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THE DANCE MOTIF IN ZOLA'S L'ASSOMMOIR

by

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THE DANCE MOTIF IN ZOLA'S L'ASSOMMOIR

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The vocabulary of *l'Assommoir* is one of movement; it is the vocabulary of dance. The way in which people and even animals and machines move is expressed in terms that evoke the ballet of nineteenth-century France. Thus *l'Assommoir* presents an example of transposition of art. The relationship of dance to literature has not been studied before, so the terms of the study have to be determined by using anthropological and sociological studies of dance and works on ballet theater.

The text of *l'Assommoir* is divided into sections like the acts of a ballet. The plot, like a balletic pretext, is less important than the telling of the story, the description of movement, and the expression of life through gesture. The ballet of *l'Assommoir* has a precedent in French ballet with respect to plot, character, theme, atmosphere, and symbolism.

The method by which Zola achieves this evocation of ballet consists of three parts: word choice; association of gesture with certain situations and character types; and the use of techniques associated with the stage.

The dance has influenced literature in many ways, beginning when "literature" was an oral, not a written, phenomenon, as in Homeric times. The stage has also been a place where the two genres met. In addition, many writers, such as Diderot, have sought to infuse more life into language by
incorporating dramatic techniques into their words and their works.

In nineteenth-century Paris dance and the figure of the dancer were important in the arts as a whole. Also, the concept of performance and performance viewed were the subject of intellectual and artistic interest. L'Assommoir's episode in the Louvre illustrates this point: The wedding party is a commedia dell'arte troupe parading through galleries viewing paintings, while they themselves constitute a spectacle, which in turn is reflected in the paintings.

The emphasis on movement and the dance heighten the symbolic value of Gervaise's limp. This symbol, which makes her lame in a world of dancers, unites the poetic constructs of the text, even calling on images from ancient myths. The artistry with which Zola uses this symbol and the way in which it both unifies the text and unites L'Assommoir with the rest of the Rougon-Macquart cycle is a tribute to the often overlooked artistry of the author.
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INTRODUCTION:

TWO ARTS RELATED
With the exception of anthropologists, scholars have paid little attention to the dance. Although its origins and role in ancient or so-called "primitive" societies have been studied, little interest is shown in dance in its sociological context - and almost none at all in its influence on the other arts. In her 1969 pioneer study, Frances Rust points out that although anthropological studies always mention the significance of dance, up to the time of her study there had not even been a systematic sociological investigation of dancing.¹

Just as it is possible to go further than the anthropology of dance and explore its sociological nature, it is possible to take still another step and see how the dance may be integrated into another art form - literature. In reading Emile Zola's novel l'Assommoir, I was struck by what appeared to be a recurrent dance motif in the text. The vocabulary, the description of certain scenes, the structure of the novel, the metaphors all contribute to the impression that in l'Assommoir is a remarkable example of transposition of art - the techniques of one art form applied to another. I had only to find an approach to studying a text with reference to the dance.

Critics have looked for literary motifs in theatrical
dance, but apparently the reverse had not been done. Meth-
ods of studying the dance have not been applied to any other
art form, nor have other works of fiction been studied as if
they portrayed dances. But first it is necessary to decide
what is meant by "dance," and what aspects of dance may be
singled out and used as evaluative criteria. In addition,
this type of study must take into consideration the anthrop-
ological and sociological origins and implications of dance.
In fact it is just these elements that link the dance so
closely with Zola's work. However, we shall not limit our-
selves to the anthropological or sociological aspects of the
dance, for a dance motif dominates l'Assommoir on another
level as well - an aesthetic one. All three levels or as-
pects must be taken into consideration. Understanding the
relationship between dance on the one hand and, on the oth-
er, human instinct, cultural patterns, and self-expression
leads to greater appreciation of the artistry of this novel,
of the world it portrays, and of the concept of human exis-
tence it reflects.

It is striking that so much has been written on the
relationship of painting and music to literature without
dance and literature's having been studied together - even
though dance motifs occur in many texts.¹ This is even

¹See N. Frye, Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays
more curious when one considers the significance of the
dance per se as an art.¹ It has qualities not to be found
elsewhere and which contribute to the vitality of other
media when integrated into them.

