



In the Looking-Glass: Zola and Contemporary Painting

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It has been amply demonstrated that Lewis Carroll's reflections on the real and the virtual leave a lot to be scientifically or optically desired, starting, as Jonathan Miller has remarked, with his artful occlusion of 'the indescribable shemuzzle' that would have occurred when Alice met herself coming in the opposite direction (1998: 119). But those reflections retain, in Alice's classic reference to the illusions (as Umberto Eco and others have insisted) of inversion, and to 'the books [which] are something like our books, only the letters go the wrong way', at least a suggestive capacity. That is not limited, I want to argue, to Zola's juggling of the letters of his own name in inventing that of Sandoz, the novelist in *L'Œuvre*, aligned in opposition to his fictional painters and the looking-glass 'monde à part'¹ into which the real Zola clammers in his retrospective summa of 1886. For even the metaphor allows us to reconfigure, in and through his confrontations with contemporary painting, the ways in which we might be forced to reassess a relationship too often uncritically celebrated in a network of biographical infrastructures and promiscuous analogies.

Perhaps paradoxically, given the novelist's theoretical insistence on transparency (panes of glass, the work of art as a 'fenêtre ouverte sur la création', etc.), there are many mirrors, both real and figurative, in Zola's own fiction.² These range from the narrative matrix of the founding text of *Les Rougon-Macquart* all the way to the *mise-en-abîme* of *Le Docteur Pascal* which brings the series full circle. *La Fortune des Rougon* is exemplary in this respect: the twin reflective surfaces in which Silvère and Miette can see each other within the claustal space of the Aire St Mittre generate the pleasures of the text and encode the habitual processes of Zola's art of visualisation, from initial hazy blur to well-defined perception. That is not to forget Florent's dematerialization of the threatening female in the mirrors of *Le Ventre de Paris* and, above all, the objectifying strategies of a naturalist *prise-de-conscience* which bring many of his women, or feminized, characters face to face with reflections of, and on, who they are and what they have become. One thinks immediately of Nana, of course, emblematic of the mirroring of text and image whereby the last part of *L'Assommoir* generates Manet's picture of 1878, which is transposed in turn by Zola in Nana's pleasuring of

herself 'en riant à l'autre Nana, qui, elle aussi, se baisait dans la glace' (*Les Rougon-Macquart*, II: 1271). Curiously (especially given their pragmatic functionality), the one space where there are no mirrors is Claude Lantier's *atelier* in *L'Œuvre* itself: a dishevelled Christine gets up in the morning and searches in vain for one in which to reorganize the face which, while she had been unconscious, Claude had already painted: 'Elle ne dit rien, elle prit son chapeau, chercha du regard une glace, puis, n'en trouvant pas, elle se décida à nouer les brides au petit bonheur des doigts' (*Les Rougon-Macquart*, IV: 30).

Beyond the stereotypically gendered recourse to Western art's endless rehearsal of the categorically feminine nature of self-contemplation, those kinds of mirrors are not beside the point: Renée, in *La Curée*, ends up seeing herself dead: 'quand elle rouvrit les yeux, elle s'approcha de la glace, se regarda encore, s'examina de près. Elle était finie. Elle se vit morte' (*Les Rougon-Macquart*, I: 576); so too, for Nana, the sight (in due course) of her estranged image in the mirror will prefigure her facial loss of outline and ultimate invisibility. In relation to painters and painting, and without quite turning upside down, or back to front, Oscar Wilde's conceit about Caliban seeing or not seeing his face in a glass (in the Preface to the *Picture of Dorian Gray*),³ I shall be arguing that such pictorial models provide for Zola a mirror in which he can see himself reflected, and are themselves mirrored in his own writing: the pictorial looking-glass, in other words, is the frame of self-definition, as seen by others, and the location of an anxiety lodged between uniqueness and an annihilating *dédoublement* (and between similarities and difference, starting with his protesting *Différences entre Balzac et moi* and his grappling with the eroding resemblances of genealogy), the site of the related staging of a persona and an artistic originality. But there is also a sense, signalled by the absent mirror in *L'Œuvre* and Claude's terminal confusions between art and life, in which — in contradistinction to the apparently unmediated reflection of painting — Zola's writing on the latter, and indeed writing *tout court*, accommodates the necessary consciousness of the distinction between the real and the virtual dimensions of mirroring, or mimetic practice. While these kinds of perspectives might usefully renew our general thinking about the relationship between Zola and the art of his time, they are at least opened up by the cases of Cézanne and Manet — to choose the two most famous and the most contrary of Zola's encounters with contemporary painting.

