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ÉMILE ZOLA
THE KILL

A new translation by Brian Nelson



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THE KILL

ÉMILE ZOLA was born in Paris in 1840, the son of a Venetian engineer and his French wife. He grew up in Aix-en-Provence where he made friends with Paul Cézanne. After an undistinguished school career and a brief period of dire poverty in Paris, Zola joined the newly founded publishing firm of Hachette which he left in 1866 to live by his pen. He had already published a novel and his first collection of short stories. Other novels and stories followed until in 1871 Zola published the first volume of his Rougon-Macquart series with the subtitle *Histoire naturelle et sociale d'une famille sous le Second Empire*, in which he sets out to illustrate the influence of heredity and environment on a wide range of characters and milieux. However, it was not until 1877 that his novel *L'Assommoir*, a study of alcoholism in the working classes, brought him wealth and fame. The last of the Rougon-Macquart series appeared in 1893 and his subsequent writing was far less successful, although he achieved fame of a different sort in his vigorous and influential intervention in the Dreyfus case. His marriage in 1870 had remained childless but his extremely happy liaison in later life with Jeanne Rozerot, initially one of his domestic servants, gave him a son and a daughter. He died in 1902.

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ÉMILE ZOLA

The Kill

(La Curée)



Translated with an Introduction and Notes by

BRIAN NELSON

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INTRODUCTION

The Kill (La Carée), published in 1872, is the second volume in Zola's great cycle of twenty novels, *Les Rougon-Macquart*, and the first to establish Paris as the centre of Zola's narrative world. Zola began work on the cycle in 1868 at the age of 28, and devoted himself to the project for the next quarter of a century. It is the chief embodiment of naturalism—Zola's brand of realism, and a logical continuation of the realism of Balzac and Flaubert.

As a writer, Zola was in many respects a typical product of his age. This is most evident in his faith in science and his acceptance of scientific determinism, which was the prevailing philosophy of the latter part of the nineteenth century in France. Zola placed particular emphasis on the 'scientific' nature of his project; his naturalist theories were quite explicit in their analogies between literature and science, the writer and the doctor. He was influenced by the philosopher Hippolyte Taine's views on heredity and environment, and by Prosper Lucas, a forgotten nineteenth-century scientist, the author of a treatise on heredity. Zola himself claimed to have based his method largely on the physiologist Claude Bernard's *Introduction to the Study of Experimental Medicine (Introduction à l'étude de la médecine expérimentale)*, which he had read soon after its appearance in 1865. Zola espoused the Darwinian view of man as an animal whose actions were determined by his heredity and environment; and the 'truth' for which he aimed could only be achieved, he argued, from a meticulous notation of verifiable facts, a methodical documentation of the realities of nature, and, most importantly, systematic demonstrations of deterministic natural laws in the unfolding of his plots. The art of the novelist, Zola argued, represented a form of practical sociology, and complemented the work of the scientist, whose hope was to change the world not by judging it but by understanding it.

The subtitle of the Rougon-Macquart cycle, 'A Natural and Social History of a Family under the Second Empire', suggests Zola's two interconnected aims: to embody in fiction 'scientific' notions about the ways in which human behaviour is determined by heredity and environment; and to use the symbolic possibilities of a

