision signifies the diminished power of the gaze vis-à-vis Gervaise and blocks her ascension to agency. As Gervaise looks out the window, which functions as a type of screen, we do not see what she sees, we simply see her looking. Gervaise’s agency dissolves onto the screen of the window, as she, the initial subject, becomes the object of the reader’s gaze.

In the second paragraph, Zola places the point of view with Gervaise and permits her to survey the room. The description of what she sees is a vision of nothingness, the absent present again compromising her agency. Gervaise repeatedly describes the *absent*, the *void*, and the *trou* as she describes things that are not in the room but should be. For example: “Lantier n’était pas rentré;” “meublée d’une commode de noyer dont un tiroir manquait;” “de trois chaises de paille et d’une petite table” (9; ch. I); “la malle . . . grande ouverte dans un coin, montrait ses flancs vide;” “un châte troué;” and “un pantalon mangé par la boue” (10; ch. I). The lack of space and interior confinement is represented by “un lit de fer qui barrait la commode et emplissait les deux tiers de la pièce” and one pillow shared by the two children. Lastly, to codify Gervaise’s lack, immobility, and passivity, she is shoeless, “pieds nus, sans songer à remettre ses savates tombées...” and physically deformed, characterized as *la boiteuse*, which becomes her nickname. Before returning to the window, Zola mentions her eyes again: “le regard

noyé de leur mère...,” “une nouvelle crise de sanglots...,” and “elle levait les yeux . . .” (10; ch. I). This last reference to her vision is to describe what she sees from her window while waiting for Lantier, which again is nothing.

However, Gervaise does not acquiesce. She struggles to maintain her gaze, and her integrity, as she tells Lantier: “Je n’ai pas pu fermer l’œil” (15; ch. I). Therefore, Gervaise sees both within and without. She surveys her room and then looks out to an open space that could lead her out of her present environment: “Quand elle levait les yeux, au-delà de cette muraille grise et interminable qui entourait la ville d’une bande de désert, elle apercevait une grande lueur, une poussière de soleil, pleine déjà du grondement matinal de Paris” (11; ch. I). Gervaise’s vision is unblocked when she looks past her present situation and removes herself from patriarchal interference.

When Lantier finally returns, Gervaise’s tears subside, “[elle] ne pleurait pas lorsque Lantier entra tranquillement” (15; ch. I), as she fixes her increasingly, powerful gaze on Lantier: “Du coup, elle se releva, le regarder en face, sans lâcher les chemises sales . . .” (18; ch. I). Gervaise appears to be in control as her gaze intensifies: “Et elle l’examinait, inquiète, retrouvant sur son visage de joli garçon la même dureté, comme si rien, désormais, ne devait le fléchir” (20; ch. I). As Lantier finds himself objectified and powerless, he looks for an escape and goes to sleep: “Puis, pour échapper aux regards dont elle le poursuivait, il retourna s’étendre sur le lit, en disant qu’il avait sommeil . . .” (20; ch. I).

Gervaise continues with her routine activities as she gathers the dirty laundry. She seems intent on going to the laundry as if trying to cleanse herself of Lantier’s lies and unfaithfulness. As Gervaise enters the laundry she enters a feminine enclave, which

presents a community of women. It is here that women's voices are heard. This community is represented as a collective space with few individual characters. "Les laveuses" seem to act and react as one entity.

The laundry is also a space where lies are rectified and Gervaise's vision is clear. In the apartment, Lantier lied to Gervaise about his whereabouts on the previous evening. Even Mme Boche, Gervaise's "friend," tries to protect her by supporting Lantier's lie. However, in this particular instance, it is the two children who are messengers of the truth. Claude and Etienne arrive at the laundry with the news: "Papa est parti... Il a sauté du lit, il a mis toutes ses affaires dans la malle, il a descendu la malle sur une voiture... Il est parti" (29; ch. I). It is significant that the two young children both happen to be pre-adolescent boys, untainted and naïve about the workings of the patriarchal order. It is only after this information that Mme Boche confirms the affair with Lantier and Adèle. Here in the laundry, away from her home, Gervaise regains her sight, her power, and her agency.

This feminine space also suggests an area where women are free to be physical, if only to "beat" the dirt from their laundry. This physical violence spills over to Gervaise as she attacks Virginie in revenge. Gervaise opens her eyes, follows her desires, and seizes control: "Gervaise ôta ses mains, regarda. Quand elle aperçut devant elle Virginie, au milieu de trois ou quatre femmes, parlant bas, la dévisageant, elle fut prise d'une colère folle" (31; ch. I). The two women fight, cheered on by the others, until Gervaise wins. Her victory is instrumental yet deceiving. Gervaise is successful in female space but this agency does not survive in male space. Regardless, turning her "misfortune" into an opportunity, Gervaise has a "chance" to change her life and take

control. When Gervaise returns home, she notices that Lantier has taken her mirror, and along with it her previous passive image: “Elle ne retrouva même pas le petit miroir rond accroché à l’espagnolette” (40; ch. I). This time, the “void” represented by the missing mirror in Gervaise’s apartment does not signal a “lack” but an opportunity for a new personae and image. After the departure of Lantier and the acknowledgement of his affair with Adèle, Gervaise begins to take control of her life. Once Lantier leaves, the blinding effect of his negative presence dims as Gervaise’s personal light begins to shine.

Gervaise uses this opportunity to create a new life for herself and her two children. She works hard, saves her money, and strives to attain her goal of owning her own shop. Free of patriarchal restraints in her household, Gervaise accesses her agency. She drives the narrative forward, as she is now the active agent although her agency is tenuous and fleeting.

Three weeks after the departure of Lantier, Gervaise is courted by Coupeau, the roofer. Gervaise is flattered but uninterested in his attention as she plans to fulfill her own desires. However, her knowledge of the difficulty of raising and providing for her two children as a single woman, pushes Gervaise to agree to Coupeau’s proposal of marriage.

Under the legality and sanction of the sacrament of marriage, Gervaise and Coupeau’s marriage flourishes. They become the envy of the neighborhood:

Ce furent quatre années de dur travail. Dans le quartier, Gervaise et Coupeau étaient un bon ménage, vivant à l’écart, sans batteries, avec un tour de promenade régulier le dimanche, du côté de Saint-Ouen. La femme faisait des journées de douze heures chez madame Fauconnier, et trouvait le moyen de tenir son chez elle propre comme un sou, de donner la pâtée à tout son monde, matin et soir. L’homme ne se soulait pas,

rapportait ses quinzaines, fumait une pipe à sa fenêtre avant de se coucher, pour prendre l'air. On les citait, à cause de leur gentillesse. (111; ch. IV)

Celebrating their good fortune, Gervaise and Coupeau move to a new apartment and are blessed with the arrival of their first child. Gervaise is happy and shares her happiness with others: “elle triomphait, elle criait, ravie d’être si bien pour si peu d’argent” (114; ch. IV).

Three years pass and Gervaise remains happy in her life with Coupeau. Trying to better their situation, she dreams of owning her own shop as she and Coupeau diligently watch their finances and continue to save money: “Le ménage, malgré la charge des deux enfants, plaçait des vingt francs et des trente francs chaque mois à la Caisse d’épargne” (125; ch. IV). Gervaise’s agency increases as she works in tandem with her husband, Coupeau. At last, Gervaise envisions her dream and can no longer close her eyes: “Quand leurs économies atteignirent la somme de six cents francs, la jeune fille ne dormit plus, obsédée d’un rêve d’ambition; elle voulait s’établir, louer une petite boutique, prendre à son tour des ouvrières. Elle avait tout calculé” (125). She keeps her eyes wide open to survey her savings as her dream starts to become a reality: “quand elle rêvait à sa boutique, elle s’oubliait là, devant le cadran, à regarder fixement tourner les aiguilles, ayant l’air d’attendre quelque minute particulière et solennelle pour se décider” (126). Gervaise now sees clearly and initiates the purchase of her boutique.

Seeing an available boutique on the rue de la Goutte-d’Or, Gervaise’s clear vision and agency startle her: “J’ai vu ça, il y a une heure, en allant acheter du fil. Ça m’a donné un coup” (127). Privileging Gervaise’s point of view, Zola describes the boutique as: “une boutique très propre, juste dans la grande maison où ils rêvaient d’habiter

autrefois. Il y avait la boutique, une arrière-boutique, avec deux autres chambres, à droite et à gauche; enfin, ce qu'il leur fallait, les pièces un peu petites, mais bien distribuées" (127).

Exercising her agency, Gervaise returns to the boutique to record measurements and to design the layout of her laundry. At home, Gervaise is giddy about the shop and her ability to access to the gaze: "Le lendemain, restée seule, elle ne put résister au besoin d'enlever le globe de la pendule et de regarder le livret de la Caisse d'épargne. Dire que sa boutique était là-dedans . . ." (127-28). Again, still in control, Gervaise takes Coupeau to see the store and to handle the business affairs: "elle voulait emmener Coupeau voir les lieux et tâcher d'obtenir une diminution sur le loyer" (128).

Gervaise lays out her plans, as the realization of her desire is within her reach. Unfortunately, women's desires, whether economic or sexual, are considered either dangerous or frivolous; therefore Gervaise must overcome numerous obstacles to attain her goal. Interestingly, the source of these obstacles emanates from men, first Coupeau and then Lantier. When Lantier and Coupeau join forces, Gervaise is doomed to fail.

Gervaise encounters her first obstacle when she goes to search for Coupeau where he is working. Gervaise knows the danger involved in distracting her husband while at work and she admits that this is only the second time she has ever gone to see him. Although Gervaise understands the danger of Coupeau's work, Nana is too young and naïve. The best day in Gervaise's life becomes her worst as Coupeau falls from the roof: "Et il tomba. Son corps décrivit une courbe molle, tourna deux fois sur lui-même, vint s'écraser au milieu de la rue avec le coup sourd d'un paquet de linge jeté de haut" (133).



The comparison of Coupeau's body to a package of laundry serves to symbolize the eventual death of Gervaise's business.

Zola suggests that it is Gervaise's impatience that causes Coupeau's untimely fall while Mme. Boche immediately blames Nana positing the female gaze as destructive: "C'est à cause de sa petite, il a voulu la regarder, et patatras!" (134). Gervaise, not mindful of where she is, insists in the middle of a public street that her desires be met: "J'ai de l'argent... C'est mon mari, n'est-ce pas? Il est à moi, je le veux. Et l'on dut rapporter Coupeau chez lui" (133-34). This public refusal of governmental assistance reinforces Gervaise's general disdain for patriarchal intervention. Nevertheless, Gervaise's wish is granted and Coupeau is brought home to recuperate. During this time, Gervaise's agency is fragmented and undercut as Mme. Lorilleux and Mme Boche interfere in Gervaise's approach to Coupeau's illness and rehabilitation.

Les Lorilleux and others derive pleasure from Gervaise's misfortune and her inability to have her own shop. Gervaise however, does not give up easily and her desire for a shop of her own continues:

Matin et soir, elle allait, rue de la Goutte-d'Or, voir la boutique, qui était toujours à louer; et elle se cachait, comme si elle eût commis un enfantillage indigne d'une grande personne. Cette boutique recommençait à lui tourner la tête; la nuit, quand la lumière était éteinte, elle trouvait à y songer, les yeux ouverts, le charme d'un plaisir défendu. Elle faisait de nouveau ses calculs: deux cent cinquante francs pour le loyer, cent cinquante francs d'outils et d'installation, cent francs d'avance afin de vivre quinze jours; en tout cinq cents francs, au chiffre le plus bas. (141-42; ch. IV)

Gervaise's pride, ambition, audacity, and desire propel her to accept money from Goujet and his mother to rent her shop.