In the case of Zola and Cézanne, it is almost heretical not to accede to a 'fraternity of genius'⁴ retailed in museum bookshops and cultural histories. But while there is no need to go over the well-trodden ground of their childhood friendship, its vicissitudes across the best part of forty years and its termination as a result of Zola's *L'Œuvre* in 1886, it remains potentially valuable to explore, very summatively, the extent to which — both biographically and in relation to Cézanne's art — Zola's contemplation of, or looking at, the man and his painting can be seen as what might be termed a process of negative definition. What is certain is that the mawkish correspondence of the 1850s and 1860s between the two of them, from which Zola's biographers are at pains to

eliminate the slightest hint of even latent homoeroticism, is marked, on Zola's part at least, by the straining desire of a possessive self-identification. He rebukes Cézanne for not writing to him: 'Ne sois pas égoïste : tes joies comme tes douleurs m'appartiennent' (*Correspondance*, I: 146); or, a few months later (in that same summer of 1860), he asserts that 'sous bien des rapports, nos caractères sont semblables [...]. Ne-suis je pas dans le même cas que toi ? La forme n'est-elle pas également rebelle sous mes doigts ?' (*Correspondance*, I: 213); and, even six years later, Zola nostalgically reminds the painter that 'tu es toute ma jeunesse : je te retrouve mêlé à chacune de mes joies, à chacune de mes souffrances. Nos esprits, dans leur fraternité, se sont développés côte à côte. Aujourd'hui, au jour du début, nous avons foi en nous, parce que nous avons pénétré nos coeurs et nos chairs'.⁵ Earlier, in 1861, when Cézanne was about to join him for the first time in Paris, Zola made him a timetable:

Voici comment tu pourras diviser ton temps. De six à onze tu iras dans un atelier peindre d'après le modèle vivant ; tu déjeuneras, puis, de midi à quatre, tu copieras, soit au Louvre, soit au Luxembourg, le chef-d'œuvre qui te plaira. Ce qui fera neuf heures de travail ; je crois que cela suffit et que tu ne peux tarder, avec un tel régime, de bien faire. [...] Travaillons, travaillons ; c'est l'unique moyen d'arriver. (*Correspondance*, I: 272)

This is followed by a minutely detailed budget of what Cézanne might allow himself to spend on rent, canvas, paint-brushes, breakfast, lunch, and laundry, making it hardly surprising that Zola's letters to other friends in the 1860s and 1870s rush from the excitement of Cézanne's latest imminent arrival to the despairing and soon-to-be-confirmed prediction that the painter would soon be packing his bags and returning to Provence! What runs through such repeated advice is the 'Be more like me', the idealised projection frustrated by, and superimposed on, a barely-contained resistance to Cézanne's often provocatively boorish behaviour and calculatedly bad manners: declining to shake Manet's hand on the grounds that he hadn't washed for a week; exploding out of the Café Guerbois with his 'L'esprit m'emmerde'; dressing like a scarecrow; specializing in scatological bluster and inventive variations on the art of how not to eat soup at Mme Alexandrine Zola's newly-bourgeoisified table. Against this anecdotal backdrop, Zola's advice speaks of his absolute differentiation¹ from Cézanne as a man, and of a perception of both 'l'homme et l'oeuvre' as volatile, impatient, stubbornly inconsistent and infuriatingly illogical. Zola is so close to Cézanne that he never gets away from confusing the painter and the man, confronting less the work than the strange human being who paints, consistent with Cézanne's own self-portraits in the looking-glass in only one of which — the *Zurich Self-Portrait with a Palette* — does he present himself as a *painter* (a declaration of his painterly status, as it were), at

the very moment (in 1886) when Zola apparently places the biggest of question-marks over Cézanne's achievement.

