

ASPECTS OF EROS IN EMILE ZOLA'S GERMINAL

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ABSTRACT

According to classical Greek mythology, Eros was one of the first beings to arise out of Chaos and represented the concepts of harmony and union necessary in creating the world and its creatures.

The primary fear that Zola addresses (and exploits) in Germinal is the fear of anarchy and of social chaos. This is accomplished thanks to a relentless textual insistency on eroticism. This emphasis on human sexuality, along with Zola's ground-breaking treatment of the working class, represents the breaking of the two greatest literary taboos in nineteenth century French literature: the vivid depiction of bodily urges and the minute examination of the proletariat.

Our thesis is that the revolutionary impact and the incontestable literary longevity of Germinal stem largely from Zola's successful shattering of these timorous traditions--the logical extension of reigning bourgeois morals--via his persistent depictions of the corporeal and the erotic. This essay, therefore, is an attempt to analyze, to describe, and to reconcile the diverse and contradictory elements which comprise the erotic sub-text in Zola's most famous novel, that is to provide an erotic reading of Germinal.

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INTRODUCTION

What is naturalism? To the reader unfamiliar with Emile Zola's works, the dictionary definition of this term gives some idea as to the significant role that this school of thought once played as an artistic and literary movement which advocated detailed realistic and factual description, especially as this method was illustrated in nineteenth-century France in the writings of Zola and Gustave Flaubert. Expressed in its most simple form, naturalism may be considered to be a search for truth within Nature: it is thus against a backdrop of changing seasons, storms, and sensations that the drama of Germinal (1885) unfolds, a structure in which human beings and natural forces struggle endlessly, at times in concert with and at other times in resistance to each other. Surprisingly, as an imaginative artist Zola claims an unusually passive role in molding his literary creation: "Le naturalisme ne se prononce pas. Il examine. Il décrit. Il dit: ceci est. C'est au public de tirer les conclusions."¹

The starting point for this essay is our belief that Emile Zola was inadvertently lying when he formulated this popular quotation. As a literary doctrine, naturalism may not be in a position to reach a moral "verdict" on a given question, but Zola the naturalist novelist most certainly is: his artistic and moral pronouncements may be disguised, but a close reading of his text--between the lines--reveals that they are nonetheless blindingly present.

One of the primordial questions in Zola's oeuvre is that of the role played by Eros in human endeavors: but Germinal was not written in a vacuum, and represents the thirteenth link in the twenty-volume Rougon-Macquart series, the great natural and social novel cycle of a family living during the Second Empire under Napoleon III. Within this larger literary context, then, Germinal is not the only erotically-centered work of Zola's; but it is undoubtedly his greatest.

What do we mean when we refer to Eros and the erotic world? In Greek mythology, Eros was the son of Aphrodite and was the god of love; in Freudian theory, Eros as life instinct governs acts of self-preservation that tend towards uninhibited enjoyment of life. Thus Eros has both a mythological and psychosexual heritage; we shall draw upon both these domains in this essay.

Of course, any discussion of Eros would be incomplete without corresponding analysis of Thanatos, the ancient Greek personification of death, the son of the goddess of the night, Nyx. Thanatos was the name Freud chose to represent what he considered to be a universal death instinct, the antithesis of Eros. For although the natural and human processes of creation and regeneration in Germinal are extraordinarily puissant, so too are the ostensibly diametrically opposed forces of violence and cataclysm. Viewed from this mythopoeic and epic perspective, Germinal

is in part a synthesis of the Erotic and of the Thanatonic: if we are to appreciate Northrop Frye's assertion that "the presiding genius of comedy is Eros" and that "Eros has to adapt himself to the moral facts of society"² then we must also make allowances for the competing role of Thanatos, the "presiding genius" of tragedy.

In conjunction with the mythical proximity of Eros and Thanatos is Gaea, the goddess of the earth, who bore Uranus and by him Oceanus, Cronus, and the Titans. We feel at liberty in introducing the notion of the Earth Goddess since James Lovelock's scientific theory that "the planet is alive and functions as a superorganism in which living things interact with geophysical and chemical processes"³ could well be a description of the Germinalian landscape, a naturalist world where science and religion are almost reconciled in the study of life on Earth. We are aware that the Gaea hypothesis has found recent favour amongst New Age practitioners, and we wish to emphasize that it is by no means our intention to embrace any stereotypically related notions of healing crystals or trance channeling. Rather, it is to explain the terrestrial fury in Germinal as a result of the violative effects of industry on the natural and human environment: although Mother Nature/Mother Earth/Gaea appears to have reverted to the archetypal status of Terrible Mother, we will argue that Zola actually espouses a holistic view of Nature by blurring the distinctions between life and death and between Eros and

Thanatos.

These blurrings of binary distinctions give rise to many examples of oxymoron and irony, both in Zola's melodramatic narrative and in his erotic subtext. In fact, part of our methodology will be to focus on Zola's exact choice of words in a linguistic attempt to show how the notions of thematic blurring, oxymoron, and irony are crucial to an erotic reading of the novel.

We have divided this essay into four chapters. In the first, we analyze the erotic nature of men and explore how patriarchy and the code of machismo affect (and, in part, create) this nature. In Chapter Two we discuss female sexuality and the role of women as victims and as potential revolutionaries. Chapter Three is devoted to a critical examination of erotic deviance and Zola's sexual ideals. Finally, in the fourth chapter we investigate the question of social class and revolution.

All quotations taken from Zola's novel have been referenced parenthetically and are based on the text of the Garnier-Flammarion edition of 1968. All other quotations have been numerically referenced.

CHAPTER ONE

EROTIC FACES OF THE PATRIARCHAL MALE

Patriarchy is normally defined as a form of social organization in which a male is the head of the family; as a result, such concepts as descent, kinship, and title are traced through the male genealogical line in what is known as patrilineal succession. For better or worse, since recorded history patriarchy has been the dominant system in most Western societies, including, inevitably, the society described by Emile Zola in Germinal. Within this sociological definition, however, we intend to focus on one key element of patriarchy, its bedrock, if you will: male power. Male power is one of the central thematic concerns in the novel: firstly, it forms the backdrop for the bitter rivalry between Etienne and Chaval not only in political terms--for the leadership of the striking coalminers--but in erotic terms as well--for "possession" and "domination" of Catherine Maheu; secondly, it permeates the antagonistic relationship of Hennebeau, the representative of the interests of capital, and Etienne, the spokesman for the workers; thirdly, male power is also very much at stake

within the bourgeoisie itself since Deneulin, the owner-operator of the Jean-Bart mine, must try valiantly to resist the monopolistic designs of the Company's takeover bid, although ultimately to no avail; finally, masculine power is used throughout the novel as a means of subjugating women; in other words, the hegemony of the male in Germinal ensures that, for the most part, the man will have the upper hand over the woman, thereby relegating her to secondary and inferior status, and assuring himself victory--albeit temporary--in the battle of the sexes.

Since Germinal is concerned with quasi-mythical heroism and is painted with such bold and superepic strokes, it should come as no surprise that Zola would choose to portray male pride in its extremes. This pride is governed by the code of machismo, a value system which relies heavily on the ideals of male strength and dominance. The macho code is essentially a sexual one which advocates and even decrees an obdurate and intractable differentiation of the sexes and of the functions they perform: the male must at all times be virile and potent, in physical, erotic, and preferably financial terms as well; he must treat all other males as potential competitors, and be perpetually ready to defend his chosen erotic domain (his queen), his physical being (his impenetrable armour), and his materialistic concerns (his castle). Finally, he must subscribe to the maxim of "might is right" (in French, to the rules of conduct that "la raison du plus fort est toujours la meilleure" or that

"la force prime le droit"). Despite the vast gulf carved between the two warring classes during the miners' strike, they are nonetheless linked by their mutual subscription to traditional patriarchal standards in political and familial matters, including the crucial pledge of allegiance to the macho code, with all that this sexist canon entails.

The question of male pride and its various injuries is critical if we are to gain an understanding of the erotic implications of the novel. What makes the erotic component of the macho ethic in Germinal so pivotal and provoking is that the novel's protagonist, Etienne Lantier, is bedeviled by an internal struggle, the terms of which involve the pitting of the violent forces of traditional machismo at its best (or worst) against a heroic and abstemious messianism in which Eros is carefully sublimated into political and spiritual activism. In erotic terms, then, this struggle is Etienne's attempt to channel the powerful unconscious forces within himself into the performance of works of social utility and into the espousal of egalitarian ideals such as justice. The institutionalized doctrine of sexual asceticism has come to be associated in the West with the Roman Catholic Church, which requires its priests to uphold a vow of absolute chastity. Since this essay is not the proper forum for an in-depth analysis of Catholic orthodoxy, we introduce the notion of sexual sacrifice merely to establish a parallel between the erotic subtext of Etienne's behavior and the Biblical temptations that Jesus

of Nazareth underwent. In fact, Etienne's erotic struggle has much in common with Christ's attempt to come to terms with a role of divine leadership necessitating sexual sacrifice in the face of powerfully seductive temptations.

In the Germinalian universe, as in the Christian Bible, sexual forbearance is an essential heroic trait; in much the same way, the miners' strike is also symbolic of abstention and self-sacrifice for the benefit of the collective. As leader of the strike, Etienne's spiritual turmoil is rooted in erotic tension: to resolve this tension, Etienne must rise above the macho dictum of "defend to the death" in an attempt to attain the ideal of non-violence as embodied in the Biblical admonition to turn the other cheek. He must eventually spurn--although initially succumbing to--the amorous advances of La Mouquette because she compromises the effectiveness of his political leadership by reducing him to the rank of the humble cartboys who comprise a not insignificant proportion of her multitudinous sexual partners. In this way, La Mouquette is in effect Etienne's erotic nemesis, his Mary Magdalene "qui l'adorait comme un Jésus" (272). In addition to overtly sexual matters, Etienne must also paradoxically expunge his lust for violence by actually breaking the Decalogue's primary commandment--"thou shalt not kill"--in order to make peace with his flawed heredity and to eliminate the self-doubts which plague his own vulnerable and individualistic sense of masculinity. He must taste the prideful triumph of

sexual superiority in victorious macho combat before he can truly be a leader of men at peace with himself; he must give in to his unconscious instincts before he may ultimately transcend them.

In refuting Philip Walker's mythopoeic analysis of Zola's novel, F. W. J. Hemmings has stated that "we cannot see . . . any widespread or significant 'application of Christian, Celtic, and Greco-Roman mythology' in Germinal."⁴ In light of the overtly messianic elements present in Etienne's character and behavior, we find this assertion to be egregious and fallacious. Etienne is shown as having evangelical zeal (182) and the gift of prophecy (240), as refusing earthly power (241) and as being a light in the darkness (285). In actual fact, it is the spirit of Eros which motivates Etienne and charges his political ambition. Thus, even after having received the adulation of the crowd during the night-time meeting in the forest as Vandame, Etienne still feels the need to "se faire acclamer" (289) in front of Catherine, his thwarted love interest. This glimpse into the dynamics of Etienne's socialistic steeliness and leadership resolve is instructive since it reveals him to be all-too-human in his vanity and in the increasing self-satisfaction of his incipient embourgeoisement. It seems clear that although Etienne may not be the Christ returned, he is at least a Marxist apostle of the Revolution.

The circumstances involving La Mouquette's eventual

seduction of Etienne are also revealing: initially, he reacts with amusement--but without desire--to her lascivious tone and to her erotically-centered antics. "Elle promenait ... l'indécence de son costume, d'un comique troublant, avec ses bosses de chair, exagérées jusqu'à l'infirmité" (53). Note how Zola's exaggeration of La Mouquette's physical attributes necessarily borders on "l'infirmité" since her very strength and hyperfemininity--and, by extension, her erotomania--are to a certain extent her disability and her weakness as well. One may compare the preceding with Etienne's good-natured reaction to La Mouquette's sexual advances: "Et il disait non, amusé pourtant, mais sans avoir la moindre envie d'elle" (165). Later on, after the outbreak of the strike, Etienne witnesses an old woman collapsed in a heap on the roadside, almost dead from hunger. It is thanks to the assistance and generosity of La Mouquette that the woman is saved "avec du genièvre et un pain" (258), redeemed, that is, by the miners' equivalent of bread and wine, the symbols of the Catholic liturgy and of Christ's ultimate bodily sacrifice as outlined in the Biblical account of the Last Supper. This notion of Christian charity as demonstrated by La Mouquette is reiterated in the same chapter when she selflessly gives Etienne the last of her potatoes so that the Maheu family may eat instead. Previously, Etienne felt intimidated "d'être ainsi forcé de retourner à Réquillart" (264) since La Mouquette's concupiscent intentions were so evident. It is La Mouquette's practical and sincere application of

Christian caritas which paves the way for the eventual sexual union of her and Etienne as a temporary couple.

Nevertheless, it is with feelings of embarrassment and shame that Etienne finally reacts towards his carnal pleasures as tasted with La Mouquette. He takes the decision to break off their relationship despite being very much aware of the conflict between his own strong sexual desires and his perceived need for moral superiority in the eyes of his comrades: "Il lui expliquait . . . qu'elle compromettait la cause de la politique" (277). In the final analysis, it is in part this fear of gossip and slander that actuates Etienne's second change of erotic heart. The reader is unsure whether Etienne is serious in stating that "il la [La Mouquette] reverrait, rien qu'une petite fois, de temps à autre" (277), an assertion highly reminiscent of the drug addict's complete renouncement of cocaine--except on weekends! The real skeleton in Etienne's closet, however, is his attraction to Catherine Maheu, who unlike La Mouquette is erotically inaccessible by virtue of her physical immaturity, her partial androgyny, and her sexual thralldom at the hands of Antoine Chaval.

In fact, erotic inaccessibility furnishes much of the psychological drama in Germinal. Furthermore, this concept of unapproachability in Catherine and Etienne's dealings is highly ironic if we take into consideration the high frequency of sexual activity in the mining community. At the outset, this inaccessibility is reinforced by Etienne's

outsider status; later on, his political engagement ostensibly precludes erotic involvement with a comrade. Indeed, it is while witnessing the promiscuously amorous activities of young lovers amid the ruins of the deserted and unused mining pit at Réquillart that the crystallization of Etienne's political zeal takes place: "Jamais ça ne finirait, si elles s'emplissaient toujours de meurt-de-faim" (143). Here, "ça" refers to the interminable cycle of poverty and lassitude which typifies the miners' existence. On a morphological level, Zola's choice of the name Réquillart emphasizes the fact that almost all the young people of the mining community take their pleasure in this manner, that is by taking part in an "art requis", a required art for erotic living. There is something sinister and foreboding about the setting for these impassioned activities, activities watched by Etienne like an alienated Peeping Tom amid a background of ramshackle hovels and industrial debris suggesting moral ruin and decay. Perhaps this notion of decadence is what exacerbates Etienne's voyeuristic sadness since he reacts with the following moralistic thought: "Est-ce qu'elles n'auraient pas dû plutôt se boucher le ventre, serrer les cuisses...?" (143). At this moment, however, the narrator is careful to interject: "Peut-être ne remuait-il confusément ces idées moroses que dans l'ennui d'être seul..." (143). From this moment on, Etienne's philosophy becomes one of "if you can't join them, lead them" and within the space of two chapters he

is fervently recommending the establishment of a contingency fund and galvanizing the discipular Maheu family with his naïvely political proselytizations. It is indeed timely, then, that Etienne's sexual libido is neatly sublimated into political action.

Not all of the dramatic conflict in Germinal is centered on Etienne Lantier's internal erotic agonizings. Much of the novel's agon--its literary friction--is generated by the diametrical opposition of Etienne and Chaval--also an outsider--with Catherine Maheu representing the erotic prize for the victor. Whereas Zola portrays Etienne as beset by doubts and confusion as to his own virility and courage, namely as struggling to transcend primitive male rituals, there is no doubt as to where Chaval stands in this regard. The contrast in personality is mirrored by Chaval's physical description as "un grand maigre de vingt-cinq ans, osseux, les traits forts" (60). Zola later mentions that "[s]es moustaches et sa barbiche rouges flambaient dans son visage noir, au grand nez en bec d'aigle" (71). What we have, then, is the depiction of a diabolical figure drawn in red and black, the colors of hell: like Lucifer, he is bony, thin, with a goatee and a long, thin nose. The allusion to an eagle may be a reference to the French saying "ce n'est pas un aigle", according to which eagles are associated with intelligence and cunning. In addition, the French "aigle" is ultimately related to the Latin "aquila/aquilus", the latter term

signifying dark and swarthy. The illustration of polar opposites is thus evident: Etienne is Christ-like and has the potential for spiritual transcendence while Chaval is brutally satanic, horse-like in his power and virility (Chaval = cheval = horse), a prince of macho darkness. In this regard, Rachelle Rosenberg uses Jungian symbolism to explain the archetypal notions of horse and devil:

Jung has also stated that the horse is often a symbol for the devil because the devil in folklore and legend sometimes has a horse's hoof and takes the form of a horse. Moreover, he has explained that the devil's sexual passion is sometimes imparted to the horse with which he is associated.⁵

Virility is in effect one of the first characteristics to be associated with Chaval's persona. During Etienne's first day in the mine, Maheu is exasperated by Chaval's purported absence: "Que fait-il donc, cette rosse de Chaval? Encore quelque fille culbutée sur un tas de pierres!" (55). From the start he is portrayed as a powerful and sexual creature, the first to "se mettre le torse nu, pour avoir moins chaud" (64) in the scorching underground heat. Also significant is the fact that during their first meeting Etienne and Chaval feel an instant contempt for each other, "une de ces haines d'instinct qui flambent subitement" (60); animalistic instinctive reaction goes on to play the primary role in their inimical relationship. Chaval's inability to rise above brutishness means that Etienne must lower himself to Chaval's level in order to finally emerge victorious. He must triumph

according to the law of the jungle in order to satisfy his own preconscious animalistic yearnings. The most contentious of the issues separating Etienne and Chaval is the question of relative virility, especially as this attribute relates to the "possession" and "domination" of Catherine. Etienne's initial attraction to Catherine is almost instantly threatened by Chaval's exhibition of domineering brutality in violently kissing Catherine. Etienne is thwarted by raw machismo: "Il y avait, dans ce baiser, une prise de possession, une sorte de décision jalouse" (71). As Chaval and Etienne's rivalry also extends to the competition of political leadership, we concur with Colin Smethurst, who has stated that "from this viewpoint, the strike is a virility drama."⁶

Chaval, however, can only offer Catherine access to the most primitive and violent ritualistic displays of lust since at heart he has the greatest contempt for women. This contempt is expressed more often than not in jealous outbursts and violent acts. On Etienne's first day in the mine, Chaval excoriates his rival's lack of experience and strength, growling that "ça n'a pas la force d'une fille" (67), a most ironic assertion considering the brutally hard work that girls and women also perform in the mines in Germinal. Although Chaval's misogyny is shared by most of the other male characters in the novel, even Etienne is guilty on occasion, whether through erotic frustration or through sexual jealousy, of an uncharacteristic lapse into

machismo. Consider, for example, his reaction upon finally discerning Catherine as being one of the lovers he spies on at Réquillart on that spring afternoon: "Quelle catin! et il éprouvait un furieux besoin de se venger d'elle, sans motif, en la méprisant. . . . elle était affreuse" (147) or his self-righteous and insecure dismissal of Catherine as a trollop after Chaval spites him: "Assurément, elle lui avait menti . . . car elle avait déjà le déhanchement d'une gueuse" (78).

Yet as the novel unfolds, Chaval comes to represent machismo, already a code of extremes, pushed to even greater excess. Although capable of some tenderness and compassion, as seen during his first seduction of Catherine and at the moment of her collapse in the mine from heat prostration, such displays of vulnerability and concern on his part are by far the exception than the rule. Even then, his tenderness is only a prelude to a one-sided "prise de possession" and is tinged with the notions of swallowing and death: Catherine is "si tendre qu'il l'aurait mangée" (145), and when embracing Catherine Chaval "la tuait de caresses" (189).

Zola's use of the verb "manger" is clearly used to equate sex, food, and triumphant engulfment. While "manger" is used in the above example within a context of heterosexual misogyny, the author is also careful to insist upon its use within the very context of Etienne and Chaval's own venomous rivalry. As Etienne confesses to Catherine,

"je ne peux pas avaler deux petits verres sans avoir le besoin de manger un homme" (68). Although this hardly seems an overtly homosexual statement, such confessions do indeed add to the (homo)erotic undercurrents which inflame Etienne and Chaval's competitiveness. "Manger" is also frequently used by the omniscient narrator and not just by the novel's predominately orocentric characters. During a fight between Etienne and Chaval at the Avantage bar, Zola states baldly that "[m]aintenant, il fallait que l'un des deux mangeât l'autre" (239). In the opinion of David Bellos, "the substitution of the terms for eating and killing . . . gives symbolic access to . . . a substructure of meaning in the text and in the reading of it".⁷ But Zola is actually practising a tripartite substitution: it is through the equation of terms relating to eating, killing, and sexual activity that an erotic textual substructure is in fact constructed.

The life-sustaining forces of food and sex are oxymoronic since each term contains its own antithesis: eating at once represents the extension of the life of the consumer and the death/disappearance of the consumed. Similarly, macho sex is at the same time the reinforcement of male domination and the perpetuation of women's enslavement through tyranny and violence. Put more bluntly, Zola's ethic states that sexual activity is creative and erotic only when it is procreative and enshrined in the rites of fertility. But Eros becomes linked with the forces

of Thanatos when mating borders on violent rape, a term which accurately describes the sexual misconduct of Chaval during his initial seduction of Catherine: "Non, non, je ne veux pas! Je te dis que je suis trop jeune" (146). Etienne's hidden presence at this scene of defilement spurs him on to vengeance, in an attempt not only to assert his own confused and threatened virility but also to somehow repudiate the macho mindset of rape. For this hero certain forms of violent behavior may at times be acceptable or necessary, but never in the context of male-female sexual relations, which are sacrosanct. Etienne is not reduced to using force in order to prove his erotic appeal to anyone; Chaval, his diabolical macho nemesis, is.

Crucial to the notion of atavistic macho behavior in Germinal is the disruptive presence of alcohol. Whereas Chaval often becomes violent at the slightest provocation, Etienne often needs a drink or two in order for the full force of his inherited and internal demons to be unleashed. Alcohol thus becomes one of the primary--though not exclusive--triggers for Etienne's rage in the novel. As we know, alcohol often weakens a person's judgement by bringing to the surface elements of personality that are normally repressed at an unconscious level and thereby turning loose the beastly elements within a normally tranquil character. Alcohol affords us a glimpse into the dark recesses of Zola's characters' monstrous and subconscious forces. It is therefore significant that two of the three clashes between

Etienne and Chaval occur on the premises of the *Avantage*, the pub run by Rasseneur and his wife. (In fact, the third of these conflicts, which culminates in Etienne's murder of Chaval, takes place underground, an ideal location for the release of unconscious urges.) The main source of alcohol for the mining community is the principal forum for animalistic displays of eroto-competitive behavior where the "beast within" may be temporarily unchained for all to witness. As Maarten Van Buuren maintains, these displays of raging violence within "*la bête humaine* . . . expriment une combinaison de passions érotico-meurtrières qui est sans exception associée au mal et à la mort".⁸ As well, on these occasions there is a ready-made audience for Etienne and Chaval's fisticuffs, an audience which helps to fan the flames of male pride during these conflicts. Indeed, there is a strikingly direct Zolian link between the fires of the subconscious and the subterranean, as evidenced in the following parallel passages.