The ramifications of Gervaise's decision are far-reaching. Goujet's mother is not content, as she believes that Coupeau has turned bad and that he will ruin Gervaise and her shop. Coupeau is disturbed because he thinks that Goujet is sexually interested in Gervaise. And, Gervaise is concerned about outward appearances, public perception, and her ability to repay the loan. The only person seemingly happy with the arrangement is Goujet. The narrative now moves forward privileging Gervaise's story and the acquisition of her shop.

At the end of three years, Gervaise's shop is flourishing. She demonstrates that she is an adept businesswoman while at the same time, gentle, kind, and fair to her employees and customers. She is well respected in the neighborhood: "Dans le quartier, on avait fini par avoir pour elle beaucoup de considération, parce que, en somme, on ne trouvait pas des masses de pratiques aussi bonnes, payant recta, pas chipoteuse, pas râleuse" (181; ch. V). In addition, Gervaise keeps her eyes open and maintains control over all activities and events that involve the success of her store. When her two sister-in-laws come to visit, they see the intensity of Gervaise's surveillance. They observe: "les yeux de la blanchisseuse magnifiques, des yeux auxquels on aurait allumé des bouts de papier;" (181; ch. V).

Gervaise enjoys the success of her hard work and plans a party to celebrate her birthday and her good fortune. Unfortunately, this party reintroduces Lantier back into the household and causes the collapse of Gervaise's world. Gervaise's sight becomes clouded and unclear as Lantier enters the party. First, she tries not to look, as she "hasarda un coup d'oeil" (255; ch. VII). Then, similar to the beginning of the novel, Gervaise's eyes fill with tears and block her vision: "torturée par la présence de Lantier,

[elle] ne put retenir ses pleurs . . . (256; ch. VII). She then attempts not to look:

“D’abord, quand son mari avait poussé son ancien amant dans la boutique, elle s’était pris la tête entre les deux poings, du même geste instinctif que les jours de gros orage, à chaque coup de tonnerre” (260; ch. VII). Lastly, Gervaise doubts the veracity of her vision and fear, as this peculiar situation now appears to be normal: “Puis, en voyant les deux hommes assis, sans que même les rideaux de mousseline eussent bougé, elle avait subitement trouvé ces choses naturelles” (260). To validate her impression of normalcy and her nervous approval, Gervaise surveys the other guests at the dinner party. She observes:

L’oie la gênait un peu; elle en avait trop mangé, décidément, et ça l’empêchait de penser. Une paresse heureuse l’engourdissait, la tenait tassée au bord de la table, avec le seul besoin de n’être pas embêtée. Mon Dieu! A quoi bon se faire de la bile, lorsque les autres ne s’en font pas, et que les histoires paraissent s’arranger d’elles-mêmes, à la satisfaction générale? (260; ch. VII)

Lantier’s untimely return coupled with Gervaise’s lack of acute vision begins the destruction and downfall of the Coupeau household. Once Gervaise relinquishes her access to the gaze, she no longer maintains her status as active agent and loses control of her life. Malevolent patriarchal domination from Lantier and Coupeau extinguishes Gervaise’s agency.

The remainder of the novel follows Gervaise’s rise and fall, success and ultimate failure. The life of Gervaise Macquart Coupeau drives the narrative forward, but it does not privilege her as the subject. Zola makes that choice in choosing the enigmatic masculine title, L’Assommoir, instead of the feminine oriented title, La Vie Simple de Gervaise Macquart. The continued reference in the novel to the bar as l’Assommoir *du*

*père Colombe* doubly emphasizes this space as male-dominated and representative of the patriarchy. This physical, public space is the epicenter of Gervaise's troubles; it is where Lantier drinks, Coupeau proposes, the wedding party eats, and Gervaise partakes of alcohol. Gervaise will find brief periods of agency in women's space (the laundry and her own shop) but will always encounter failure in male space, demonstrated when she crosses the arbitrary and fragile boundary between her shop and her home.

Gervaise does not approve of *Père Colombe's* bar and her hesitation before entering demonstrates her unexplainable fear:

Deux fois elle retourna se planter devant la vitre, son oeil collé de nouveau, vexée de retrouver ces sacrés pochards à couvert, toujours gueulant et buvant. Le coup de lumière de l'Assommoir se reflétait dans les flaques des pavés, où la pluie mettait un frémissement de petits bouillons. Elle se sauvait, elle pataugeait là-dedans, dès que la porte s'ouvrait et retombait, avec le claquement de ses bandes de cuivre. Enfin, elle s'appela trop bête, elle poussa la porte et marcha droit à la table de Coupeau. (387; ch. X)

Gervaise tries to rationalize her entrance to avoid any potential retaliation: "Après tout, n'est-ce pas? C'était son mari qu'elle venait demander; et elle y était autorisée, puisqu'il avait promis, ce soir-là, de la mener au Cirque" (387; ch. X). As Gervaise crosses the boundary into this male-dominated space, she again loses her sight as she is overcome by the smell and the smoke: "elle étouffait, les yeux brûlés, la tête déjà alourdie par l'odeur d'alcool qui s'exhalait de la salle entière" (389; ch. X). One hundred and six pages later, Gervaise dies at the age of forty-one: "Un matin, comme ça sentait mauvais dans le corridor, on se rappela qu'on ne l'avait pas vue [Gervaise] depuis deux jours; et on la découvrit déjà verte, dans sa niche" (494; ch. XIII). Her final role is as an "object" that fills the "trou" vacated by *le père Bru*. Gervaise loses her struggle to survive and is

stripped of her human qualities as signified by the use of the object pronouns and possessive adjectives *ça, la, sa*.

A retrospective look at Emile Zola's L'Assommoir, after 106 years of cinema, unveils a novel that abounds with numerous filmic correspondences, cinematic equivalences, manipulated shadows, and projected images. In fact, Zola's extensive use of different narrative lenses and perspectives in his descriptions seems to function as a type of script for a film. Possibly, this explains why L'Assommoir, adapted by Ferdinand Zecca in 1902, was the first of numerous Zolian novels to be transported to the screen and explains its immense popularity with directors who screened the novel four more times between 1902 and 1921.

Intrigued by photography as well as writing, Zola understood the importance of a well-constructed image and the pleasure of looking. In the novel, Zola draws upon his interest in photography and introduces new ways of seeing and cinematic methods of narration. Although Zola did not begin to practice photography himself until 1894, according to Massin and Dr. François Emile-Zola, we know that he first met Nadar, the famous photographer, and journalist, in the 1860s. In 1876, Nadar started a series of portraits of Zola that he would complete in 1898. During this time the two corresponded frequently (Massin 4). In the novel, Zola's interest in pictures is seen in his description of the blacksmith Goujet's evening activities: "le soir, la lecture le [Goujet] fatiguait; alors il s'amuse à regarder ses images" (123; ch. IV). This passage indicates that Goujet has idle hours to fill as the concept of "leisure time" begins to reach the working classes. To fill that time, Goujet, who does not frequent bars, music halls or prostitutes, searches for other distractions besides reading. Putting the three words of this phrase together,

soir...regarder...images one is left with a sketchy definition for the cinema, or in other words, the projection of pictures that people would look at alone, in the dark. Cinema, which debuted in 1895, would ultimately become a popular alternative to reading to fill the increasing leisure time of the working classes.

Zola describes Goujet's bedroom and the pictures that cover his walls from Gervaise's point of view: "des images du haut en bas, des bonshommes découpés, des gravures coloriées fixées à l'aide de quatre clous, des portraits de toutes sortes de personnages, détachés des journaux illustrés" (123; ch. IV). Goujet enjoys looking at the pictures and places them on his wall where he may enjoy them from a distance. This permits him to enjoy the pictures without touching them as if he was a spectator at a film. These pictures also represent an alternative mode of representation emphasizing the iconic over the written word. Unknowingly, Zola's description of Goujet's room and his affinity for a different mode of representation illustrates the fetishistic pleasure of looking and foreshadows the advent of projected images. Gervaise is aware of the power of these manipulated images and hopes to replace Goujet's pictures as his desired image.

Additional passages of Zola's narration are reminiscent of various camera shots and angles as he leads the reader through the novel as if screening these passages on film. A few representative examples of close-ups, long shots, dissolves, and foreshadowing serve to demonstrate Zola's affinity with the seventh art. When Gervaise and Coupeau first meet at Père Colombe's bar, the conversation turns to Lantier. As a result of the pronunciation of Lantier's name, a "dissolve" occurs that places Gervaise in another place emotionally:

Sans doute que je l'aimais... Seulement, après la façon dégoûtante dont il m'a lâchée... Ils parlaient de Lantier, Gervaise ne l'avait pas revu; elle croyait qu'il vivait avec la soeur de Virginie, à la Glacière, chez cet ami qui devait monter une fabrique de chapeaux. D'ailleurs, elle ne songeait guère à courir après lui... (45; ch. II)

This retrospective on Lantier by Gervaise continues until Coupeau speaks to her to release her from her reverie. While Gervaise and Coupeau are still sitting in Père Colombe's bar, we find an example of a "close-up:" "Alors, lui, les coudes toujours sur la table, avançant la face davantage, la complimenta en risquant les mots, comme pour la griser" (47; ch.II). Gervaise's response to Coupeau's action is similar to a reverse shot: "Mais elle disait toujours non de la tête, sans se laisser tenter, caressée pourtant par cette voix câline" (47; ch. II). As this scene takes place without any spoken words, one can imagine the camera first behind Coupeau and then behind Gervaise.

In chapter III, during the wedding of Gervaise and Coupeau, a short, visual scene foreshadows the doomed marriage: "Et elle [Mme Lerat] appela la société sur la porte du marchand de vin, pour voir les nuages, un orage d'un noir d'encre qui montait rapidement au sud de Paris" (82; ch. III). An example of a long shot in deep focus occurs later in the novel, when Coupeau does not arrive as promised to take Gervaise to the circus.

Gervaise goes looking for Lantier at Père Colombe's and Zola records what she sees:

Elle resta là un instant, l'échine tendue, l'oeil appliqué contre la vitre, entre deux bouteilles de l'étalage, à guigner Coupeau, dans le fond de la salle; il était assis avec des camarades, autour d'une petite table de zinc, tous vagues et bleuis par la fumée des pipes; et, comme on ne les entendait pas gueuler, ça faisait un drôle d'effet de les voir se démancher, le menton en avant, les yeux sortis de la figure. (387; ch. X)

From this passage, Zola leads Gervaise into the bar to experience what she has just seen.

As she nervously enters Père Colombe's bar she is intimidated when confronted by the

darkness of the bar and the strangeness of the projected images. From a contemporary perspective, it seems as if she is entering a movie theater:

Puis, brusquement, elle [Gervaise] eut la sensation d'un malaise plus inquiétant derrière son dos. Elle se tourna, elle aperçut l'alambic, la machine à soûler, fonctionnant sous le vitrage de l'étroite cour, avec la trépidation profonde de sa cuisine d'enfer. Le soir, les cuivres étaient plus mornes, allumés seulement sur leur rondeur d'une large étoile rouge; et l'ombre de l'appareil, contre la muraille du fond, dessinait des abominations, des figures avec des queues, des monstres ouvrant leurs mâchoires comme pour avaler le monde. (389; ch. X)

The frightening images portrayed on the wall by the still are again suggestive of images a camera projects on a screen. Just as the alcohol-producing machine of 1877 consumed Gervaise, so will the image-producing machine of 1956. Gervaise witnesses the power of the image as she watches the monsters screened on the wall of L'Assommoir devour her husband and others, including herself.