At its most elementary level, this can be explained in the juxtaposition of Cézanne as Zola knew him and the increasing divergence of initially parallel lives; in the shifting position from which the established Parisian writer perceives Cézanne mostly out of sight (down there in Provence), remembered as he was, trapped in the mythologies of the past and of his personality as surely as both Cézanne and his painting, for Zola, are perceived once and for all as he had seen the work and known the man up close, too close to the intensity and vicissitudes of his life, in the context of their personal friendship. It is that same temporal freeze-frame and inordinate biographical focus which informs Zola's partial portraits of Cézanne in his own fiction. As numerous scholars have shown, these are to be found, essentially, in three works. Firstly, in the portrait of Laurent, the neurotic painter of *Thérèse Raquin* (1867) struggling with his demons and producing works which are repulsive, ill-composed and murky, but nevertheless strange and powerful, painted 'au gré de sa fantaisie, sans se soucier de la nature', as he sketches 'les têtes les plus diverses, des têtes d'anges, de vierges avec des auréoles, de guerriers romains coiffés de leur casque, d'enfants blonds et roses, de vieux bandits couturés de cicatrices' [...] and 'se jeta dans la caricature, [...] exagéra les traits [...] inventa des têtes grotesques' (*Œuvres complètes*. 1966-9. I: 628-9). Secondly there is *Le Ventre de Paris* (1873); and, in this case, it is clear from Zola's notes for the novel that, both physically and in relation to his fictional painter's apprenticeship — and in his early reliance on the Old Masters in particular —, Cézanne is indeed the model for his fictional character. Once again Zola refers to a painter's vain efforts to get it right, his extravagant visions, his imaginative excess and his repeated destruction of his canvasses. It is very much to the point that many of those canvasses are either *plein-air* nudes or, more often than not, still-lives. To read Zola's description of Claude Lantier here is to summon up Pissarro's portrait of Cézanne [FIG. 1] a year later:

C'était un garçon maigre, avec de gros os, une grosse tête, barbu, le nez très fin, les yeux minces et clairs. Il portait un chapeau de feutre noir, roussi, déformé, et se boutonnait au fond d'un immense paletot, jadis marron tendre, que les pluies avaient déteint en larges traînées verdâtres. Un peu courbé, agité d'un frisson d'inquiétude nerveuse qui devait lui être habituel, il restait planté dans ses gros souliers lacés ; et son pantalon trop court montrait ses bas bleus. (*Les Rougon-Macquart*, I: 617).

And then, thirdly, and most famously of all, there is the Cézanne visible within the composite figure of Claude in *L'Œuvre*, in which the above pen-portrait from *Le Ventre de Paris* is used again, almost word-for-word, more than a decade later. Without wanting to return to the strangely mannered and variously interpretable 'Thank you very much' with which Cézanne responds to the gift of his own signed copy of

L'Œuvre, it remains instructive that, in his preparatory notes for the latter, Zola says at one point that his fictional painter will be, at least in part, 'un Cézanne dramatisé', further underlining the extent to which Zola conceives of the artist as an individual psychology and almost a ready-made character for a drama or a novel, assessing him, it seems, from his own literary perspective.

If we remain concerned less with the human drama and its denouement than with Zola's critical writing on Cézanne, that biographical reflection is merely a starting-point, I think, for what such writing ultimately tells us about the very nature of Zola's art criticism and the possibilities and limits of its engagement with contemporary painting. For the process of negative self-definition means that the work of Cézanne, in particular, cannot be accommodated within, or appropriated by, its discursive strategies and aesthetic assumptions. At an earlier stage, prior to Zola's journalistic education as an art critic in the late 1860s, we find a seldom-quoted admission to Cézanne that he really knew nothing at all about painting: 'lorsque je vois un tableau, moi qui sais tout au plus distinguer le blanc du noir, il est évident que je ne puis me permettre de juger des coups de pinceau' (*Correspondance*, I: 249). By the time of the distorted transpositions of *Thérèse Raquin*, by contrast, Zola has at his disposal a lexicon and a set of emerging presuppositions into which Cézanne does not fit by virtue, precisely, of what Zola calls his 'étrangeté', making it perhaps less curious that nowhere in his art criticism is there any substantive reference to Cézanne himself.