family whose heredity is warped to represent critically certain aspects of a diseased society—the decadent and corrupt, yet dynamic and vital, France of the Second Empire (1852–70). At one level, the Rougon-Macquart cycle is an account of French life from the coup d'état that placed Napoleon III on the throne to the French defeat at the hands of the Prussians at the Battle of Sedan (1 September 1870), which brought about the Empire's collapse. Through the fortunes of a single family, Zola examined the political, moral, and sexual landscape of the late nineteenth century in a way that scandalized bourgeois society. He was the first novelist to write a series of books portraying the lives of members of one family, though his example has frequently been followed since. The Rougon-Macquart family is descended from the three children, one legitimate and two illegitimate, of an insane woman, Tante Dide, who dies in the last volume of the series, *Doctor Pascal*. There are thus three main branches of the family. The first of these, the Rougons, prospers, its members spreading upwards in society to occupy commanding positions in the worlds of government and finance. *His Excellency Eugène Rougon* describes the corrupt political system of Napoleon III, while *The Kill* and *Money*, linked by the same protagonist, Saccard, evoke the frenetic contemporary speculation in real estate and stocks. The second branch of the family is the Mourets, some of whom are successful bourgeois adventurers. Octave Mouret is an ambitious philanderer in *Pot Luck*, a savagely comic picture of the hypocrisies and adulteries behind the façade of a new bourgeois apartment building. In *The Ladies' Paradise*, the effective sequel to *Pot Luck*, he is shown making his fortune from women as he creates one of the first big Parisian department stores. The Macquarts are the working-class members of the family, unbalanced and descended from the alcoholic Antoine Macquart. Members of this branch figure prominently in all of Zola's most powerful novels: *The Belly of Paris*, which uses the central food markets, Les Halles, as a gigantic figuration of the appetites and greed of the bourgeoisie; *L'Assommoir*, a poignant evocation of the lives of the working class in a Paris slum area; *Nana*, the novel of a celebrated prostitute whose sexual power ferments destruction among the Imperial Court; *Germinal*, perhaps Zola's most famous novel, which focuses on a miners' strike in the coalfields of north-eastern France; *The Masterpiece*, the story of a half-mad painter of genius, containing portrayals of a number of literary

and artistic celebrities of the period; *Earth*, in which Zola brings an epic sweep to his portrayal of peasant life; *La Bête humaine*, which opposes the technical progress represented by the railways to the homicidal mania of a train driver, Jacques Lantier; and *La Débâcle*, which describes the Franco-Prussian War and is the first important war novel in French literature.

Zola's naturalism is not as naive and uncritical as is sometimes assumed. His formulation of the naturalist aesthetic, while it advocates a respect for truth that makes no concessions to self-indulgence, shows his clear awareness that 'observation' is not a totally unproblematic process. He recognizes the importance of the observer in the act of observation, and this recognition is repeated in his later, celebrated formula (used in his polemical essay 'The Experimental Novel', 1880) in which he describes the work of art as 'a corner of nature seen through a temperament'. He fully acknowledged the importance, indeed the artistic necessity, of the selecting, structuring role of the individual artist and of the aesthetic he adopts. It is thus not surprising to find him, in a series of newspaper articles in 1866, leaping to the defence of Manet and the Impressionists—defending Manet as an artist with the courage to be individual, to express his own temperament in defiance of current conventions. As far as Zola's own work is concerned, it is his powerful mythopoeic imagination that makes his narratives memorable; the influences of heredity and environment pursue his characters as relentlessly as the forces of Fate in an ancient tragedy. What makes Zola one of the great figures of the European novel is the poetic richness of his work. He uses major features of contemporary life—the market, the machine, the department store, the stock exchange, the theatre, the city itself—as giant symbols of the society of the day. Out of his fictional (rather than theoretical) naturalism emerges a sort of supernaturalism. The originality of *The Kill* lies in its remarkable symbolizing vision, expressed in its dense metaphoric language.

Zola began to make his mark in the literary world as a journalist in the late 1860s, particularly with his uncompromising attacks on the Second Empire (1852–70), which he saw as reactionary and corrupt. Zola conceived *The Kill* from the beginning as a representation of the uncontrollable 'appetites' unleashed by the Second Empire. In republican circles in the 1850s and 1860s denunciation of the political and financial corruption that accompanied the Haussmannization of

Paris, and of the moral corruption of Imperial high society, was a common theme. Zola's originality was to combine into a single, powerful vision, through style and narrative, the themes of 'gold' (Saccard's lust for money) and 'flesh' (Renée's lust for pleasure); hysterical desire becomes the governing trope of the novel.