Now, unable to escape, these images follow Gervaise outside the bar. When she first sees her shadow on the street, she is both surprised and horrified:

Et brusquement, elle aperçut son ombre par terre. Quand elle approchait d'un bec de gaz, l'ombre vague se ramassait et se précisait, une ombre énorme, trapue, grotesque tant elle était ronde. Cela s'étalait, le ventre, la gorge, les hanches, coulant et flottant ensemble. Elle louchait si fort de la jambe, que, sur le sol, l'ombre faisait la culbute à chaque pas; un vrai guignol! (466-67; ch. XII)

As Gervaise's health declines and her situation becomes more desperate, these projected images become more monstrous and increase in frequency:

Puis, lorsqu'elle s'éloignait, le guignol grandissait, devenait géant, emplissait le boulevard, avec des révérences qui lui cassaient le nez contre les arbres et contre les maisons. Mon Dieu! qu'elle était drôle et effrayante! Jamais elle n'avait si bien compris son avachissement. Alors, elle ne put s'empêcher de regarder ça, attendant les becs de gaz, suivant des yeux le chahut de son ombre. Ah! elle avait là une belle gaupe qui marchait à côté d'elle! Quelle touche! (467; ch. XII)



Gervaise cannot stop herself from examining these specular images. She sees herself as grotesque spectacle, represented by le guignol and caricature. The projected images, like those of the still, continue to follow and frighten her. As the narrative concludes, Gervaise sees her death foreshadowed in this deformed, non-human caricature: “Et ça se passait sur un bec de gaz, elle apercevait son ombre difforme qui avait l’air de rigoler sur la neige, comme une vraie caricature” (470; ch. XII). The objectified, non-human caricature signifies her impending death.

Working within the confines of the Tradition of Quality and the responsibility to produce a financially successful film, Clément’s adaptation follows Zola’s novel very closely, with a traditional approach by the writing team of Aurenche and Bost, who attempt to “inventer sans trahir.” They remain “faithful” to the linear narrativity of the novel and deviate rarely, if at all, from the original story line and only if they must “trouver des équivalences pour des scènes ‘intournables’ d’un roman.” The usual omissions of minor characters and episodes occur to produce a film of acceptable length and condensation occurs where necessary. Although this film won numerous awards, including Best Foreign Film in 1957 (NY Film Critics Circle Award) and the Volpi Cup Award for Best Actress, film scholar Alan Williams dismisses the film as lacking originality:

Ten years after he made his first fiction film, Clément seems to have lost most of his will to experiment with film genres, styles, and subject matter. Although Gervaise (1956, script by Aurenche and Bost after Zola’s L’Assommoir) is one of the period’s better historical costume dramas, there is little in it that another, equally competent filmmaker of the day would not have done. Possibly he had become discouraged by the hostile reviews of his work in that official organ of youthful rebellion, Cahiers du cinéma. At any rate, just a few years before the arrival of the New Wave,

Clément abandoned his role as the industry mainstream's in-house innovator and became a simple artisan of the *cinéma de papa* (305).

Despite William's lack of appreciation for the film, other critics have applauded Clément's adaptation. James Reid Paris appraises the film: "A superb adaptation, beautifully directed and acted, Gervaise retains its power and is among Clément's best work." (162), Pierre Ballard states, "Gervaise (1956) en fera une autre démonstration en nous offrant la plus superbe et intelligente adaptation de Zola qui soit (L'Assommoir) . . ." (607). Russell Cousins offers:

Of the nine subsequent film versions none has enjoyed the critical acclaim accorded to Gervaise directed by René Clément from a script by Jean Aurenche and Pierre Bost. Indeed, this screen adaptation has come to be regarded as a model rendering of the author's socially committed realist text and a traditional auteurist approach has naturally privileged René Clément's role in this achievement. ("Ideology" 1)

Clément's adaptation of L'Assommoir does not elicit the explosive reception that greeted Zola's novel but these varying, disparate reviews of the film echo the controversial reception of the novel. As Lilian Furth states, "L'Assommoir has been from the outset one of Zola's most controversial works, arousing strongly conflicting opinions ranging from the wildly censorious to the highly laudatory" (9). Whereas Zola's narrative seems to be sensationalized, Clément's film is characterized by understatement.

Clément's subtlety and use of understatement lead to the most innovative aspect of his film—his decision to screen Gervaise Coupeau in 1956 as a political commentary on the social status of women. Since women did not achieve the ability to own their own businesses without their husband's approval until 1965, Clément might have found this film exceptionally relevant. Thus, the originality of Clément's adaptation rests in his

reading of the novel as a social commentary relevant for the 1950s, while guarding the historical accuracy of the novel.

In the aftermath of the right of women to vote in 1944 and the publication of Le Deuxième Sexe in 1949, the 1950s became an explosive but exciting time for women in France. In this feminist shadow, Clément can be seen as a political commentator and the film can be read as an exposé on the working conditions of women. Clément politicizes a story that Zola maintained was apolitical, as he insisted in the preface of the novel: “J’ai voulu peindre la déchéance fatale d’une famille ouvrière, dans le milieu empesté de nos faubourgs . . . C’est de la morale en action, simplement” (7). Clément explains his intentions:

pour être fidèle à l’esprit de Zola, il n’y avait qu’un moyen, braquer le projecteur sur un personnage en qui se joue, comme dans un miroir sensible, tout le drame. J’ai choisi Gervaise... J’avais envie depuis longtemps de tourner un film sur la condition des femmes. (qtd. in Cousins, “Ideology” 2)

This film can be read as a celebratory homage to Gervaise released one hundred and six years after her arrival in Paris with Auguste Lantier in the spring of 1850. From the optic of the feminist movement of the 1950s, this film echoes the lack of real change in the working lives and political independence of women from 1850 to 1956. Zola places the blame for Gervaise’s demise on her inability to conquer her heredity. Clément, however, dims the misogynistic light of Zola’s novel and reorients the film to portray Gervaise as an impotent character confined to and brutalized by her surroundings. Even though Gervaise is not successful in her attempts to resist patriarchal domination, Clément applauds her efforts to forge a new life for herself and her children. Therefore,

in the reconstructed image of Gervaise, Clément portrays her as an innocent and pure victim claimed by the omnipotence and oppression of the patriarchy.

This pervasive, patriarchal authority results from the Napoleonic Civil Code, which was enacted in 1804. This Code reinforces both national and personal patriarchal power by proclaiming Napoleon the father of the country, and the husband the “king” of his household. As such, the wife is treated like a minor child under the guardianship of her husband. This Code serves to “keep Gervaise in her place” in both public and private spaces and denies her access to agency. With large portions of this Civil Code still intact in 1956, it serves as a bridge between the novel and the film.

To accomplish the reorientation of Gervaise as total victim, Clément deletes her ancestral information from the film. Whereas Zola’s Histoire naturelle et sociale d’une famille sous le Second Empire depends on genealogical information to explain the actions of his characters, Clément’s Gervaise does not. For example, Clément removes the background information about Gervaise’s parents, childhood, and adolescence from the film. Specifically, Clément suppresses the information about Gervaise’s relationship with her father and the origin of her limp, thus negating heredity as the cause of her failure. By removing Gervaise’s biological father as the source of her misfortune, Clément lays the blame of Gervaise’s death on all fathers of the patriarchy.

Clément also deletes the horrific details of Gervaise’s degradation, prostitution, filth, starvation, and most notably, her death. As the film concludes, Gervaise clings to life in Père Colombe’s bar in reverie. Possibly, she is reminiscing about her life, which would return the film to the beginning. The circularity of the narrative underlines the repetitiveness of patriarchal oppression from one generation to another. The cinematic

consequence of this over-victimization of the protagonist is the loss of her agency. As Clément screens Gervaise, he subtly filters out her ability to act, redefining her as the passive object manipulated by the patriarchy.

The inherent duality of an adaptation, one story narrated in two different mediums, is like a shadow that reproduces but distorts the original object. At first glance, Clément's film seems to simply "recreate" the novel as a historical drama. However, upon closer examination, we see that Clément uses his artistic control as director (although limited) to screen Gervaise according to his perspective. Through Clément's vision of Gervaise as the oppressed subject, he re-adjusts her cinematic persona to represent her as pure victim. Clément presents Gervaise's struggles as she tries to negotiate a male-dominated society governed by the Napoleonic Civil Code. This reading of the text works well for the 1950s, where a woman's political and economic life is not very far removed from the life of Gervaise under the Second Empire. Gervaise cannot sustain a household, a store or even her own body. Clément makes the point very effectively as he follows the downward trajectory of Gervaise's life through his camera angles. Examining the first and last scenes of the film, placed side by side, the path from point A to point B is a continual downhill decline. The elevated position of Gervaise on her balcony in the initial scene is never repeated in the film.

Through the use of the beggar at Gervaise's wedding, Clément sutures the spectator into the cinematic machinery as he demonstrates how a director controls the iconography and veracity of a scene or character. The beggar's sign illustrates how easily a character's image can be manipulated. As the wedding party leaves the church, the beggar is seen sitting, with a sign hanging from his neck, that says, "aveugle." He

deceives the mean-spirited and miserly Mme. Lorilleux as she carefully and reluctantly places a few coins in his cup. As it begins to rain, the beggar runs up the steps, sits down and flips his sign over. It now says, “sourd et muet.” At this point, the spectator knows that the beggar is not blind, mute or deaf. During this scene, Clément privileges the female point of view as Mme Boche, the perpetual busybody, witnesses the beggar change his sign. The importance of this small scene is multi-faceted. First, Clément acknowledges that males are free to move around at will within a patriarchal society. Secondly, he shows how women observe this freedom accorded to males. Thirdly, he records how women remain silent about the inequalities of this patriarchal system. Lastly, since the scene occurs after Gervaise’s promises to love and obey, it foreshadows Coupeau’s quick change from a hard-working, dutiful husband to a drunk. Clément lays bare the repetitive images of women as the spectators of life versus the images of men as the initiators of action.

With Clément in control, the restructuring of Gervaise’s image begins with the title change, which underscores the constant ambiguity of her position as subject and object. This moves the primary focus of the diegesis from a male-centered narrative to a feminine centered narrative with Gervaise as the epicenter. This, in turn, produces a character-centered film as opposed to Zola’s more socially oriented novel. Now, all diegetic plots must revolve around Gervaise. Aurenche and Bost justify this change: “Nous avons choisi dans l’oeuvre de Zola ce qui concernait la vie de Gervaise. L’histoire à laquelle nous avons collaboré n’est pas un manifeste anti-alcoolique, c’est l’histoire d’une femme” (qtd. in Cousins “Ideology” 2).

Naming the film after the victim instead of the abuser deceptively appears to provide Gervaise more access to agency. It does, however, imply less culpability and justifies, in part, her constant vacillation from subject to object. This change also impacts the cinematic representation of Gervaise in contrast with Zola's representation of Gervaise as it humanizes and softens her image for the screen. Conversely, it diminishes her agency. In speaking of the "gentler" more "personalized" film adaptation, Russell Cousins states:

The general tendency is to prune away the darker elements and to provide a less brutal account of the lives of Zola's working class characters. Gervaise emerges as the almost faultless victim of a scheming rival, Virginie, and of her male burdens, Lantier and Coupeau, whereas Zola had subjected her actions and attitudes to a tougher scrutiny in her regression to the life-style of the milieu she had sought to reject. ("Ideology" 3)

Zola permitted Gervaise to actively reject her situation and strive for a better life and to actively accept her defeat and demand death. On the other hand, Clément's screening of Gervaise portrays her as a naïve, simple blond moving haplessly from one lover to the next. This is demonstrated particularly with his choice of actress.

The parameters of the Tradition of Quality insisted on the "Frenchness" of the production and relied on star appeal. Working with two famous women, one real, one fictional, Clément subverts the "Frenchness" of the original by choosing an Austrian-born actress to portray the infamously famous French Gervaise. This change is evident in her slight German accent. He collides the two women, one real, and the other fictitious, into a new image during the credits. Maria Schell's name appears first on a black screen in white capital letters while "GERVAISE" is superimposed. As Maria Schell's name fades out from underneath, the two become one. The actress/female protagonist used as

cinematic currency and “name” appeal nullifies any pre-implied agency and emphasizes her “objectification.” This vacillation of power and agency in the film manifests itself in the conflicted image of Gervaise as French/Austrian, mother/adulteress, aggressor/victim worker/shopkeeper, narrator/protagonist, present/absent participant/observer, lover/friend, and subject/object.