In his 1866 articles in *L'Événement*, his stress on 'le tempérament', in his oft-repeated definition of a work of art as 'un coin de la nature vue à travers un tempérament' has sometimes been seen as gesturing towards Cézanne's forceful individuality. And when he collected those articles in volume-form (under the title *Mon Salon*), Zola did publicly dedicate the volume to Cézanne, as he would dedicate, later that same year, his first (and largely autobiographical) novel, *La Confession de Claude*. But the *dédicace* to the volume of art criticism did come with something of a double-edge, with Zola explaining to Cézanne that although (of course) he remained his best friend, he had not actually mentioned him in his art criticism because he was reserving judgment on him as a painter, a judgement deferred because Zola felt that Cézanne's experimentation in technique and subject was itself a deferral, or a procrastination, endlessly postponing the adoption of a *manière*, an aesthetic or a personal style. In a letter of May 1870, Zola writes of Cézanne's continuing 'période de tâtonnements': 'Attendez qu'il se soit trouvé lui-même' (*Correspondance*, II, 219), thereby inscribing in the mirror of his own newly-fashioned self-assurance the problematised self of Cézanne's unfinished quest for identity. For it is that notion of Cézanne not yet having found himself, or not yet having become more like the novelist, which at least partly explains Zola's differentiating fictional representations of Cézanne and the virtual absence of his name in Zola's art-criticism — which otherwise ranges far and wide in contemporary painting. The references to Cézanne are notoriously few and far between. Over 30 years, to be more precise, from Zola's first writing on

painting in 1866 to 1896 (when he does so for the last time) there are only six such references, a paucity put in more acute perspective by the fact that this is as few as to a relatively forgotten artist like Bonnat while, by comparison, there are over one hundred references to Manet, and almost thirty to Corot or Monet. What is more, they are barely passing mentions at that, amounting to a few isolated comments on a painter still in the process of becoming one, with not a single one of Cézanne's paintings the subject of analysis or appreciation.

It seems to me that we can only make sense of that infamous critical silence not so much in terms of incomprehension and lack of insight, but rather in Zola's inability to *write* about Cézanne, to the extent that his work is unamenable not only to Zola's aesthetic principles and priorities, but also to the semantic configurations and discursive practices of Zola's art-historical rhetoric. What *L'Œuvre* underlines, extrapolating from its composite portraits, is that Zola's Cézanne is a failure on aesthetic grounds, too, in his residual Romanticism, assertive subjectivity and conception of art as something very different from Zola's own mimetic imperatives, not least in the writer's *ex post facto* reconciliation (symptomatically identifiable in his writing on Manet) of individuated vision and truth, and of technical mastery and the appearance of the spontaneity of the real. Judged against such criteria, it is no wonder that Zola has nothing to say about Cézanne, other than to stress that he is an artist in the making, still emerging in Zola's own looking-glass through the blur of indistinction: 'le jour où M. Paul Cézanne se possédera, il produira des œuvres tout-à-fait supérieures'.⁶

It has often been shown that the novelist's art criticism, however challenging and intelligent in its own right, is the testing-ground for the development of his own theoretical positioning.⁷ This is equally visible, in the adjoining literary domain, in his teleological cultural history — interrupted by the aberrations of Romanticism and spaced by precursors (Stendhal, Flaubert, Balzac) — in which the fixed end-point, the apex, is Naturalism and Zola himself. So, too, as far as the visual arts are concerned, the writer recruits this or that painter or sculptor in the very terms of his own emerging aesthetic, territorially gathering, under the Naturalist banner, each and every modernist tendency from Delacroix to Impressionism. It is within that forward-looking dynamic, too, that Cézanne does not fit — in his case so deliberately re-working the art of the past (as this dimension of the fictional painter in *Le Ventre de Paris* already suggests) that Zola would have found it impossible to effect so strategic a suppression of that past which Manet's modern subject matter, by contrast, inherently allowed him to do, and as Manet knew. And if, at a purely rhetorical level, much of Zola's art criticism works by analogy, comparison and conflation,⁸ by equivalents, metaphorical substitutions and superimpositions, eroding the distinctions between differentiated artistic practices in the service of his own Naturalist project and, crucially, on the assumption that the literary is inherently superior to the pictorial, here again Cézanne does not fit, simply by virtue of refusing to offer the writer the necessary fixed point in any such rhetorical move.