In *The Kill*, the ambitious Aristide Rougon (who later changes his name to Saccard) comes to Paris from the provincial town of Plassans. When he arrives, he walks excitedly through the streets, as if taking possession of the city. In an early scene in the novel, he looks down over the city from a restaurant window on the Buttes Montmartre and sees Paris as a world to be conquered and plundered. Having had the opportunity, by virtue of his employment at the Hôtel de Ville, to discover the plans for the rebuilding of the city by Baron Haussmann, he realizes that he can use this knowledge to make his fortune. Stretching out his hand, open and sharp like a sabre, he sketches in the air the projected transformations of the city: 'There lay his fortune, in the cuts that his hand had made in the heart of Paris, and he had resolved to keep his plans to himself, knowing very well that when the spoils were divided there would be enough crows hovering over the disembowelled city' (p. 70).

The novel's title gives the work its dominant image. A hunting term, *la curée* denotes, literally, the part of an animal fed to the hounds that have run it to ground. Figuratively, the title evokes the scramble for political spoils and financial gain that characterized the Second Empire. The wedding between Maxime and Louise is arranged at a time when 'the rush for spoils filled a corner of the forest with the yelping of hounds, the cracking of whips, the flaring of torches' (p. 112), thus suggesting that Renée is the quarry, hunted and caught in Saccard's speculative schemes. The daughter of an old bourgeois family, she is made pregnant by a rape. In return for saving her honour by marrying her, Saccard receives a large sum of money, together with Renée's dowry in the form of prize real estate. With this capital he launches his speculative ventures. He buys up properties designated for purchase by the state, which he 'sells' to fictitious purchasers, driving up the price with each 'sale' so as to obtain high compensation prices from the authorities. Saccard and his young wife soon start to lead separate lives, and little by little Renée and her stepson Maxime become lovers. When Saccard discovers their affair, he seizes the opportunity to despoil Renée of her real estate and to

precipitate Maxime's marriage to the aristocratic Louise de Mareuil. Renée knows she is trapped, and realizes that Saccard has directed the hunt from the beginning, setting his snares 'with the subtlety of a hunter who prides himself on the skill with which he catches his prey' (p. 188).

The serialization of *The Kill* in the newspaper *La Cloche* was stopped by the government—ostensibly for immorality, but almost certainly for political reasons. In a letter dated 6 November 1871 to Louis Ulbach, editor of *La Cloche*, Zola wrote:

I must point out, since I have been misunderstood and prevented from making myself clear, that *The Kill* is an unwholesome plant that sprouted out of the dungheap of the Empire, an incest that grew on the compost pile of millions. My aim, in this new *Phaedra*, was to show the terrible social breakdown that occurs when all moral standards are lost and family ties no longer exist. My Renée is the 'Parisienne' driven crazy and into crime by luxury and a life of excess; my Maxime is the product of an effete society, a man-woman, passive flesh that accepts the vilest deeds; my Aristide is the speculator born out of the upheavals of Paris, the brazen self-made man who plays the stock market using whatever comes to hand—women, children, honour, bricks, conscience. I have tried, with these three social monstrosities, to give some idea of the dreadful quagmire into which France was sinking.

Referring to his novel as 'a combative book', Zola asked Ulbach: 'Should I give the names and tear off the masks in order to prove that I am a historian, not a scandalmonger? It would surely be futile. The names are still on everyone's lips.'

Haussmann's Paris

In December 1848 Louis-Napoleon Bonaparte, the nephew of Napoleon Bonaparte, was elected President of the Second Republic. On 2 December 1851 he staged a coup d'état that gave him dictatorial powers. A year later he established himself as Napoleon III, Emperor of the Second Empire. The familiar pattern of nineteenth-century French history was thus repeated: a liberal revolution gave way to a conservative political reaction. Louis-Napoleon seized power through a violent coup, his only claim to the throne being the fact that he was descended from Napoleon I. To establish his authority, and acquire a kind of legitimacy, he pursued a policy of modernization

and 'progress'. He determined to make Paris clean and salubrious, and above all 'modern'. He thus initiated what has remained the largest urban renewal project in the history of the world. For this grand scheme he selected a talented and ambitious civil servant, Georges Eugène Haussmann, whom he appointed Prefect of the Seine, and therefore—since there was no elected mayor at the time—chief administrator of Paris.