First, we have the description of a fight at the *Avantage*: "On entendit le ronflement de leur haleine, tandis que leur face rouge se gonflait comme d'un brasier intérieur, dont on voyait les flammes, par les trous clairs de leurs yeux" (396). Compare the preceding with the following description of *Le Tartaret*: "La nuit, les braves qui osaient risquer un oeil à ces trous, juraient y voir des flammes, les âmes criminelles en train de grésiller dans la braise intérieure" (303). Revealing are the repetitions

"brasier intérieur/braise intérieure", "flammes", "oeil/yeux", and "trous". In the first description, we are afforded a glimpse into the hell of hells, reserved exclusively, according to miners' legend, for female sexual criminals; in the second, the holes in the ground leading to hell are replaced by burning eyes leading to the "hell" of the homoerotic competition inherent in the macho code. In effect, Etienne is in the throes as much of his internal conflicts as he is of his external ones:

Une voix abominable, en lui, l'assourdissait. Cela montait de ses entrailles, battait dans sa tête à coups de marteau, une brusque folie de meurtre, un besoin de goûter au sang. Jamais la crise ne l'avait secoué ainsi. Pourtant, il n'était pas ivre. Et il luttait contre le mal héréditaire, avec le frisson désespéré d'un furieux d'amour qui se débat au bord du viol. Il finit par se vaincre, il lança le couteau derrière lui. . . . (398)

This is as close as Zola comes to erotically defining the macho ethic of competition between males for control and for power, as metaphorically encompassed in the act of homosexual intercourse. Here, Etienne's unconscious need for revenge and his innate bloodlust come to the fore without the emboldening and dynamogenic effects of alcohol. Chaval's treacherous use of a dangerous weapon--eliminating any chance of a truly fair fight--acts as a trigger for Etienne's unconscious phobias. His primary fear is of death by penetration, the fear of male rape by Chaval's destructive phallic substitute, his knife. Keeping in mind the extraordinary penile sizes associated with "les grands

chevaux" (and the fact that Zola uses the adjective "grand" in conjunction with Chaval's name for the entire first section of the novel), we conclude that there is a substantial homoerotic component to Etienne and Chaval's rivalry, in addition to the more obvious heterosexual connotations of winning Catherine's love and devotion. Part of Etienne's internal struggle is thus to prove himself unquestionably heterosexual.

The equating of sex and death is one of Zola's primary manipulations of the erotic in Germinal, effectively bordering on the obsessional. Etienne gains heroic stature by resisting his primitive need to rape and kill until he literally has no other choice. This is why Catherine "serait au dernier vivant" (482) during Etienne and Chaval's third struggle, a final fight to the death that takes place underground. Victorious, Etienne is at last able to relish "un orgueil, l'orgueil du plus fort" (483). According to the widespread but erroneous nineteenth century genetic theory of telegony--the supposed permanent influence of a previous sire on offspring born by a female to other sires--Etienne is the first man to engage in "real" sexual intercourse capable of resulting in Catherine's impregnation, thereby relegating Catherine and Chaval's previous sexual activity to infantile and infertile status.

Chaval is ultimately treacherous and diabolical because he is unwilling to renounce and transcend his animal nature. In fact, he is a caricature of the macho ethic gone awry,

jealous to the point of violent insanity and cruel to the point of driving a naked and distraught Catherine from their home. Above all, the hypocrisy of the macho code is revealed by this rampant male violence directed against women; any notions of chivalry or of gallantry are thus swallowed up by moral and physical cowardice. Although Chaval is one of the more violent and misogynistic characters in the novel, at one point the Maheus' neighbour Levaque is also described as "délassé et excité d'avoir tapé sur sa femme" (134). In an other instance, before the onset of his political and apostolical role, Etienne uncharacteristically enunciates the following pernicious maxim: "Lorsque les filles disent non, c'est qu'elles aiment à être bourrées d'abord" (144), as if sexual satisfaction necessarily depends on the threat of imminent violence. Jeanlin, as the depraved and monstrous chief of his prepubescent coterie, "battait Lydie comme on bat une femme légitime" (271), having learned by all-too-common adult example that the "might is right" equation applies in practise just as ruthlessly to women and children as it does to direct competition between males. Finally, after the castration of Maigrat at the hands of La Brûlé, Mme Maigrat looks down upon the bloody scene below:

En haut, à la fenêtre, Mme Maigrat ne bougeait toujours pas: mais, sous la dernière lueur du couchant, les défauts brouillés des vitres déformaient sa face blanche, qui semblait rire. Battue, trahie à chaque heure, les épaules pliées du matin au soir sur un registre, peut-être riait-elle. . . . (362-63)

In this case, the wife-beating misogynist and corrupted erotomaniac becomes the fitting victim of female revenge, one of the most powerful forces in the Germinalian universe.

As a supplement to the tyranny of Chaval's macho brutality, Maigrat is also reprehensible in his despotic application of male power. Maigrat is the monopolistic shopkeeper, the extender of credit, in short a puppet for the narrow interests of the mining company. His tyranny is due not only to his ability to control the availability of foodstuffs, but also to his willingness to accept sexual payment for his usury: "Quand un mineur voulait une prolongation de crédit, il n'avait qu'à envoyer sa fille ou sa femme, laides ou belles, pourvu qu'elles fussent complaisantes" (1110). In Maigrat, then, Zola has combined the erotomania of *La Mouquette*, the materialism common to bourgeois capitalists like the Grégoires or the Hennebeaus, the interclass treachery of Dansaert and La Pierronne, and the feline viciousness of Jeanlin. He is a literary lightning rod for the negative qualities of almost all the other characters and as such he comes to the most gruesome of ends: castrated and emasculated. Like Jeanlin, Maigrat has an aberrant nature which seems to be provoked by a fusion of the macho ethic with the more ferocious and monstrous metaphorical elements of unfettered and exploitative monopolistic capitalism. In Maigrat's case, capitalistic greed is equated quite literally with venery and unfair social advantage; as a result, his bloody death

is one of the most revolutionary and gripping scenes in the novel.

Other characters in Germinal also undergo symbolic castration or emasculation: Souvarine, the anarchist, is given a girlish countenance; Deneulin, in the ultimate display of entrepreneurial impotence, is forced to sell his independent mining operation; Hennebeau and Pierron are portrayed as cuckold husbands, eunuchized by immoral wives; and Grégoire, with his "idées fixes" and his "idées reçues", is described as being passive and sterile. Clearly, male characters who are virile and erotically balanced are few and far between: Toussaint Maheu seems to be the only male figure who consistently fulfills this description of Zola's erotic ideal throughout the novel. Fittingly, Saint Maheu is shot in his key bodily organ, the heart.

The androgynous qualities of Souvarine on the surface seem to be at odds with his anarchistic exploits as a saboteur. But one must not think in terms of effeminacy as signifying only weakness and passivity: Souvarine's androgyny is as much a threat to the patriarchal social order as is his sabotage to the perpetuation of industrial capitalism (see Chapter Three for a closer analysis of the role of androgyny in Germinal). Yet despite Souvarine's seditious and subversive nature, he too is a proponent of the law of the jungle. By logical extension of this premise, he is thus an indirect guarantor of machismo: During Etienne and Chaval's second and more violent

confrontation at the Avantage, it is Souvarine who Darwinistically asserts that "il y en a un de trop, c'est au plus fort de vivre" (396).

It must be stressed that Zola goes to some length to paint a reasonably diverse and down-to-earth portrait of his socialists and his capitalists, going so far as to describe three separate factions within each group. M. Deneulin represents the independent capitalist struggling against all odds to preserve the integrity and profitability of his operation in the face of the devouring influence of the Company, with its ruthless bottom line and monopolistic inclinations. But despite the narrator's assertion that "les ouvriers respectaient surtout en lui l'homme de courage" (299), Deneulin too is "autoritaire, l'allure brusque" (299), a man who "se montrait paternel pour ses hommes" (299) and who patronizingly refers to his employees as "mes enfants" (299). Within the patriarchal system, Deneulin as "père de famille" is as vulnerable as his mine since he is a widower with two daughters who, according to the sexist and arcane rules of phallocracy, will fail to perpetuate their father's surname, thus representing a genealogical cul-de-sac. In negotiations with his miners, he is portrayed as "éperdu de son impuissance" (301), a term which although adequately rendered in English as "powerlessness", also contains in French the connotation of "impotence". Zola repeats this term during the miners' gallop across the countryside, during which Deneulin once

again has "la conscience immédiate de son impuissance" (319). As if to counterbalance these feelings of male and managerial inadequacy, Deneulin insists upon his admiration of "gouvernements forts" (299), and is reduced to stammering macho threats when the striking workers seize control of his mine: "Tas de bandits, vous verrez ça, quand nous serons redevenus les plus forts!" (307); note how this desperate utterance has the French equivalent of "might is right" at its very core. At the same time, however, Deneulin is shown at his most patriarchal and macho when his back is indeed to the wall, that is when his very own productive capacity is threatened. His assessment of the workers is actually the most accurate and sympathetic of all the capitalistic characters: "Des brutes sans doute, mais des brutes qui ne savaient pas lire et qui crevaient de faim" (325).

Macho posturing is also at the core of M. Hennebeau's attempts to compensate for his domestic sexual frustration. He is held in contempt by his wife, an unusual creature who engages in a long series of extramarital affairs with the compliance of her husband. In fact, Hennebeau has never been sexually intimate with his wife, although he fantasizes about being able to "la prendre, de rouler sa tête entre les deux seins qu'elle étalait" (210). During the chronology of Germinal, Mme Hennebeau is having an illicit affair with Paul Négrel, her husband's nephew and the chief engineer at the Voreux mine. Moreover, this quasi-incestuous liaison is common knowledge to both workers and managers. Deneulin

jokes about it while at the Grégoires for dinner--much to the horror of his host--, and La Maheude, La Pierronne, and La Levaque, although struck with fear in Hennebeau's military-like presence, know all too well that "c'est pourtant vrai qu'il a une tête de cocu" (126). As so often seems to be the case, M. Hennebeau is the last to know the specifics of his wife's adultery, although he does have some suspicions. Indeed, it is only upon his discovery of "traces abominables souillant les linges" (340) that he really gets on with the business of fighting a bloody war with the intransigent miners: "Dès lors, il n'hésita plus" (342); this is the last straw for Hennebeau's wounded male pride, a trigger for the violence to come. Nevertheless, Hennebeau's internalized rage and self-hatred are such that he is eventually able to take cold comfort from his wife's perverse choice of sexual partner: "Sa femme avait simplement un amant de plus, cela aggravait à peine le fait qu'elle l'eût choisi dans la famille; et peut-être même y avait-il avantage, car elle sauvegardait ainsi les apparences" (348). It is in this sentence that Hennebeau's marital servility and toadyism are clearly set out. In erotic terms, Hennebeau's pain is fundamentally "une fureur d'impuissance" (341-42) where the male perspective on labor and class conflicts is inextricably linked with sexual considerations once again. Unable to confront his wife, Hennebeau compensates by seeking revenge against the strikers; rendered impotent in the bedroom, he seeks to

define a hypermasculine identity on the battlefield. Since he has lost yet another battle with his wife, he strengthens his resolve to win the larger and career-oriented war if only in his role of salaried administrator: "L'homme était dompté, il ne restait en lui que l'administrateur correct, résolu à remplir son devoir" (353). For Hennebeau this moment represents the point of no return; his macho ideal has been called into question once too often. In many ways, his reaction of wounded male pride is very similar to Etienne's own rebellious thoughts on the living and working conditions of the coalminers: "Son orgeuil d'homme se révoltait, à l'idée d'être une bête qu'on aveugle et qu'on écrase" (90). The motivations of the opposing camps in the Germinalian epic battle in reality have the same basic root cause: injured pride and masculine insecurity seeking revenge through the assertion of power over the weak.

Throughout Germinal, the military constitutes one of the primary opportunities for men to put the macho code of society into practise. Rigid authority and strict discipline combine to form a moral austerity which becomes the backdrop for the brutal violence inherent in military affairs. It is as if the soldiers and officers were forced to channel their testosterone-inspired libidos in a ramrod-straight, hierarchical display of tightness and rigidity! When we first encounter Hennebeau, for example, he is "serré dans une redingote noire . . . , le visage autoritaire et

correct" (126); a little later, he is poised to "préparer militairement son champ de bataille" (210). He is consistently "boutonné militairement", even though Zola makes no mention of official military service in his past. (Hennebeau grew up in semi-poverty, struggled through mining school, became an engineer and was then promoted to a series of boring and low-paying administrative positions.) Hennebeau's toughness is simply a front and a sham: his initial negotiations with the miners are merely "un espoir de soumission" (230). Unable to dominate his wife, he seeks to play a dominant and sadistic role in his erotically-colored struggle with Etienne with disastrous consequences. Hennebeau's attempt at erotic compensation and his efforts to relieve his intense sexual dissatisfaction only serve to increase the frustrations of the miners: "Cette raideur autoritaire produisit l'effet le plus fâcheux" (261). Perhaps a more flexible attitude, one without so much emphasis placed on derring-do and instantaneous hostile erection, would have resulted in a less destructive outcome for the miners' rebellion. In this respect Hennebeaus's exaggerated macho pride, the result of terminal cuckoldry, plays an integral role in the catastrophic culmination of the novel's events. Without it, there would be no drama.

Pierron is the other cuckold in Germinal. His wife, La Pierronne, is an attractive yet hypocritical woman involved in a poorly-concealed affair with Dansaert, the cowardly chief foreman at Le Voreux. The implications of this

liaison are chiefly class-related (see Chapter Four for a closer analysis of the implications of their affair), but there are also notions of sterility and moral cowardice in Pierron's tacit acceptance of his wife's brazen infidelity. In fact, it is he who writes to Hennebeau, advising him that he is an unwilling and coerced participant in the strike, thus assuring himself the sobriquet of stool pigeon; it is he who formerly made gifts of rabbits to the mining foreman in order to ingratiate himself with authority. Pierron gives away the symbol of the miners' most effective weapon--fertility--for his own nefarious purposes. His cuckold status is most aptly commented on by La Maheude: "Pierron avant de l'épouser donnait des lapins au porion, maintenant ça lui coûte moins cher de prêter sa femme" (122). His compliance earns the wrath of La Brûlé, Pierron's mother-in-law: "Ce cochon-là me déshonore" (382). In the end, Pierron must accept the interclass dominance of Dansaert if he is to continue enjoying the luxurious perquisites associated with erotic capitulation to the enemy. In Zola's male hierarchy Pierron is on the lowest rung as a result of the sin of self-castration, the Zolian literary equivalent of plunging into an unfathomable moral abyss.

In many respects, the "obéissance du soldat" (329) among the better-organized forces of Capital complements the normally unbreakable bonds of workers' solidarity: the mine foreman at Mirou with snow-white hair and beard and with a stentorian voice audible above the shouts of the rampaging

mob of workers is "raidi dans son entêtement du devoir militaire" (328) and resembles a Jehovah-like figure from the Old Testament; his name (le père Quandieu) may be interpreted as being a pun on the French word for God. He is a patriarchal and bullying "god" who attempts to prevent his wayward children from destroying the temple of capitalistic industrial ritual. In fact, his words do have a temporary hold over the mob, as if reminding them that their docile history of exploitation and poverty is perhaps the best of all possible worlds for them. In Zola's day, military and business careers were the exclusive preserves of males and were socially acceptable forms of male self-expression. Even today, the male fulfilling his duty, whether in the military or in business, must be sure to be on his guard at all times, like Hennebeau or like the captain of the military forces assigned to guard Le Voreux. This military rigidity is the ultimate symbol of the well-disciplined male, powerful yet unfeeling. Throughout these portrayals of various captains of industry and sundry imperial officers emerges a glimpse of what seems to be Zola's own negative attitudes towards such narrow and unhealthy forms of traditional authoritarian male behavior. These men are very rarely shown as being relaxed or happy since their resolute stoicism is the antithesis of the playfulness, exuberance, and carefree spirits that characterize the miners during the holiday period of the "ducasse." When the discipline of the Emperor's soldiers is

severely tested, that is when they are sworn at and taunted by the mob, Zola pointedly refers to "le hautain et triste silence de la discipline militaire" (416), thereby completing the equation of proud silence with the duties of protecting capital and property. Compare the sadness of this macho silence with the natural and pervasively erotic sounds heard at other times in this same countryside: "Le Voreux . . . respirait d'une haleine plus grosse et plus longue" (39); "On n'entendait plus que le souffle ardent de l'homme" (146); "[Hennebeau] rentrait . . . désespéré par ces longs bruits, perdus au fond de la campagne noire, où il n'entendait que des baisers" (281).

Clearly, silence is a rare phenomenon in the midst of not only unceasing industry but also amid the omniscient sounds of couples communing so amorously with Nature. Silence for Zola is "unnatural", representing not only industrial machinery at unproductive rest but also a dangerous sublimation of libido and of anger; silence is the eerie calm before the proverbial storm of blood and destruction. The Zolian soldier can tolerate only so much insult before engaging in an orgy of violence when his thwarted libido finally must unleash its phallic blade in a wave of killing. Although Jung defines libido as a "natural energy which first and foremost serves the purposes of life",⁹ libido may just as easily join forces with Thanatos, the mythological (and Freudian) representation of the death instinct. In this way, the limbic nature of Zola's

equations of erotica is stressed: sex and violence are inextricably bound together within the primitive instincts of the human animal.

Nowhere is this equation illustrated more clearly than in the account of Jeanlin's "acte gratuit", his murder of Jules, the young Breton soldier: "Jeanlin . . . lui enfonça dans la gorge son couteau grand ouvert. . . . On ne voyait, du couteau, que le manche d'os, où la devise galante, ce mot simple: 'Amour', était gravé en lettres noires" (404-05). Whether this murder satisfies Jeanlin's primitive lust for blood and mayhem or whether Jeanlin is cowardly attempting to defend his territory which is under enemy occupation is immaterial: Zola uses this scene to probe the depths of the human limbic system, the most primitive evolutionary vestige of the brain stem responsible for the control of basic emotions, hunger, and sex. In this respect, Jeanlin may be seen to occupy a retrograde position on the developmental scale and the evolutionary ladder, "dans sa dégénérescence d'avorton à l'intelligence obscure et d'une ruse de sauvage, lentement repris par l'animalité ancienne" (276). Zola previously describes Jeanlin as having "l'intelligence obscure et la vive adresse d'un avorton humain qui retournait à l'animalité d'origine" (198). These parallel descriptions portray Jeanlin in a totally limbic light since he has lost almost all trace of higher human emotions. Cast as a living human "abortion," Jeanlin represents stunted and malignant sexuality and

violence.

It is Etienne who takes Jeanlin to task for selfishly gathering food in the midst of collective famine. Jeanlin also represents Etienne's own unconscious animal urges which, as we have seen, Etienne tries to keep in check in order to become a Marxian apostle; the monstrous Jeanlin plays the fragmentary structural role of mirror for Etienne's own internal monsters. This subtextual relationship is emphasized by them sharing the same bed in the Maheus' overcrowded house. Carol Fuller has maintained that "on the symbolic level Jeanlin clearly illustrates the effect of social and natural forces on a child victimized by his environment".¹⁰ On an erotic level, since Jeanlin is prepubescent (and thus sterile), he is reduced to indulging in "des jeux de petits chiens vicieux" (141) with Lydie, imitating their elders' erotic activities; but in order to compensate for his stunted potency, Jeanlin is forced to concentrate on violent rather than on sexual behavior. It is he who is the chief tormentor of the perpetually pregnant rabbit, Pologne, an obvious symbol of terrestrial and animal fertility; it is also Jeanlin who symbolically bites Catherine's breast, as if to reject sustenance and nourishment. Jeanlin is thus a subhuman degenerate, in direct confrontation with human fecundity.

In Germinal we have a vivid and dramatic portrait of various patriarchal versions of the male, with his instinctive allegiance to the macho code. This code

ultimately aims to repress and counteract male fears of castration and emasculation, leading to sterility, effeminacy, and moral doom. Although they wield real economic and political power, these men are more victims of the code of machismo than they are victors, for only Etienne may be said to gain any degree of spiritual transcendence over the laws of the natural and Darwinian jungle. Eroticism forms a backdrop for the actions of every male who attempts to achieve heroic status, since moral courage and physical potency/virility are inseparable in Zolian thought. Sterility, as metaphor for anti-sexuality and sexual frustration, is nonetheless the punishment for many male characters, both proletarian and bourgeois. This is a logical consequence of the patriarchal value system, to which both of the novel's otherwise diametrically opposed camps subscribe. Patriarchy and machismo are the most important unifying factors, since according to the harsh traditions of business and military combat "for every winner there must be a loser"; for every dominator there must be someone or something dominated. The most interesting aspect of male psychology in Germinal is that the number of male "losers"--especially in erotic terms--is much greater than the number of male "winners." This anomaly will be examined in the second chapter of this essay, where we take into account the vengeful presence of women in the traditionally male-dominated arenas of coalmines and union meetings.

Suffice it to say that an analysis of Germinalian male

psychology and power must acknowledge the Freudian sexual overtones associated with the extraction of mineral resources from the Earth. The respective roles of Machine and Nature are remarkably anthropomorphic and gender-oriented: the Machine with the perpetual thrusting and breathing of its phallic and corporeal symbols is like a male animal in heat, conscious only of the fulfillment of its desire; the Earth is for the most part a passive female forced to submit temporarily to the Machine's relentless lusts. Thus, patriarchal capitalistic industry is represented by masculine sexual instincts in mechanical form; the fertile and pregnant Earth is on the other hand the terrestrial representation of Gaea, the Natural Goddess.

Yet owing to the vagaries of gender assignment in French grammar, both Machine and Earth ("la machine" and "la terre") are nominally feminine. To a certain extent, it is true that the monstrous machine does have some destructively vicious and stereotypical feminine traits, much like the female praying mantis who devours her mate or the sow who eats her young. It is for this reason that Jean Borie considers that the mechanical cataclysm at the conclusion of Germinal "renvoie donc aussi bien à la figure de la mère qu'à celle du père, et fait la synthèse immédiate et dangereuse des parents."¹¹ Despite this limited androgyny of the Machine/Monster, male power in the end is overwhelmed and indeed beaten by female revenge and fury. Male "winners" are only temporary fixtures in the Germinalian

landscape; they are only fleetingly triumphant victors bound by the repressive rules of the macho ethic.