Moreover, Zola's contrary positioning (contrary, in other words, to a perpetual motion on Cézanne's part) is stabilized by his own taxonomic and ordering propensities and, as is evident from the preparatory dossier for *L'Œuvre*, by assigning an aesthetic immobility to himself in the surrogate figure of Sandoz; as he puts it in his work-notes for the novel: 'Moi, fatalement, je suis immobile'. The fixed-point in the mirror is thereby self-defining in opposition to the painter partly modelled on Cézanne, while it simultaneously asserts a defiant conservative positioning in relation to what Zola calls the contemporary 'anarchie de l'art', uncannily anticipating Bourdieu in citing the extraordinary proliferation of painters and paintings liberated from institutional control: 'une Babel de l'art' (as Zola puts it in his art criticism contemporary to the writing of *L'Œuvre*), which is also the hyperbolic 'crise' of absent geniuses, generic illegibility and transitional disorder, which is a crisis less of the time in the novel (the 1860s) than in the time of the novel (the 1880s) which is also reflected in Zola's critical writing at that time. Cézanne, by contrast to Zola's positioning and almost confirming his worst fears, does not stand still. This is evident in both the serial indeterminacy of his self-portraits and in the creative re-inventions of his artistic styles, never fixed within an identifiable school or a movement, a development or an evolution, or even a tendency. He is impossible to place, in Zola's terms and lexicon, to situate or classify, to explain or define, to include or write-in, other than in the interstices and silent margins of transition. In Zola's looking-glass, Cézanne can never be more than an inverted image of himself, but more usually figures the far more sinister absence of any reflection at all.

Which is not the case with Manet, of course. And indeed if Manet is Zola's favourite painter, it is surely, within the above dialectic, because he is not Cézanne. As Fantin-Latour's 1867 portrait of him [FIG. 2] also projects, this worldly, well-dressed, stylish and sophisticated gentleman was not all, as Zola stressed in his championing, the 'rapin débraillé' of polemical caricature and popular mythology: as Zola recalled him, in 1884, 'un Parisien adorant le monde, d'une élégance fine et spirituelle' (*Ecrits sur l'art*: 452). The creative relationship between the two men has many mirroring dimensions to it: an identification, in the 1860s and early 1870s which pervades the language of Zola's self-definition as a critic and as a novelist; common themes and sources elaborated in analogous techniques and descriptive fabrics; the pre-emptive relegation, by Zola, of subject-matter to formalist concerns, thereby effecting the necessary separation between scandalous realisms and artistic integrity; positive valencies ascribed to fictional painters, compensating for Cézanne-like aberrations, by the writer intermittently mapping their practice on to Manet's own; the verbatim cannibalisation of his journalistic discourse on Manet retranscribed within fictional dialogue or authorial commentary in *L'Œuvre*; a posited shared martyrdom at the hands of the philistines; sincere solidarity neatly coinciding with self-interest in the superimposition of the image of one modernist artist on another. These dimensions add up, in every sense (sartorial, moral and optical), to distinction.

And yet that relationship is problematised rather than confirmed, it seems to me, by Manet's *Portrait d'Emile Zola, écrivain* [FIG 3]. And, in the context of this particular essay, it is worth thinking again about Zola's confrontation with that portrait as an image of himself and the ways we might relate it to his shifting representation of the painters of his time. Manet's painting of 1868 is often seen, it should be said, as another celebration, an expression of gratitude for the writer's support, cited here in the recognizable blue cover of Zola's pioneering study of him and in the turning of Olympia's glance in acknowledgement of his efforts to defend her reputation. And the portrait is also seen as a testimony, not only to a friendship between the two artists, but also, like Fantin-Latour's 1870 *Un atelier aux Batignolles*, to a common commitment to a new aesthetic programme. Taken to euphoric lengths, as Henri Mitterand has declared, 'on ne saurait mieux signifier la consubstantialité du scriptural et du pictural' (1994: 108).