The Haussmannization of Paris was, at one level, official state planning on a monumental and highly symbolic scale, glorifying the Napoleonic Empire as if it were a new Augustan Rome, and attempting to turn Paris into the capital of Europe. The nineteenth-century bourgeoisie was to find its apotheosis, argues Walter Benjamin, in the construction of the boulevards under the auspices of Haussmann; before their completion the boulevards were covered over with tarpaulins, to be unveiled like monuments.¹ Another view of the spectacular modernization of the city is to see it as intimately linked to rationalization and to forms of social and political control. For Benjamin, 'the real aim of Haussmann's works was the securing of the city against civil war. He wished to make the erection of barricades in Paris impossible for all time.'² In the revolutions of 1789, 1830, and 1848 the barricade had been a potent weapon of resistance in the dense, rabbit-warren streets of the working-class slums. Haussmann's straight boulevards and avenues linked the new barracks in each *arrondissement*, thus allowing the rapid deployment of troops in case of insurrection. Many of the new streets were designed to cut through the densest and politically most hostile districts of Paris. Haussmann admitted quite candidly that one of his aims was to control the unruly and ungovernable poor. He was a great respecter of authority, and saw the keeping of order as one of his main duties. For him there was little difference between this kind of control and the improvement of the city's sanitation; it was simply another form of hygiene.

The first project entrusted to Haussmann was the creation of a vast new central market. A twenty-one-acre site was cleared to create the market complex known as Les Halles, which functioned as the

¹ Walter Benjamin, 'Paris, the Capital of the Nineteenth Century', in id., *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, Mass., and London: The Belknap Press, 1999), 11–12.

² *The Arcades Project*, 12.

so-called 'belly of Paris' until 1968, when it was pulled down. Another of his tasks was to extend the Rue de Rivoli from the Bastille to the Place de la Concorde, thus allowing Louis-Napoléon to fulfil his uncle's plan to create an effective east-west crossing of the city. This ruthlessly straight street, over 3 kilometres long, set a precedent for the transformation of Paris. Although the official cost had trebled to 11 million francs by its completion in 1855, it achieved Napoleon I's goal, and also allowed for the rapid deployment of troops from the barracks near the Tuileries Palace to the industrial east of the city, a traditional centre of political unrest. Haussmann's next major enterprise was the creation of a new central boulevard on the north-south axis, crossing the Rue de Rivoli by the Tour Saint-Jacques and reaching down to the river at the Place du Châtelet. Work began in 1855, with huge disruption as hundreds of buildings were demolished to create the space needed for this great new artery.

Haussmann had taken full advantage of a new law of expropriation, permitting compulsory purchase of private property by the government, to buy up whole blocks of land on either side of the projected route of the boulevard in order to resell it to property speculators at great profit and thus offset the cost of the project. With the completion of the Boulevard du Centre, now called Boulevard Sébastopol, the centre of the capital was connected directly to the Gare de l'Est and other mainline stations to the north and east of France. The new boulevard was opened by the Emperor with great fanfare, celebrating the achievement as one of national importance. On either side, the newly built apartment blocks erected by property speculators began to give the city an architectural uniformity. As soon as work on this north-south crossing had begun, plans were made to continue it across the Île de la Cité to the Left Bank, to join the cutting of a huge southern extension, another 2 kilometres long, the Boulevard Saint Michel.

Throughout the 1850s and 1860s a great number of buildings were torn down. Hundreds of thousands of people were evicted. Working-class people in particular were forced into cheaper outlying areas. On Haussmann's own estimate, the new boulevards and open spaces displaced 350,000 people; 12,000 of them were uprooted by the building of the Rue de Rivoli and Les Halles alone. In compensation, the work itself provided profitable new employment, attracting many more people into Paris from the provinces. New and better