CHAPTER TWO

EROTIC FACES OF THE FEMALE UNDER PATRIARCHY

Le roman est le soulèvement des salariés, le coup d'épaule donné à la société, qui craque un instant: en un mot la lutte du capital et du travail. C'est là qu'est l'importance du livre, je le veux prédisant l'avenir, posant la question la plus importante du vingtième siècle.¹²

Despite this statement by the novelist that Germinal is primarily concerned with an epic struggle between the forces of labor and capital, the rebellion portrayed within the novel is in fact multifarious. Although the author does not make any direct reference to the concept of a rebellion taking place within a larger revolution, an erotic reading of the novel indicates that its revolutionary bite does come as much from its radical portrayal of women throwing off the shackles of patriarchy as it does from its portraiture of the proletariat assaulting the bourgeoisie. Zola is very careful to paint a diversified picture of female behavior and character, ranging from fiery radical creations back to archetypal--even stereotypical--representations of women more in keeping with a traditional sexist philosophy assuming passive and fatalistic female acceptance of male

hegemony. To a large extent, the independence and self-reliance with which Zola endows several of his major female characters are protofeminist traits; yet Zola at the same time paradoxically reveals himself to be a subscriber to myths and superstitions which would seem to be the preserve of more fervent defenders of patriarchal values. But from the literary perspective of his female characters, Zola plays the creative role of radical traditionalist as a result of his gripping and true-to-life depictions of female eroticism and sensuality.

The introduction to the toil and drudgery which typify female lives in Germinal is swift: we soon learn that Catherine Maheu is responsible for the morning chores in the Maheu house and must also awaken her sleeping family in preparation for a day of exhausting labor in the mines. It should be noted that French law throughout most of the nineteenth century did indeed allow for the use of female labor in heavy industry; the resultant picture of female exploitation in Zola's novel is quite accurate. Moreover, not once do we see male characters taking part in household labor, although we do see females expend energy underground to the point of total exhaustion. Any industrial labor is in addition to the already substantial cooking and cleaning duties waiting to be performed at home. This sexist and disproportionate division of labor is even reinforced by Etienne once he becomes the Maheus' lodger: his political ascendancy is facilitated by the fact that "son linge était

lavé, raccommodé, ses boutons recousus, ses affaires mises en ordre; enfin, il sentait autour de lui la propreté et les bons soins d'une femme" (177). This is a classic example of male power acquisition through female subservience and at female expense. The sexist counter-argument to this inequitable state of affairs would be that it is the men who perform the truly heavy tasks, while the women are occupied by more menial and cosmetic jobs such as the sorting and cleaning of the coal. One has only to read the account of Catherine's own heavy toil to realize that the pain women must stoically endure is even more excruciating than that of the menfolk.

It is owing to an endless succession of long hours, back-breaking work, and an unbalanced diet that the onset of Catherine's menstrual cycle is delayed. Environmental factors associated with industrialism fall just short of wreaking havoc with natural female fecundity, a situation that in the Germinalian landscape is akin to unnaturally enforced sterility. It should be kept in mind that sterility/anticreativity is the most serious human "crime" in Zola's naturalistic world. Accordingly, we may divide the novel's womenfolk into two broad categories, those who are overtly sensual and/or fertile, and those who are nonfertile and metaphorically sterile. Catherine Maheu is positioned in a gray area between these two camps, in much the same way as her main love interest, Etienne Lantier, is in conflict with his primitive macho heredity and his

potential messianic transcendentalism. The author uses this gray area as a source of dramatic tension for both his male and female protagonists.

In Catherine's case, the physical onset of puberty is delayed in part because she works too hard in inhumane conditions. In the Zolian universe, this goes against the cycle of Nature and is thus metaphorically "criminal" or "unnatural". Pathetically, Catherine is tormented by the thought of having to take up prostitution in order to survive should she ever lose her job in the mines at Montsou. As a result, she doggedly endures the harshest of conditions with even the strongest of the male characters, going so far as to shock Etienne on his first day in the mine when his cart derails: "D'une pesée des reins, elle la [la berline] soulevait et la replaçait. Le poids était de sept cents kilogrammes. Lui, surpris, honteux, bégayait des excuses" (65). One has the impression that Catherine's heavy workload is responsible not only for her delayed menses but also for her physical androgyny. Of course, this characteristic blurring of gender is in part attributable to the male work clothes that Catherine must don to work in the depths of the mine, but it also seems reasonable to surmise that Zola's aim was to increase the dramatic tension resulting from Etienne's initial mistaking Catherine for a boy. (We further study the implications of Catherine Maheu's androgyny in Chapter Three.)

With Catherine Maheu we are once again in full Zolian

paradox: despite her above-mentioned Herculean heroics, she is also the most passive and fatalistic female character in the novel, "prête à subir les choses et les hommes" (70). Abused by a violently possessive boyfriend, Antoine Chaval, she comes to expect to be beaten on a regular basis: "Peut-être qu'il avait raison, on n'en rencontrait guère, des femmes heureuses" (311). She even goes as far as to stubbornly defend her "man" from the invective of others: "Chaval n'était guère gentil, bien sûr; même il la battait, des fois. Mais c'était son homme, celui qui l'avait eue le premier" (329). This sort of illogical "logic" is to be expected from someone who has been systematically victimized over the years. Moreover, the honor she seems to be defending is nothing less than spurious since it is based on the sexist notion that to be the first to deflower a virgin is a sign of the utmost virility. Catherine at this point seems unwilling to cast off the chains of her own oppression, perhaps because she sees no alternative to her hardened life in the mining community. Indeed, while it is possible to suggest that the miners overall are slaves with nowhere to run or hide, it would be more accurate and illuminating to consider the relative degrees of freedom enjoyed by males and females respectively. It would be most difficult to imagine Catherine or any of the other female characters setting off across the countryside in search of alternative work during a period of mass unemployment and industrial decline, although this is what Etienne is doing

at the outset of the novel. But it would be easy to imagine a young woman such as Catherine being forced into prostitution just to survive if she were to walk out on an abusive partner and leave Montsou. Women are less free and less mobile in the Germinalian universe simply because they are bound by the sexist code of patriarchy. The suffering of Catherine is ample proof thereof: "Il la battrait, et quand il serait las de la battre, il s'arrêterait : ne valait-il pas mieux ça, que de rouler les chemins comme une gueuse?" (402). When the freedom to seek nonviolent relationships is equated with being a beggarwoman or a rascally trollop, who indeed would not prefer to suffer the status quo? It is presumably for this reason that Francis Heck concludes that "in Germinal, the deportment of the women might be summed up in the word submissiveness."¹³

The key in the novel for women's successful overcoming of their own ingrained resignation and fatalism lies in the release of suppressed rage, and age-old anger which normally finds only limited expression in their notorious and sexually charged gossip sessions. This fury is manifested in various ways, depending on which character is involved: Catherine is most likely to become worried and moody; La Mouquette would probably bare her ample buttocks; Constance Maheu might box her children's ear; and La Brûlé would continue her vociferous threats of revenge against the Company. It is only when these women can manifest their rage and protest together that their internalized

frustrations and self-hatred can be effectively released and attenuated. It is through feminine solidarity that progress is made on this score. Living as they do in a male-dominated and violent world, these women in the end respond in the only way they know how and in the only way that authoritarian males will recognize: the women's ultimate weapon is erotically-based violence that plays upon men's darkest fears.

For all of Zola's insistency on the fertile and creative side of female power, it is his portrayal of women on the warpath which ultimately prevails. Women lead the miners' rampage across the beetfields, attack Cécile Grégoire, abduct and strip a female miner who is in defiance of the general strike order at the Crèvecoeur mine, castrate Maigrat the lecherous shopkeeper, and hurl bricks at the soldiers guarding the entrance to Le Voreux. By the time the miners' rage reaches its peak, even meek little Catherine is carried away by the frenzy of the mob:

Elle n'aurait pu dire pourquoi, elle suffoquait, elle crevait d'une envie de massacrer le monde. Est-ce que ça n'allait pas être bientôt fini, cette sacrée existence de malheur? Elle en avait assez, d'être giflée et chassée par son homme, de patauger ainsi qu'un chien perdu dans la boue des chemins. . . . (419)

This is a dramatic example of emotional catharsis through violence, an example of the release of pent-up negative energy in much the same way that Nature in Germinal manipulates the four basic elements--earth, air, fire, and water--in order to achieve terrestrial catharsis through the

release of the cataclysmic power of Nature's revenge. For just as women are silenced and exploited by men in the novel, so too are Gaea and the Earth systematically abused by the relentless exploitation of mineral resources. Similarly, the women of Germinal eventually reach their own breaking point and the Goddess of the Earth also exacts her own furious revenge: "C'était la terre qui se vengeait, qui lâchait ainsi le sang de la veine, parce qu'on lui avait tranché une artère" (474).

This natural boiling point is the point past which normal healthy desire becomes corrupt and perverse lust. In economic terms, when the long-term environmental consequences of industrial growth are ignored, the Earth strikes back as if to support those workers who help achieve this growth without being able to share in the resulting profits and who are forbidden from asserting themselves. In erotic terms, it is the point past which loving and procreative sexual activity is supplanted by adultery and other sundry deviations from Zola's erotic ideal.

Since Maigrat exchanges food and credit to desperate women in return for sexual favors, it is thematically fitting that this sexually corrupt character should die as a result of falling from the roof of his store, thereupon to be castrated at the hands of La Brûlé, the most witch-like character, who is aided and abetted by La Mouquette and La Levaque. It is indeed a fitting fall from capitalistic grace since La Brûlé comes closest to incarnating the

mysteriously destructive and vengeful aspects of Gaea: in addition, La Levaque and La Mouquette are both young and sexually active and as such are likely targets for Maigrat's concupiscence. At the moment of Maigrat's death and mutilation, Zola chooses female bourgeois characters to be the mouthpieces for what we presume to be the novelist's own personal attitude towards male sexual corruption and excess:

"Qu-ont elles donc au bout de ce bâton?" demanda Cécile, qui s'était enhardie jusqu'à regarder.

Lucie et Jeanne déclarèrent que ce devait être une peau de lapin.

"Non, non," murmura Mme Hennebeau, "ils auront pillé la charcuterie, on dirait un débris de porc." (363)

This passage is especially telling since it equates Maigrat's mutilated penis both with a rabbit skin--the frequency and nature of Maigrat's sexual blackmail is sufficiently promiscuous to warrant the rabbit comparison--and with a scrap of pork: Maigrat is a sexual pig of the worst order. Once again the bourgeois characters are symbolically unable to perceive reality properly: their blindness is both physical and moral.

It is significant that all these instances of female violence are suffused with overt sexual energy. Women too must deal with a limbic system that irrevocably links sex, food, fear, and violence, even in the age of semi-sophisticated civilization. This continual limbic equation is further evidenced by Zola's descriptions of female sexual response: during Lydie and Jeanlin's prepubescent fumbings, Lydie "se laissait prendre avec le

tremblement délicieux de l'instinct" (141). In the scene where Chaval virtually rapes Catherine, "[1] a peur du mâle l'affolait, cette peur qui raidit les muscles dans un instinct de défense, même lorsque les filles veulent bien, et qu'elles sentent l'approche conquérante de l'homme" (146). It is not at all surprising that the rampaging womenfolk are sexually obsessed as they pillage their way across the northern French countryside. When Cécile Grégoire is accosted as she arrives at La Piolaine, La Brûlé and La Levaque are intent on tearing off her bourgeois-and virginal--finery: "On va t'en mettre au cul, de la dentelle! . . . Foutez-moi-la donc toute nue, pour lui apprendre à vivre!" (356). This is another example of a thinly veiled dramatization of aborted homosexual rape, although in this instance it is rape from a purely female perspective. At the Crèvecoeur mine a similar scene takes place when a female mineworker is set upon, whipped, and stripped while the men look upon her bare buttocks with laughter and derision.

Finally, one must consider the symbolic violence and contempt inherent in La Mouquette's triple display of anal exhibitionism, "ce qui était chez elle l'extrême expression du dédain" (84). In the first instance, La Mouquette "moons" a group of young boys who are telling jokes of a sexual nature about her; however, the atmosphere here is one of levity. On the second occasion, she exposes herself at La Piolaine in a moment of antibourgeois fury: "Il

n'avait rien d'obscène, ce derrière, et ne faisait pas rire, farouche" (346). In the final instance, La Mouquette flashes the Emperor's own soldiers, an act which precipitates a wholesale rush upon the troops and the taking of prisoners. Clearly, each "moonning" takes place against a backdrop of ever-increasing violence: the stakes get higher as La Mouquette becomes more and more audacious. As far as the forces of law and order are concerned, La Mouquette's vulgarity represents female sexual power turned against the male oppressor and as such must be punished with the full force of the patriarchy. In addition, her shamelessness is also a challenge to the guilt-ridden bourgeois erotic code. It is for this reason that Richard Zakarian refers to La Mouquette as being "the abstract symbol of Licentiousness without moral guilt"¹⁴ and that Sandy Petrey concludes that La Mouquette's behavior represents a "total rejection of bourgeois modesty and signals the approach of total annihilation of the bourgeois world."¹⁵ Accordingly, La Mouquette lies dead in the end, "deux balles dans le ventre" (421), symbolically shot in her enormous belly that never did serve as a womb. As for the residents of La Piolaine, an exhibition of proletarian rump would only serve to strengthen their belief in the basic depravity of the coalminers. Amongst her own kind, however, La Mouquette's antics are seen as the reflection of her exuberant physical desires and of her larger-than-life physical attributes.

Larger-than-life attributes are most pronounced in the

case of La Mouquette, but they are by no means restricted to her. The widow Désir and Constance Maheu are also portrayed as steatopygic, that is as having excessive fatness of the buttocks and by extension of the breasts as well. Zola deliberately draws two of the most important female protagonists in Germinal in an almost cartoon-like and Rubenesque fashion, a style also reminiscent of those primitive cave paintings which depict fertility rites involving people endowed with impossibly large sexual organs. This is the archetype of the Great Mother in potentia, perpetually fertile and, to this end, sexually alluring. During La Mouquette's initial description, Zola points out that "la gorge et le derrière énormes crevaient la veste et la culotte" (53), and that "toute la mine y passait" (53), perhaps referring not only to her shack located amid the ruins of the unused Réquillart mine--one of the centers for the miners' outdoor amorous activities--but also to La Mouquette herself. Zola is also careful to use a revealing turn of phrase to describe La Mouquette's promiscuous erotomania: "au milieu des blés en été, contre un mur en hiver, elle se donnait du plaisir, en compagnie de son amoureux de la semaine" (53). La Mouquette's desire is shown to be in parallel with the natural cycle of the seasons. Her sensuality is bountiful and munificent, close to the Earth and free from shame. As such, her desire is a simple yet humane extension of the powerfully creative feminine forces at work within the Earth

itself: "toute une vie germait, jaillissait de cette terre" (154). Here we have Zola's first use of the verb "germer" (to sprout, produce shoots, germinate) in the novel, an apt description of Etienne's first springtime in the coalmining region, the springtime of his political and sexual development. According to Maarten Van Buuren, "Zola prend soin de séparer la reproduction humaine, valorisée positivement comme phénomène végétal, de l'acte sexuel qu'il associe au phénomène négatif du rut animal."¹⁶ This animal/vegetable split is a fundamental element of Zola's erotic ideal throughout Germinal.

Another striking aspect of Zola's moral and erotic ethos is his description of La Mouquette's promiscuous nature: it is as if, when having sex, La Mouquette enters into a more profound level of communication with the Earth below and with Nature around her than she does with her faceless and interchangeable male partners. To his credit, Zola attempts a portrayal of virtually self-contained female pleasure; it is now the male who is uncharacteristically subordinate to a natural and very female process, having become an almost perfunctory accessory to the joy of sex. La Mouquette, although the frequent focus for a great deal of the miners' sexual banter, remains free from any aspersions of sexual immorality such as prostitution. Somewhat ironically, it is the virginal Catherine who is pursued by her guilt-ridden visions of wenches and squalid whorehouses, whereas a guilt-free La Mouquette is able to

live and love with relative impunity.

Zola also brings the notions of steatopygia and uninhibited female sexuality into play in his description of the widow Désir, whose very name indicates her attitude towards the erotic pleasures to be tasted in life: she is "une forte mère de cinquante ans, d'une rotondité de tonneau, mais d'une telle verdure, qu'elle avait encore six amoureux, un pour chaque jour de la semaine, disait-elle, et les six à la fois le dimanche" (170). Once again, Etienne reacts with amusement to such an imposing and suggestive sight:

[I]l ne put s'empêcher de sourire en la regardant, tellement elle lui parut vaste, avec une paire de seins dont un seul réclamait un homme pour être embrassé; ce qui faisait dire que, maintenant, sur les dix galants de la semaine, elle en prenait deux chaque soir, à cause de la besogne. (243)

The reference to sex as work may be discounted as miners' humor; what is relevant to the present discussion is the idea of sex as religion--"six à la fois le dimanche." La Mouquette and the widow Désir are the practitioners of a new found "art"--new found, that is, to the middle-class readership of Zola's Rougon-Macquart series, previously unaccustomed to vivid and torrid descriptions of proletarian desire. These two female characters are like priestesses at the high temple of eroticism. They are the incarnations of the Great Feminine Roundness--women's physiological otherness--whether they are described as barrels ("tonneaux") or as "une vessie de saindoux" (171), a tub of

lard. In the final analysis, La Mouquette and the widow Désir are more at ease with their own sensuality than any of the other characters in the novel: they are in harmony both with their natural environment and with the sexual values of their social class. This female desire is based on the notion of instincts being freely indulged, and this is what differentiates them from their frustrated, sterile, or perverse bourgeois counterparts.

But desire is also what links these two social classes for it is only the regulation and control of desire that is class-determined. Whereas sex is the only inexpensive pleasure available to the miners, the bourgeois characters' sexual drive is largely supplanted by ostentatious consumerism and materialism. Bourgeois desire is manifested by the giving of lavish dinner parties or the acquisition of stocks and bonds.

Interestingly, we find the root word *désir/desire* not only within the name of the widow Désir, but also in the name of Désirée, one of Philomène and Zacharie's children, as well as in the name of the section of the Jean-Bart mine bordering on the Tartaret region, "la veine Désirée", the desired vein of mineral deposits. This latter desire is a purely industrial creation, a focus of intense exploitation exceeding even simple greed. Note the reaction of the miners to the sweltering heat which characterizes working conditions near Le Tartaret: "Lorsqu'ils parlaient de cette région de la fosse, les mineurs du pays pâlissaient et

baissaient la voix, comme s'ils avaient parlé de l'enfer" (305). Indeed, it is only a small semantic jump from "la veine Désirée" to the aforementioned "artère tranchée/slashed artery" that eventually triggers the vengeful and hellish wrath of Gaea. Ultimately, Nature retaliates against the parasitic presence of a vampire feeding upon her blood, the antifertile (although nominally "productive") force of unrestrained capital: "Le travail demanderait des comptes au capital, à ce dieu impersonnel qui suçait la vie des meurt-la-faim qui le nourrissaient!" (290). The dichotomy is clear: in Germinal, female sexual power is in league and in harmony with the forces of the planet itself. Masculine capitalistic power, although virile and potent, nevertheless often runs counter to these same female forces, resulting in calamity and bloodshed.

To complement the notion of Mother Earth, Constance Maheu plays the structural and archetypal role of Great Proletarian Mother. To reinforce this parallel, Zola accentuates her ample bosom, thereby bringing out the predominant motifs of fertility and nourishment that characterize most of the mothers in the mining community. The word "sein" has the meanings of both "breast" and "womb" in French; similarly, the word "ventre" may indicate both "stomach" and "womb". We point out these euphemistic dualities to shed some light on the Zolian sensual equation of eroticism and food. Clearly, hunger for food within a starving population takes on profoundly vital and erotic

overtones. Zola's women are sources not only of the sexual pleasure provided by physical intimacy but also of the very food of life itself. Although it seems self-evident, Zola emphasizes the equation to such great effect that the dividing line between the concepts of sexual and alimentary pleasure often becomes blurred.

This is how Constance Maheu can possess such admirable qualities as sexual fidelity, personal integrity, and a longing for social justice: As Great Proletarian Mother, she is kept occupied by the demands of maintaining a household for an extended family of ten people. Chief among her multiple duties is that of breast-feeding Estelle, her youngest child; indeed, Zola is relentless in his constant references to the art of giving suck. In grand Zolian dramatic fashion, however, oxymorons abound, even when the issue is motherhood. In one instance, a sleeping Estelle, gorged with milk and purring contentedly, comes very close to being crushed by the not insubstantial weight of her own mother's breast, only to be saved in the nick of time by the presence of mind of her older sister, the saint-like Alzire: "Et elle sauva l'enfant, à demi étouffée sous la coulée énorme des seins" (105). Zola's use of the word "coulée" is highly poetic in this context: The author seems to be implying that the infant is threatened as much by an excessive flow of milk as it is by the weight of La Maheude's bosom. It is indeed ironic that the hand that rocks the baby should also very nearly bring about its

strangulation. The use of oxymoron is a trademark used to great effect by Zola throughout Germinal: danger may thus lurk behind even the most comforting of acts, within the most revered symbol, within the most docile of sacred cows. Death and life are two sides to the same coin: Eros has united with Thanatos and the breast of life has become a weapon of death and destruction.

Havelock Ellis considers that this Zolian obsession with nudity and breast-feeding is ill-considered: "On the one hand Zola over-emphasises what is repulsive in the nutritive side of life, and on the other hand, with the timid obsession of chastity, he over-emphasises the nakedness of flesh. In so doing, he has revealed a certain flabbiness in his art. . . ." ¹⁷ It is true that feeding is often reduced, at least in plebeian circles in the novel, to its most fundamental and feral level. Accordingly, Zola at times resorts to horse imagery and simile to describe mothers with suckling children: Without inhibitions, women at the Bon-Joyeux dance hall "sortaient des mamelles longues et blondes comme des sacs d'avoine" (173); women's breasts have become the bags of oats upon which foals feed. This equine motif is also used to describe La Mouquette, who steals away from her work in the mine as a cartgirl to catch up on her sleep next to the horses' troughs, "avec les bêtes, dans la litière chaude" (79). In a similar light, Zola also refers to La Maheude's "mamelle de bonne bête nourricière" (127) and to "son corps de bonne bête trop

féconde" (498). La Maheude may be a beast, but she is at least a good beast. If she is a mare, then she is the archetypically significant Great Mare caught up to such an extent in her role of fruitiferous mother, nourisher, and protectress that she is unable to realize that paradoxically it is her own hyperfertility that is slowly killing her and her family. While she is of the opinion that an increase in the number of mouths to feed is eventually counterbalanced by the increase in total household income in the long run, that is, when the children are old enough to be put to work for the mining industry as well, this philosophy of long-range hope is of no practical use to the Maheu family in the here and now of a protracted strike that causes so much suffering as a result of starvation. In the jungle of Zolian naturalism, hyperfertility may indeed lead to overpopulation with all the catastrophic consequences that this phenomenon entails. Once again, "un sein . . . tombant jusqu'au ventre" (235-36) is more than just a parody of fertility symbols. It is also symbolic of female corporeal forces pushed to extremes by the extreme practicalities of patriarchal capitalism.