As the credits begin, the background frames reinforce the paradoxical nature of the film. Choosing a well-known, famous novel in order to attract readers to see the film, Clément erects a filmic barrier in the initial frame, the closed up entrance to *L’Assommoir*, blocking the spectators’ entrance to the film. The introductory sequence with the darkened screen and the iron bars reaching from the top to the bottom of the frame tells the ending of the story, not the beginning, and holds the spectators at a distance. The extra-diegetic, melodramatic music augments the “doom-like” atmosphere and functions as a musical microcosm of the narrative. It mimics the rise and fall of Gervaise’s success as it changes from the melodramatic to a frivolous “can-can” type melody and then reverts back to the melodramatic. The frivolous interlude offers a small, emotional release to the spectator and represents Gervaise’s short ascendance to agency.

The first shot of Gervaise on the balcony concretizes her fluctuating role of subject and object. At first glance, Clément appears to increase the subjectivity of Gervaise by enlarging the scope of the narrative to appear as an autobiography as the film is structured by fifteen voice-overs that Gervaise narrates in a flash-back. However, Clément immediately places Gervaise on display to pronounce that she will also be the object of the spectacle she narrates and he visually separates her from the other characters to signify her “otherness.” Gervaise remains object of the gaze even when she describes



other characters in her voice-overs. This subverts any implied agency that she had acquired as narrator.

Framed in the rectangular woodwork of the window on the balcony of her one room flat, it appears as if Gervaise is on stage. She is object of the gaze for both the audience and the diegetic characters. Despite the voice-over, this scene announces that Gervaise is pure object with no true access to agency. She is separated from the other characters by physical space (across the street, elevated, in a different room) and by camera space (individual camera frames). As spectacle, Gervaise is also deprived of information that the other diegetic characters possess. It is at this point that Clément privileges the spectator, who had previously been held at a distance, with information that Gervaise, as object, does not have.

Gervaise is privileged to have the first point-of-view shot where she looks down to acknowledge Mme Boche (Maria Casadesu) who addresses her. However, Clément compromises Gervaise's elevated position as Lantier (Armand Mestral) and Virginie (Suzy Delair) watch her from eye level from the interior of Adèle's second floor room. This diminishes the power of the gaze for Gervaise and gives Virginie, allied with Lantier in the male sphere of the voyeur, a superior power position, since she cannot be seen. Gervaise acknowledges the presence of Mme Boche, which breaks the fourth diegetic wall, but not the others. She is only aware of Lantier's absence. In a voyeuristic manner, Virginie pulls back the curtains of the window as if opening the curtains on stage. Both Virginie and Lantier look at Gervaise, as she is the object of spectacle for both the masculine and feminine gaze. Clément does not suture the spectator into the film at this point as Virginie closes the curtain and the view is blocked. Virginie, Adèle, Lantier, and

Mme Boche all observe Gervaise's performance on the balcony as she delivers her first line knowing that it is pure performance: "Oui, il dort encore. Il est un peu fatigué." As the first person narrator (subject) and the diegetic protagonist (other), Gervaise is the present absent.

As Lantier returns to the small apartment he shares with Gervaise, Clément visually sutures the spectator into the film through Gervaise's over the shoulder point-of-view shot. This aligns the spectator with Gervaise's position and creates increased empathy for her as the spectator has information that Gervaise does not. In the masculine space of the apartment, Gervaise accuses Lantier of infidelity but maintains her composure and acquiesces. She does not hold Lantier accountable for his infidelity. Gervaise displaces her anger with Lantier and takes out her physical aggression on Virginie in the women's space of the town laundry.

The scene in the laundry occurs as Gervaise learns the truth about Lantier and Adèle. Her newfound agency is demonstrated. Gervaise asserts her rise to agency in her victory over Virginie in the feminine space of the laundry. The smile and look of triumph and pleasure on Gervaise's face are almost maniacal. The lengthy close-up of this look signifies its importance. Equally important is that Gervaise's ascendance to the role of active agent occurs in a typical female space where men fear to get involved but like to watch. All women in the laundry watch the fight but it is Charles, the male laundry worker, who has the privileged point of view on the scaffold above. Again, Gervaise is object and subject simultaneously. When Charles is asked to get involved and to separate the two women, he refuses, prolonging the fight: "Merci, la dernière fois j'ai failli blesser un oeil." The reference to the eye is instrumental in signifying

masculine power. Loss of sight illustrates the fear of castration and impotency in addition to the resistance of the patriarchy to attend to the social and domestic problems of women. In the novel, Gervaise's agency lasts for barely ten pages and concludes the first chapter. Juxtaposing the two elements of subject and object, Clément devotes five minutes to this scene in the film. Was this to epitomize Gervaise's ascent to agency or merely a calculated ploy to circumvent her agency by using her as spectacle to attract male spectators with a titillating on-screen wrestling match between two women?

Supported by this temporary ascendance to agency, Gervaise walks triumphantly home with her two young sons. As she leaves the laundry, a passing carriage whirls by obstructing her path and Gervaise recoils to save herself and her children from being trampled. This serves as a warning to Gervaise to watch her step and to adhere to society's restraints on women. The carriage also serves as a vehicle of demarcation designating the boundaries of Gervaise's world. Her movement will be confined to her neighborhood of la Rue de la Goutte d'Or. This neighborhood serves as the closed enclave that Gervaise will inhabit for twenty years. Unlike men, specifically Lantier, who are permitted to be mobile, signified by his trunk, Gervaise is immobile, confined to her home and her children. Her limp signifies not only her infirmity, but the crippling effect of patriarchy on women.

To reinforce the theme of Gervaise's confinement and women's static existence in the patriarchy, Clément employs almost all medium shots throughout the film. The effect of this camera shot produces a feeling of claustrophobia as each frame of the film is completely filled with characters and/or objects that overlap the edges into off-screen space. The static position of the camera and the partial body images of the characters

intensify the confined feeling and lack of mobility. Women characters are generally placed in the frame as if being placed in a picture whereas male characters enter and exit the pre-established frames at will. Most frames of the film contain and limit Gervaise, which heightens her role as a victim, always watched with no privacy. Her private space becomes public space in the film.

The cut from the street to her wedding represents the haste of Gervaise's marriage, her fatal interaction with the patriarchy, and her loss of agency. As Gervaise begins her relationship with Coupeau she attempts to resist sexual objectification by her husband. After the wedding and the couple's return home, Gervaise undresses for bed. As she removes her stockings, she notices Coupeau's lascivious gaze. She acts immediately and pulls her dress over her stockings as if closing the curtains on a stage. Then, when Coupeau attempts to kiss her, she turns her face to the side. Gervaise attempts to assert her independence and to resist objectification as a sexual object. This scene is repeated in her shop when Coupeau arrives drunk and wants sexual favors from her. Clément includes these two scenes to remind the spectator of Gervaise's inherent shyness and naiveté. Reading against the grain, one has the impression that Gervaise has only married in order to be a respectable member of the community and to comply with patriarchal codes.

The remainder of the film occurs mostly in masculine spaces and Gervaise's access to agency disintegrates. Since the threshold between Gervaise's store and her home is blurred, she will never again attain the agency and authority in her own shop that she demonstrated in the town laundry. This is foreshadowed as she passes through a

series of male-dominated spaces; the bar, the church, the magistrate's office, the Louvre, and her home with her husband.

After the wedding, the group returns to Père Colombe's because of the rain. To escape the malevolent influence of l'Assommoir, the group decides to spend the afternoon in the Louvre. As the group traipses through the endless halls of the museum they become lost. The Louvre, an ancient place of Law and the former palace of the French kings, epitomizes how Gervaise will be lost in her personal maze of male, patriarchal space. Gervaise enjoys a few brief periods of implied agency, her triumph over Virginie, the acquisition of her shop, her birthday feast, and her decision to take care of Coupeau, but they are all eventually subverted.

Clément continues to format his commentary on the patriarchy vis-à-vis the emerging feminist issues of the 1950s. This is supported by his decision to devote significant screen time to the necessity of signatures on official documents, such as the wedding certificate and the lease for Gervaise's shop. These signatures represent, both then and now, the inequality of the French judicial system towards women. Brian McFarlane comments:

Conditions within the film industry and the prevailing cultural and social climate of the time of the film's making (especially when the film version does not follow hot upon the novel's publication) are two major determinants in shaping any film, adaptation or not. (21)

Both of McFarlane's determinants impact the screening of Gervaise. Clément works under the strict code of the Tradition of Quality, being boxed into a specific cinematic genre. However, cognizant of the social climate of the time, Clément takes more artistic latitude in his approach to exposing women's issues. He carefully chooses which aspects

of the novel to extract, reject, embellish, invent or revise in order to highlight his position on women's issues. This particular time period (1956) renders Zola's novel excruciatingly relevant to the 1950s woman, as most of the Napoleonic Civil Code is still intact.

Clément embellishes and revises two passages from the novel to emphasize the oppressive nature of the patriarchy and the secondary role that women play as "citoyennes" of the Second Empire. In the novel, the first passage appears to be of minor importance as Zola explains the feeling of haste by the wedding party: "Et les formalités, la lecture du Code, les questions posées, la signatures des pièces furent expédiées si rondement, qu'ils se regardèrent, se croyant volés d'une bonne moitié de la cérémonie" (79; ch. III). Zola continues his explanation: "Tous s'étaient appliqués sur le registre, dessinant leurs noms en grosses lettres boiteuses, sauf le marié qui avait tracé une croix, ne sachant pas écrire" (79; ch. III). Clément extracts these two small sentences, which encompass references to the "Code" and Coupeau's illiteracy as emblematic of women's lack of voice in the patriarchy. He highlights this passage for the film.

After the wedding, Gervaise proudly signs her name on the wedding certificate. Her signature is graceful and legible. Clément purposely chooses a close-up shot of Gervaise signing her complete name. Gervaise hands the pen to Coupeau and Clément then focuses on Coupeau who can only produce an "X." Coupeau is encouraged to sign this way by the magistrate and not to feel embarrassed. To make the document legal, Coupeau's signature must appear in some manner. The universal "X" represents the commonality and camaraderie of men. Even though Gervaise can read and write, while

her husband cannot, she is denied equal access to the law, which emphasizes the inequality of the French judicial system.

The second passage that Clément imports from the novel is Coupeau's fall from the roof. This fall is the catalyst for the rest of the events in the novel and causes Gervaise's destruction. Clément will recreate the same passage on film while at the same time reorienting the events that precede the passage. In the novel, Zola blames Nana for calling out to her father, which distracts him and causes the fall. In the film, Clément usurps Gervaise's agency and places the blame on the Law, which forces Coupeau, who is illiterate, to sign the papers for the laundry instead of Gervaise. Clément focuses again on the importance of Coupeau's signature.

Regardless of the fact that Gervaise has earned and saved the money, she, as a woman, cannot enter into a business agreement. She objects to M. Boche: "Mais vous ne comprenez pas . . . mais puisque j'ai de l'argent." M. Boche informs her: "Il doit signer, c'est la loi." Gervaise goes to see Coupeau while he is working to inform him of the necessity of his signature. The elevated position of the illiterate roof worker and his young male assistant, demonstrates the artificial and undeserved power of men and boys. In Gervaise's conversation with him, Coupeau also questions the reasoning of the need for his signature. Gervaise tells him: "Il faut que tu viennes. —*mais pourquoi?* —pour signer—*je ne sais pas signer.*—fais un croix. C'est la loi. —*Ah oui, il faut respecter la loi.*" Coupeau, amused, tells his assistant as he points to himself: "Regarde bien, il faut que je signe." The only thing that qualifies Coupeau to sign is his anatomical make-up.