As I have tried to show elsewhere, a more equivocal reading of the painting might start with Manet's signature displacing Zola's own (Lethbridge, 1994: 153-7). Nor is this the place to review the extraordinarily rich allusive texture of the painting, either responding to Zola's commentary or reasserting those creative contacts with tradition which Zola had missed, or dismissed, in all his writing on Manet since 1866.⁹ Suffice it to repeat that these multiple inscriptions make of the portrait as a whole the most eloquent refutation of the novelist's unwillingness to grant Manet a degree of intentionality. They contradict Zola's formalist platform (his view that *Olympia* and *Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe* are merely a structure of colours) the implications of which are that only writing can articulate meaning. Or irony, for that matter, such as that picked up by a contemporary journalist who wrote of Zola being 'perdu dans ses idées noires', turned away, in non-recognition, from every visual influence on display. We need only compare it with other portraits of writers, Degas's of Duranty (1879) or Cézanne's of Gustave Geffroy (1895), integrated with the backcloth of their personal libraries. The fact that Zola is surrounded by the signs of Manet's activities rather than his own adds to that sense of him being awkwardly misplaced. Dangling eye-glasses suggest the perceptual blank of Zola's gaze, oblivious not only of the pictures around him but also of the portrait-painter. What is more, there seems to be a calculated inversion of the literary and the pictorial, in the transformation of Zola's books into a decorative *éventail* and the juxtaposition of the image of the writer and the name of the painter. If that signature is framed by texts, both Zola and his writing about the artist are themselves firmly within Manet's interlocking frames of Japanese screen, angled chair and cropped representations. And where the painter stands can be gauged by following the diagonals to an originality writ large, in the lettering dwarfing Zola's authorship. Here, resistance to textual appropriation is indexed by an exuberant quill-pen which fails to obscure the marker of the painter's achievement, overlaid by the ironies of a Zola captured in contemplation rather than the act of writing, while Manet's creative presence manifests itself (literally) in print. It is not illegitimate to

wonder whether, in looking at himself in this particular mirror, Zola would have been entirely reassured.

In asking that question, and by way of an epilogue to the celebrated chapter it occupies in the history of nineteenth-century French culture, there is the also slight mystery — or at least the contradictory narratives — about what happened to the portrait. The story has a happy ending, of course, in so far as it remains in the Musée d'Orsay (and appropriately right next to, on the same partition-wall, as *Olympia*), having been made over to the State in 1918, with a residual life-interest cancelled by Zola's wife's death in 1925. But its fate subsequent to Manet giving it to Zola after the Salon of 1868 is made more intriguing by the Goncourt Journal entry of 26 October 1890 which reports Huysmans's malicious reflections on Zola's 'maison qui ne possède qu'un objet d'art, le portrait de Zola par Manet, on l'a relégué dans l'antichambre' validated by the authoritative catalogue of the 1983 Manet centenary exhibition (*Manet*. 1983: 285), but strenuously denied by Zola's *fidèles* and family descendants: 'L'ennui est que cette peinture ne cessa de figurer à la place d'honneur dans le cabinet de travail de l'écrivain à Paris' (Le Blond-Zola, 1999: 23). The implication of Huysmans's reported remark is that Zola did not much like the portrait, not least perhaps in response to the contemporary reception in which it had been pointed out that such was the degree of Manet's self-projection in this looking-glass of his own that the sitter's sartorial elegance made it, indeed, a portrait not of Zola but rather of Manet himself.

Less speculatively, another interesting aspect of the Manet portrait is the way it became, for contemporaries, the benchmark of a certain image of the novelist. When Zola loses significant amounts of weight, Edmond de Goncourt notes, on 4 March 1888:

C'est positif, son estomac s'est fondu, et son individu est comme allongé, étiré et, ce qui est parfaitement curieux surtout, c'est que le fin modelage de sa figure passée, perdu, enfoui dans sa pleine et grosse face de ces dernières années, s'est retrouvé et que vraiment, il recommence à ressembler à son portrait de Manet avec une nuance de méchanceté dans la physionomie. (*Journal*, III: 105)

But then, barely 7 months later, Zola's having (inevitably) put all that weight back on inspires another Journal entry: 'Chez Charpentier, ce soir, un monsieur vient à moi, que je ne reconnais pas tout d'abord. C'est Zola, mais si changé que vraiment, dans la rue, je serais passé à côté de lui sans lui donner la main. Ce n'est plus sa tête du portrait de Manet qu'il avait un moment retrouvée' (*Journal*, III: 173-4). And it is not beside the point, to take another example, that when Monet writes to Zola after the publication of *L'Œuvre* he too is concerned about the image of his fellow-painters that might be left in the public mind.¹⁰

Nor should we discount the fact that, of all the paintings Zola acquired (a dozen Cézannes, a Berthe Morisot, a Fantin-Latour, a few Guillemets, a Monet, a couple of Pissarros and much else besides), the Manet portrait was the only one, as far as we know, he ever photographed — which we might align with Degas's famous 1895 photographic image of Mallarmé and Renoir framed by a mirror.¹¹ In Zola's case, however, his photograph of the portrait above a commemorative medallion of himself [FIG. 4] can be associated with his own extraordinary funereal compositions in which the image of a life's work is anticipated *in memoriam* (Emile-Zola and Massin, 1988: 178-80). For it is as if his image of himself, in Manet's picture, almost needs this supplementary confirmation of the identity of its subject.