Thus it is the bitter reality of mass oppression and poverty that provokes the novel's working-class women to vengeance, as illustrated in the scene where starving children are transformed into flags of war in their mothers' arms: "Les femmes avaient paru, près d'un millier de femmes, aux cheveux épars, dépeignés par la course, aux

guenilles montrant la peau nue, des nudités de femelles lasses d'enfanter des meurt-de-faim. Quelques-unes tenaient leur petit entre les bras, le soulevaient, l'agitaient, ainsi qu'un drapeau de deuil et de vengeance" (344). It is this thought and sight of the semi-naked and desperate female with child that would have been the greatest shock, not only to the bourgeois residents of La Piolaine but, in all likelihood, to Zola's readers as well. Although nudity within the novel clearly has several dimensions--a bare chest may symbolize male strength, bare buttocks might express contempt, an exposed breast may indicate indifference to artificial bourgeois decorum--its primary role is the depiction of female vulnerability and suffering. In terms of social class, this vulnerability is universal: Even bourgeois women are susceptible, as for instance when La Brûlé threatens Cécile Grégoire's protective bourgeois trimmings. However, since it is the women of the mining community who suffer disproportionately at the hands of men, they are also the ones who must almost exclusively endure the agony of nudity. For example, as the miners work the Désirée section of the Jean-Bart mine, Catherine is forced to move closer and closer to the Tartaret region where an intense subterranean fire burns incessantly. As Catherine is slowly strangled by the noxious fumes, her torture is also exacerbated by a 45° Celsius heat which obliges her to take off her work clothes layer by layer, leaving her to become the butt of her male co-workers' taunts. This is

Zola's vivid depiction of a hell reserved for women alone: it is the metaphorical hell of physical abuse, mental cruelty, and unrelenting poverty. These objectionable conditions, although endured by the menfolk of the mining community as well, are in fact the disproportionate lot of the female characters in Germinal. Working-class women are victims within an already victimized group for they are the sufferers of patriarchal double jeopardy. Henri Mitterand seems to concur with us on this point when he maintains that "la plus courbée de toutes est la femme, sur laquelle pèse une autorité supplémentaire, celle de l'homme, qu'il soit son époux ou son amant."¹⁸

Later on it is no accident that Chaval evicts Catherine while she is "vêtue à peine, meurtrie de coups de pied dans les jambes" (408). Her semi-nudity is not only pathetic, but it leaves her open to sexist charges of obscenity and lasciviousness which, according to her worst fears, would presumably culminate in her being sent "comme une gueuse, à cette maison publique de Marchiennes" (409). The use of the epithet "gueuse" in this instance is in itself sexist: the male variant "gueux" simply means "beggar", whereas the female form also contains implications of sexual debauchery. While women are objects of male sexual desire, they are at the same time held in contempt for having the potential to satisfy male lust, a traditional yet perverse double standard perpetuated by almost all of the novel's male characters. We are dealing with the literary application of

the age-old Madonna-whore duplexity, a female dichotomy that has no real male equivalent in either present-day Western society or in France during the 1860s. This dichotomy is neatly summarized in Carol Fuller's article "The Infertile Rabbit":

[T]he ultimate justification of a female in the coron lies in her production of offspring, whereby she establishes economic security, demonstrates her own "femaleness" by fertility, and proves her man's virility. Infertile, she remains only as a love object for sex/pleasure, greatly diminished in the eyes of the male and the community as well as in her own. ¹⁹

Another striking symbol of female vulnerability and fertility in Germinal is Pologne, the perpetually pregnant rabbit kept by the Rasseneurs. Pologne is introduced as she is being tormented by young boys throwing stones as she grazes outside. It is the androgynous Souvarine who becomes the frightened animal's comforter. He in turn is mellowed by the presence of such symbolic warmth and softness. Yet it is this very warmth and softness that constitutes metaphorical sexual differentiation. We are led to infer that it is indeed difference--woman as Other--that engenders male hostility and brutality. Why else would children derive pleasure from stoning a symbolically defenceless rabbit? Fittingly, it is Jeanlin who becomes Pologne's chief tormentor since, on a slightly less than epic scale, Jeanlin and Pologne represent opposite ends of the fertility spectrum. He is the embodiment of stunted, depraved, and violently destructive anti-fertile forces; she is a

victimized symbol of natural and unrestrained female hyperfertility.

It is Pologne's pregnant condition that proves to be her downfall when being chased on another occasion by Jeanlin, Bébert, and Lydie: "Si elle n'avait pas eu un commencement de grossesse, jamais ils ne l'auraient rattrapée" (279). Pregnancy is described as a hindrance to freedom, a situation closely paralleled by the subjugation of the women trapped in the mining community with babies at their breasts and more little ones on the way. Pologne is rendered sterile by the injuries she incurs at the hands of Jeanlin. After giving birth to a succession of stillborn babies, Pologne is summarily transformed into a nourishing rabbit stew "pour ne pas nourrir une bouche inutile" (394). The implications are clear: females, whether animal or human, are indeed useless unless they are capable of fulfilling their primary role of being baby machines, and are therefore disposable when the fulfillment of this role is no longer possible. As Chantal Jennings rightly remarks, "pour Zola, la mission par excellence de la femme est la maternité, dont il fait l'éloge tout au long de son oeuvre, et qu'il finit par diviniser."²⁰ Similarly, Catherine dies shortly after making love for the first time as a woman capable of actually being impregnated, thereby proving Etienne's virility. Finally fertile, Catherine is symbolically reduced to resolving Etienne's crisis of manhood. Once his seed is planted within both her and the

encompassing "womb" of the Earth, Catherine's role becomes redundant--from the male perspective--and she is expeditiously killed off. Zola not only reinforces the paternalistic notion of women as "breeders" but inextricably equates sex and death anew.

Nowhere are the concepts of sex and death linked so closely as they are in abortion and miscarriage. It is not surprising that Zola should refer to the eventual crussing of mass upheaval as "l'avortement final de cette levée en masse, qui avait menacé un instant d'emporter d'une haleine la vieille société pourrie" (391) since the revolutionary fervor of the striking miners clearly has a sexual undercurrent. At one point, Zola mentions that the male symbols of industry (the water pump and other associated pumping and penetrative equipment) are themselves highly vulnerable to destruction by the forces of Gaea unless they are steadfast and durable: "il n'y avait toujours que l'échappement de la pompe soufflant son haleine grosse et longue, le reste de la vie de la fosse, que les eaux auraient détruite, si le souffle s'était arrêté" (233). The silence of the night-time Germinalian landscape is broken afresh by the sounds of the erotically committed male. In the end, only the Deluge brought about by Gaea's rushing waters can overcome and silence this male voice. Although this is the destructive, abortofacient side of the great powers of the Earth, the use of such extreme force is the exception rather than the rule. In the context of the

novel, the Earth reacts in retribution for "une artère tranchée," against an exploitative misuse of resources, both natural and human. The carnage and suffering accompanying this "avortement final" are necessary in epic terms for the renewal inherently associated with the return of spring. Whereas much of the blood spilled over the one hundred years of the Company's existence was aimed to appease the ogre/vampire/monster of Capital, the ultimate sacrifice of men, women, and machinery represents an appeasement to the truly supreme terrestrial powers of Gaea. This final abortion is a welcome alleviation of gross injustice.

In Zolian terms we have come full circle: the supporting waters of the gentle womb and the nurse's milk in the ample breast as the sources of human life also have the innate yet contradictory potential to turn violent and snuff out that very same life. This is the transubstantiation of milk and water into sacrificial blood, as symbolized by Catherine's first menstrual period, a momentous development that occurs on a day of brutal violence: "c'était le flot de la puberté qui crevait enfin, dans la secousse de cette journée abominable" (427). It is as if the natural flow of fluids within the bodies of the novel's female characters is intimately connected with and paralleled by the natural cycle of Gaea's own waters. This explains why Zola stated that "je l'arrangerai pour que je puisse obtenir ses [Etienne's] amours avec Catherine au fond."²¹ Etienne may thus deposit his revolutionary seed of education within the

Earth, thence to develop as the beginnings of a new generation of soldiers. Catherine, although she eventually perishes, is now able to be truly fertilized by her lover. This scene of love amidst death takes place within a fusion of the ancient Greek elements of earth, air, fire, and water: Catherine may die, but the power of Gaea ultimately triumphs in the form of "un lac boueuse qui occupa la place où était naguère le Voreux" (459).

Despite this climactic flood of bloody violence, however, hope springs eternal at the conclusion of the novel, thereby marking the dawning not only of a new day, but of a new cycle of revolutionary seasons. The insurrection detailed in Germinal is but an embryonic shape of things to come. Nowhere else is Zola's prose so inspirational and so heartbreakingly poetic:

Maintenant, en plein ciel, le soleil d'avril rayonnait dans sa gloire, échauffant la terre qui enfantait. Du flanc nourricier jaillissait la vie, les bourgeons crevaient en feuilles vertes, les champs tressaillaient de la poussée des herbes. De toutes parts, des graines se gonflaient, s'allongeaient, gerçaient la plaine, travaillées d'un besoin de chaleur et de lumière. Un débordement de sève coulait avec des voix chuchotantes, le bruit des germes s'épandait en un grand baiser. Encore, encore, de plus en plus distinctement, comme s'ils se fussent rapprochés du sol, les camarades tapaient. Aux rayons enflammés de l'astre, par cette matinée de jeunesse, c'était de cette rumeur que la campagne était grosse. (502)

Zola's meaning is clear: It is spring at last and the Earth is heavy with child; seeds become buds become leaves become flowers; and everywhere the sap of life is flowing. Just as Etienne's former workmates are "rapprochés du sol," so

too has Zola achieved a rapprochement of human nature with Nature itself. Readers of Zola cannot help but make the obvious connection between Constance Maheu's banal utterance that "La Levaque est enceinte" (498) with Zola's near simultaneous description of terrestrial bloom. Just as Catherine's menstruation coincides with the bloody violence of soldiers and the wrath of Gaea, so too does La Levaque's pregnancy mirror the fertile resonances of spring reborn and peace returned to the Earth: her child will be the first born of a new revolutionary age, conceived in the very month of Germinal, the seventh month of the French Republican calendar (March 21st - April 18th). As Auguste Dezalay points out, Germinal is "le mois des germinations avant d'être celui des insurrections: la poussée exercée sur les murs des maisons bourgeoises apparaît aussi dans l'imagination créatrice de Zola comme la simple poussée des herbes et des feuilles du printemps."⁶⁰

The necessities of epic balance and symmetry ultimately regulate Zola's dramatic use of female erotic power, both creative and destructive, in Germinal. Although Etienne Lantier is the obvious protagonist of the novel, many female characters, such as Constance and Catherine Maheu, also achieve heroic and noble status. It is to Zola's credit that the female psychology described in the novel is so powerfully complex and rich. Even though women are prone to a stereotypically traditional mixture of passivity, fatalism, and resignation, they are also capable of great

strength and endurance. Germinal is neither male chauvinist narrative nor feminist diatribe; it is instead a picture of natural interaction between men and women, whether in love or in hatred, whether at war or at peace. The novel purports to describe unvarnished reality and it does indeed provide for a raw and pulsating view, complete with the misogynistic excesses of male domination and the subsequent castrative fury of women seeking their sexual revenge. Although the bulk of the novel's violence is absorbed by women and perpetuated by men, men too are at times faced with the turned tables of women in open rebellion. This is but one of Zola's techniques for conveying the message of eroticism in order to complete his tale of class revolution. Women's attempting to throw off the shackles of patriarchy thus constitutes a revolution within a revolution, the all-too-natural reaction of an increasingly victimized subgroup within a larger oppressed class.

An even more insidious form of rebellion is the wholehearted female embracing of unabashed eroticism, exemplified by the tireless libido of La Mouquette and the widow Désir. Promiscuity constitutes a serious threat to the patrilineal structures of ownership so dear to the hearts of bourgeois male supremacists. The natural "religion" of sexual freedom thus represents an obstacle to the maintenance of the fundamental Germinalian female condition of enslavement. In this respect, the author is not quite so radical. In fact, Zola seems intent on emphasizing the "sex equals death"

formula by killing off female characters such as La Mouquette--even though she dies heroically by giving her own life to save Catherine--and Catherine herself--sacrificed after experiencing "fertile" love for the first time.

Zola also seems to have an unconscious terror of women's mysteries such as pregnancy, childbirth, abortion, miscarriage, and lesbianism. While Zola's own ignorance and neuroses may indeed be great enough at times to warrant charges of sexism, however inadvertant, we must keep in mind that Zola was writing for a predominately male readership which, presumably, would more or less share the same neurotic heritage of gynophobia. Zola's primary aim in writing Germinal was to shock and frighten the bourgeoisie out of its characteristic drifting complacency. By relentlessly playing on existing male fears, he succeeds.

Given the spirit of Zola's age, a time when wife beating was considered a legitimate right rather than a crime, when women were still routinely excluded from the worlds of art, politics, economics, and religion, Zola can hardly be positioned on the vanguard of Judaeo-Christian misogyny. Instead, we would apply the term "radical traditionalist" to describe the philosophy held by Zola towards women, as evidenced by the complex and contradictory range of female characters in Germinal. As Naomi Schor so wryly points out, "Zola's Messianic politics, centred on a Christ-like leader, are mirrored in his sexual politics. And, just as Zola's paternalistic brand of socialism does

not win high marks from Marxist critics, his paternalistic brand of feminism is hardly likely to win an endorsement from N.O.W."²³

Zola's traditional fear of woman as Other is redeemed by his obvious compassion and poetic sensitivity to suffering. He is bold enough to show women's considerable--some would say greater--strengths in conjunction with stereotypical passivity and fatalism. As an erotic pioneer, he is intrepid enough to describe or allude to the fears of seduction, menstruation, castration, and rape--fears which have formed the points of departure for misogynistic violence--while also focusing on the larger and more positive female traits of intimacy, warmth, light, and on the sacrosanct bond between archetypal mother/Gaea and archetypal child/Humankind.

The portrait of women casting aside the fetters of patriarchy in Germinal is an indirect yet powerful critique of Zola's ultrasexist age. In this sense, women form the heart of the novel's revolution and are thus the focus of the Germinalian universe. It is for this reason that we are in complete accordance with Anna Krakowski's conclusion in La condition de la femme dans l'oeuvre d'Emile Zola:

Zola était convaincu qu'on ne pouvait pas lutter pour l'émancipation de la femme en tant que telle sans participer en même temps aux revendications des travailleurs. Il a aussi saisi que seul le combat revendicatif ne résoudra pas le problème, qu'il y faut avant tout une éducation de comportement à l'intérieur du foyer, un libre consentement guidé par le sentiment et le respect, conditions indispensables à l'égalité des deux partenaires. A l'époque où la femme était encore

en plein asservissement il tenait le langage des
plus fervents sociologues féministes modernes.²⁴

CHAPTER THREE

EROTIC DEVIANCE

The blaze of anarchistic physical destruction which erupts towards the conclusion of Germinal has two broad purposes: to seek sacrifice and to exact punishment. In order to understand the causes of this vengeful destruction, it is helpful to view the industrial process of mineral extraction at the mine as breaking a fundamental law of nature. Since the omnipotent Company is unconcerned with the environmental or social costs of its profitable operations, the mining activity at Le Voreux is like a rape of the planet and indirectly of its inhabitants. Hence the Earth's "need" to punish those people guilty of this and other "unnatural" practices, both industrial and erotic.

In terms of cause and effect, the concept of crime and punishment is often nebulous throughout the novel. This question does not lend itself to simplistic "black and white" analysis, with a speedy application of justice for those guilty of transgressing "natural" laws of behavior. Instead, the moral ethos at work in Germinal is a combination of stereotypical nineteenth century French

middle-class values mitigated to a certain extent by the author's semiliberal doctrine of erotic naturalism. Zola holds a contradictory assortment of both liberal and conservative attitudes towards various types of human sexuality. Unsurprisingly, the nineteenth century critics of Germinal reacted to Zola's erotic depictions with such indignation and condemnation that the adjective "Zolaesque" came to acquire the connotations of "coarse" and "lewd", as dictionaries from the first half of this century will attest. Zola's largely middle-class readership was able to assuage itself knowing that when all was said and done, however, Zola too shared their fundamental moral beliefs.

In particular, the following erotic orientations or acts are viewed negatively in the novel and are "punished" (or are seen as punishment in themselves): prostitution, homosexuality, adultery, incest, and interclass sexual relations. Owing to its inherent complexity, promiscuity is treated either positively, negatively, or neutrally by Zola, depending on the character involved. Broadly speaking, total sexual fidelity within institutionalized marriage is the author's erotic ideal, but he shows signs of some flexibility in allowing for diversity in erotic behavior among some of his characters. Unmarried people are given a degree of sensual license that corresponds both to their youthful sexual freedom and to the need for experimentation before choosing a mate. Once they are married, however,

partners are expected to be at once faithful and fertile. In this respect, the working-class Maheus--in a most ironic shift of middle-class values--become the epitome of Zola's erotic ideal. To underscore this class-based erotic value transfer, Zola portrays his bourgeois families as virtually barren in comparison. Tellingly, the most sympathetic of the bourgeois characters, M. Deneulin, has two daughters; the Grégoires, banal yet semi-charitable, have only one daughter; and the Hennebeaus, base and pernicious, are symbolically without child. In fact, Zola's most lofty ideal is that of erotic self-abnegation, but this is a theoretical goal never attained by any of the novel's mature characters.

A key to understanding Zola's approach to sexual deviance in Germinal is his use of the word "abominable", which has its etymological roots in the Latin "abominari", meaning "to regard as an ill omen". This notion of ill omen is highly pertinent both to Zola's sexual ethic and to the very dénouement of the novel. The "old" society--portrayed by Zola as being threatened by popular uprising and socialist ideology--is corrupt, degenerate, and decadent--hence the barrenness of its bourgeois figures. The "new" world of justice and equality envisioned by the novel's revolutionaries is seen as a more "natural" place, free from sexual corruption and deviance. The catastrophic climax of the novel is an erotic purification, in much the same way as the Biblical accounts both of the Flood and of the

destruction of Sodom and Gomorrha represent cosmic or divine retribution against human iniquity and "abominations."

The word "abominable" and its derivatives appear in various contexts in the narrative, most notably in the description of the Tartaret region of the mine ("crachant du soufre et des vapeurs abominables" [305]), as well as in the scene where M. Hennebeau finds proof positive of his wife's semi-incestuous infidelity ("des traces abominables souillant les linges" [340]), at the Avantage bar when Etienne comes very close to slitting Chaval's throat ("une voix abominable, en lui, l'assourdissait" [398]), at the moment of Catherine's first period ("dans la secousse de cette journée abominable" [427]), and at the murder scene of Cécile Grégoire (Mme Hennebeau: "Quelle abomination!" [473]). Zola's frequent and persistent use of "abominable"--considering the vast array of synonyms available in French--provides an interpretative key to understanding the convergence and divergence of Zola's own sexual values with the reigning patriarchal bourgeois ideals of his age. In the five instances cited, the circumstances are respectively the author's attitude towards lesbianism (Le Tartaret is, according to local legend, where "wicked" girls are sent), a bourgeois male character's expression of revulsion at his own wife's incestuous depravity (her lover is his nephew), Zola's description of erotically-charged violence (Etienne and Chaval's relationship has frequent homoerotic overtones), Catherine's long-delayed entry into

womanhood (delayed because of subhuman working and living conditions), and a bourgeois female's reaction to the murder of a virginal young woman (death of a virgin has clear sexual connotations for the mythopoeic novelist). The word "monstrueux" is also used in a revealing way by M. Hennebeau to describe his own fleeting yet suspicious reaction to his wife's overly enthusiastic involvement in her nephew's wedding plans: "il rougit de son imagination monstrueuse" (213). In addition, Zola refers to the capitalist Minotaur who inhabits the mine as "ce pourceau immonde, cette idole monstrueuse" (290). "Abominable" and, to a lesser extent, "monstrueux" are thus indications of gross deviance since Zola uses them at critical erotic junctures. These occasions represent either crimes against the creative forces of Nature (e.g. homosexuality is inherently non-procreative), or infractions of Zola's own erotic commandments.

The traditional female deviance of prostitution represents an obvious way for Zola to focus his naturalist lens on the human sexual condition. Revealing in its own right is another appearance of the closely-related "monstre," which is used to describe the female singers at the Volcan pub during the miners' "ducasse" celebrations: "Cinq chanteuses, le rebut des filles publiques de Lille, défilaient, avec des gestes et un décolletage de monstres" (167). "Monstre" is indeed an unusual choice of words for this scene, no matter how sleazy or tawdry these women

actually are in Zola's imagination. The author seems to be imitating bourgeois hyperindignation while at the same time stressing the omnipresent Germinalian connection between monstrousness and voracious sexual appetite. Sacrifices to the great monster/vampire of capital thus have an exaggerated mythopoeic eroticism of their own, in much the same way as the legendary ancient Greeks chose their most nubile and virile sons and daughters--virgins, in effect--to appease the horrendous Minotaur.

As seen, prostitution constitutes punishment for sexual infidelity and promiscuity. For Catherine to make love with Etienne so soon after her break-up with Chaval, notwithstanding the latter's monstrously abusive and treacherous nature, would be irrefutable proof of her own innate depravity. In addition, Catherine also has grave misgivings as to the ramifications of female homosexuality. The "loose woman", whether prostitute or lesbian is also the nucleus of Catherine's superstitious belief in "l'Homme noir. . . . [1]e vieux mineur qui revient dans la fosse et qui tord le cou aux vilaines filles" (70), a shadowy bogeyman to whom we are introduced very early on in the novel as if to deliberately set the stage for the erotic crimes and deviatory punishments yet to come. (We explore the fascinating implications of the archetypal "vieux mineur" in the following chapter.)

Since sexual fidelity in marriage forms one of the cornerstones of Zola's erotic ideal, it is not surprising

that his portrayals of the adulterer/adulteress should all be so overwhelmingly negative: La Pierronne, Madame Hennebeau, and Maigrat are the only married characters in the novel who engage in extra-marital sexual relations--with the exception of Levaque, La Levaque, and Bouteloup, participants in an entirely voluntary "ménage à trois"--and they are three of the most odious and reprehensible individuals in Germinal. La Pierronne is a shameless hypocrite, prone to hurling accusations of sexual impropriety regarding socially transmitted diseases at Etienne and the Maheu family, all the while having a tremendously lucrative affair, in terms of gifts of food and wine, with Dansaert, the cowardly and bullying foreman at the mine. Her cuckold husband, Pierron, who is fully aware of his wife's activities, is reduced to spying and informing for the Company, betraying his own workmates in the process. In the Zolian naturalist universe, the Pierrons are especially "unnatural" since they renounce all notion of marital fidelity and, equally important, take unfair advantage of their access to food and drink. The resultant punishment meted out for the Pierrons is physical abuse from their neighbors, ostracism, and contempt. Maigrat, whose greed and lust have already been amply documented, himself undergoes the symbolic punishment of castration and emasculation as a result of the sexual blackmail he perpetrates on the female population of the mining settlement. This state of erotic extortion is exacerbated

by Maigrat's own ability as shopkeeper to influence the supply of food. In a "natural" universe, it is Mother Nature who allows for the harvest: In this "unnatural" situation, Maigrat's attempt to usurp the Earth's power and role as source of life and food culminates in his gruesome death at the hands of the starving.