In opposition to the novel, Clément silences Nana. He also deletes the gaze of the old woman who watches from her window. In this way, Clément places the entire blame

of Coupeau's fall on the legal system. Gervaise's only crime is her ambition and her attempt to create a stable and comfortable life for her family independently and/or in spite of men.

Gervaise tries repeatedly to assert her ability and her right to support and care for her family. After Coupeau's fall, she publicly refuses state help and insists that he return home: "Non, pas à l'hôpital! Chez moi! Emmenez-le chez moi!" She relies on her personal earnings and savings: "...mais j'ai de l'argent...j'ai de l'argent!...puisque j'ai tous qu'il faut. Je veux le soigner, moi, c'est mon mari!" For Gervaise to accept this assistance would require her to surrender her independence whereas her refusal serves to validate her position that women are capable of maintaining and supporting a household. Unfortunately, Gervaise's audacity to exert her feminine philosophy in a public street dooms her to failure. This overt declaration and public refusal of patriarchal assistance increases the haste of Gervaise's demise and highlights the resistance and fear of the patriarchy to permit women to succeed.

Clément does not shy away from portraying the inherent homosociality present in Zola's novels and creates a more sympathetic yet decidedly more passive Gervaise in doing so. Coupeau tries to explain the importance of male-bonding to Gervaise while he is lying in bed thinking about Lantier: "Tu ne sais rien. L'amitié entre hommes est au-dessus." Reading against the grain, this seems more a homosexual reference than a homosocial reference because of the *mise-en-scène* that Clément constructs. He places Coupeau in a sexually charged but passive situation by showing him lying down, rather than standing and by placing him in the bedroom, rather than in the kitchen or at a café.



This seems to be a scene in which one would expect a woman to be placed rather than a man.

Coupeau demonstrates his loyalty to Lantier by inviting him to Gervaise's birthday feast, by asking him to move in, and by permitting him to share his wife. Coupeau is so enamored with Lantier that he carries his trunk and waits on him as if he were a servant or a woman. In Gervaise's home and in Père Colombe's bar, the two drink, smoke, and scheme together. In the novel, Gervaise describes their relationship:

Le pis était qu'ils s'entendaient très bien, ces matins-là. Jamais ils ne se disputaient; ils se ricanaient dans la figure, le soir, après le dîner, les coudes posés au bord de la table; ils se frottaient l'un contre l'autre toute la journée, comme les chats qui cherchent et cultivent leur plaisir. (325; ch. IX)

Zola's reference to cats and his use of the verb "frotter" to describe these two men is typically reserved to depict female sensibility and intimacy. Clément continues to add an undertone of sexuality to his scenes of male-bonding. He oftentimes represents Lantier and Coupeau's intimacy through frequent shots of the two together in the house, specifically in the bedroom, wearing their nightclothes.

Lantier and Coupeau also share the parenting of each other's children. Etienne's comment, "J'ai trop de pères," is telling and reaffirms the scandalous information about Gervaise's household. Clément expounds on the theme of two against one by visually placing Gervaise in the position of victim. With Coupeau, Lantier, and Gervaise, the three are usually framed together with Coupeau and Lantier side by side. The overt homosociality of Lantier and Coupeau demonstrates the destructive power of men working and/or scheming together. Gervaise is repeatedly placed in the role of the

“other” as witnessed in the bar scene where she tries to retrieve the pawn ticket from Coupeau.

After Nana informs Gervaise that Coupeau has pawned her customer’s sheets, Gervaise leaves. As she walks towards the door of her shop, her name is seen in reverse on the door window. She runs through the pouring rain to find Coupeau in Père Colombe’s bar, drinking with Mes Bottes. As Gervaise enters, the bar becomes silent and Coupeau and Mes Bottes turn their heads as she approaches. Gervaise, furious, grabs Coupeau and turns him toward her. She yells angrily: “Les draps. Allez tout de suite. Où sont mes draps?” Coupeau ridicules her as he says: “Ah oui, les draps. Oui, les draps.” He continues to emphasize that Gervaise has nothing: “...Ils ne sont pas à toi, ces draps.”

As Gervaise looks through his pockets hunting for the pawn ticket, Coupeau complains that she is tickling him. Canned laughter is heard after each of Coupeau’s statements from the other patrons of the bar. This encourages him and gives him strength. Gervaise calls Coupeau a thief, which infuriates him, and he pushes Gervaise. He holds the pawn ticket above his head as Mes Bottes confirms the ticket. At this point, Coupeau puts the ticket in his mouth and eats it, literally eating Gervaise out of house and home. Clément pans the other customers in the bar who are still laughing at the antics of Gervaise and Coupeau. Gervaise is ridiculed as she tries to assert her agency and save her family, while at the same time, Coupeau is praised for his drunkenness. Here, Gervaise is the epitome of the objectified, simple woman.

After Gervaise wrestles Coupeau out of the bar, her shadow glides over a flat, one-dimensional painting of a woman on the exterior façade of the bar. The painting appears to be of a nude with her arms raised above her head holding a platter. This fading,

iconographic image remains in the edges of the frame and stands as a referent for Gervaise's eventual annihilation and death. As Gervaise, accompanied by Etienne, heads towards home with Coupeau she keeps repeating to Etienne: "Il faut que tu partes, il faut que tu partes..."

Surrounded by dark-haired villains (Lantier, Coupeau, and Virginie), Gervaise's sexual interaction with men (evidenced by the birth of children) drains her of her female strength, which results in the loss of her agency and eventually her life. Clément neutralizes this effect by increasing the importance of Gervaise's relationship with Goujet. In addition, Clément adds and enlarges Goujet's participation in the strike and his jail sentence.

Zola presents a prototype of a new man, strong yet gentle. In spite of his hyper-masculine profession of blacksmith, one who pounds on steel incessantly, Goujet would never pound on or "assomer" a woman. In a letter to Yves Guyot, published in Le Bien Public, dated February 10, 1877, Zola describes this idealized man:

Goujet, dans mon plan, est l'ouvrier parfait, propre, économe, honnête, adorant sa mère, ne manquant pas une journée, restant grand et pur jusqu'au bout. N'est-ce pas assez d'une pareille figure, pour que tout le monde comprenne que je rends pleine justice à l'honneur du peuple? (Les Rougon-Macquart II 1294)

However, Zola is concerned that he might have overly exaggerated Goujet's character and considers the possibility that Goujet is too unrealistic for his milieu:

Il y a dans le peuple des natures d'élite, je le sais et je le dis, puisque j'en ai mis une dans mon livre. Et l'avouerai-je même? je crains bien d'avoir un peu menti avec Goujet, car je lui ai prêté parfois des sentiments qui ne sont pas de son milieu. Il y a là, pour moi, un scrupule de conscience. (Les Rougon-Macquart II 1294)

Zola could also regret that he has overly “feminized” Goujet, therefore denying his masculinity, criticizing the common working man, and challenging the “bruteness” of the patriarchy. In addition to feminizing Goujet, Zola goes so far as to strip him of any sexuality—portraying him more as a child or a female than a male. Zola makes four references to Goujet’s child-like character during his introduction. As Gervaise enters Goujet’s bedroom, Zola remarks: “C’était gentil et blanc comme dans la chambre d’une fille. . . .” After showing Gervaise Goujet’s bedroom, Madame Goujet tells her, “que son fils était un grand enfant. . . .” Zola then explains how Goujet spends his free time with his mother since he does not have a wife: “Le dimanche, il sortait avec sa mère, à laquelle il donnait le bras; le plus souvent, il la menait du côté de Vincennes; d’autres fois, il la conduisait au théâtre. Sa mère restait sa passion” (123; ch. IV). The word “passion” evokes sexuality but here it is directed to Goujet’s mother. Zola’s last comment again seems to deny Goujet his manhood: “Il lui [sa mère] parlait encore comme s’il était tout petit.”

The result of this description of Goujet as a young boy or girl strips him of his sexuality as a man. Goujet is portrayed as a man-child without any sexual desires. This renders Goujet a type of “feminine” character since women in this time period are considered “non-sexual” beings without sexual desire. (Gervaise’s daughter, Nana, will change this perception) Despite Goujet’s inexperience with women and his attachment to his mother, Zola makes an important cautionary statement, which he places in the mouth of Coupeau, Gervaise’s husband. He says: “mais il fallait pourtant qu’un homme fût un homme, sans quoi autant valait-il tout de suite porter des jupons” (124; ch. IV).

According to Zola's descriptions, Goujet mirrors Gervaise in a type of Narcissus-like image both physically (big, blond, strong) and emotionally (good, sensitive, caring, determined, hard-working). They are both marginal characters sharing the hereditary trait of drunken fathers. Even the large "G" in the beginning of their two-syllable names suggests an uncanny similarity between the two. Using Zola's descriptions to infer the scope of Goujet and Gervaise's relationship, it appears that Goujet resembles a close girlfriend more than a lover and that Gervaise and Goujet's relationship is similar to a relationship between women. After their first encounter, Goujet quickly becomes accustomed to Gervaise. Zola explains: "Les premiers jours, Gervaise le gêna beaucoup. Puis, en quelque semaines, il s'habitua à elle. Il la guettait pour lui monter ses paquets, la traitait en soeur, avec une brusque familiarité, découpant des images à son intention" (124; ch. IV). As Coupeau and Goujet are friends, the small group is complete. The Coupeau and the Goujet go out together every Sunday night creating a "family" type outing and putting the relationship of Goujet and Gervaise above reproach. Their involvement "passes" public scrutiny because Goujet is so well respected that no one would suspect that he would have impure thoughts. The couple passes as "friends" just as women are able to "pass" as friends. To summarize, it seems that Goujet is codified as a type of "like" image of Gervaise, forging a safe, "lesbianesque," but non-sexual relationship with her. Where Thérèse Raquin runs away from the feminized male, Gervaise runs towards him.

In the film, Clément respects Zola's descriptions of Goujet and Gervaise and demonstrates the likeness of the couple. The close-ups of the two together (in the kitchen, in the Louvre, at the fair, etc.) exemplify the resemblance of the couple. The

long scene at the fair reinforces their “likeness” and subtly hints at the issue of homosexuality.

Seated at a table, Gervaise and Goujet are facing each other while Gervaise is trying to convince Goujet that nothing has happened with Lantier. The two are repeatedly placed together in the same frame, displaying their closeness and their “likeness.” A series of close-ups of Gervaise begins as the two begin to dance. After dancing, a reciprocal act of tenderness occurs, Goujet places his arm around Gervaise’s waist and then she places her arm around his waist. When the couple sits down they reverse their previous seats. Clément seems to reinforce the idea that the two are interchangeable.

As soon as they sit down, Gervaise rises and moves next to Goujet. In this close-up of the two sitting together, Gervaise’s hair falls down. She proceeds to put it up again. A close-up of Goujet’s hand shows that he has caught some of her hairpins. He starts to help her pin up her hair and at one point it is difficult to distinguish Gervaise’s hand from Goujet’s. Clément, at this point, uses a close-up of the hands, which fragments the image. The largeness of Gervaise’s hand coupled with the softness of Goujet’s hand make the two hands almost indistinguishable and therefore interchangeable.

Goujet, after caressing Gervaise’s neck, tries to kiss her but she turns her head away. This scene is again a reversal of the scene in the kitchen at the birthday party where Gervaise approaches Goujet and says, “embrasse-moi.” Goujet at first refuses but then gives in to the clandestine, adulterous kiss, hidden from the others. In public, at the fair, Gervaise now refuses the kiss, as it is inappropriate and tainted by her relationship with Lantier. This is an affair that is not to be exposed to public scrutiny.