¹"Nor the epic song, but the dance... constitutes
everywhere the most primitive... art... Whether as a
ritual dance, or as a pure emotional expression of the joy
in rhythmic bodily movement, it rules the life of primitive
men to such a degree that all other forms of art are subor-
dinate to it." (W. Wundt, Volkerpsychologie Bd. 1 Teil 1,
p. 227., quoted by Rust, Dance in Society, p. 12."
Concept and Approach

Dance is traditionally defined as "a rhythmical skipping and stepping, with regular turnings and movements of the limbs and body, usually to the accompaniment of music, either as an expression of joy, exultation, and the like, or as an amusement or entertainment; the action or an act or round of dancing."\(^1\) Rhythm and gesture are the pillars of dance, and also points at which dance is linked to other art forms. Gesture, the animated form of design, ties it to the plastic arts - especially sculpture. In its dependence on rhythm it is like poetry and music. But the element of rhythm is not limited to just these areas. More and more frequently the term "rhythm" is used to indicate harmonious movement, animation, and communication in art. It an underlying principle of human activity.

No one really knows when man first began to dance, but dance is linked to all the rituals of primitive societies.\(^2\) It is likely that dancing preceded speech - a theory developed

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\(^2\) In the life of primitive peoples, nothing approaches the dance in significance. It is no mere pastime but a very serious activity. It is not a sin but a sacred act. It is not mere 'art' or 'display' divorced from the other institutions of society: on the contrary, it is the very basis of survival of the social system in that it contributes significantly to the fulfilment of all of society's needs." (Rust, *Dance in Society*, p. 11.)

\(^3\) Ibid., p. 9.
by Langer;\(^1\) he traces the origin of dance to the spontaneous movements and gestures of self-expression which were man's symbols of communication before language. In any case dance is probably the precursor of what we know as literature, as well as being the oldest mode of artistic expression. (I am indebted to Frances Rust, whose very interesting observations on the dance as an art form provided a basis for the remarks below. These observations appear in *Dance in Society*.)

Unlike other genres, dance has upward social mobility, the dances that find their way to the stage or palace originate in the lower classes in folk motifs. It is the only art form which is frequently banned by society "across the board," the implication being that it poses more of a threat than the other arts.\(^2\) By way of contrast, although individual works or schools of painting have been censured, certain musical pieces have been considered controversial, and some books banned, the genres of painting, music, and literature have survived fairly well intact in nearly every society where they have come into existence. It seems to exist as both an avant-garde and lower class phenomenon simultaneously.

Dance is strongly linked to magic and human transformation. This is obvious even from a quick glance at the themes

\(^1\)Ibid., p. 9.

\(^2\)Ibid., p. 5.

of classical ballet. Further, history contains instances of actual dance mania, a pathological manifestation of the art.¹

Dance is the art form quickest to respond to cultural or social changes. It is a way of demonstrating sociological patterns, and particularly the psychology of a group; group dance creates a common identity among the performers and is a symbol to outsiders of the solidarity of the group.²

Dance can also be totally individualistic. But whether group or individual, dance is a potent art form, and at times a frightening one. It is intensely physical - indeed it is more physical than mental art, and much of its power is due to the fact that its movements and rhythms are often sexual ones which cannot be intellectualized to the point of losing their immediacy. At the heart of any explanation of dance's great power as a form of expressive behavior is the fact that its basic tool is the human body - and this means that dance has greater immediacy for both performer and spectator.³ It is this forcefulness inherent in the very nature of dance that causes it to be banned both frequently and on a broad scale in many societies. In fact, it has been pointed out that Plato's eagerness to eliminate poets

¹Rust, Dance in Society, (chapter 3) discusses. She also notes (p. 26) the "extensive body of literature on dissociational states and the dance that frequently accompanies them."