housing of all categories was erected under strict building regulations by private developers, who then demanded higher rents.³ Property speculation became all the rage. The building work was unremitting, in some places proceeding by night as well as by day, using the new technology of electric arc lights. At the height of the fever of reconstruction, one in five Parisian workers was employed in the building trade. The devastation of old Paris was deeply controversial, but Haussmann pursued it with a ruthless logic. By 1870 over 1,200 kilometres of new streets had been built, nearly double what had existed before. Well over half of these streets had sewers running underneath them, and most were well lit with gas.⁴ There were policemen, night patrols, and bus shelters. Men were even provided with ways to relieve themselves (more or less) in public. Eighty thousand new apartment blocks had been built, many receiving fresh running water. The city had twice as many trees as in 1850, most of them transplanted full grown, and had almost doubled in size and population. The Bois de Boulogne and the Bois de Vincennes were made into public parks, and in a new spacious context, such urban buildings as the Louvre, the Hôtel de Ville, the Palais Royal, the Bibliothèque Nationale, Notre Dame, and the Opéra became monuments. Paris became the centre of Europe, with six new railway lines converging on the capital. In 1867 the Second Empire was at the height of its power, and, as Walter Benjamin wrote, the phantasmagoria of capitalist culture attained its most radiant unfolding in the World Exhibition held in Paris that year. Paris was acknowledged as the capital of luxury and fashion—the capital, indeed, of the nineteenth century.⁵

Haussmann's project was fantastically expensive: in fact the debt incurred to finance the transformation of Paris was not retired until 1929. Louis-Napoleon, when he appointed Haussmann Prefect of the Seine, and gave him as his major task the transformation of Paris, told him that he could not raise taxes to finance the project. Haussmann was thus forced into using a series of clever expedients—a mixture of direct grant, public loans, and 'creative accounting'—in

³ By Haussmann's own estimate, rents in the centre of the city doubled between 1851 and 1857.

⁴ Haussmann's proudest moments included breaking the monopoly of the cab company—the Compagnie des Petites Voitures—in 1866, and promoting that of the makers of streetlamps—the Compagnie Parisienne d'Éclairage—in 1856.

⁵ *The Arcades Project*, 8.

order to realize his plans. The first thing he did was go into deficit spending on a very large scale. The Pereire brothers became his major financiers, and the traditional banks were shut out. He then set about attracting private capital by giving land to developers, who were obliged to pay upfront for their various construction projects. They loaned him money at virtually no interest, in exchange for bonds, which were then floated on the stock market. Furthermore, he compelled the developers (private investors) to follow his regulations of height, roof lines, and facing materials—all of which gave the city a new face. These materials—cut stone rather than cheaper brick, for example—were dictated partly by the planned uniformity of the buildings and partly because every piece of stone that came into Paris was charged an excise tax, which Haussmann then ploughed into his projects. Another scheme he used for a while was to confiscate much more land than he needed, develop it, and sell it back at the improved rates. Haussmann considered such ‘creative’ methods justified in economic terms, because in the end they increased state and city revenues and allowed the balancing of private and public investment. However, he encountered growing criticism, not only because of the escalating cost of his works, but also because of the perceived irregularities of his financial practices. In a celebrated pamphlet, *The Fantastic Accounts of Haussmann* (*Les Comptes fantastiques d’Haussmann*), published in 1868, Jules Ferry played on the title of Offenbach’s recent operetta *The Tales of Hoffmann* (*Les Contes d’Hoffmann*) to denounce the financial manipulations of Haussmannization. Haussmann was finally forced out of office at the same time that Napoleon III became embroiled in the war with Prussia that led to the humiliating siege of Paris and the collapse of the Empire.

Character and Milieu

The Kill begins with a description of an urban spectacle, a traffic jam in the Bois de Boulogne. The motifs of the description are typical of the novel and define Second Empire society as represented by Zola—a society of flamboyant materialism and of new social spaces, in which people are seen as the products of their social environment. Theatricality and the play of light on glittering surfaces are the keynotes of the scene; conventional boundaries—between nature

and society, public and private, interior and exterior—are blurred (as we shall see later in relation to the liminal space of the new boulevards), and social norms transgressed at many levels.⁶