The character of Madame Hennebeau is so perverse that she fits into several categories of deviance simultaneously: she is both inveterate bourgeois adulteress and incestuous mother figure to Paul Négrel. Her adultery is pathological, ostensibly the result of having chosen the wrong husband for the wrong reasons. She thus attempts to add meaning and passion to a life of domestic (f)rigidity and monotony. Once again, the cuckold husband is aware of the past infidelities of the wife; yet, in this case rage and resentment do build up within him since there is no material advantage to be had in being complacent and acquiescent. And despite M. Hennebeau's delusions of power and control, after twenty-five years of marriage the Hennebeaus are still without child--not surprising when we learn that husband and wife have never been sexually intimate in that time. In terms of both fertility and virility, then, they are a sterile and bankrupt couple. Interestingly, their punishment is uncertain: there are no convenient lightning bolts from the sky, no sudden earthquakes swallow up their property. They are simply doomed to continue living through the hell of their own bloodless marriage: in fact, this is

the most effective punishment Zola could have devised for them.

What differentiates Mme Hennebeau's latest affair from her previous ones is its quasi-incestuous nature. Although Paul Négrel is M. Hennebeau's nephew, he initially becomes a confidant for Mme Hennebeaus's loneliness, thereby becoming the son she never had. Since Zola describes him as "ce Paul dont elle devenait la mère" (340), theirs is obviously a coded incestuous relationship. And although there are two willing players involved, it is Mme Hennebeau who is portrayed as the corrupting influence on an innocent. At one point she is described in Eve-like terms as tasting the forbidden fruit of her young nephew: "Il [M. Hennebeau] innocentait presque l'enfant, auquel elle avait mordu dans ce réveil d'appétit, ainsi qu'on mord au premier fruit vert, volé sur la route" (341). Thus, not only does sex equal food, but deviant incestuous sex represents poison, "le poison de leur accouplement" (341) in the desperate and bitter thoughts of M. Hennebeau. Mme Hennebeau's comments on the reigning "moeurs patriarcales" (125) in the mining community may therefore be seen as the ultimate representation of bourgeois hypocrisy and as an ironic example of the class-based transfer of sexual values that Zola triggers. Similarly, the author's use of the word "naturellement" to describe the inevitability of Mme Hennebeau and Paul's affair ("Naturellement, un soir, il se trouva dans ses bras" [213]) might well be taken as an

ironic tongue-in-cheek aside, with naturalism being the butt of the joke. In no way does the novelist consider this incestuous relationship to be anything less than sordid and perverse and he places the bulk of the blame upon the shoulders of a "femme oisive et finie" (213). To underscore his contempt for Mme Hennebeau and her predatory bourgeois hypocrisy, Zola even has her lean against a trough when she and the others take refuge in a barn from the rampaging miners. Of course, it is also she who recognizes Maigrat's mutilated penis as being a piece of pork. Assuredly, the porcine connection is clear.

Incest also casts a shadow across Catherine and Etienne's relationship. Since Etienne moves in to the Maheu household as a boarder following the departure of the Maheus' eldest son, Zacharie--who moves out in order to marry Philomène Levaque--we view Etienne's moving in as the replacement of the old son through the adoption of a new son. Maheu and La Maheude become Etienne's surrogate parents, while Catherine becomes his symbolic sister, herself a hard-working member of the great fraternity of workers. As co-worker and roommate Catherine is much like a sisterly comrade for Etienne. It is no wonder that the two of them feel so much shame and embarrassment when undressing before bed or that they pay lip service to being simply friends. Indeed, even though Etienne comes to consider the idea of making love with Catherine to be "toute naturelle et d'une exécution facile" (400) after having fought and beaten

Chaval in hand-to-hand combat, there is still some ineffable wall between them, an obstacle which only serves to further delay their first sexual encounter together: "Une pudeur les sépara, cette pudeur ancienne où il y avait de la colère, une vague répugnance et beaucoup d'amitié" (401). Once again, Zola combines the notions of sex and death in the single word "exécution". Are we to consider Catherine's death after finally having engaged in long-delayed sexual intercourse with Etienne as being an execution, the "logical" punishment for incest? Knowing that Catherine and Etienne's feelings for each other remain too fraternal for Eros to take hold during almost the entire novel, such would seem to be the case. The obstacles which remain largely insurmountable are Etienne's own political determination and ambition, into which a large part of his sexual energies is sublimated, as well as both brotherly and sisterly resistance to symbolic incest. Perhaps it is the nineteenth century literary critic Jules Lemaitre's own aversion to incest that explains his disappointment with regard to Catherine and Etienne's lovemaking: "And I would prefer that he had not become her lover, the instinctive modesty which they felt in one another's presence being almost the sole vestige of higher humanity which the writer has allowed to exist in his bestial poem".²⁵ But, as Henri Mitterand notes with reference to the incestuous component in Etienne and Catherine's relationship,

le désir qui naît entre les deux jeunes gens ne peut être désormais qu'un désir incestueux. Soeur, Catherine ne peut être amante. Maheu . . . est en même temps un obstacle infranchissable à l'accomplissement du désir. Pour que l'ombre de l'inceste, et son interdit, disparaissent, il faut que Maheu meure. C'est lui qui empêche Etienne de toucher Catherine, et non pas Chaval.²⁶

Thus incest represents one of the key elements in Catherine and Etienne's mutual erotic inaccessibility, an inaccessibility which further strengthens the novel's already powerful sexual drama.

There are also allusions to symbolic incest between Etienne and La Maheude, even though these rumors are presumably spread by La Pierronne who, as we know, has her own hidden erotic agenda. It is as if Zola included this possibility of Oedipal incest to add to the long list of temptations with which Etienne is confronted along the road to becoming truly messianic. In the words of La Maheude, "après la mort de mon homme, ça aurait très bien pu arriver, si j'avais été plus jeune, n'est-ce pas? Mais aujourd'hui, j'aime mieux que ça ne se soit pas fait, car nous en aurions du regret pour sûr" (498). The simple acknowledgement from both La Maheude and Etienne that such incestuous behavior could only lead to misery indicates the degree to which they hold moral and erotic superiority over Paul Négrel and Mme Hennebeau, their bourgeois counterparts in this incestuous regard. Etienne and the Maheus--with the exception of Jeanlin and Bonnemort--are working-class characters mysteriously endowed with stereotypical middle-class sexual

attributes.

An even blacker shadow is cast in Germinal by the spectres of androgyny and homosexuality. It is Zola's unwritten belief that androgyny, as personified by Souvarine the ruthless anarchist, is itself a form of disturbing sexual anarchy which poses a grave threat to the established patriarchal social order. Moreover, androgyny also besets Catherine and Etienne's relationship, especially at the beginning of the novel. In fact, both of them are described in terms of the opposite sex as when, for example, Etienne mistakes Catherine for a young boy during his first day in the mine. That Catherine, if only by virtue of her physical immaturity and her abysmal working conditions, should at times resemble a young male is not in itself surprising. As Maarten Van Buuren mentions, in political terms "la solidarité fraternelle efface même la différence homme/femme, qui est toujours, chez Zola, une source de discordes potentielles."²⁷ What is interesting in Etienne's personal reaction to the slippery gender of Catherine is the fact that androgyny seems to be a lure for his erotic interest. Throughout the novel this phenomenon serves to heighten characters' frustrations, to increase sexual tensions, and to cast doubts on people's sexual desires. Epicenism is shown either as an optical illusion, an obstacle to be surmounted, or as a semi-innate physical condition which represents subversive and deviant political dedication linked to the destructive side of Nature.

Androgyny may be a "natural" deviation in that hermaphroditism is widespread in the animal and plant kingdoms, but it is nevertheless on the same Germinalian scale as a murderous earthquake or a deadly typhoon, both of which constitute entirely "natural" yet highly destructive phenomena. In this sense, androgyny would appear to be an area of profound distress for Zola the man and Zola the author since he promotes it to the rank of literary superstition.

Zola projects this notion of superstition into the thoughts of his protagonist Etienne when he first glimpses Catherine in the mining pit: "Quand il aperçut . . . Catherine avec son air doux de garçon, l'idée superstitieuse lui vint de risquer une dernière demande" (52). What does Zola find so superstitious about Etienne's simple enquiry about work? There is nothing obvious in the text to suggest that this choice of words is anything less than eccentric, such as, for example, having Catherine be the thirteenth person to enter the elevator in the mine or indeed any other such superstitious cliché exemplifying irrational fears. Perhaps it is because Etienne is lucky enough to chance upon someone of approximately the same age, approximately the same size, and at least initially approximately the same sex that he is emboldened to ask for a job against the odds. In this way, Catherine's androgyny would be in parallel with Etienne's own struggle to prove himself a man. What better way to romantically link a young couple both unsure of their

respective erotic paths?

The rest of Part I, Chapter 3 represents the progressive sharpening of a projected image. In Etienne's mind Catherine starts out as a boy and it is not until the very end of the chapter that this misconception is corrected. In fact, reference is made by Maheu in the same chapter to the Company's wish to start replacing females with male workers in the mine; presumably this is an attempt by Zola at sociological verisimilitude since female mine labor was eventually banned in France.²⁸ But this convenient and timely reference of Maheu's is in accord with our belief in the ephemerality of Catherine's gender: Not only is Etienne replacing "la grande Fleurance" (53) in terms of employment, but he too is subjected to some intermediacy in gender. We note in particular Zola's description of Etienne hard at work in the mine after his brief apprenticeship: "Sa petite taille lui permettait de se glisser partout, et ses bras avaient beau être fins et blancs comme ceux d'une femme, ils paraissaient en fer sous la peau délicate, tellement ils menaient rudement la besogne" (152). Etienne is not unfamiliar with the physical demands of backbreaking work; we conclude that any physical signs of androgyny in him are thus manifestations of an integral part of his character. Indeed, Zola goes to some trouble to make his meaning explicit and unequivocal: Etienne's arms may look like a woman's but they are in fact steely and powerful. He may seem effeminate in comparison

with Antoine Chaval or Toussaint Maheu but the author's intent is only to tease the reader with such notions of dual sexuality since the novel, read on a superficial level, is the political account of a young man's quest for heroic status. The slightest suggestion of androgyny in this hero serves to make his final triumph in virile manhood that much more glorious. Endowed with a greater degree of sensitivity and insight than his comrades, Etienne is in this way a more attractive protagonist.

Chapter 3 of Part I may in actual fact be interpreted as an account of Etienne's quest for Catherine's true sexual identity. After she indicates that Etienne is about to be hired on, he shakes her hand with joy, saying "vous êtes un bon bougre, par exemple!" (54). Catherine's reaction to this case of mistaken gender is one of amusement, similar to Etienne's amused smile at the sight of the extrabuxom La Mouquette and the widow Désir. This is one of the few moments in the novel where a character is indeed able to laugh off aspersions of gender confusion, however erroneous; it is also one of the few occasions where Catherine is secure in her own physical sexuality. (At this point in the narrative Catherine has yet to become involved with Chaval, and is still a virgin.) Compare this nonchalance on her part with her reaction near the end of the novel, after Etienne has fought and beaten Chaval at the Avantage and where Catherine declares her worthlessness: "Tu [Etienne] ne perds pas grand-chose, si tu savais, quelle patraque je

suis, guère plus grosse que deux sous de beurre, si mal fichue que je ne deviendrai jamais une femme, bien sûr!" (401). Catherine has come full circle, from gender-related indifference and amusement to self-flagellating guilt. It is as if she mistakenly blames herself for her environmentally-retarded physical immaturity.

Even when Etienne is pressed closely against Catherine during the descent into the pit, he is unable to interpret her bodily warmth as that of a female: "Qu'as-tu sous la peau, à être chaud comme ça?" (57). It is not until the ascent at the end of the workday that Etienne finally brushes against Catherine's budding breasts, realizing that she is in fact a boyish-looking girl in mining garb. When Catherine exclaims: "Mais oui... Vrai! tu y a mis le temps!" (61), it is as if she has been a riddle to which Etienne must find a workable solution; it is as if his initiation into the subterranean world of hell-fire and bestial working conditions necessitated a simultaneous introduction to the mysteries of the androgyne. The disturbing implication here is that, in general, the androgynous figure is inherently a bestial and hellish one--corresponding to the working conditions underground--and that the androgynous woman, in particular, is a monstrous yet fascinating subject. In this regard, one of Anna Krakowski's primary conclusions in her landmark feminist study of Zola's works is that "cette attribution au sexe féminin des facultés et dispositions du sexe masculin

est à la base de toute sa conception de la femme."²⁹ Zola seems much more willing to toy with female than with male androgyny; it is as if he, as a man, felt a profound yet disturbing attraction to the masculine side of sexual fantasies.

Catherine's boyishness, although troubling to Etienne, also serves to heighten his erotic interest in her as a person: "Ces vêtements de garçon, cette veste et cette culotte sur cette chair de fille, l'excitaient et le gênaient" (70). The lure of the androgyne represents an additional temptation for Etienne to overcome since he does have the latent propensity for homoerotic arousal. His triumphant murder of Chaval--in self-defense--and his subsequent prise de possession of Catherine indicate that in order for Etienne to attain heroic status and true manhood, he must repudiate sexual deviance in his own life by killing his (homo)sexual rival and engaging in fully procreative heterosexual intercourse. Female androgyny is shown to be an "unnatural" result of having women perform tasks more easily performed by males; it is as if Zola were condemning an exploitative capitalist practice with sinister overtones of gender confusion and, consequently, sterility. We feel secure in stating that within the Germinalian universe, the sterilization of a female character must be viewed both as a highly symbolic and tragic act, and as a warning of the possible sterilization and eventual disappearance of the "race" in question, the working class. In contrast, La

Mouquette, who succeeds in maintaining her hyperfeminine physique despite her own work in the mine--albeit less physically demanding work than Catherine's--is one of the few exceptions to this Zolian rule. Her sexuality is so resolute and overt that even La Maheude, the Great Proletarian Mother who is virtually forced underground after the death of her husband, looks "lamentable dans ses vêtements d'homme" (495). In this case, Zola seems to be lamenting the harsh reality of poverty within a single-parent family and one woman's attempt to overcome it.

Most of our discussion of Dansaert and La Pierronne's interclass relationship follows in Chapter Four, but it seems appropriate to mention the reaction of the gossip-prone miners to the illicit affair of Dansaert and La Pierronne. It is the latter who does most of the necessary dissembling and lying, going so far as to declare one day that she is going off to visit her female cousin in Marchiennes. As Zola so wryly notes, "on plaisantait, car on la connaissait, la cousine; elle avait des moustaches, elle était maître porion au Voreux" (163). Again, androgyny albeit in banal and humorous guise is equated with sexual impropriety and deviousness. On the whole, it is this concept of deviousness which primarily characterizes the deviant in matters of gender.

It is in fact owing to the deviousness and surreptitiousness of Souvarine the androgynous anarchist that the industrial operations at the Montsou mines are

brought to a crashing halt. In the same way that Zola frequently uses the adjective "grand" to describe Chaval and the term "serré" when mentioning M. Hennebeau, that is relentlessly focusing on the one trait that differentiates a particular character, the novelist is also unremitting in his use of androgynous epithets to describe the physical traits of Souvarine the machinist. "[U]n air de fille" (155), "son visage de fille blonde" (246), "ses mains délicates" (248), and "sa face blonde de fille" (392) are only some of the ambiguous phrases that the author uses to drive home this point. Souvarine is androgynous, has no time for "normal" sexual relations or marriage, and has but one focus, extermination. His personality may not even be situated within the neutral realm of sterility since he is actively and shamelessly exterminatory, hell-bent on razing to the ground not only all the vestiges of monopolistic capitalism's infrastructure, but also all those people foolish or helpless enough to become the cogs in the wheels of such industrial exploitation.

As asexual hero, Souvarine is a maniacal threat to the various pillars of patriarchal and industrial society, most of which are supported by Zola. The novelist once again establishes a fixed link between the appearance and physical reality of his characters, and their inner motivations and subsequent acts. Most of the characters in Germinal are indeed like books that are partially judgeable by their covers. It is only when Zola's figures approach heroic

status that they assume the complexity of personality which gives rise to literary verisimilitude.

Despite these frequent manipulations by Zola of two-dimensional characterizations--the never-ending fury of La Brûlé or the middle-of-the-road level-headedness of Rasseneur--some depth is given to Souvarine's anarchistic tendencies. Souvarine's erotic point of departure is the heartbreak resulting from the execution of his former wife-in-anarchy, Annouchka, hanged for her role in the bombing of a railway line used by the Russian Emperor. Souvarine draws the questionable conclusion that her execution is the result of antierotic cosmic vengeance as a result of having betrayed the cause of political subversion, rather than being the expression of society's contempt for bloody terrorism: "C'était notre punition. . . . Nous étions coupables de nous aimer" (438). Souvarine goes on to formulate his own version of anti-eroticism in even clearer terms: "Quand il y avait une femme dans le coeur d'un homme, l'homme était fini, il pouvait mourir" (445). Anarchy is not simply an existence of chaste sterility led by an antierotic eunuch: Instead, it is the active expression of the forces of entropic destruction that are busy at work in Germinal. Souvarine is himself a parallel manifestation of the destructive side of Gaea, in much the same way as La Brûlé represents a human incarnation of terrestrial bloodthirstiness. Consequently, Souvarine's act of sabotage is also in parallel with Maigrat's emasculation.

The industrial saboteur in effect castrates and emasculates the crucial machinery of industry, blind to the human suffering accompanying the immobilization of the machine: "Ah! rien, ni parents, ni femme, ni ami! rien qui fasse trembler la main, le jour où il faudra prendre la vie des autres ou donner la sienne!" (438).

We also note that it is not until between three and four o'clock in the afternoon that the mining infrastructure sabotaged by Souvarine actually begins to be consumed by the very earth into which it is dug. Is it coincidence that Biblical accounts of Christ's crucifixion give the same hour as the time at which Jesus actually died on the Cross? Perhaps Zola sees the almighty Machine as an economic Messiah for profit-centered industry; according to this conjecture, Souvarine's immolation of the mining equipment has resonances of capitalist crucifixion.

Zola paints as inspired a portrait of the death of the Machine-as-Savior as he does of the budding pregnant Earth at the conclusion of the novel:

[A]u fond de sa chambre éventrée, on apercevait la machine, assise carrément sur son massif de maçonnerie: les cuivres luisaient, les gros membres d'acier avaient un air de muscles indestructibles, l'énorme bielle, repliée en l'air, ressemblait au puissant genou d'un géant, couché et tranquille dans sa force. . . . Des détonations souterraines éclataient, toute une artillerie monstrueuse canonnant le gouffre. . . . Et l'on vit la machine, disloquée sur son massif, les membres écartelés, lutter contre la mort: elle marcha, elle détendit sa bielle, son genou de géante, comme pour se lever; mais elle expirait, broyée, engloutie. Seule, la haute cheminée de trente mètres restait debout, secouée, pareille à un mât dans l'ouragan. On croyait qu'elle allait

s'émietter et voler en poudre, lorsque, tout d'un coup, elle s'enfonça d'un bloc, bue par la terre, fondue ainsi qu'un cierge colossal: et rien ne dépassait, pas même la pointe du paratonnerre.
(458)

Even a cursory and superficial examination of the above passage reveals the desperate presence of the Monster lurking behind (or within) a highly erotic Machine. This is Zolian anthropomorphism at its finest. From the use of "membres" to describe the machine's projections to the obvious "muscles" and the direct comparison to the "puissant genou" of a giant--Zola uses both "géant" and "géante" in the above quotation--, the author is finally showing his hand. The great god of capital may indeed reside in some remote locale like Paris, but its Minotaur-like, ogreish terrestrial henchman is very much in the physical here and the immediate now. Furthermore, the presence of so many obvious phallic symbols--"la bielle", "la haute cheminée", "le mât", and "le paratonnerre"--leads us to conclude that, at least on an erotic level, the voracious machine suffers much the same fate as the voracious and venal Maigrat. This is but one example of Zola's brilliant erotic logic and symmetry as they are applied throughout the novel. Similar crimes merit similar punishments. In this case, the corrupted promiscuity of both man and machine engender the finality of castration. Souvarine the emasculator fulfills his role of anarchistic judge and moralist. His, however, is not a passive, hands-off sterility like that of the prototypically bourgeois Grégoire family but rather a

vicious damn-the-consequences act of social terrorism which he likens to a necessary sacrifice meant to appease Gaea and bring about an overdue renewal of the Earth: "Oh! du sang, murmura-t-il, qu'est-ce que ça fait? la terre en a besoin" (247). Compare this with Zola's description of the fate that befalls Nicolas Maheu, Bonnemort's own grandfather: "Nicolas Maheu dit le Rouge, âgé de quarante ans à peine, était resté dans le Voreux, que l'on fonçait en ce temps-là: un éboulement, un aplatissement complet, le sang bu et les os avalés par les roches" (37-38). Is the death of Nicolas the (blood-)Red merely an early sacrifice to monstrous capital or does this blood-letting indeed have a dual nature? Zola refers to "cent six ans d'abattage" (38) as being the encapsulated genealogical history of the Maheu clan. The author's use of "abattage" is revealing since the term is conveniently multivocal in French, meaning the slaughter of animals, the felling of trees, and the physical extracting of mineral resources. Zola is simultaneously able to refer to 106 years of exploitative industry and 106 years of human sacrifice and suffering, and the two concepts are inextricably linked.

In mythical terms we are dealing with two monsters: the ogre of capital in conjunction and in confrontation with the monstrously destructive yet purificatory aspects of Gaea. As Zola shows, in the end there can be no contest: Man-made monsters cannot hope to win against the "monstrous" forces of expurgation and depuration at work within the

Earth itself.

Souvarine's own monstrousness stems from his physical androgyny; yet we find it difficult to extend this androgynous duality into the different but related realms of bi- and homosexuality. It is true that Souvarine's own physical androgyny is paralleled by his attitudes towards women: "La femme était pour lui un garçon, un camarade, quand elle avait la fraternité et le courage d'un homme" (156). But his attitude is more one of total indifference to sexuality than it is to one of potential homoeroticism. Also, we must keep in mind the soothing effect that the constant companionship of the rabbit Pologne has on Souvarine. In fact, it is through the rabbit that he is shown as sensitive to female warmth and comfort, despite his ideological protestations to the contrary. Female animal charms serve to attenuate some of the more gruesome and frightening aspects of Souvarine's persona which come to the fore when his anarchistic principles are put to the test: "En parlant, Souvarine devenait terrible. Une extase le soulevait sur sa chaise, une flamme mystique sortait de ses yeux pâles, et ses mains délicates étreignaient le bord de la table, à la briser" (248). Zola again refers to human eyes as being windows looking into a hellish inner fire and just as Etienne's arms are likened to those of a female, albeit while having the hidden power of steel, so too are Souvarine's hands called delicate, even though they have the necessary strength to break a table or saw through mining

equipment. We prefer to interpret Souvarine's inner fire as being the hell created by all-consuming revenge rather than the hell of Tartarus which specifically burns for those "vilaines filles" (70) guilty of homosexual acts. Zola's allusion to Souvarine's strength and intensity is meant not only to lend credence to his subsequent intricately performed act of sabotage, but also to provide a psychologically masculine counterpoint to his physical effeminacy. In the words of Carol Fuller, this psychosexual complexity serves to underscore "a curious symbiotic relationship of opposing figures--rabbit and anarchist, creator and destroyer."³⁰

A final proof of Souvarine's destructive asexuality is his relationship with the depraved Jeanlin, who is the first to consider eating Pologne, an action which Souvarine himself eventually performs. Jeanlin is described as suddenly overcome by the desire to totally consume and cannibalistically annihilate this symbol of female vulnerability and fertility: "une convoitise lui venait de l'emporter et de la manger" (280). However, Souvarine does react with dismay upon hearing that Pologne is actually in the stew without his knowledge and that he is inadvertently helping to eat the one living creature with which he still maintained seminormal relations. Symbolically, however, Souvarine as devourer of the novel's primary fertility symbol is entirely in keeping with his function of apocalyptic and antifertile anarchist. It is through the

vulnerable feminine fertility of Pologne that Jeanlin and Souvarine are linked.