³ See Ibid., p. 159.
from his system refers to poets who performed with immense physical exertion and animation.\footnote{Joseph Russo and Bennett Simon, "Homerian Psychology and the Oral Epic Tradition," Essays on the Iliad: Selected Modern Criticism, John Wright ed. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978), p. 51.}

Its impact as a form of expressive behavior is also due to the fact that dance brings body and soul together. In this respect dance refutes the contention that mind and body are separate and that the body is inferior and a traitor to man's nobler qualities, for the body externalizes what is felt and thought in the mind and is its instrument. At this point we are very close to what we might call one of Zola's "literary beliefs" - and a very important one - the unity of the physical and the psychological, and thus of heredity and destiny. "Les caractères de nos personnages sont déterminés par les organes génitaux. C'est de Darwin! La Littérature, c'est ça!"\footnote{Zola's statement (1868) quoted by Patrick Brady, "L'Oeuvre" de Emile Zola: Roman sur les arts, Manifeste, Autobiographie, Roman à Clef (Genève: Droz, 1968), p. 332.}

Finally, and perhaps most importantly - dance is multisensational. In this last way it is an especially appropriate and effective vehicle for Zola, who viewed the writer's art essentially as one of transforming and transmitting artistically what he feels within his physical self through the senses. Zola expresses the idea thus:
... mais la Vie est partout, et l'art n'est autre chose que la Vie. Si vous êtes des arrangeurs de mots, faites-vous ébénistes, disposez vos petites phrases selon les lois de la morale puérile et honnête. Si vous êtes des personnalités, vous écrivez comme on vit, instinctivement, vous irez où votre sang et vos nerfs vous emporteront vous ne croirez plus que l'art est cantonné en haut ou en bas, vous le retrouverez partout, dans chaque battement de votre cœur et chaque frisson de votre chair.

The means by which dance "carries away" the spectator are varied. As we have said, dance is multisensual, so the spectator is receiving many stimuli at the same moment, making it difficult for him to differentiate between his responses and keep control of his response system. He reacts to the sight of the dancer; the costumes or masks add another element to the task of visual comprehension; there may also be music; in some situations the performer and the spectator may be close enough to each other for the dancer's smell or warmth in exertion to be perceptible. In addition, the spectator cannot take his time in assimilating all this sensory material, because dance is not like painting, where one can step back and contemplate at leisure. The audience must react instantly to ever-changing patterns. This multisensual immediacy of dance is not only what makes it exciting, but what makes it threatening.

Since patterns of movement are so deeply ingrained in us and quite often subconscious, we are very uncomfortable

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when faced with movements that seem strange. This discomfort is usually a vague sensation, but when gesture is reified, as it is in the dance, it becomes more forceful and clearly defined - and so do our reactions. As Royce says, "Some of us like our catharsis in small doses while others have greater capacities."¹

So not only does dance touch the spectator on a very basic level, it also embodies class mannerisms and carries within its own patterns and gestures, sociological statements. In fact, dance and movement are inextricably woven into the strata of a given society, and embody the class differences which at times generate hostility and encourage isolation between sub-groups of the same culture. The listless march of the workers in the morning of Nana's parade down the streets of her neighborhood in l'Assommoir are both veiled threats to the comfortable bourgeois world, and poignant contrasts to the pompous, stylized promenades of the upper and middle classes.

Certainly no one could accuse Zola of "liking his catharsis in small doses": the dances he describes are powerful and in many cases shocking, as for example Coupeau's danse macabre at the hospital just before his death: all the power inherent in the dance is manifest in this scene. (See our Chapter I, "Steps.")

¹Royce, Anthropology, pp. 162-163.
The use of dance to evoke powerful emotion and its association with the most basic functions of man dates from prehistoric times. These primal aspects of the dance are still stressed in religion of the Far East. In Hinduism one of the most important forms of Siva, the creator and the destroyer of the world, is King of Dancers (nataraja). Dance began with Siva; the story, as told by Faubion Bowers, is given below:

In the beginning of time, Siva once stood with his feet on a demon, and began shaking a little hand drum . . . which he held in one of his four hands. This sounded the world's first rhythm and as he started to move his body in keeping with its beat, the world gradually took shape. During this act of creation, fire appeared in the palm of another of his hands, and he continued to dance until his world was complete and provided at the same time with the means to destroy itself . . . . . . .