The barouche in which Renée and Maxime are seated reflects patches of the surrounding landscape in such a way that it almost becomes part of the natural world, while the characters are disconnected from nature, concerned with social rather than natural phenomena. Renée, as if leaning from an opera box, uses her eyeglass to examine Laure d'Aurigny and to establish that 'Tout Paris was there' (p. 6). 'Silent glances were exchanged from window to window; no one spoke, the silence broken only by the creaking of a harness or the impatient pawing of a horse's hoof' (p. 6). The occupants of the carriages, as if waiting for a show to begin, do not interact in any way other than by seeing and being seen. Although outdoors, Zola's characters behave as if indoors; the categories of public and private appear interchangeable. Though part of an urban spectacle, they also become part of nature: the women are decorated in such a way that they seem almost like botanical specimens. Renée wears a bonnet adorned with a little bunch of Bengal roses, while rich costumes spill out through the carriage doors like foliage. The park itself is strikingly artificial—a contrived, carefully planned 'scrap of nature' (p. 8). It is as if nature is subject to interior decoration. The lake is a mirror, in which the black foliage of the theatrically grouped trees is 'like the fringe of curtains carefully draped along the edge of the horizon'. Light conspires with this 'newly painted piece of scenery' to create 'an air of entrancing artificiality' (p. 8). Tree-trunks become colonnades, lawns become carpets; the park gates form a lace curtain shielding this outsize drawing room from the exterior, creating a semi-transparent boundary which becomes further blurred as the sun goes down. It is at dusk, as the light disappears, that the boundary between nature and the world becomes completely blurred; the prospect of the transformation of the park into 'a sacred grove' where 'the gods of antiquity hid their Titanic loves, their adulteries, their divine incests' (p. 11), creates in Renée 'a strange feeling of illicit desire',

⁶ For an extended analysis of the novel's opening chapter, see Larry Duffy, 'Preserves of Nature: Traffic Jams and Garden Furniture in Zola's *La Curée*', in *Les Lieux Interdits: Transgression and French Literature*, ed. with an introduction by Larry Duffy and Adrian Tudor (Hull: University of Hull Press, 1998), 205–16.

thus setting the scene for the drama of forbidden desire played out in the novel.

In the second half of the opening chapter, the description of Saccard's opulent mansion near the Parc Monceau reflects the same indifferentiation, the same confusion of interior and exterior, social and natural, public and private. Luxury and decoration characterize the buttercup drawing room, with its extravagantly foliated furniture and its lawn-like carpet. The mansion itself is described as 'a miniature version of the new Louvre, one of the most typical examples of the Napoleon III style, that opulent bastard of so many styles' (p. 17). The comparison identifies it with the regime, while its eclectic architectural style⁷ implies both a blurring of boundaries and the illegitimacy associated with the regime. The extravagance and excess that characterize the mansion are the hallmarks of the Second Empire itself, to which it is a monument.

On summer evenings, when the rays of the setting sun lit up the gilt of the railings against its white façade, the strollers in the gardens would stop to look at the crimson silk curtains behind the ground-floor windows; and through the sheets of plate glass so wide and clear that they seemed like the window-fronts of a big modern department store, arranged so as to display to the outside world the wealth within, the petty bourgeoisie could catch glimpses of the corners of tables and chairs, of portions of hangings, of patches of ornate ceilings, the sight of which would root them to the spot, in the middle of the pathways, with envy and admiration. (p. 17)

The voracious desires of Zola's three 'social monstrosities' are seen as an inevitable product of Second Empire Paris, and Zola constantly correlates narrative developments with their social settings. Lengthy descriptions of houses, interiors, social gatherings, and the like emphasize the connections between individuals and their milieu. Indeed, as Claude Duchet has remarked, *The Kill* is 'less a study of characters placed in a particular milieu than a study

⁷ 'The Second Empire is the classical period of eclecticism—a period without a style of its own in architecture and the industrial arts, and with no stylistic unity in its painting. New theatres, hotels, tenement-houses, barracks, department stores, market-halls, come into being, whole rows and rings of streets arise, Paris is almost rebuilt by Haussmann, but apart from the principle of spaciousness and the beginnings of iron construction, all this takes place without a single original architectural idea': Arnold Hauser, *The Social History of Art*, 4: *Naturalism, Impressionism, The Film Age* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1962 (1951)), 58.

of a milieu placed in particular characters'.⁸ Despite Zola's theoretical commitment to documentary accuracy, it would be profoundly mistaken to equate his naturalism with inventory-like descriptions. His descriptions provide not merely the framework or tonality of his world but express its very meaning.