The most explicit reflection on his own pictorial image remains Zola's review of his own portrait in his Salon article of 10 May 1868 (*Ecrits sur l'art*: 198-200). At this further level of self-consciousness and objectification, he recalls 'les longues heures de pose', watching himself being pictured while sinking into the trance-like 'engourdissement' of exhausted limbs and eyes, removed from the noise of the street below and the pettiness of human toil. In this evocation of the dehumanised and dematerialized subject, we are reminded of Barthes's description of having his photo taken: 'un sujet qui devient objet' (1980: 30). So too, Zola is reduced to the status of (in his own words) 'une bête humaine quelconque' or an inanimate object copied by the fastidiously mimetic artist, the lifeless pictorial matter which a number of critics singled out for comment, not least Redon's likening the image of the writer to a *nature morte*. Zola himself, on the other hand, seeks to qualify such judgements by singling out (as a quasi-Barthesian 'certificat de présence', one might say) the detail of his writing hand:

Mais je recommande tout particulièrement la main placée sur un genou du personnage; c'est une merveille d'exécution. Enfin, voilà donc de la peau, de la peau vraie, sans trompe l'œil ridicule. Si le portrait entier avait pu être poussé au point où en est cette main, la foule elle-même eût crié au chef-d'œuvre.

That 'de la peau vraie' and the reacting crowd refer us back to the critique of Olympia's own realistically dirty skin, as the highlighted hand is held in an analogous arrested relationship (with his feathery quill in florally-decorated inkwell) to the courtesan's (in relation to the flowers offered for her to take). Such an allusion evokes the scandalised focus of 1865 on that toad-like hand at the very centre of *Olympia*, too life-like, with a life of its own, substituted for the veiled conventional coverings of *l'Origine du monde* as surely as Zola's active writing will originate his own, in the midst of this re-visualisation of Manet looking at him, looked at by her (Olympia), having been represented yet again by the painter who had looked at her... now looking at Zola, in 'un étonnant jeu de miroirs'¹² at least as complex as we find in his novels.

And then, as a coda, we might note that the year of the Manet portrait is also the year of *Madeleine Féral*. For in this early novel, a photographic portrait of the heroine's

first lover functions as a morbid and contaminating presence, precluding liberation from the *empreinte* of the past. Such obliquely connected musings need to be placed in the same perspective as the mirrors with which I began: 'elle se vit morte'; in the fearful paradoxes of *dédoublement* as both negative inversion (exemplified, as I've suggested, by Cézanne) and positive recognition (at least in his writing on Manet which precedes the 1868 portrait). For, in the case of Manet too, there is an increasing resistance, on Zola's part, to an assimilating absorption which threatens to negate his own differentiated identity as an artist. Increasingly, in the 1870s, Zola reasserts a critical distance: he finds fault with Manet's lack of finish, associating him less with the solidity of his own constructions than with the indirections of Impressionism; by the time of *L'Œuvre*, the composite portrait necessarily speaks of contradiction and incongruity from which Manet is not exempt; Zola's preface to the 1884 retrospective organized in the aftermath of Manet's death is suitably and warmly admiring, but also anachronistically directed back to the battles of the 1860s and ambivalently concluding that 'son rôle de précurseur ne peut plus être nié par personne' (*Écrits sur l'art*: 458).