Clearly, then, we as readers cannot help but recognize the Zolian picture of androgyne as highly dangerous subversive. As Colin Smethurst states,

Souvarine, like Etienne, walks out of the novel at the end. He has been responsible for the cataclysm and by the very enormity of his act has taken on mythical proportions. By his implied continued presence in society and the total mystery of his ultimate destination he represents most clearly the figure intended to induce the shudder Zola wanted the middle-class reader to experience.³¹

Within and even beyond this mysterious danger of the sexually ambiguous we encounter the even more dangerously and negatively-charged condition of the true homosexual, an erotic orientation that the author refuses to name directly or describe in any detail whatsoever. In the words of Naomi Schor, "Zola, that fearless iconoclast, drew the line at overt representations of male homosexuality. . . . [t]hus Zola's women are connected with the author's (latent) homosexuality in two ways: first, male homosexuality is transcoded into female homosexuality; second, the women separate the men from the men."³² It is only through a process of allusion and implication that Zola manages to weave the homosexual strand into his narrative. It is because of this uncharacteristic Zolian sexual circumspection--in some ways highly ironic within such an erotically-centered novel, yet, in other ways vitally necessary--that the reader is obliged to undertake an

unconscious process of textual transcoding and decoding in order to gain insight into the author's attitude towards homosexuality in Germinal.

The characteristics of the geographical setting of the Montsou mine provide us with the first clues necessary for a homoerotic reading of parts of the novel, which opens with a chilling description of the wintry and fallow landscape of the mining country of northern France. It is an introduction to "la plaine rase" (31), bleak, black, and God-forsaken. The author immediately creates resonances with the Biblical account of God's destruction of the ancient cities of Sodom and Gomorrha, ostensibly as a result of sexual misconduct.³³ These are also cities on a plain, cities which according to traditionally narrow Biblical interpretation were razed because of immoral erotic depravity. The sterile and foreboding mise en scène which introduces the narrative is Zola's way of saying that this is indeed a place of wickedness, too. From the very outset, homosexuality, the "crime" of Sodom, and moral wickedness are equated in much the same way in Germinal as they are in the Old Testament.

This cities of the plain motif is repeated throughout the novel. For example, Zola refers to a wave of people being like so many ants, "perdues dans la nudité rase de la plaine" (168); the erotic connection between nudity and punishment is made clear in this instance. After the massacre at the hands of the Emperor's troops, the priest

Ranvier "appelait sur les assassins la colère de Dieu . . . [et] la prochaine extermination de la bourgeoisie par le feu de ciel" (422). Here, retribution is specifically linked to bourgeois idleness, excess, and inhumanity. Finally, the flooded Voreux mine is compared to "ces lacs sous lesquels dorment des villes maudites" (459). In this case, not only is cosmic punishment also reminiscent of the Flood--itself a divine punishment for human wickedness--, but divine vengeance has swung from the general to the highly specific, from the whole country shown in hibernal mourning to the Voreux mine as a lightning rod for God's sulphurous wrath. How then may we account for the anomaly existing between retribution following (homo)sexual depravity and retribution taken as a result of industrial indifference to environmental rape and destruction?

What we must take into account is "le coup de bestialité qui soufflait dans la fosse" (66), this feral primitivism which further reduces the working-class to the rank of brutes. The human beast is aroused and provoked by the unwillingness of the Company to take the workers' physical, psychological, and moral well-being into consideration. Zola's question, although left unposed, is this: How can industry spend such staggering sums on development and capital investments, and so little on the people who give their lives in (and for) the mines. Why do mechanical resources take such precedence over human ones? It is in this way that industrial indifference gives

simultaneous rise to brutal human passions as well as to cosmic fury. Do the workers slide of their own accord into degeneracy, of which homosexuality is both Biblical and Germinalian symbol, or are they dragged into debauchery by the poisonous system that enslaves them so completely? In "Les Rougon-Macquart" d'Emile Zola, Maarten Van Buuren concludes that social degeneracy was at the heart of much of Zola's erotic ethos: "Le changement de sexe symbolise en premier lieu la dégénérescence que Zola considère comme caractéristique de l'époque du Second Empire."³⁴ We assume that a change of sexual orientation would be consistent with this Zolian philosophy of degeneracy.

Gaea's rebellion in Germinal is indeed directly attributable to industrial excess: "sous le ciel livide, dans le jour bas de cet après-midi d'hiver, il semblait que tout le noir du Voreux, toute la poussière volante de la houille se fût abattue sur la plaine, poudrant les arbres, sablant les routes, ensemençant la terre" (90). It is in this passage that coal dust, the seed or sperm of the male-force mining operation, is sown/driven into the barren female earth. Yet this is not the procreative and milky-white sperm that we as humans know. Instead, this is machine seed, the blackened and oily soot of pulverized coal, prevalent and carbonous but ultimately poisonous and cancerous. This is the squalid heart of perversion within the Germinalian cosmos; it is as if industrial fecal by-products were supplanting natural human creative juices in a

ritualized and bloody rape of the Earth's crust. It is thus a cold and bestial wind that attempts to drive this misguided pollutant into the temporarily dormant planet.

This is how the "coup de bestialité" is able to reach into the mines and distort the behavior of the miners in general and the cartgirls in particular. Just as the miners suffer from a whole panoply of physical ailments because of their exposure to coal dust and noxious fumes, so too is this poisonous presence reflected in acts of "stunted" or non-procreative sexuality. It is for this reason that Zola creates the Tartaret region of Montsou, the Germinalian equivalent of the Greek mythological hell of hells, Tartarus, located as far below Hades as the Earth is from Heaven, and bounded by the burning stream Phlegethon, a river of metallic fire:

Le Tartaret, à la lisière du bois, était une lande inculte, d'une stérilité volcanique, sous laquelle, depuis des siècles, brûlait une mine de houille incendiée. Cela se perdait dans la légende, des mineurs du pays racontaient une histoire: le feu du ciel tombant sur cette Sodome des entrailles de la terre, où les herscheuses se souillaient d'abominations; si bien qu'elles n'avaient pas même eu le temps de remonter, et qu'aujourd'hui encore, elles flambaient au fond de cet enfer. Les roches calcinées, rouge sombre, se couvraient d'une efflorescence d'alun, comme d'une lèpre. Du soufre poussait, en une fleur jaune, au bord des fissures. La nuit, les braves qui osaient risquer un oeil à ces trous, juraient y voir des flammes, les âmes criminelles en train de grésiller dans la braise intérieure. Des lueurs errantes couraient au ras du sol, des vapeurs chaudes, empoisonnant l'ordure et la sale cuisine du diable, fumaient continuellement. Et, ainsi qu'un miracle d'éternel printemps, au milieu de cette lande maudite du Tartaret, la Côte-Verte se dressait avec ses gazons toujours verts, ses hêtres dont les feuilles se renouvelaient sans

cesse, ses champs où mûrissaient jusqu'à trois récoltes. C'était une serre naturelle, chauffée par l'incendie des couches profondes. Jamais la neige n'y séjournait. L'énorme bouquet de verdure, à côté des arbres dépouillés de la forêt, s'épanouissait dans cette journée de décembre, sans que la gelée en eût même roussi les bords.
(303)

Zola uses this passage to make the Sodom-Tartaret connection quite plain. As Van Buuren has pointed out, "ce passage est l'un des rares endroits où le contenu mythique apparaît à la surface thématique du roman, au lieu d'être refoulé au niveau métaphorique."³⁵ However, it is upon descriptions of a specifically female Gomorrha that the author actually focuses. Either male homosexuality as a period taboo would have been too "shocking" for Zola's predominately male readership to contemplate, or else the choice of females as homosexual "victims" is made to show how industrial wastes have metaphorically inverted the child-bearing portion of humanity. The "coup de bestialité" has thus led women into the temptation of "choses qu'on n'osait pas répéter" (306). Zola's use of the words "souillaient", "abominations", "lèpre", "criminelles", "enfer", and "diable" indicates a moral agenda according to which homosexuality is equated with filth, disease, criminality, and diabolism. This depiction of hellish punishment specifically meted out for lesbians goes beyond mere description of women who have turned their backs on strictly procreative sexual practices and instead verges on the judgmental and the paranoid. In reality, Zola did in fact harbor some irrational fears

towards (male) homosexuals, perhaps explaining his eagerness to condemn homosexuality in females through transcoding: "J'en ai rencontré dans le monde, et j'éprouve à leur serrer la main une répulsion instinctive que j'ai quelque peine à dominer."³⁶ It is clear that same-sex love is one of the most grievous "crimes" to be judged in the Germinalian courtroom. It is as if the expression of human homosexuality were in defiance of both the Christian God and of Gaea herself. As such, homosexuality is especially vulnerable to Zolian vitriolic excess. Philippe Lejeune's analysis of the description of Le Tartaret quoted above refers to the "germ" within Nature: "Le germe n'est plus le grain fécond, mais le microbe ou le virus qu'il faut extirper."³⁷ M. Lejeune's metaphorical treatment is apt, yet he fails to isolate the implicit Zolian connection between homosexuality and moral "sickness" and "degeneracy". His analysis of Le Tartaret and La Côte-Verte is thus timid and critically circumspect: despite Zola's direct reference to Sodom, Lejeune does not even broach the subject of homosexuality.

Despite this eagerly homophobic vindictiveness on the part of the novelist--perhaps owing to Zola having been homosexually assaulted as a very young boy³⁸--the moral "aberration" of homosexuality is paralleled by the "unnatural" geophysical anomaly of La Côte-Verte, the small region of boundless fertility which remains leafy and green even as the neighboring fields lay deep in snow. La Côte-Verte is

located directly above the underground inferno of Le Tartaret in much the same way as the Christian Heaven is above Hell or as Mount Olympus is "above" Hades. It is indeed the apogee of Zolian symbolism when the prime example of natural terrestrial fertility and redemption is superposed upon the nether regions of human sexual depravity: fertility thus emancipates the decadent dweller of barren hell. This "green" region is not only the novelist's way of lending a degree of geographical verisimilitude to his literary setting,³⁹ but may be Zola's way of providing salvation for his characters, no matter how bent they are. In the end, however, Zola is all too conscious of homosexuality's equivocal heritage of moralistic repression, fear, and ignorance, and refuses to push his erotic radicalism (or iconoclasm) into overt descriptions--let alone a defense--of homosexual love.

It is ignorance which also typifies many Germinalian characters' attitudes towards promiscuity; in fact, there exists a clearly defined split in terms of values held by different social classes on this subject. In the same way that lesbianism is a manifestation of human "perversity" and suffering, so too is promiscuity primarily attributable to the deliberate overcrowding of miners and their families in tiny apartments "qui sentent le bétail humain" (40). The famous "coup de bestialité" gives rise not only to latent homoerotic impulses, but also refers to "le désir subit du mâle lorsqu'un mineur rencontrait une de ces filles à quatre

pattes" (66-67); once again, "pattes" reinforces the Zolian notion of human erotic animality. This animality is also evidenced by the promiscuous sharing of toilet facilities: "La révoltante promiscuité s'aggravait, avec l'empoisonnement des haleines, l'ordure des besoins satisfaits en commun" (482). Overall, promiscuity and overcrowding may either be symptoms of human suffering--especially when spreading disease--, an obvious indication of boundless libido--as in the cases of La Mouquette and the widow Désir--, or a manifestation of corruption and depravity--as with Maigrat and, to a slightly lesser extent, Mme Hennebeau. Promiscuity, however, does not necessarily imply or guarantee fertility. One could argue that La Mouquette is shot "dans le ventre" (421) because, although sexually hyperactive, she fails to prove her fertility by giving birth. In all of these scenarios, however, the Zolian sexual ethic of heterosexual nondeviance through monogamy reigns supreme. Promiscuity is immature and second best since it is only sanctioned by Zola in its youthful experimental phase as a prelude to the commitment of marriage.

It is through Zola's complex analyses and depictions of human sexual deviance that the Germinalian universe unfolds. These deviations are symptomatic of an industrial society in decline, operating without principles and guided solely by the maximization of profits at great human cost. It is also through Zola's contradictory picture of human sexual foibles

that his own contradictory nature as a moralist is unveiled. While he shows himself to be liberal and innovative on some occasions--especially in his joyful portraits of youthful sexual abandon--, on other occasions he seems even more conservative and repressed than his contemporaries in nineteenth century French society, as evinced by his harsh allusions to homosexual suffering. Zola sees the phenomenon of sexual deviance and the attainment of sexual freedom as ultimately being regulated more by the creative and destructive elements of Mother Nature than by the legal strictures of Judaeo-Christian culture. Sexual acts of deviance tend towards the sterile, the unfertile, or the antifertile. These non-procreative acts are performed by asexuals, bisexuals, homosexuals, androgynes, adulterers, and those guilty of incestuous conduct; they incite the wrath of Gaea even though these actions are very often the result of Germinalian human adaptations to a poisonous and industrial world. Similarly, prostitution is a symbolic manifestation of female subjugation to patriarchal desire. Adultery is the preserve of the desperate and the loveless, couched mainly in terms of female revenge against male impotence or weakness of will. Incest is a fundamental human temptation; androgyny is indicative of monstrous deviousness, inner weakness, or "unnatural" female strength; and homosexuality is linked to the abhorrent practices of hell-destined sinners. Promiscuity, although ritually sanctioned as a fertility rite, is symptomatic of the

mammalian de-evolution of humankind. Zola's picture of erotic deviance is diverse, contradictory, largely negative, and virtually complete. Mitterand maintains that criticisms of the novel's own deviance or scandalousness are only correct insofar as the novel does shatter the complacency of bourgeois morality, primarily

parce que son topos guerrier et cataclysmique détruit le doxa des représentations admises, les espérances de pacification sociale, le silence sur la lutte des classes. Il arrache le lecteur à toute sécurité durable, tout autant qu'il le fait jouir de n'avoir eu peur qu'en rêve.⁴⁸

Through his revolutionary portraits of human sexual deviance from idealized behavior, Zola proves himself to be a skilled manipulator of human neuroses and fears.

CHAPTER FOUR

EROTICISM AND CLASS REVOLUTION

Germinal is about the revolution of the working-class--as represented by a group of striking coalminers--against the long-standing tyranny of the bourgeoisie. What gives this rebellion a particular quality is the undercurrent of eroticism that permeates almost all of Zola's characters and settings. As a member of the middle class, the author would presumably be hard pressed not to let his own class perceptions and biases color his narrative. In fact, it is very much in keeping with his own social standing that Zola paints a picture of such outrageous bourgeois consumerism, materialism, and sterility, and that the author creates such a long list of pugnacious and vulgar characterizations to round out his representation of the oppressed working class. What is most surprising is Zola's insistence on transferring stereotypical bourgeois sexual values to some of his proletarian characters. In this regard, at least, Zola is truly revolutionary. As Hugh Kenner observes:

When you said "bourgeois" in the nineteenth century, you were letting irritation show. It was the word for people you disliked, who were inferior to you but not inferior enough. So "bourgeois" came to mean all that Matthew Arnold meant by "philistine," and more. It became an all purpose slur.

Like the tree toad and the swamp adder, the "bourgeois" is named for his habitat, the "bourg"; he's an urban irritant, like the traffic jam. Whether affluent or threadbare, hearty or pale, he institutionalizes mediocrity. The satisfactions he craves, erotic or aesthetic, will be above all undemanding, reassuring.

It is not only different social classes that are in conflict in Zola's novel but the erotic codes to which these classes subscribe are themselves opposed, although not always as diametrically. Despite the vast differences in sexual behavior demonstrated within the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, there also exist great personal differences within each social group and there is some overlap between their divergent erotic systems, thereby creating the human commonality which affords Etienne Lantier the opportunity of rising above the social limitations of his working-class origins. At the same time, although several bourgeois characters fail to repudiate the material advantages enjoyed in life, they do attempt to cross the erotic divide separating the two classes. One of Zola's primary theses in Germinal is that the processes of embourgeoisement/déclassement are virtually impossible to complete, at least in erotic terms. In this sense, the author is an erotic "segregationist" who works under the assumption that this gulf shall never be bridged in any real or lasting way.

Zola shows the reader of his novel into a universe fraught with paradoxes. On a deeper level, the quest for freedom undertaken by the miners is also an unconscious search for erotic transcendence or, conversely, liberation from the prison of eroticism. Zola shows many of the miners obsessed with sex, promiscuously satisfying their amorous desires like so many animals in heat, whenever and wherever the feeling strikes them. In comparison, the bourgeois characters in the novel on the whole have much greater mobility, broader educational and cultural opportunities, vastly more extensive financial resources and much more effective political representation than the working class. Yet, as if to offset this embarrassment of riches, the bourgeoisie is either sexually repressed to a very high degree or erotically perverse and corrupt. These middle-class characters are shown as prisoners in their own right, trapped by sterile consumerism and banal relationships. In some ironic ways, they are less free--"naturally" speaking--than the proletariat they ostensibly oppress and imprison.

There are two phenomena to be reconciled: first, the bourgeoisie looks upon the working class as exacting the revenge of the cradle by multiplying indiscriminately, not only out of ignorance, but also out of the sheer unconscious desire to become numerically predominant; second, premature motherhood was one of the primary causes of poverty in the nineteenth century (and in fact continues to be so in the inner cities of North America today), contributing to fatigue, illness, overcrowding, apathy, and violence amongst

poor families. How do we resolve the difference between bourgeois fears of the revolutionary potential in proletarian hyperfertility with the tiring realities of the day-to-day strain of overpopulation and hunger? As Germaine Greer so candidly observes, "perhaps what we really fear from the exploding populations of the world is that they will challenge the superiority of our own subgroup and compromise our survival as the biggest, richest, greediest and the most numerous group on earth."⁴²

In painstakingly researching Germinal, Zola familiarized himself with virtually all aspects of life in the real-life mining community of Anzin, near the Belgian border. In addition to his sojourn in northern France, he read widely on the medical and physical details of the miners' lives. What follows here is an excerpt from a nineteenth century medical journal on working-class sexual mores:

De bonne heure, les enfants des charbonniers apprennent à parler comme leurs parents, qui ont généralement la mauvaise habitude de tenir des conversations trop licencieuses; plus tard, les travaux qu'ils exécutent en compagnie des ouvriers adultes, les familiarisent encore davantage avec les termes et les idées les plus cyniques. De sorte que, avant même d'être arrivés à l'âge de la puberté, ils sont déjà corrompus. . . . Il ne peut guère en être autrement lorsque des filles et des garçons, dès leur plus tendre jeunesse, se trouvent continuellement en présence dans les heures de travail, aussi bien que dans les moments de loisir.⁴³

In this picture of enforced overcrowding and promiscuity can be glimpsed the seeds of bourgeois destruction. It is a

timeless picture of fear of engulfment by the Other, as relevant today in those areas of the world where the ruling élite is "threatened" by the higher birth rate of a competing social subgroup.⁴⁴

Part I, Chapter 2 presents us with a similar and immediate picture of working-class existence in the Zolian universe. It is here that Zola introduces in rapid succession not only the various members of the Maheu family, but also most of the key elements of proletarian erotic reality. The author refers to the shamelessness of children who are obliged to relieve themselves in each other's presence: "Ils se soulageaient sans honte, avec l'aisance tranquille d'une portée de jeunes chiens, grandis ensemble" (42). There are also allusions to incest, primarily the result of children of opposite sexes having to share a bed (in fact, Zola seems unable to mention Lénore and Henri, the two youngest Maheu children, without using the phrase "aux bras l'un de l'autre" to describe their sleeping position⁴⁵). The concept of violent and depraved anti-fertile forces is introduced when Jeanlin bites his sister's breast (42). We are made aware of the young children's amusement at the ménage à trois of Levaque, La Levaque, and Bouteloup, whose tripartite passions are clearly audible through the paper-thin walls. Zola makes mention of Zacharie and Philomène's two illegitimate children; the interclass erotic activities of La Pierronne and Dansaert are pointed out; and La Maheude, the Great Proletarian

Mother, is shown breast-feeding Estelle in full view of all the other family members. Within the space of only ten pages the reader is afforded an intimate and summary glimpse into the poverty, licentiousness, and promiscuity which characterize life in the mining community.

By way of contrast, the prototypically bourgeois Grégoire family is distinguished by having only one child, Cécile, who is spoiled and rendered chubby by the gourmet cooking and assorted other duties performed by the small contingent of domestic servants. This atmosphere is one of luxury, warmth, comfort, and opulence; conspicuous by its absence is any reference to overt human sexuality at La Piolaine. Instead, there follows a detailed account of the history of the Montsou mining operations and of the Grégoires' ancestors investments as if to describe overt financial sublimation of erotic desire. The dividends paid from the family's shares are such that the Grégoires lead a comfortable existence without ever having to work a day in their lives. In an illuminating passage, Zola traces some of the financial history of the Montsou stock, in which Léon Grégoire stubbornly and exclusively puts his economic faith. Unconcerned with temporary short-term losses, he reassures himself with the thought that "*ça remonterait, Dieu n'était pas si solide. Puis, à cette croyance religieuse, se mêlait une profonde gratitude pour une valeur, qui, depuis un siècle, nourrissait la famille à rien faire*" (99). If the function of this section of the novel is to introduce the

notion of working-class erotomania, a sexual mania which has all the hallmarks of a pagan religion, then the function of the corresponding juxtaposed introduction to the Grégoires is to show them as worshipping at the sterile altars of materialism and passive profiteering. In the words of Deneulin, "l'argent que vous gagnent les autres est celui dont on engraisse le plus sûrement" (102). The overworked faces of the Maheu family are pallid, sickly, and scrofulous, whereas those of the Grégoires are rosy, plump, and healthy. This stark contrast reflects a class-based difference not only in terms of erotic codes, but also in terms of "religion". The miners are overtly sexual, almost to the point of degeneracy, while the bourgeois are tightly repressed to the point of sterility, a condition associated in Zolian terms with stagnation and lack of real economic production. The workers practise an erotically-based paganistic religion, whereas the capitalists worship the luxuries that only money can buy. What the Grégoires do not consciously realize is that the money they spend--albeit prudently--is actually produced and earned by the hard work of the miners, who are paid only a pittance for their efforts. The Grégoires are thus in league with the vampire of capital, slowly draining the life blood from the veins of women, children, and anyone else unfortunate enough to be sucked down deep into the mines. In an inversion of the Biblical account of the Last Supper, the chambertin gracing the Grégoires' elegantly-laid dinner table is in effect a

metaphor for a familiar religious ceremony, slightly distorted. The toasts made to the continued good health of the Montsou shareholders represents the transsubstantiation of workers' blood into communion wine, a perverse capitalist version of the Christian liturgy. This is the never-ending Zolian cycle of blood, whereby bourgeois characters cannibalistically savour the nuances of workers' life fluids. This ceremony has much in common with the rape of the Earth by means of the blackened machine seed that defiles the countryside around Montsou: as the bourgeois control the apparatus of industry in such a way as to perpetuate this disproportionate sharing of wealth, the bourgeois characters--behind the various masks of charity, prudence, and decorum--are vampires, cannibals and rapists.