Two of the key themes of l'Assommoir — fire, as symbolized mainly by alcohol, and life rhythm, are forces that lie at the origin of the dance in a basic tradition of the East.

Although the thesis of the novel itself is explicitly sociological in orientation, this current runs parallel with

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1Faubion Bowers, Theatre in the East (New York, Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1956), pp. 8-9. Bowers also notes that the secrets of dance and drama that Brahma confided to a sage named Bharata so that mortals could imitate his theater of the gods, the creation of the world. This dramatic code "although considerably more exhaustive and comprehensive in content, . . . is roughly analogous to Aristotle's codification of Greek drama. . . ." Cf. also Ram Dass, The Only Dance There Is (New York: Anchor, 1974). The primacy of the dance in this religious context is the equivalent of dance's place in l'Assommoir in significance and scope; rhythmic movement as the sign of life is the unifying principle of the text.
two others - the anthropological and the aesthetic. A higher order of things is always operative - a concept of human life itself that is more property situated in the area of metaphysics than in sociology, and which is better expressed by symbol than by event. The origin of the dance fits into this metaphysical realm, for all dance was at one time sacred, the re-enactment of an archetypal gesture or the commemoration of a mystical moment.\footnote{Mircea Eliade, The Myth of the Eternal Return, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1954), p. 28.} This basic nature of dance as a primitive force in man and nature is not ignored in \textit{l'Assommoir}. It is manifested in the use of fire symbolism, the association of dance with both life and death, and in the use of rhythm to represent life's activities.

If we look at the sociological functions of the dance motif it is helpful to use a typology such as the one given by Rust, which was developed by Talcott Parsons for the study of the interrelationship of dance and society. Parsons created four categories to cover all possible societal functions:

1) \textit{pattern maintenance} and \textit{tension management}, which would include socialization and control over potentially disruptive elements,

2) \textit{adaptation}, which refers to adjustments \textit{vis-à-vis} the social and nonsocial environments, roles, and the division of labor

3) \textit{goal attainment}, or all of the goals of society, and
4) integration, which includes all the mechanisms like social control, power structure, etc.
that find the different elements in a society.  

Basing herself on Parsons, Rust developed the following requirements to be used in her analysis of social dance:

a) The basic pre-requisite that the item in question (the social dance) represents a standardized item of social structure (to insure that it can legitimately be made the subject of functional analysis).

b) A detailed account of the item . . . and an analysis of its functions, in terms, for example, of the four problems enumerated above together with an account of the way it operates and interacts with other items, and contributes to the functioning of the whole social system.

c) Observation and analysis of any change in structure and function of the item . . . correlating such change in the larger social system of which it is a part (1969:3-4). . . .

With slight adaptation (using "dance" rather than specifically "the social dance" these same categories can be used to describe the sociological functioning of the dance motif in l'Assommoir. Rust's second point, transferred to the study of a text, involves giving accounts of the dance episodes in l'Assommoir and detailing the overall balletic structure of the novel, which incorporates all the dances into a unified whole.

Rust's four categories - pattern maintenance and tension management; adaptation; societal goals; and integration -

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1 Rust, Dance in Society, p. 3.
2 Ibid., pp. 3-4.
form a social pyramid whose pinnacle is a successful uniting of the individual to his society (integration), with the attendant phenomena of cooperation between groups and the accomplishment of societal goals. By way of comparison, Gervaise is systematically forced down this pyramid and at the end finds her place at the very bottom of this geometrical representation of socialization. She is not integrated; the society in which she lives is marked by rivalry and not by cooperation; and, her goals are never accomplished. In fact, at the end she is ironically deprived of the only modest requests she had made of life.

So, if the relationship between dance and the verbal art forms is a neglected field, there is no better place to begin to develop this area of study than with Zola. The relationship between life rhythms and the dance leads us to speculate that, preoccupied as he was with sensuality, sensitive to the earth in its fecundity and to the forces that emanate from it, Zola inevitably expressed himself in terms of dance. The dance had only to be put on paper - described in the text, and recreated with verbal rhythm to create the "logique de sensation et de sentiments" (dont) le dénouement "devenait un résultat arithmétique du problème posé."