Goujet's physical appearance visually distances him from Lantier and Coupeau and, ideologically, he is removed from them by his loving relationship with his mother and his respect of women. His gentleness, cleanliness, education, and love of books and pictures distance him further from them. This masculine anomaly, however, like Gervaise, cannot be permitted to survive in la rue de la Goutte d'Or. Perhaps this is due to the nature of their relationship or the threat they represent to the established order. Regardless, Goujet is imprisoned, sequestered from the community, and eventually expected to leave. Gervaise, confined by her role as a woman, and unable to escape except by death, sends a part of herself with Goujet, her son Etienne, hoping that he might become part of a new order.

The vacillation of Gervaise as subject and object brings her to the edge of success until Coupeau and Lantier's alliance finally destroys her. Coupeau literally "pulls the rug out from underneath of her" by the total destruction of her shop. Gervaise has hit the glass ceiling of the 1850's. As Coupeau dances manically in the shop window he becomes the object of the gaze for everyone in the neighborhood, both men and women. Once objectified, Coupeau loses his agency and must be removed. This again foreshadows Gervaise's removal, as she has always been defined in the film as an object. As Gervaise watches Coupeau carried off to the asylum, her shadow again appears on the street.

Clément has created shadows during other scenes of the film, for example, after Gervaise's fight with Lantier when she finally throws him out and when she leaves the bar with Coupeau. However, this full body shadow is the shadow of Gervaise's past, which has finally come to claim her, as well as a cinematic reference to Zola's theory of

heredity. The shadow is again present as Gervaise returns to her home and sits at the table. A bottle of wine in front of her and her shadow behind her, Gervaise is sandwiched into her final demise. How many times can she be expected to start over instead of just give up? This hereditary shadow slowly consumes Gervaise as it deprives her of speech and agency. From this point forward, there are no more voice-overs in the film as other characters complete the narrative.

The final scene of the film, privileging Nana's point of view, shows Gervaise seated in le Père Colombe in an alcoholic stupor. The overhead shot of Gervaise, seated in a booth, incapable of speech, is a complete reversal of the initial scene where Gervaise is standing on the balcony and speaking. Clément uses the booth to cinematically recreate le père Bru's hole. Trapped between the booth of the bar and the screen, Gervaise cannot survive because she has overtly and publicly rejected the patriarchal system and refused to be an object of exchange for men.

When Nana enters the bar, she seizes the gaze and examines the men in the bar, then their cards and then her mother. Nana offers Gervaise candy but she does not respond. Gervaise sits, immobile, with a blank, glassy stare. She is not capable of returning the look, which signifies her death and total annihilation. Undaunted, Nana ties a ribbon in her hair, looks at her image in the dirty glass in the door, and runs off to the street. Nana understands the homosociality of Coupeau and Lantier and the implied homosexuality of Gervaise and Goujet. She will survive because she knows how to use and manipulate the power of the gaze and her looks.

Clément's film truly illuminates the "women's condition" of the past seventy years. It does seem, however, that his attempt to produce a "gentler" more palatable



protagonist for the screen results in the weakening of Gervaise's agency and the strengthening of her objectification and oppression. His decision to extract the horrific ending of her life negates Gervaise's final attempt at agency. In the novel, Gervaise regains her sight and demands death, insisting that she be heard. She verbalizes her last desire: "Emmenez-moi répéta plus ardemment Gervaise . . . Mais, tenez! Donnez vos mains, je n'ai plus peur! Emmenez-moi faire dodo, vous sentirez si je remue.. Oh! je n'ai que cette envie, oh! je vous aimerai bien!" Gervaise continues her plea: "Emmenez-moi, emmenez-moi, criait toujours Gervaise, je veux m'en aller" (476; ch. XII). While this may not be the type of agency that women hope to achieve, it does highlight women's ability to express desire. Clément removes Gervaise's long, arduous struggle for peace and tranquility, which in this case is death.

Framed as a still life painting confined in the corner of the bar, Gervaise is reduced to a flat, but cinematically pleasing, one-dimensional object consumed by alcohol and her male-dominated environment. Clément constructs a cinematic tableau resembling Degas' 1876 portrait of the Absinthe Drinker, painted one year before the publication of L'Assommoir. Clément's "painting" is a reversed mirror image of the original. The conflicted image of Gervaise as subject and object and present/absent is again operational here. The final image that remains with the spectator is Gervaise as pure object even though she is the "subject" of the painting and the film. It is as if she has become one of the paintings she had previously admired in the Louvre. As Degas' painting may have inspired Zola to write the novel, Clément references the painting to close the film, which gives Gervaise the opportunity to reflect on her life. For Clément, then, this scene functions as the starting point for Gervaise's autobiographical reflection

on her life, which launches the flashbacks and voice-overs that fill the narrative. Clément does not permit Gervaise to die, but gives her the opportunity to retell her story.

Clément's final scene provides two different readings of the film. First, if the last frame of the film is viewed as the closing scene of the film and not the trigger for a flashback, the film may be read as yet another example of a patriarchal institution that maintains the status of women as objects to consume. This reading propagates and validates the use of women for men's specular enjoyment and entertainment. In addition, it marks the finality of Gervaise's existence and the hopelessness of the female condition.

Conversely, a different reading of the film's conclusion opens up a small fissure of optimism. Clément accomplishes a layering of past, present, and future time with his choice of ending and creates a cyclical narrative, which emphasizes the generational repetitiveness of female oppression. However, Clément chooses not to include Gervaise's death in order to postpone the ending of her story. While Gervaise is sitting in the bar, Clément implies that Gervaise has the opportunity to recreate her story. He affords the same optimism to Nana, Gervaise's daughter, who also has her own story to write, as she runs away from her mother and Père Colombe's to begin her own life.

Reading the last scene as the catalyst for the flashback cinematically reorients the nature of the narrative to increase Gervaise's agency. Clément gives Gervaise a voice and the power to retell the story of her life, which is evidenced through the fifteen voiceovers in the film. Gervaise can revise, delete, reinvent, embellish or repair the story of her life. Denying Gervaise's death and her desire for death erases the finality of her story. Therefore, every time the film concludes, Gervaise has a new opportunity to tell her story. In this light, during the period of social feminism of the 1950s, Clément

reverses the negative authority of the cinematic “assomoir” to give Gervaise her own voice and the agency to recount her autobiography on film. This is far removed from Zola’s patriarchal and oppressive narrative that denies women a voice in the outcome of their lives. Clément cautiously and quietly leaves the door open for women, as an invitation to them, to write their own history and to film their own stories in order to take control of their destiny and to resist being victims of any type of patriarchal “assommoir.”

## CONCLUSION

“As soon as the cinema began to see itself as a narrative entertainment, the idea of ransacking the novel—that already established repository of narrative fiction—for source material got underway, and the process has continued more or less unabated for ninety years” (McFarlane 6-7). In France, this borrowing of narrative plots, stories, and intrigues from novels was especially popular. Marie-Claire Ropars-Wuilleumier goes so far as to say that this process of adapting novels to film “fut essentiellement français” (76). She admits that this same process took place in American film but insists on its uniqueness to French cinema: “Mais c’est en France que la tradition romanesque du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle et du début du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle avait le plus fortement, et le plus anciennement, orienté les réalisations des cinéastes:” (77). She cites numerous authors (Balzac, Maupassant, Flaubert, Mirbeau, Zola, and others) whose novels were chosen for the screen.

Among these authors, especially those of the nineteenth century, Emile Zola’s narratives have been especially attractive to directors, providing inspiration for more than sixty films. Leo Braudy discusses Zola’s popularity:

The novels of Zola were the most appropriate subjects for the new medium because they emphasized the accurate recording of physical reality. Most critics agree that the embryonic French film industry was nourished by both the example of Zola’s practice and the injunctions of his theory. (74)

Of the sixty film adaptations produced, almost two-thirds of the adaptations were done during the silent film era (Braudy 83). This exemplifies cinema's early attempt to incorporate narrativity as a basic function of film form.

Unfortunately, while bringing the agency of his female protagonists to the screen, Zola's "accurate recording of physical reality" was oftentimes compromised. Judith Mayne reminds us: "Like the novel, cinema depends upon the illusions of realism. Realism in the novel is grounded in the assumption that language transparently shows the world. Realism in the cinema is often considered not a function, but an inherent quality" ("Mediation" 86). The caveat here is the phrase "illusions of realism." Although realism may be perceived as a function of cinema it is instead a carefully constructed "image" of realism.

Studying the primary relationship between novel and film permits us to examine the function of narratives in two different mediums. This shared element of novel and film makes adaptation studies a popular and fertile field. However, the comparison of these two equal, but separate mediums sets a trap for unwary scholars, students, and critics. George Bluestone continues to remind us not to be seduced into the simplistic polemic of which is better—the novel or the film. It is here that Zola speaks to us about the importance of acknowledging different temperaments and screens: "Certainement, il est permis de préférer un Ecran à un autre, mais c'est là une question individuelle de goût et de tempérament" (Correspondance I 378). Understanding that the referent remains intact while the signifiers are numerous and varied, Zola acknowledges an individual's need to express her or his own aesthetic vision while engaging with outside source

material. This provides for alternative and interesting interpretations of original works. Zola's approval of and insight into the different, creative approaches to source material suggests an appropriate approach to the study of novels adapted to film. Following Zola's directive, this dissertation has examined five different readings of Zola's women in film.

In the introduction to this dissertation, I stated that my goal was to examine how traditional cinema resists and distorts the representation of female desire and female agency while transporting Zola's female protagonists from parchment to celluloid. Refusing the basic binary opposition of good images and bad images, Zola's women have been juxtaposed with their literary sources to evaluate how traditional cinema screens Zola's women. Judith Mayne says: "A novel is not simply transposed to the screen, but rather becomes one of the many texts to which the realist filmmaker, like the realist author, refers" ("Mediation" 88). However, as diegetic heroines are adapted to mainstream cinema, their realist images fade as they are filtered through a screen of abject commercialism.

The "problem" of female subjectivity, which interested many authors of the nineteenth-century novel, was not a preoccupation in cinematic narratives. Primary importance was placed on the viability and commercial value of a woman's image on the screen. The female protagonist was given no more depth in her character than the painted images seen on handbills and posters that advertised the film. Teresa de Lauretis strongly suggests that it is the "elision of woman that is represented in the film, rather than a positive or negative image; and what the representation of woman *as* image, positive *or* negative, achieves is to deny women the status of subjects both on the screen and in the

cinema” (57-58). In varying degrees, all five of Zola’s female protagonists are denied the status of subjects, as they are adapted to the screen.

In the five films of this study, female subjectivity is denied and/or suppressed as Renoir’s films are essentially phallocentric, Cayatte’s film is innocuous, and Carné’s film tends towards the homoerotic. The last film, René Clément’s Gervaise, problematizes female subjectivity through its autobiographical voice-overs. Clément attempts to open a small space in cinematic narration for women’s stories.

Without suggesting that Zola is an advocate for women’s issues and that cinema is not, it appears that Zola’s preoccupation with the “problem” of female subjectivity produced more literary active agents than cinematic ones. Anna Krakowski elaborates:

Les romans de Zola se situent à une époque bien singulière dans l’histoire de la femme. D’une part, nous assistons à l’expansion suprême de la mondanité et à l’accroissement de la promiscuité de la courtisane; de l’autre, nous voyons se faire jour une certaine tendance favorable à l’émancipation féminine.

Ne renonçant pas facilement à ses dons l’ensorceleuse de l’homme, la fille d’Eve voudrait garder à la fois ses anciens privilèges et en acquérir des nouveaux. Elle semble faire la loi dans différents domaines: la mondaine dans son salon, la commerçante dans son magasin et la femme du peuple se donne aussi parfois l’illusion de commander.