The risks run by the miners simply by showing up for work are infinitely greater than any chances taken by passive middle-class stockholders. It is for this very reason that the forces of capital need a steady supply of "worker babies" to ensure the continuation of profitable operations. Although Zola sometimes exaggerates to make his point, it is true that the work in the mines is so dangerous and low-paying that it is almost essential that the miners have extra-large families simply to ensure that there will be enough earning power to buy food so that the family tree may continue to grow. Accordingly, Zola refers to the mines' tunnels as being like "un dédale d'escaliers et de couloirs obscurs" (55); "dédale" is derived from the Greek

Daidalos, the name of the legendary builder of the labyrinth in Crete where the mythical Minotaur was confined, the half bull half man to which various golden and virginal youths and maidens were sacrificed. The miners' work is therefore like a horrifying and often lethal descent into a monster's lair, a maze created on behalf of industry. It is in the narrow financial interests of the middle-class élite to help perpetuate the overpopulation and destitution endemic in the mining community.

As a direct and symbolic result of this inequitable status quo, the Grégoires always refuse to give financial contributions to the poverty-stricken mining families since the bourgeoisie is stereotypically bedeviled by "la continuelle crainte d'être trompés et d'encourager le vice, car c'était un fait connu, dès qu'un pauvre avait deux sous, il les buvait" (111). The prevalence of such idées fixes is also indicative of sterility of thought, hypocritically wrapped in the guise of genuine social concern. Thus it is with indignation at workers' excessiveness that the Grégoires react to the knowledge that La Maheude has seven children:

-Sept enfants, mais pourquoi? bon Dieu!
 -C'est imprudent, murmura la vieille dame.
 La Maheude eut un geste vague d'excuse. Que voulez-vous? on n'y songeait point, ça poussait naturellement. Et puis, quand ça grandissait, ça rapportait, ça faisait aller la maison. (112)

The use of the word "naturel" and its derivatives by the naturalist novelist often indicates a highly-charged

situation in which the spirit of Nature is invoked--often ironically--to explain human instincts and actions. In this case, having seven children does seem wildly excessive in comparison with the Grégoires' only daughter. But these workers' children will go on to be starved, crippled, raped, and shot; if they are unlucky enough to survive these inhumanities, they too will move out and start large families of their own. Thus the cycle of Nature is perpetuated for the proletariat within a political cycle of repression, violence, and poverty. Just as the Grégoires stake their entire fortune on the success and failure of the value of their shares in the Montsou mines, so too do they put all their genealogical eggs in one basket by limiting their offspring to one child--hardly the act of a truly prudent "investor" in the future since she is so vulnerable--as we shall soon see--to ritualistic sacrifice. So it is not really prudence that has governed the Grégoires' choice to have only one child, but rather limited bourgeois fertility.⁴⁶

Zola relies on his characteristic "artistic propensity to enlarge beyond the bounds of reason"⁴⁷ while painting a portrait of exaggerated and often diametrically opposed differences; it is in this way that the Zolian picture of heightened bourgeois and proletarian reality emerges. As a result, we may consider the Grégoires and the Maheus to be each other's sociological and erotic counterparts or foils. Nowhere is this parallel system more apparent than in the

contrasting portrayals of the eldest daughters, Catherine Maheu and Cécile Grégoire. The former is fatigued, thin, anaemic, physically immature, yet sexually aware; the latter is well-rested, plump, rosy, healthy, yet presumably maintained in a familial state of erotic ignorance and denial. In fact, the deliberate contrasts between these two representatives extend to include their speech, dress, and dietary habits as well.

Just as the mining settlement is made remarkable by an exaggerated emphasis on human sexuality and corporeity, so too are the bourgeois residences of the Hennebeaus and Grégoires noted for the astonishing culinary and gastronomic achievements of their residents. In the space of only fifteen pages,⁴⁸ mention is made of oysters, sausages, pineapple, scrambled eggs with truffles, brook trout, roast partridge, Rhine wine, Russian salad, crayfish, apple charlotte meringue, grapes and pears! As if to further underscore bourgeois indifference to human suffering, there is also a champagne which is unfortunately "jugé commun" (221). Zola's most important erotic formula in Germinal equates sex with food, and it is in this passage that the middle-class version of this formula is put under the novelist's microscope. Zola presents a marvelously symmetrical class difference: The workers need food but must settle for sex; the bourgeois characters need sex but instead gorge themselves with gourmet dishes. It is no wonder that the dividing line between alimentary and erotic

hunger becomes so blurred.

The most important line of demarcation that is crossed in the novel is that which separates human beings from animals; here it is proletarian characters who are much more likely to cross over the line. This inequality in metaphorical treatment is not only a direct reflection of the social inequalities of Zola's age, but is also representative of a strain in nineteenth century bourgeois thought which denied fundamental human complexity to individual members of the working class, preferring to see the proletariat in terms of violent and primitive rutting brutes who lose their souls by devoting themselves to or losing themselves in unabashed eroticism.

It is this callous attitude which is particularly present in the thinking of the Hennebeaus, who are unable or unwilling to understand the roots of the workers' unhappiness:

Est-ce qu'ils n'étaient pas très heureux? Des gens logés, chauffés, soignés aux frais de la Compagnie! Dans son indifférence pour ce troupeau, elle ne savait de lui que la leçon apprise, dont elle émerveillait le Parisiens en visite; et elle avait fini par y croire, elle s'indignait de l'ingratitude du peuple. (218)

Indeed, the individuality of the miners has been swept aside by the use of the animal collective term "troupeau." To Madame Hennebeau, the miners are nothing but cattle and deserve to be treated as such. This "leçon apprise" is a prime example of logical and intellectual sterility since she actually believes the divisive propaganda of the Company

party line she so glibly spouts. In a similar fashion, Monsieur Hennebeau is also unmoved by the miners' demands. According to him, the miners cannot hope to have any legitimate grievances when their lives are exclusively devoted to "la tranquille satisfaction des instincts" (349), while his own life is characterized by "la souffrance inassouvie des passions" (349). This bourgeois hypocrisy is revealed by linguistic duplicity: While we have our "passions", they have mere "instincts"; whereas our personalities are complex and nuanced, theirs are simple and unidimensional; and while we are true human beings, they have somehow become animalistic brutes. Zola in fact succeeds in transcending the bias of his class by his vivid portrayals of working-class characters. As Sandy Petrey points out, "although Zola was unquestionably guilty of reproducing hackneyed social types, he never transformed lower class characters into reified, predictable objects denied an ability to choose and act freely which is accorded men in higher social situations."⁴⁹ This reification or objectification of the working class by the bourgeoisie is the very sin of which M. Hennebeau is guilty.

The great class-based irony in life for M. Hennebeau is that his sexual frustrations become so intense that he would be willing to renounce his material wealth, life of comforts, and five-course meals just to re-establish contact with his own submerged animal libido: "Il leur en aurait fait cadeau volontiers, de ses gros appointements, pour

avoir comme eux, le cuir dur, l'accouplement facile et sans regret" (349). The whole tone of Hennebeau's frustrated ravings leads us to wonder if the author is perhaps transferring his own bitterness and inhibition by taking over the voice of one of his most pathetic characters. While such conjecture is even more subjective than the already nonobjective nature of literary analysis and evaluation in general, it is interesting to note that Zola became seminatorious for using his literary activities for the release of sexual energies which remained unspent within his marriage.⁵⁰ Trapped in the isolated prison of his spineless bourgeois arrogance and class envy, Hennebeau does not realize that he is only receiving a partial picture of working-class eroticism. The miners too have sensitivity, regrets, and erotic difficulties; but all that is visible to M. Hennebeau are couples making love in the fields, seemingly without a care in the world.

M. Hennebeau's whole fantasy of being able to make love with his wife outdoors, "sur des cailloux, de tous se reins et de tout son coeur" (281), of being "man" enough, "assez goujat pour gifler sa femme et prendre du plaisir sur les voisines" (349) shows him as being sorely tempted by the erotic system of the working class, whose lifestyle does indeed allow for uninhibited sex in the great outdoors, promiscuity, and domestic violence. Hennebeau's moral crisis is resoundingly erotic. His is the case of a dissatisfied "churchgoer" who wants to switch from the

worship of materialistic power to the veneration of sexual licence. Overt mention of such class-treacherous fantasies would leave M. Hennebeau open to harsh condemnation from his middle-class associates. The sterility of the bourgeoisie is thus enforced from within, and is maintained on almost all levels. Financially, Léon Grégoire rejects active investment or speculation--an ironic strategy considering his name means "lion" in Old French. In genealogical terms, he also mistakenly maintains that his "denier de Montsou . . . nourrira les enfants de mes petis-enfants" (435) when, in fact, he will have no descendants at all. In addition, the Grégoires offer a crippled Bonnemort a pair of shoes in a metaphorical display of the utterly sterile uselessness and absurdity of their misplaced charity. Overall, the bourgeois erotic code is marked by the sterility of inhibition, hypocrisy, repression, and silence.

In contrast stand the clearly differentiated working-class standards of sexual ethics. These traits include not only overt sexual extravagance, rampant violence against women often within a sexual context, and widespread youthful promiscuity, but also sexual fidelity within traditional marriage. Although there are in fact many illegitimate children, there is still great social pressure exerted on men to marry the women with whom they have produced children. Nevertheless, once married or living together, working-class women are especially vulnerable to domestic violence at the hands of their men, chiefly as a result of

illness, poverty, and overcrowded living conditions. Further, although promiscuity is condoned and prevalent amongst young unmarried couples, once married, husbands and wives are expected to be faithful to each other and to take proper care of their children.

The rampant promiscuity in the mining community is actually the primary result of long-enforced poverty: even M. Hennebeau is aware that sex out-of-doors, in the fields and behind the walls, represents "la seule joie qui ne coûtait rien" (281) and thus constitutes a cost-effective escape for the young miners. Marriage is even more financially limiting, with the attendant demands of children and the Company:

On mangeait, mais si peu, juste de quoi souffrir sans crever, écrasé de dettes, poursuivi comme si l'on volait son pain. Quand arrivait le dimanche, on dormait de fatigue. Les seuls plaisirs, c'était de se soûler ou de faire un enfant à sa femme; encore la bière vous engraissait trop le ventre, et l'enfant, plus tard, se foutait de vous. (178)

Only the intoxicating yet temporary effects of liquor or the erotic release of physical love can dull the pain of never-ending poverty. The aftereffects of the former, while crapulous, are limited, but the upshot of the latter may mean an additional mouth to feed for sixteen years. It is in this way that the vicious circles of poverty and overpopulation are perpetuated within the working class in Germinal.

Conspicuous by its absence in the novel is any

description of sexual acts between bourgeois participants. As Colin Smethurst remarks, "Zola shows how the conquest of a prominent position in the bourgeois hierarchy is gained at the expense of natural or instinctual behavior."⁵¹ In contrast, Zola develops an almost tender scene in which Maheu and La Maheude make love after their evening meal is finished and the other family members have gone off. Symbolically, this lovemaking occurs as a consummation to Maheu's evening bath, during which the wife helps purify her husband following a normal day of filth and toil. Once clean, the way is paved for "l'accouplement facile" (349) of which M. Hennebeau is so envious. These sexually-charged early evenings are by no means peculiar to the Maheus: "C'était également chez les camarades du coron l'heure des bêtises, où l'on plantait plus d'enfants qu'on n'en voulait . . . le seul bon moment de la journée pour un dessert qui ne coûtait rien" (133). The verb "planter" suggests a natural and almost agricultural aspect to proletarian love-making, while the noun "dessert" once again frames sexual pleasure within the context of food. In addition, it must be kept in mind that to a white-collar observer, the working class would indeed look frightening and filthy after a day in the mines. Hence the need to cleanse and purify before sex, instead of afterwards.

What distinguishes the Maheus' version of this erotic ritual is that the père de famille is reluctant to strip naked and wash in the presence of his children. Although

Maheu and his workmates are proud of their seminaked bodies, sitting on the front steps of their homes, displaying their bare arms and chests with "la joie de toute cette chair lasse de travailleurs, mise au grand air" (133), Toussaint Maheu, the idealized and archetypal Great Proletarian Father, "n'aimait pas se laver en famille, comme cela se pratiquait dans beaucoup d'autres maisons du coron" (131). Alzire is therefore quick to hustle the two youngest children outside so that Maheu may bathe in the company of his wife. It is as if Zola were using this scene to accentuate the qualities of moral leadership and integrity which distinguish Constance and Toussaint Maheu not only from their earthier and more violent comrades, but also from their sterile and corrupt bourgeois counterparts. Toussaint Maheu is both at ease with his own peers and with his own conscience, having sustained the Zolian transfer of bourgeois values such as cleanliness, steadfastness, and decency.

The routine of the Maheu's bathing ritual is slightly disturbed when Etienne moves in as their lodger. Subsequently, the men wash downstairs and Catherine bathes by herself in the upstairs room: "Toute la pudeur de la famille s'était réfugiée dans le lavage quotidien" (176). Nevertheless, all those resident at the Maheus' home must adjust to the general lack of privacy by becoming inured to the rituals of disrobing and grooming. Although Etienne and Catherine are frequently sexually preoccupied in each

other's presence, even they become used to the inherent semi-nudity of bedtime: "L'habitude tuait la honte d'être nu, ils trouvaient naturel d'être ainsi, car ils ne faisaient point de mal et ce n'était pas leur faute, s'il n'y avait qu'une chambre pour tout le monde" (176). The sexual ethic in force amongst the mineworkers is in fact largely determined by the sheer physical proximity of the inhabitants of the mining village. If they are violent, it is in part because frustrations increase in proportion to reductions in personal space; if they are promiscuous, it is because boys and girls sleep and often bathe together starting from a very young age; if they are coarse, it is because even the most intimate details of their lives are common knowledge.

It is Constance Maheu who often articulates the practicalities of the working-class code of ethics. It is she who is obsessed with the notion that children must contribute as much as they can financially to the running of the household, at one point even asking, "Est-ce que Zacharie ne nous doit pas du respect? Il nous a coûté, n'est-ce pas? eh bien, il faut qu'il nous rende, avant de s'embarrasser d'une femme. . . ." (120-21). In conflict here are the divergent principles of financial and parental responsibilities: yes, Zacharie has cost his family over the years, but his primary allegiance--if he is to follow the moral code of his social class--must now be to his own children, Désirée and Achille, along with their mother,

Philomène.

A similar conflict erupts between Maheu, La Maheude, and Catherine over the daughter's loyalties, which are divided between her immediate family and her boyfriend, Antoine Chaval. In this case, however, Catherine does not have any illegitimate children so her decision to remain with Chaval is interpreted by her parents as an act of outright betrayal. Accordingly, the Maheus react with great harshness towards Catherine, who, by moving out, reduces the already insufficient family income. To a certain extent, the acrimoniousness of the parents is mitigated by their unrelenting and increasing poverty. Specifically, we note the overtly sexual nature of Maheu and La Maheude's criticisms: "Il fallait être la dernière des filles dénaturées" (237); "Ah! salope, toi aussi!... Quand ta mère crève de faim, tu la trahis pour ton maquereau!" (324). Clearly, to be "dénaturé" is to be the antithesis of "naturel", a serious state of affairs in a naturalist context. Sex as prime substitute for food is the equation intimated by Catherine's taking up with a "pimp". In her own starving mother's eyes, then, Catherine has indeed become the prostitute which Catherine had always dreaded becoming.

Since patriarchal family values are the most important element of working-class ideals, these conflicts between parents and children are the most serious result of the strains of poverty and of the frustrations due to

overcrowding. Although La Maheude sometimes plays the role of proletarian moralist, for example when she declares that it is wrong for La Pierronne to "lâcher sa famille, un dimanche de ducasse" (163) in the pursuit of selfish erotic stimulation, in the end she is remarkably forthright about her own monogamous marriage, confessing that "lorsqu'on n'a point fait le mal, c'est souvent que les occasions ont manqué" (240). It is this sort of refreshing and candid attitude that cements the bond between the reader and those heroic and idealized representatives of the working class, the Maheus.

In contrast, La Pierronne and Dansaert dare to step outside their respective class boundaries. In the midst of such virulent opposition their affair takes on overtones of hypocrisy, duplicity, treachery, and greed. It is La Pierronne who feigns disgust at the disorder and promiscuity which characterize the ménage à trois of Levaque, La Levaque, and their lodger Bouteloup. This ménage is stereotypically negative since the husband drinks to excess, beats his wife, and keeps company with the prostitutes who sing and dance at the various Montsou drinking establishments. La Pierronne's haughty disgust at such households is completely hypocritical since she uses Dansaert's influence to ensure that her own family benefits materially. In effect, they selfishly enjoy cake and wine while their generous yet indigent neighbors slowly starve to death. To add insult to injury, Pierron, at best seemingly

indifferent and at worst encouraging of his wife's greed-inspired infidelity, is also the one who denounces the strike in a letter written to the management of the mining company. Theirs is a family of weasels and labor scabs which is wont to spreading malicious gossip about Etienne and the Maheus' alleged incestuous promiscuity: "Ils s'étaient pourris ensemble, jusqu'aux petits, avec une saleté prise par Etienne au Volcan" (380). The idea of Etienne's socialist ideology and influence on the Maheus is equated with infectious social diseases attributable to sexual promiscuity. This is similar to when M. Hennebeau refers to "le fameux Rasseneur, qui continue à empoisonner le Voreux, avec ses idées et sa bière. . . ." (218). These are further manifestations of the bourgeoisie's ignorant and fearful prejudices against the working class, expressed in semierotic terms. In the end, however, La Pierronne is revealed to be a Tartuffian character, wallowing in erotic hypocrisy while Dansaert, the cowardly foreman, suffers the fate of being fired for "cette lâcheté du capitaine abandonnant ses hommes" (461). The Zolian judgment is clear: bridge the erotic class-gap at your own peril.

This Zolian doctrine of erotic class segregation would seem to have its roots in bourgeois fears. One has the impression that it is worse for middle-class characters to "lower" their erotic standards (déclassement) than it is for members of the working class to "raise" theirs (embourgeoisement). This discrepancy is especially evident

in M. Hennebeau's rationalizations of his wife's latest infidelity. To his mind, even though she stoops to engaging in semi-incestuous affairs with his own nephew, she at least confines her perversity to her own social class: "elle sauvegardait ainsi les apparences" (348). It is this question of maintaining appearances, of perpetuating the illusion of conjugal harmony, which is foremost in M. Hennebeau's thinking. His erotic philosophy is in reality characterized by fecklessness and spinelessness. After all, "une seule peur lui restait, celle de voir sa femme tomber plus bas, à quelque laquais peut-être" (359). It is the fear that his own shortcomings as a "man" will be revealed for all and sundry to see that enables M. Hennebeau to "garder son neveu, dans la crainte de son cocher" (473). It is also interclass eroticism which permeates Hennebeau's symbolic action of having his wife "entrer un instant . . . dans la mesure du vieux Mouque" (473) when she is shocked to hear of Cécile's death. This hovel, as M. Hennebeau knows all too well, is one of the focal points for working-class sexual abandon: It is a chapel for sex-as-religion, a synagogue for erotic paganism in the heart of Nature amid the industrial wasteland of Réquillart.

The final example of interclass erotica is provided by Etienne's gradual embourgeoisement. Although he does not actually break the Zolian rule of erotic class fidelity, he does react with a middle-class perspective to the problems caused by the sexual promiscuity of his co-workers. Just as

Zola describes Zacharie and Philomène's relationship as being "la commune histoire des promiscuités du coron, les garçons et les filles pourrissant ensemble" (120), that is espousing a middle-class view of working-class inhibitions and sexual "freedom", so too does Etienne use the verb "pourrir"--to rot, spoil, corrupt--in his own reaction to young lovers romping in the fields of wheat:

Depuis que sa nature s'affinait, il se trouvait blessé davantage par les promiscuités du coron. Est-ce qu'on était des bêtes, pour être ainsi parqués, les uns contre les autres, au milieu des champs, si entassés qu'on ne pouvait changer de chemise sans montrer son derrière aux voisins! Et comme c'était bon pour la santé, et comme les filles et les garçons s'y pourrissaient forcément ensemble! (178)

Various relations of cause and effect are present in this short but revealing passage. Etienne's thinking and tastes are becoming more refined and middle-class, so he is consequently offended by these scenes of erotic promiscuity; he recognizes the connection between the lack of privacy and dignity, and sexual temptations; and by using animal metaphors such as "bêtes" and "parqués", Etienne implicitly calls into question the idea that the working class is somehow more free as a result of its sexual promiscuity. Whereas M. Hennebeau views the workers' indulgence in uninhibited sexuality as reason enough for them to be carefree and content, Etienne introduces the interesting notion that the miners are seeking freedom and spiritual release through relatively unrestrained sexuality, the only means available or affordable to them. By opining that a

better course of erotic action might be for young girls to "serrer les cuisses" (143), Etienne is embarking upon the dangerous road leading to the sterility of bourgeois anti-eroticism. In a self-denying and heroic way, however, Etienne is ultimately advocating freedom from sexuality rather than freedom through sexuality. That he eventually succumbs to the temptations offered by La Mouquette and Catherine is proof not only of the contradictions in his all-too-human nature, but is also a symbolic guarantee of his fidelity to his own social class. As Rachelle Rosenberg points out, "Etienne's chastity earn him great respect in the mining community, for abstinence on both the sexual and alimentary levels is a mark of heroism in the Zola novel."⁵²

The concept of promiscuity is indeed a tricky one in Germinal. In fact, Zola does everything in his artistic power to keep the issue confused and contradictory. On the one hand, we have the undeniably negative image of an overcrowded population, like cattle in a pen, rutting indiscriminately in a futile attempt to escape the pain of poverty; on the other, we have the positive picture of young lovers making love in the heart of Nature, without fear, guilt, or inhibitions. In this positive light and in mythopoeic terms, Philip Walker is correct in stating that "Zola's Eros is in some ways a substitute for divine Grace, but the virtues it imparts are intensely pagan ones--virility, strength, courage, physical joy, ecstatic awareness of one's animality, and unity with nature."⁵³ How

then do we reconcile old Mouque's feeling of calm "devant les choses de la nature" (142) with Etienne's increasing disgust at the stresses and pain imposed by "les abandons de la misère" (139)?

In part, there is a good deal of jealous hypocrisy in Etienne's dismissive judgmentalism since he is shown as willing to sublimate his sexual libido into the pursuit of his political ambition. Nonetheless, as Smethurst asserts,

his [Etienne's] coming from outside the community of Montsou provides a motive for his clearer observations of the true state of the miners' existence, provokes the reaction that something must be done about the situation, and begins the process of political education⁵⁴ which culminates in his leadership of the strike.