The new city under construction becomes a vast symbol of the corruption of Second Empire society. The description of the visit of Renée and Maxime to the Café Riche is a striking example of Zola's use of imagery to suggest the complicity of the city.⁹ Descriptions of the boulevard seem to stimulate Renée's erotic feelings: 'The wide pavement, swept by the prostitutes' skirts and ringing with peculiar familiarity under the men's boots, and over whose grey asphalt it seemed to her that the cavalcade of pleasure and brief encounters was passing, awoke her slumbering desires' (p. 123). Renée is as if intoxicated by the urban scene. The boulevard seen from an open window—the pleasure-seeking crowds, the café tables, the chance encounters, the solitary prostitute—acts as a symbolic correlative to her mounting excitement; indeed, it is as if she is seduced less by Maxime than by the boulevard itself. Afterwards,

[w]hat lingered on the surface of the deserted road of the noise and vice of the evening made excuses for her. She thought she could feel the heat of the footsteps of all those men and women rising up from the pavement that was now growing cold. The shameful lust that had lingered there—momentary lust, whispered offers, prepaid nights of pleasure—was evaporating, floating in a heavy mist dissipated by the breath of morning. Leaning out into the darkness, she inhaled the quivering darkness, the alcove-like fragrance, as an encouragement from below, as an assurance of shame shared and accepted by a complicitous city. (p. 133)

The 'complicitous city' is a very active agent in Renée's progressive degradation. The public spaces of the city become the lovers' personal preserve: 'The lovers adored the new Paris. They often drove through the city, going out of their way in order to pass along certain boulevards' (p. 168). Every boulevard 'became a corridor of their house' (p. 169). The Saccard apartment becomes an extension of the Rue de Rivoli: 'The street invaded the apartment with its rumbling

⁸ Claude Duchet, Introduction to the Garnier-Flammarion edition of *La Curée* (Paris, 1970), 17–31 (p. 21).

⁹ This episode is analysed with great finesse by Christopher Prendergast in his *Paris and the Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), 40–5.

carriages, jostling strangers, and permissive language' (p. 104). Renée's mental instability alarms Maxime, who associates her illness with the disorder of the street: 'Maxime began to be frightened by these fits of seeming madness, in which he thought he could hear, at night, on the pillow, all the din of a city obsessed with the pursuit of pleasure' (p. 179). The promiscuity of Haussmann's Paris is all-pervading, and finally it takes possession of Renée's mind.

Money, Movement, Madness

The links between Haussmannization and a burgeoning capitalism were profound. The shaping force of capitalism was reflected in the physical, visual changes made in the city.

Capitalism was assuredly visible from time to time, in a street of new factories or the theatricals of the Bourse; but it was only in the form of the city that it appeared as what it was, a shaping spirit, a force remaking things with ineluctable logic—the argument of freight statistics and double-entry bookkeeping. The city was the *sign* of capital: it was there one saw the capital take on flesh—take up and eviscerate the varieties of social practice, and give them back with ventriloquial precision.¹⁰

In purely economic terms, capitalism took a firm grip on French society during Napoleon III's reign. Public works were the motor of capitalism—they were the avant-garde of the economy to come, laying the groundwork for the 'consumer society'. Vast amounts of money were invested in the expansion of the railways and in the coal and iron industries. A modern banking system, based on credit and investment, was developed, and was greatly stimulated by the wild speculation in real estate and public works engendered by Haussmann's reconstruction of the city. In this context, money became a liquid asset. It flows metaphorically through Zola's text in all directions. Saccard's growing mastery as a speculator is evoked in typically phantasmagoric terms, by an image of an ever-expanding sea of gold coins in which he swims:

Saccard was insatiable, he felt his greed grow at the sight of the flood of gold that glided through his fingers. It seemed to him as if a sea of twenty-franc pieces stretched out around him, swelling from a lake to an ocean,

¹⁰ T. J. Clark, *The Painting of Modern Life: Paris in the Art of Manet and His Followers* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1985), 69.