Dans quelle mesure ce pouvoir était-il réel, à quelle point la femme a-t-elle contribué au relèvement ou à la décadence des mœurs: Voilà des questions auxquelles le romancier cherchera à répondre. (93)

Cinema, during these thirty years of film (1926-1956), was not poised to address the same problems of female subjectivity. In fact, in order to privilege male subjectivity, the narratives of Zola’s novels were restructured. Mary Ann Doane explains the dichotomy: “Yet, although the cinema is often theorized as the extension and elaboration of the narrative mechanisms of the nineteenth-century novel, its spectator is almost always

conceptualized in the masculine mode” (Desire 2). With men in control of the gaze, women are returned to their pre-existing roles as objects of scopophilic pleasure.

After a close examination of female agency in five novels and films, I conclude that these cinematic readings of Zola’s protagonists usurp their agency. This occurs in the four “cinematic” time periods of this study—silent film, Poetic Realism, Occupation films, and the Tradition of Quality. The screening of women as commodity remains a constant during these thirty years. The most obvious example of this “privileging of male agency” occurs in the opening credits of the films. Although four of the five films retain the original title of the novel, the female actor does not carry the narrative in the film. That responsibility is assigned to the male actors. The introduction of the actors in the credits places the lead of the film with the male actor and posits the female actor as an accessory. In La Bête Humaine, Renoir even goes so far as placing a filmed narrative in the opening that says that this is a film about Jacques Lantier. In addition, he then devotes the first four minutes of the film to Lantier’s role as the train engineer as he conducts both the passengers and the spectators through the film. All signifiers revolve around Jacques’ story and Jacques’ film. This is doubly increased if we layer the desires of Renoir and Jean Gabin to “make a film about trains.” In Au Bonheur des Dames, it was the reappearance of Michel Simon on the screen that attracted moviegoers to the film, not Blanchette Brunoy. And in Nana, the appearance of Werner Krauss as Comte Muffat was considered a coup for Renoir and his film. Catherine Hessling was simply an aspiring actress and the wife of Jean Renoir. The roles of these important male actors had to be equivalent to their off-screen status.



In addition to the primacy of the male actor, the narratives are reoriented to privilege the masculine story. This is consistent with Mulvey's and Doane's general ideas of film narratives and sexual difference. Doane maintains:

The transfixing or immobilizing aspects of the spectacle constituted by the woman work against the forward pull of the narrative. While all the resources of the cinematic apparatus—including framing, lighting, camera movement, and angle—are brought to bear in the alignment of the woman with the surface of the image, the male character is allowed to inhabit and actively control its illusory depths, its constructed three-dimensional space. (*Desire* 5)

For example, in *Nana*, Renoir removes the community of women that surrounded and supported Nana, which Zola privileged in the novel. This flushing of the female community leaves behind a community of men hovering around Nana. Renoir duplicates too well Nana's diegetic role as object of the gaze by having her always surrounded by men. The ball scene at the end of the novel reinforces this image as Nana stands in the middle of the circle with all eyes upon her. She proceeds to lift her leg and kick the men's hats out of their hands as pure spectacle. Nana's story dissolves into a story about Comte Muffat and the other men who "want" Nana. Renoir's change of ending strikingly accents the reorientation of the diegesis as Renoir removes the gaze of the women's community from Nana's deathbed and replaces them with Comte Muffat watching the death scene.

*Au Bonheur des Dames*, originally conceived as a "fairytale" story about Denise Baudu and the inhumane treatment of store employees, becomes the economic fight between the two men, Mouret and Oncle Baudu and a romantic battle between Mouret and Denise. Denise's political concern about social and economic injustice for women is pushed to the background. The changed ending of the story, the huge announcement of

the impending marriage of Denise and Mouret, continues to privilege Mouret's story as he wins both economic and personal success. While applauding Mouret's victory, Denise's acceptance of Mouret's proposal returns her to her proper place in patriarchal society. Agreeing to be Mouret's wife implies that Denise is his possession like all the other commodities in the store. Denise acquiesces to the force of patriarchal constraints. This typical "Hollywood" ending, a male construction of film form, neatly closes the film for men as they rein in the dangerous female. Denise is the only female character in these films that lives to see the narrative conclude, although marriage may signify a different type of "death" for her.

The narrative of Thérèse Raquin echoes the same restructuring as Au Bonheur des Dames as the filmic diegesis moves from being female centered to male centered. In the film, it is Laurent who is first sexually interested in Thérèse and who first suggests they meet, as opposed to the novel where Thérèse expresses her desire. Throughout the film, Laurent is the active agent who plans the couple's clandestine meetings, the murder of Camille, and the response to Riton. Carné adds the male character of Riton, the sailor and blackmailer, who becomes Laurent's rival for survival. This removes the importance of Thérèse as an active agent from the screen and focuses on the testosterone-laden conflict between Laurent and Riton. The "animal trainer" screen reinforces this hyper-masculinized struggle between the two men. Thérèse's role is reduced to a sexual object of minor importance in the center of their argument.

A similar occurrence is found in Gervaise where the narrative privileges the male characters Lantier, Coupeau, and Goujet. The interest of the spectator appears to shift from Gervaise's story to the more active and "exciting" stories of the male characters as

they come and go in the film. Laura Mulvey remarks on this occurrence in film: “The male protagonist is free to command the stage, a stage of spatial illusion in which he articulates the look and creates the action” (Visual Pleasure 20). In Gervaise, Lantier’s sexual intrigues, Coupeau’s alcoholic discretions and deceptions, and Goujet’s quiet mysteriousness pique the interest of the spectators. Gervaise’s life of work, cleaning, and children pales in comparison when juxtaposed with the men’s stories on the screen. Clément attempts to keep the narrative focused on Gervaise, even titling the film after her, but the male characters are the active agents and the ones who progress the narrative.

Besides the narrative, the camera is responsible for the representation of women on the screen. To see how the images of women are manipulated in film, an understanding of cinematic practices is required. Teresa de Lauretis explains:

Feminist film theory, meanwhile, has gone well beyond the simple opposition of positive and negative images, and has indeed displaced the very terms of that opposition through a sustained critical attention to the hidden work of the apparatus. It has shown, for instance how narrativity works to anchor images to non-contradictory points of identification, so that the “sexual difference” is ultimately reconfirmed and any ambiguity reconciled by narrative closure. (Alice 57)

The stasis of the opening establishing shots of each film posits the female protagonists in passive and waiting poses authenticating their roles as passive objects of the gaze. Nana, Séverine, Thérèse, and Gervaise all appear in static introductory shots confining them in windows and screen frames. They are passive participants to the action as Thérèse Raquin stands with her back to the camera staring at the river and Gervaise looks out her balcony window. Séverine is poised sitting framed in a window like a painting hanging on the wall. Even though they are “looking” they see nothing because when there is no object to the gaze the act of looking is nullified.

The most representative image of women's passivity in film exists in Renoir's reading of Nana's entrance to the intra-diegetic play, La Blonde Vénus. Where Nana walks on stage and laughs at the audience in the novel, she is lowered to the stage by ropes in the film. Nana is not laughing but has a look of horror at her predicament and her lack of agency. Emphasizing her role as passive agent and manipulated object of men's sexual desires, two stagehands lower the ropes and leave Nana dangling in mid-air a foot from the floor. Playing to the image of a "tied-up" female, Renoir significantly increases Nana's objectification. This "non-space" that Nana inhabits is a leitmotif for the film as she resides somewhere between reality and the diegetic life of the theater. The insistence of Renoir to keep her in full make-up, both on and off the stage, reinforces Nana's perpetual objectivity.

Denise Baudu's entrance in the film is similar to the novel but Cayatte immediately compromises her agency. He does not begin the film with Denise but begins the narrative with a shot of another woman. In the film, Denise and her brothers arrive in front of the department store in a carriage instead of arriving on foot from the train station. At the carriage stop, this anonymous woman prepares to board. As she does, Cayatte follows her with his camera as she lifts her skirt to remove her stayed petticoat and hangs it on the side of the carriage. To underline the position of this woman as the sexual object of masculine desire, Jean Baudu, Denise's younger brother, stares at her. He tips his hat to the unknown woman and watches her from the rear as she boards the carriage as if in a trance. Denise is waiting patiently inside for Jean to help her as she calls out to him. This breaks his fixation on the anonymous woman. All of these introductory shots serve to mark the boundaries of female agency in film.

To reinforce the position of women as static and passive characters in film, most of the female protagonists are confined to interior spaces. For example, in La Bête Humaine, Jacques is traveling the countryside in the train and Roubaud is in the station greeting the passengers but Séverine is sitting in a window petting a cat. In Gervaise, Lantier is visiting across the street with Adèle while Gervaise is standing in her window. Thérèse Raquin is pinned behind the counter of the shop while Laurent is traveling back and forth from Rome making deliveries. The excessively loud noise of his truck juxtaposed with the silence of the store signals that Laurent has agency and Thérèse does not. Even the weakly and effeminate Camille comes and goes at will. Nana is, of course, dangling from a rope, not only placed in a static position, but also tied in that position against her will. Denise Baudu is hidden in the carriage while her brother Jean is already outside ogling another woman and taking charge. Once Denise is employed at Au Bonheur des Dames, she is confined to the store or her cell-like bedroom.

Within each of these films, the leitmotif of women as passive agents is reinforced with numerous iconographic female representations to align them with the surface image of film. Mannequins, posters, naked statues of women, pictures, mirrors, sculptures, cut-outs, signs, etc. all place women in the role of object as a commodity to be consumed, reified, traded, and sold. In the film, Thérèse Raquin, the tattoo of a woman on Riton's upper arm demonstrates the possession of women's images by men. Renoir's film, Nana, exemplifies the epitome of female commodification with the overuse of her written name on doors, handbills, horse stalls, and chalkboards, in conjunction with the title cards of the film.

The overuse of women's images in these films suggests that the female actor is only one-dimensional. Even the autobiographical voice-over in Gervaise cannot prevent her objectification. The frequent use of close-ups of the female actors magnifies their role as objects, as their images are fragmented and their body parts fetishized. Therefore, the female protagonists cannot carry the narrative. Judith Mayne speaks to these images: "film utilizes a *logic* of images which evolves from a similarity between the status of images and the status of language in the traditional novel. Both novel and film rely on a special status of representation" ("Mediation" 88). In film, however, the repetition of woman with iconoclastic images and pictures propagates the "normalization," to use Hayward's terminology, of woman as eye candy and visual accessory. As part of the *mise-en-scène* or visual decor, women are denied the ability to access agency. Mary Ann Doane agrees and maintains: "For the figure of the woman is aligned with spectacle, space, or the image, often in opposition to the linear flow of the plot. From this point of view, there is something about the representation of the woman which is resistant to narrative or narrativization" (Desire 5). This occurs with Zola's female protagonists in film.

In film, the placement of the gaze is of primary importance since "looking" is connoted with agency and "being looked at" is suggestive of the loss of agency. The gaze determines who will, and who will not, have control and access to agency and who is authorized to "tell" the story. Zola, as a novelist, understood the importance of the look. He privileged his female protagonists with the gaze, which provided them agency. When these females are transported to film their ability to see is compromised. Using sight as a metaphor for sexual desire, it is removed from the female protagonists and

passed to the male characters. This transfers agency to the masculine sphere and provides a point of view for the males in the audience. The most representative example occurs in Thérèse Raquin. In the novel, Thérèse's gaze at Laurent is so powerful that Laurent feels uncomfortable. She undresses him with her eyes as she gazes upon him. Her ability to maintain the gaze provides her with agency and the opportunity to plan meetings with Laurent and suggest Camille's murder. This is all removed from Thérèse in the film. It is Laurent who does the looking.

Zola, as an individual writer, was adamant about portraying the world through a realist screen regardless of the language that he needed to use or the activities, settings, people, and sexual acts that he needed to incorporate into his novels. On the other hand, cinema is based on a capitalist economic system and therefore, using the romantic and classic screens, it caters to the desires of the buying public. De Lauretis ascertains that oftentimes directors strive: "to reproduce in film our own perceptions, to reconfirm our expectations, hypotheses, and knowledge of reality" (Alice 63). This approach to film panders to the dogma of supply and demand in a capitalist society and results in male-oriented readings of Zola's novels.