In fact, Etienne, already an outsider within a homogeneous community, is further set apart from his comrades by his political autodidacticism: "Devenir un centre, sentir le monde rouler autour de soi, c'était un continuel gonflement de vanité, pour lui, l'ancien mécanicien, le haleur aux mains grasses et noires" (234). This vanity, as well as the pride he takes in his ability to make sexual sacrifice, leads to Etienne's distinct feelings of superiority, both pedagogic and erotic. It is at this point that Souvarine brings Etienne back to reality by insisting that "votre haine des bourgeois viendra uniquement de votre besoin enragé d'être des bourgeois à leur place" (393). Etienne's adopting of bourgeois manners and mores helps reinforce the contradictions in his own mind with regard to human sexuality. Once again, an attempt at erotic class betrayal

or at least a rejection of class-based sexual values is met with the sternest of rebuffs.

Paradoxically, the hyperfertility associated with promiscuity represents the key to the doors both leading into and out of the prison of repressive poverty and working conditions. Promiscuity leads not only to overpopulation and overcrowding, but to the numerical clout required for bloody revolution. One of the most striking characteristics of the novel is that its author would choose to portray revolution as having such blatantly obvious implications for human sexuality. Yet, as Ida-Marie Frandon summarizes, "Zola est . . . soucieux de dénoncer l'injustice sociale, la responsabilité de ceux qui rendent possibles de tels actes plus encore que la corruption de qui les commet."⁵⁵ Zola is highly conscious of his own ambivalence towards demotic sex, and thus prefers to criticize the cause--political repression--rather than the effect--sexual decadence.

Zola initially locates the beginnings of the workers' uprising underground. Although this setting is not surprising given the subterranean nature of mineral extraction, it is symbolic because the rebellion occurs within the Earth's "womb" and in fact germinates there like the seeds of a harvest yet to come: "Une rébellion germait dans ce coin étroit, à près de six cents mètres sous la terre" (81). This revolution takes place under the aegis of Mother Nature herself, who is pregnant with an army of people dedicated to the overthrow of the corrupt

bourgeoisie, an army which upholds the ideals of justice and egalitarianism. The numerical effectiveness of these soldiers and their dedication to Nature--and Nature to them--are demonstrated by their passionate sexual activity amidst the ruins of the abandoned mine at Réquillart. Although industrialism may result in a polluted landscape littered with debris and broken machinery, the miners are able to bring the procreative forces of natural eroticism back to such a sterile and corrupt industrial wasteland: "Et il semblait que ce fût, autour de la machine éteinte, près de ce puits las de dégorger de la houille, une revanche de la création, le libre amour qui, sous le coup de fouet de l'instinct, plantait des enfants dans les ventres de ces filles, à peine femmes" (141-42). In this way, Gaea and the miners satisfy their mutual need for revenge simultaneously, though in different ways.

It is Etienne Lantier who becomes the catalyst for these forces of instinctive revenge; it is he who is able to help overcome "la résignation de la race" (223) with his call to socialist arms, his emphasis on education, and his appeal to the miners' latent sense of natural justice. Although the revolution he temporarily leads is, strictly speaking a failure in the short term, he leaves the miners with the tools they will need in inevitable future confrontations. In effect, he helps the miners help themselves. It is thanks to Etienne's own political ambitions and thirst for acceptance that "le mineur n'était

plus l'ignorant, la brute écrasée dans les entrailles du sol. Une armée poussait des profondeurs des fosses, une moisson de citoyens dont la semence germait et ferait éclater la terre, un jour de grand soleil" (289). This explosion of semen/seed constitutes a crucial erotic subtext: this is the overthrow of the "old" society through revolutionary orgasm.

Jean Borie, in his meticulous Freudian analysis of the Rougon-Macquart series, makes this pivotal observation:

Il est deux refoulés pour la conscience bourgeoise: le peuple et le corps. . . . L'homme civilisé, le bourgeois . . . est l'homme de la nature vaincue, du corps dominé. L'homme du peuple, fruste, simple, vit au contraire au niveau des instincts. Il est l'homme naturel, c'est-à-dire à peu près la brute.¹³⁰

Hence it is no wonder that the bourgeois picture of working-class rebellion should be based on the notion of a dangerous rutting monster whose teeth are sharpened by the dissemination of socialist dogma, a monster which is an individual incarnation of the collective rage of an entire social class. Thus the night-time gathering under the full moon in the forest of Vandame is like a pack of seething wolves, "une furie de visages, des yeux luisants, des bouches ouvertes, tout un rut de peuple" (286). Zola repeats this crucial word "rut" during his description of the aftermath of the vengeful destruction of bourgeois society: "on retournerait à la vie sauvage dans les bois, après le grand rut, la grande ripaille. . . ." (346). Here again, orgiastic sexual activity is likened to frenzied feasting, where both of these are symbolic of the overthrow

not only of monopolistic capitalism, but of the bourgeois sexual code as well. As if to violently complete this strikingly erotic picture, Zola refers to "l'avortement final de cette levée en masse" (391) in which the pregnant forces of Gaea are only temporarily halted; it is because of the Earth's ability to renew itself year after year that the possibility of victory for the proletariat is only deferred, and not destroyed.

It is difficult for us to agree with David Bellos's conclusion that "in this broken proletariat nothing whatsoever is germinating in terms of politics or social change: the revolutionary wind has quite exhausted itself by the end"⁵⁷ or Van Buuren's assertion that "cette allusion à une renaissance végétale qui aura lieu dans un avenir indéterminé ne contrebalance guère la fin tragique du roman."⁵⁸ True, the strikers end up in defeat; the monopolistic power of capital is increased at the expense of Deneulin's smaller and independent company; the miners must resume work on management's terms; Pierron is promoted; La Maheude is reluctantly forced underground; Bonnemort loses his meagre pension; the miners' contingency fund is exhausted; and the fragile union organization crumbles. Yet the extent of the miners' victory, even in brutal and bloody defeat, is nevertheless considerable. Besides the obvious costs to the Company in terms of loss of confidence, ruined machinery, and annihilated investments, the workers are symbolically able to render the forces of industry

sterile by exacting the sacrifice of Cécile, the Grégoires' only daughter. Although Cécile is portrayed as being charitable, virginal, and naïve, it is the extent to which she becomes the incarnation of the fruits of bourgeois sterility that metaphorically justifies her strangulation at the hands of Bonnemort, the archetypal sage of the mining community. Her death represents the expiatory sacrifice of the youngest representative of one "race" at the hands of the oldest representative of another "race", similar in many ways to La Brûlé's emasculation--as the oldest female of the mining community--of Maigrat.

F. W. J. Hemmings' assertion that the Grégoires' "naïveté acquits them of deliberate villainy . . . and that Zola miscalculated in punishing the Grégoires so heavily at the end"⁵⁹ seems absurd in its short-sightedness and disappointing in its lack of perspicacity and imagination. Surely banality and wilful ignorance are both manifestations of the enormity of bourgeois malice. Likewise, Elliott M. Grant sees the Grégoires as "unproductive, but in no sense harmful"⁶⁰; as we hypothesized at the outset of this chapter, the Grégoires drinking vintage Burgundy while the blood of miners is spilled denotes a vampiric and cannibalistic reaction to human suffering. The Grégoires' unproductivity is therefore parasitic and very harmful indeed.

"L'Homme noir" is introduced as a superstitious figment of Catherine's imagination, an old and blackened miner who

according to local legend "tord le cou aux vilaines filles" (70) as a class-based control mechanism against non-procreative sexual activity. In fact, "l'Homme noir" becomes no other than Bonnemort himself, who twice attempts to seek the revenge of his oppressed class by sacrificing a virginal representative of the oppressor class. On the first occasion, "des mains froides venaient de la prendre au cou. C'était le vieux Bonnemort . . . qui cédait à des choses qu'il n'aurait pu dire, à un besoin de faire ça, à la fascination de ce cou blanc de jeune fille" (357). On the second occasion, Bonnemort is overcome by "un coup de brusque démente, à une tentation inexplicable de meurtre, devant ce cou blanc de jeune fille" (472). It is because Bonnemort has been so blackened and besmirched by soot over the years that he finds Cécile's white skin so attractive; yet his blackness is a sign of spiritual decay, in much the same way as his mind and body have been worn out through overwork and exposure to carcinogens. Bonnemort and Cécile Grégoire are thus antitheses, he being old, black, and crippled while she is young, white and fresh. Paradoxically, Cécile is a "vilaine fille" despite her physical purity and erotic ignorance. Her villainy is symbolic since the casual disregard of her social class comes together, rightly or wrongly, in her persona. She is the sacrificial bourgeois lamb "eaten" by the monstrous working-class wolf. Her shocking death sounds the deathknell for the smug complacency and ignorance of the

bourgeoisie: the resonances of rape in her murder at the hands of Bonnemort--her virginal status, Bonnemort's instinctive temptation to violence (much like Etienne when described as being "au bord du viol" [398]), and the mining women's previous aborted attempt to erotically humiliate Cécile--reinforce the equation of sex and death.

The clearest expression of this equation, however, comes towards the end of the novel when Etienne and Catherine finally make love underground after Chaval's dramatic elimination. The long-awaited love scene between the idealized couple culminates in Catherine's own death; it is as if her all-too-recent menstruation has left her too weak to withstand the simultaneous assault of Eros and Thanatos. Once Etienne's virility is finally proven after having successfully navigated the obstacle course of his and Catherine's relationship, Catherine is left dramatically and structurally redundant. The way is paved for Etienne's resurrection: "Etienne apparut décharné, les cheveux tout blancs; et on s'écartait, on frémissait devant ce vieillard" (491).

It is not surprising that Zola would choose to create such a profound connection between sexuality and revolution in Germinal. His age was characterized by great political changes, often brought about against a backdrop of anarchistic and mob-inspired violence. It is also true that there have always been significant differences in sexual expression as a function of social standing; these

differences are still evident to scientific researchers of our own age.⁶¹ Why should Zola not combine these obvious class differences, one political and the other sexual? Zola's achievement in Germinal, therefore, is often a fusion of the body politic with the body erotic, a synthetic process which makes for gripping and memorable revolutionary drama.

Despite this literary synthesis, Zola still remains an author highly conscious of his own adult middle-class status following a childhood spent in the poverty of a single-parent family. Mavelock Ellis traces the effects of poverty in Zola's own life, referring to the sense of isolation and segregation that the young Zola must have experienced as an adolescent:

During long years after his father's death, Zola, as a child and youth, suffered from poverty, poverty almost amounting to actual starvation, the terrible poverty of respectability. The whole temper of his work and his outlook on the world are clearly conditioned by this prolonged starvation of adolescence. The timid and reserved youth--for such, it is said, has been Zola's character both in youth and manhood--was shut up with his fresh energies in a garret while the panorama of the Paris world was unfolded below him. Forced both by circumstances and by temperament to practise the strictest chastity and sobriety, there was but one indulgence left open to him, an orgy of vision. Of this, as we read his books, we cannot doubt that he fully availed himself, for each volume of the Rougon-Macquart series is an orgy of material vision.⁶²

Having experienced both the comforts of success and the harshness of indigence, Zola becomes an erotic "segregationist" who warns against the dangers inherent in

interclass sexuality. Since Zola underwent personal embourgeoisement, we find it difficult to reconcile this psychosexual stance with his own life. Nonetheless, this segregation neatly encapsulates the dilemma faced by members of both social classes analyzed and described in Germinal. Both the proletariat and the bourgeoisie are irremediably trapped, the former group enslaved by the tyranny of heated passions blindly satisfied amid crushing neglect, and the latter paralysed by an anti-eroticism leading to symbolic sterility, the perversions of adultery and incest, and personal repression of the highest order.

The stark class-based differences in Zola's novel also find symbolic expression in the complicated equations of money, food, and sex. The proletariat makes money to exist, whereas the bourgeois capitalist exists to make money; the plebeian eats to live, while the gourmet bourgeois lives to eat; and, finally, the oppressed exist to make love, while the repressed only make love to "exist" or procreate. These are all fundamental differences of ideology and it is for this reason that "on peut conclure que le discours sur la sexualité est bien, dans Germinal, un discours idéologique."⁶³

Between the exaggerated extremes of classes in conflict lies Zola's own erotic ideal, principally as embodied in Etienne Lantier and Constance and Toussaint Maheu. They achieve heroic status by repudiating both the promiscuity of their working-class peers and the anti-eroticism of the

bourgeoisie. They successfully straddle an erotic middle ground, a symbolic balancing act in which only Catherine comes close to being successful. This bridging of the social gulf--the erotic overlap of two divergent value systems--is directly attributable to Etienne's lust for political knowledge. The results of his near embourgeoisement have ultimately far-reaching implications for every other character in the novel.

For his age, Zola was a revolutionary writer. That has been our underlying thesis all throughout this essay, and it is why we must repudiate statements to the contrary, such as Hemming's conclusion that:

Germinal, in short, is neither a revolutionary nor a reactionary work; remaining carefully and intentionally neutral, Zola left unexamined the full political significance of the social issues he raised, while he made their existence, and gravity, blindingly clear. It is arguable, however, that in 1885 the mere exposure and graphic portrayal of social injustice constituted in itself a revolutionary act.⁶⁴

It is not only Zola's graphic portrayal of social injustice that accounts for the overwhelming success of Germinal and for its well-deserved reputation as one of the most profoundly gripping novels in French literature. It is also Zola's revolutionary--both literally and figuratively--treatment of working-class eroticism which explains the novel's literary durability and power.

CONCLUSION

In the end, there is hope. Although the dénouement of Germinal has some ambiguity, even in defeat there may be future victory. This victory is profound, going beyond the classic notions of class revolution, of patriarchy, of subjugation, and of machismo. It is the Zolian victory of love as the true source of human redemption: Eros and Thanatos have been left behind.

Yet Germinal is an erotic text nevertheless. Zola, like every great artist, is a god, and as such must recreate the cosmos in his own image and in his own fashion. Zola's most permeative and creative image is that of union, the synthesis of Eros and Thanatos in the human animal.

In terms of sexuality, Zola surely used his writings to compensate for his own keenly-felt frustrations and worries; this should come as no surprise. But despite--or perhaps because of--pervasive neurosis, Zola in the end seems equally fascinated and repulsed by human eroticism. We concur with Krakowski in concluding that "Zola ne condamne pas la chair, en tant que telle, mais il attaque sa toute puissance, la volupté, qui se lève contre la justice, qui

aveugle et réduit l'être à sa pire animalité."⁶⁵ It is love that enables the human animal to transcend his evolutionary heritage of beasthood; it is love that tolerates difference--as Etienne is "different", as Catherine is "different"; it is love that razes the Darwinian jungle where only the fittest thrive; it is love that shoots through the indomitable drive for human freedom, "l'obstiné besoin de vivre, de faire de la vie une dernière fois. Ils Etienne and Catherine s'aimèrent dans le désespoir de tout, dans la mort" (490). "Faire l'amour" has become "faire de la vie": to make love is to make life, not in a narrow procreative sense, but in the affirmation of living, in the epiphany of existence.

The Zolian concept of redemptive chastity is not just anti-eroticism, pure and simple. Instead, Zola's erotic doctrine may be viewed as the advocacy as much of freedom from sexuality as it is of freedom through sexuality. Love is the ultimate Zolian liberator--for both bourgeois and proletarian--especially as felt and shown between mother and child. On the epic scale of Germinal, this becomes the mutual love of a planet and its people.

We must remember that Eros is more than just coitus. Insofar as education represents fertilization of the mind, Etienne's leadership and gift of teaching are both profoundly "erotic" since they are vital and life-enriching. The erotic for Zola is a sythesis of the mythic and the sociological, a fusion of the animal and the vegetable, in

much the same way as Germinal is his grand attempt at achieving the concord of science and religion through the marriage of melodrama and poetry. Thus, contradictions in Zola's ideology, or discord within the internal text play a large part in furnishing the richness and tension that have made the novel famous.

One of Zola's most revolutionary portrayals and one of the most striking impressions made by Germinal is that of female sexual power. Women, in fact, are the focal point of Zolian eroticism to such an extent that men suffer in comparison. Women, as being more intimately connected with Gaea, are more profoundly sensual and sexual. Male sexuality, by way of stark contrast, is the virtually exclusive focus for the brutal Zolian reduction of human erotic instincts to violent animality.

This essay has examined two fundamental levels of reading: manifest and latent. Our thesis was to illuminate the manifest narrative by probing its erotic latency. The ultimate in Zolian irony, when all is said and done, is that the erotic subtext itself gives way to a further amorous interpretation: the reading of love.

¹ David Bellos, "From the Bowels of the Earth," Forum for Modern Language Studies, 15 (1979) : 43.

² Northrop Frye, The Anatomy of Criticism (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1957) 181.

³ Eugene Linden, "How the Earth Maintains Life," Time 13 Nov. 1989 : 114.

⁴ F. W. J. Hemmings, Emile Zola, 2nd ed., (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966) 109.

⁵ Rachelle A. Rosenberg, "The Slaying of the Dragon: An Archetypal Study of Zola's Germinal," Symposium 26 (1972) : 357.

⁶ Colin Smethurst, Zola: Germinal (London: Edward Arnold, 1974) 38.

⁷ Bellos 37.

⁸ Maarten Van Buuren, Les Rougon-Macquart d'Emile Zola: De la métaphore au mythe (Paris: Librairie José Corti, 1986) 103.

⁹ C. G. Jung, qtd. in Germaine Greer, Sex and Destiny: The Politics of Human Fertility (London: Secker & Warburg, 1984) 36.

¹⁰ Carol S. Fuller, "The Symbolic and Structural Function of Jeanlin," French Review 54.1 (Oct. 1980) : 62.

¹¹ Jean Borie, Zola et les mythes: Ou, De la nausée au salut (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1971) 81.

¹² Emile Zola, qtd. in Smethurst 22.

¹³ Francis S. Heck, "Love and Women in How Green is my

Valley and Germinal," Research Studies 48.1 (1980) : 58.

¹⁴ Richard H. Zakarian, Zola's Germinal: A Critical Study of its Primary Sources (Genève: Librairie Droz S. A., 1972) 113.

¹⁵ Sandy Petrey, "Obscenity and Revolution," Diacritics III, 3 (1973) : 25.

¹⁶ Van Buuren 134.

¹⁷ Havelock Ellis, "Zola: The Man and his Work," Critical Essays on Emile Zola, ed. David Baguley (Boston: G. K. Hall & Co., 1986) 71.

¹⁸ Henri Mitterand, "Germinal et les idéologies," Les Cahiers naturalistes 42 (1971) : 143.

¹⁹ Carol S. Fuller, "The Infertile Rabbit," Nineteenth Century French Studies X, 1-2 (1981-82) : 342.

²⁰ Chantal Jennings, "Zola féministe?" Les Cahiers naturalistes 46 (1973) : 18.

²¹ Emile Zola, qtd. in Colette Becker, Emile Zola: La fabrique de Germinal (Paris: Editions Sedes, 1986) 55.

²² Auguste Dezalay, "Le thème du Souterrain chez Zola," Europe 468-69 (avril-mai 1968) : 110-21.

²³ Naomi Schor, "Mother's Day: Zola's Women," Critical Essays on Emile Zola, ed. David Baguley (Boston: G. K. Hall & Co., 1986) 136.

²⁴ Anna Krakowski, La condition de la femme dans l'oeuvre d'Emile Zola (Paris: A.-G. Nizet, 1974) 248.

²⁵ Jules Lemaitre, "Emile Zola," Critical Essays on Emile Zola, ed. and trans. David Baguley (Boston: G. K. Hall

& Co., 1986) 59.

²⁶ Henri Mitterand, "Fonction narrative et fonction mimétique: les personnages de Germinal," Poétique IV, 16 (1973) : 483.

²⁷ Van Buuren 184.

²⁸ Female underground mine labor was banned in France 19 May 1874. The chronology of Germinal is generally accepted as being 1866-67.

²⁹ Krakowski 16-17.

³⁰ Fuller, "Rabbit" 343.

³¹ Smethurst 44.

³² Schor, "Women" 140.

³³ Some modern interpretations of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrha consider violent inhospitality to be the reason for Jehovah's retribution. Suffice it to say the exegeses of this Old Testament passage are multiple.

³⁴ Van Buuren 187.

³⁵ Van Buuren 82.

³⁶ Emile Zola, qtd. in John C. Lapp, "The Watcher Betrayed and the Fatal Woman," PMLA LXXIV (1959) : 282. See also Lauppts, A la mémoire d'Emile Zola (Lyon: Rey, 1907) 10.

³⁷ Philippe Lejeune, "La Côte-Verte et le Tartaret," Poétique X, 40 (1979) 481.

³⁸ See "Un épisode inconnu de l'enfance d'Emile Zola," Mercure de France, 1 March 1929, 508.

³⁹ See Louis-Laurent Simonin, La Vie souterraine, ou les mines et les mineurs (Paris: 1867). Similar phenomena

have been reported in Saint-Etienne, France, and in Burning Hill, Staffordshire, England.

⁴⁰ Henri Mitterand, Zola et le naturalisme (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1986) 100.

⁴¹ Hugh Kenner, "Mazes," qtd. in New York Times Book Review 27 Aug. 1989, 31.

⁴² Greer 43.

⁴³ Docteur H. Boëns-Boisseau, Traité pratique des maladies, des accidents et des difformités des houilleurs, qtd. in Ida-Marie Frandon, Autour de Germinal: La Mine et les mineurs (Lille: Librairie Giard, 1955) 98.

⁴⁴ Differences in birth rates have led to the expression of political concerns in Québec, Northern Ireland, and Israel, to name but a few.

⁴⁵ Germinal 41, 44, 105, 176.

⁴⁶ Although some rudimentary forms of birth control may have been available to le peuple in mid-nineteenth century France, it was not until 1879 that the first birth control clinic opened in Amsterdam under the direction of Dr. Aletta Jacobs. See Greer 356.

⁴⁷ Zakarian 115.

⁴⁸ Germinal 215-230.

⁴⁹ Petrey 24.

⁵⁰ For more detailed discussion of Zola's intra- and extramarital fulfillment see Joanna Richardson, Zola (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1978) 127-30. It was not until 1889--four years after the initial publication of

Germinal--that Zola and Jeanne Rozerot became romantically involved.

51 Smethurst 50.

52 Rosenberg 352.

53 Philip Walker, "Prophetic myths in Zola," PMLA LXXIV (1959) : 447.

54 Smethurst 32.

55 Frandon 99-100.

56 Borie 17.

57 Bellos 43.

58 Van Buuren 113.

59 Hemmings, 2nd ed. 205.

60 Elliott M. Grant, Zola's Germinal: A Critical and Historical Study (Leicester: Leicester UP, 1962) 18.

61 See Anne McCreary Juhasz, ed., Sexual development and behavior (Homewood, Illinois: Dorsey Press, 1973); Frank A. Beach, ed., Human Sexuality in Four Perspectives (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1976); and Jacqueline P. Wiseman, The Social Psychology of Sex (New York: Harper & Row, 1976).

62 Ellis 67.

63 Mitterand, "Idéologie" 151.

64 Hemmings, 2nd ed. 209.

65 Krakowski 69.

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