What has also not been analysed is the extent to which while many of *L'Œuvre's* paintings seem to invite recuperation to Manet's originals, most notably between Claude's *Plein Air* and *Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe*, they also resist the temptations of similitude. The differences are conscious, as deliberate as the impossibility of exactly locating in a particular fictional character, as Monet admitted, any one real-life painter. In that way, too, the novelist enjoys an imaginative and animating freedom not afforded to the portrait-painter. Cézanne is reported by Emile Bernard to have said of the 'mensonge' of *L'Œuvre*, that the distorted image of the painter had, as its rationale, the corrective self-glorifying image of the novelist (Doran, 1986: 56). Degas's bitter remark that Zola had written *L'Œuvre* 'pour prouver la grande supériorité de l'homme de lettres sur l'artiste' does not seem too wide of the mark either.¹³ But only if we also see, in the writing of it, an affirmative and creatively affirming stepping-back from the pictorial looking-glass, the reflective space afforded by that writing, in which Zola confronts the negatives — in the photographic sense too — of his artistic self and imaginative practice.

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¹ Zola's preliminary subdivision of his social history into 'quatre mondes' was extended to 'un monde à part' to include, alongside the 'putain', the 'meurtrier' and the 'prêtre', the 'artiste - (art)'. See *Les Rougon Macquart*, 5 vols, ed. Henri Mitterand (Paris, Gallimard, 1960-67), V, 1735.

² See Philip Walker, 'The Mirror, the Window and the Eye in Zola's Fiction', and Naomi Schor, 'Zola: from Window to Window', both in *Yale French Studies*, 42 (1969), pp. 52-67 and pp. 38-51 respectively.

³ 'The nineteenth century dislike of Realism is the rage of Caliban seeing his own face in a glass. The nineteenth century dislike of Romanticism is the rage of Caliban not seeing his own face in a glass'.

⁴ Exemplified in the very title of Sophie Monneret's *Cézanne, Zola... la fraternité du génie* (Paris, Denoël, 1978).

⁵ In Zola's *lettre-dédicace*, dated 20 May 1866, cited in *Cézanne's Correspondance*, ed. John Rewald (Paris, Grasset, 1978), p. 116.

⁶ *Le Sémaphore de Marseille*, 29 April 1877; in *Ecrits sur l'art*, ed. Jean-Pierre Leduc-Adine (Paris, Gallimard, 1991), p. 358. Even as late as 1880, Zola refers to him in terms of 'un tempérament de grand peintre qui se débat encore dans des recherches de facture' (*ibid.*, p. 422).

⁷ See Ronnie Butler, 'Zola's Art Criticism (1865-1868)', *Forum for Modern Languages Studies*, 10 (1974), 334-47.

⁸ See my "'Le Delacroix de la musique": Zola's Critical Conflations', in *Le Champ littéraire, 1860-1900*, ed. Keith Cameron and James Kearns (Amsterdam, Rodopi, 1996), pp. 81-90.

⁹ See Theodore Reff, 'Manet's Portrait of Zola', *Burlington Magazine*, 117 (1975), 35-44; in addition to Reff's classic study, see also two important articles by Nicole Savy: 'Aut pictura, poesis: Baudelaire, Manet, Zola', *Romantisme*, 66 (1989), 41-50; and 'Un étranger vu par Manet: Emile Zola', *Les Cahiers naturalistes*, 66 (1992), 23-32. Fresh light on the iconography of the portrait is to be found in *Manet/Velasquez*, ed. Juliet Wilson-Barreau (London & New Haven, Yale University Press, 2003), p. 251, and in the catalogue of the Manet Exhibition held in Tokyo (28 July-16 Sept. 2001), notably in Sylvie Patry's essay 'Edouard Manet et les débuts du japonisme: remarques sur quelques portraits', pp. 194-210, and in Atsushi Miura's, 'Edouard Manet: citations, Mallarmé et le Japon', pp. 176-86, which repeats some of the insights in his 'Portraits de peintres en 1867: Manet, Zola, Fantin-Latour, Réflexions sur les relations entre l'image et le texte', in *Hikaku Bungaku Kenkyū [Études de littérature comparée]*, 77 (2001), 4-26.

¹⁰ In his letter to Zola of 5 April 1886, cited in *Les Rougon-Macquart*, IV, 1387.

¹¹ Reproduced in *Degas* (Paris, Réunion des musées nationaux, 1988), p. 333.

¹² Henri Mitterand, referring to the opening pages of *L'Œuvre*, in *L'Histoire et la fiction* (Paris, PUF, 1990), p. 215.

¹³ Cited by Theodore Reff, 'Degas and the Literature of his Time', in *French Nineteenth-Century Painting and Literature*, ed. Ulrich Finke (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1972), pp. 197-98 and n.71