Perhaps the financial necessity for profit explains the loss of agency for Zola's female protagonists in film. Whereas Zola took a risk to expose the unpleasant realities of life in his novels, cinema could not. For Zola, this resulted in accusations of his work as *la littérature putride* and *la pornographie française*, which appeared immediately after the publication of Thérèse Raquin and Nana. Zola's innovative, but scandalous novels created a backlash of controversy when they were published but conversely the film adaptations did not. Zola used innovative language, settings, plots, and characters to

illustrate his “Histoire naturelle et sociale d’une famille sous le Second Empire.” He scoured the margins of society for his protagonists and their stories and then presented these stories to the literate world.

As a mainstream industry, cinema is forced to adhere to strict rules and production methods. This eliminates the possibility for film to duplicate the scandal or innovation of Zola’s novels. Zola broke the boundaries of established, conventional novelistic codes. Like the Impressionists, he looked at the world in an alternative way. Cinema, as a monolithic, commercial enterprise, did not experiment with alternative production methods or break established boundaries in its adaptations of Zola’s novels.

Zola “experimented with his novels” whereas cinema was restricted to its classic and traditional production methods. For women, this resulted in their static and one-dimensional iconic image being displayed on screen, which worked against any political or social advancements they had made. Flattened out on the screen, like a painting in a museum, these images of Zola’s women in film reinforced the patriarchal desire to keep women confined to the private space of their home. Mulvey discusses the traditional screening of women:

Going far beyond highlighting a woman’s to-be-looked-at-ness, cinema builds the way she is to be looked at into the spectacle itself. Playing on the tensions between film as controlling the dimension of time (editing, narrative), cinematic codes create a gaze, a world, and an object, thereby producing an illusion cut to the measure of desire. It is these cinematic codes and their relationship to formative external structures that must be broken down before mainstream film and the pleasure it provides can be challenged. . . . Women, whose image has continually been stolen and used for this end, cannot view the decline of the traditional film form with anything much more than sentimental regret. (Visual Pleasure 25-26)



It would not be until the 1950s and the advent of the New Wave that directors would break away from mainstream cinema and gain artistic and authorial control over their work. Unfortunately, women would have to wait until the 1970s for cinema to begin experimenting with new codes and cinematic functions in its approach to the representation of women in film.

Through his novels, Zola introduced women and their communities to his readers exposing a world of strife, hardship, abuse, alcoholism, prostitution, and perseverance. Although oftentimes veiled in misogyny, Zola nevertheless brought female issues and agency to the forefront of his novels. Chantal Jennings summarizes Zola's work vis-à-vis women:

Dans ses romans, Zola prend souvent directement ou indirectement la défense de la femme en qui il voit un être bafoué et asservi par l'homme et la société. La femme lui apparaît en général comme la proie naturelle de son compagnon, qui peut impunément l'humilier, la brutaliser, faire d'elle enfin un objet commode d'utilité, de plaisir ou de profit dont il use à son gré. Cette exploitation de la femme par l'homme s'incarne dans le personnage de l'arriviste, celui qui possède l'art de faire servir la femme à son ascension sociale ou à l'établissement de sa fortune. ("Zola Féministe?" 174)

Is cinema the modern day *arriviste* of whom Chantal Jennings speaks? If so, then Zola's female protagonists have no hope for subjectivity and agency.

With so many of Zola's novels adapted to film, no one can deny the acute affinity that exists between the two. From Eisenstein to present-day critics, film narrative continues to pay homage to Emile Zola as evidenced by Claude Berri's 1993 adaptation of Germinal. Brandy reminds us: "In Zola's novels, then, there lies a potentiality for adaptation to the screen greater than that in the works of many authors, specifically because Zola is so obsessed with the nature of observation and the conflicting impulses of

detachment and involvement” (83). As Zola worked to promote the idea of naturalism and scientific study in his novels, he simultaneously worked to expose and exploit women’s issues. Hopefully, as cinema continues to develop, women will attain agency in this last stronghold of patriarchal domination. On July 7, 1865, Zola decreed: “Je ne sais pas d’étude plus attachante que l’étude de la femme dans les annales de l’humanité” (Oeuvres Complètes X 87). What we must hope for now is that cinema not only continues to adapt Zola’s narratives to film but that it also begins to adapt Zola’s interest in women to make way for a different approach to the screening of Zola’s women.

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## FILMOGRAPHY

### *Au Bonheur des Dames* (1943)

Directed by André Cayatte.  
Produced by Continental Films Paris.  
Adapted by: André Cayatte and André Legrand.  
Dialogue by Michel Curan.  
Edited by Gérard Bensdorp.  
Music by Louis Sedrat.  
Cinematography by Armand Thirard.  
Set decoration by André Andrejew.  
Costumes by Rosine Delamare.  
Sound by William-Robert Sivel.

#### Players:

Blanchette Brunoy (Denise Baudu), Michel Simon (Baudu), Albert Préjean (Octave Mouret), Jean Tissier (Bourdoncle), Suzy Prim (Mme Desforbes), Suzet Mais (Mme de Boves), Santa Relli (Geneviève), Catherine Fonteney (Mme Aurélie), André Reybaz (Jean), Jacques Latrouite (Pépé), Juliette Faber (Mlle Vadon), Jacqueline Gauthier (Pauline), René Blancard (Columban), Huguette Vivier (Clara), Maximilienne (Mme Cabin), Marcelle Rexiane (Mme Marty), Odette Barancey (Mme Bédoré), Dorette Ardenne (saleswoman), Julienne Paroli (shop owner), Jean Rigaux (Baugé), Georges Chamarat (Jouve), Pierre Bertin (Gaujon), Pierre Labrique (serrurier), Albert Malbert (cafetier), Gustave Gallet (Lhomme), Maurice Marceau (employee), Paul Barge (shop owner), Rambauville (Favier), and Albert Broquin (cocher).

Running time: 88 minutes.  
Premiere: July 20, 1943.

#### Previous Adaptations:

Au Ravissement des dames, 1913, France.  
Des Paradies der Damen, Lupu. Pick. 1922, Germany.  
Au Bonheur des Dames, Julien Duvivier. 1929, France.



**La Bête Humaine (1938)**

Directed by Jean Renoir.

Assistant Directors: Claude Renoir and Suzanne de Troeye.

Produced by Paris Films Production.

Adaptation by Jean Renoir.

Dialogue by Jean Renoir.

Edited by Marguerite Renoir.

Music by Joseph Kosma.

Cinematography by Curt Courant assisted by Claude Renoir.

Set Decoration by Eugène Lourié.

Players:

Jean Gabin (Jacques Lantier), Simone Simon (Séverine), Julien Carette (Pécqueux), Fernand Ledoux (Roubaud), Blanchette Brunoy (Flore), Jean Renoir (Cabuche), Jenny Hélià (Philomène), Jacques Berlioz (Grandmorin), Colette Régis (Victoire), Gérard Landry (Dauvergne's son), Charlotte Clasis (Tante Phasie), Jacques Roussel (Commissioner Cauche), Georges Spanelly (Camy-Lamothe, the secretary), Léon Larive (valet), Guy Decomble (train crossing guard), and Marcel Pérès (man on team).

Running time: 103 minutes.

Paris Premiere: December 23, 1938.

Previous Adaptations:

La Bête Humaine. Leopoldo Carducci. Italy, 1918.

Die Bestie im Menschen. Ludwig Wolff. Germany, 1922.

**Gervaise (1956)**

Directed by René Clément.

Assistants: Claude Clément and Léonard Keigel.

Produced by Agnes Delahaie for Silver Films.

Adaptation and Dialogue by Jean Aurenche & Pierre Bost.

Edited by Henri Rust.

Music by Georges Auric.

Cinematography by Robert Juillard.

Set Decoration by Paul Bertrand.

Costumes by Antoine Mayo.

Players:

Maria Schell (Gervaise), François Perier (Henri Coupeau), Suzy Delair (Virginie), Mathilde Casadessus (Mme. Boche), Armand Mestral (Lantier), Jacques Harden (Goujet), Chantal Gozzi (Nana), Jacques Hilling (M. Boche), André Wasley (Père Colombe), Jany Holt (Mme. Lorilleux), Hubert de Lapparent (M. Lorilleux), Lucien Hubert (M. Poisson), and Florelle (elder Mme. Coupeau).

Running time: 116 minutes

Premiere: November 11, 1957

Previous Adaptations:

Le Rêve d'un buveur. Ferdinand Zecca. France, 1898.

Les Victimes de l'Alcoolisme. Ferdinand Zecca, France, 1902.

A Drunkard's Reformation or Saved by a Play. D.W. Griffith, USA, 1909.

L'Assommoir. Albert Capellani. France, 1909.

Fal Dgruben. Emmanuel Tuede. Denmark, 1909.

Les Victimes de l'Alcool. Gérard Bourgeois. France, 1911.

Le Poison de l'Humanité. Emile Chautard. France, 1912.

Drink. Harry T. Roberts. England, 1917 (released 1919).

L'Assommoir. Charles Maudru and Maurice de Mersan. France, 1922.

The Struggle. D.W. Griffith. USA, 1931.

L'Assommoir. Gaston Roudès. France, 1933.

Nana (1926)

Directed by Jean Renoir.

Produced by Films Jean Renoir.

Adaptation by Pierre Lestringuez.

Cinematography by Edmond Crown and Jean Bachelet

Set Decoration by Claude Autant-Lara

Title cards by Denise Leblond-Zola.

Music by Maurice Jaubert Offenbach

Players:

Catherine Hessling (Nana), Jean Angelo (Comte de Vandevvres), Werner Krauss (Comte Muffat), Francis (Harbacher), Raymond Guérin (Georges Hugon), Valeska Gert (Zoé), Jacqueline Ford (Rose Mignon), Claude Autant-Lara/Claude Moore (Fauchery), Pierre Lestringuez/Pierre Philippe (Bordenave), Jacqueline Forzane (Countess Sabine Muffat), Pierre Champagne (La

Faloise), André Cerf («Le Tigre », Nana's groom), René Korval (Fontan), Nita Romani (Satin), and Marie Prévost (Gaga).

Original length: 2700 meters.

Premiere: June 1926.

Previous Adaptations:

Nana. Knud Lumbye, Denmark, 1910.

Nana. Camille de Riso, Italy, 1914.

Nana. Nino Martoglio, Italy, 1916.

*Thérèse Raquin* (1953)

Directed by Marcel Carné.

Produced by Paris Film/Lux.

Producers: Robert and Raymond Hakim.

Adaptation by Marcel Carné & Charles Spaak.

Dialogue by Charles Spaak.

Edited by Henri Rust.

Music by Maurice Thiriet.

Cinematography by Roger Hubert.

Set Decoration by Paul Bertrand.

Costumes by Antoine Mayo.

Players:

Simone Signoret (Thérèse Raquin), Raf Vallone (Laurent), Roland Lesaffre (Riton, the sailor), Sylvie (Madame Raquin), Jacques Duby (Camille), Marcel André (M. Michaud), Martial Rèbbe (M. Grivet), Marie-Pia Casilio (Georgette), France Vernillat (Françoise), Nério Bernadi (the doctor), Madeleine Barbulée (Mme. Noblet), Paul Frankeur (train conductor), Lucien Hubert (stationmaster at Dijon), Bernard Veron (mailman), and Alain Terrane (truck driver).

Running time: 102 minutes

Premiere: November 3, 1953.

Previous adaptations:

Thérèse Raquin. Einar Zangenberg. Denmark, 1911.

Thérèse Raquin. Nini Martoglio. Italy, 1915.

Thérèse Raquin. Jacques Feyder. France, 1926.