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1 Commenting on the play he wanted to write based on Thérèse Raquin, Zola says: l'action n'était plus dans une histoire quelconque, mais dans les combats intérieurs des personnages: il n'y avait plus une logique de faits, mais
une logique de sensations, et de sentiments; et le dénouement devenait un résultat arithmétique du problème posé."
Dance and Dance Motif

Dance is different from movement in much the same manner as music is different from sound. Although the same laws of physics explain both phenomena, music is more than organized sound, and likewise dance is more than patterns in space. Nevertheless, separating dance from movement is a delicate operation. What must be borne in mind, for a start, is that by any definition dance is rhythmic or patterned movement. Most definitions also allow that it is rhythmic movement done for some reason other than utility. This definition may exclude a few phenomena the true nature of which is dance, but it is generally valid.

In expanding her definition of dance (and this time the definition is inclusive rather than exclusive), Royce says, "A streamlined definition, but one which still includes the two concepts basic to almost all definitions of dance, would be one which defines dance as patterned movement performed as an end in itself."¹ This statement, combined with the earlier exclusive one, provides a workable, succinct explanation of the phenomenon of dance.

But a further step, which is more interesting and more necessary for the present study, is taken in giving a cultural or "culturally relevant" definition of dance, because, as Royce says, "... there are at least two kinds of definition of dance possible, those constructed by dance scholars

¹Royce, Anthropology, p. 8.
and those meaningful to specific cultures." There is a wide range of activities and implications covered in the term "dance." In the phrase "going to a dance" the term "dance" refers not only to actual physical activity, but to the music, the socialization with others, the refreshments, the entire setting and atmosphere of the event, which sometimes even tend to take precedence over the dancing itself.¹

To speak of the dance motif in a literary work is not only to note scenes describing dances or described as dances. "Literary dance motif" also refers to dance as a structuring element and a unifying idea with symbolic value in a given work. It is the use of movement, pattern, and rhythm in a verbal mode of expression.

In considering the dance motif of l'Assommoir from an anthropological standpoint, what is revealed to us is the metaphysics of the text. The sociological approach reveals the thematic elements of the novel. And finally, in looking at the dance motif from the standpoint of structure and technique (as would the spectators at a performance), we see the consummate literary artistry of the novel. The dance motif of l'Assommoir contains key themes and symbols based on gesture, which give it unity. It is written and organized with skill, in a moving manner - the work of a master régisseur. It meets the criteria of true ballet.

¹Ibid, pp. 9-10.
The interlocking rhythmic and gestural patterns of l'Assommoir do form a "logique de sensations." Movement and sensation pursue their own ends following basic universal laws which are in fact no less than the laws of physics by which life is maintained. Dance is merely the artistic extension or refined representation of these physical laws.

In l'Assommoir movement eventually becomes the generator of thought, and precedes idea, because without movement there is no life, no force, no consciousness. This movement flows from one generation to the next. This flow of life is expressed well in Zola's own words: "Il faut grandir avec sa génération, être poussé par celle qui vous suit, arriver avec l'idée et la forme de son temps."¹

For our purposes then, we extend Royce's basic definition ("Dance is rhythmic movement done for some purpose transcending utility.") to say that "description of rhythmic movement to emphasize its dance-like qualities for some purpose transcending utility is the form that dance takes in a literary text." For example, to say "the workers went home at the end of the day, stopping at various points along the way" would merely tell what happened, but the following passage from l'Assommoir emphasizes the inherently dance-like qualities of this daily event. The workers are per-

¹Charpentier, Théâtre, p. 12.
forming ritual rhythmic patterns, each one imbuing these patterns with the artistic style of which he is capable:

Dans le roulement plus assourdi des omnibus et des fiacres, parmi les haquets, les rapissières, les far-diers, qui rentraient vides et au galop, un pullulement toujours croissant de blouses et de bourgerons couvrait la chaussée. Les commissionnaires revenaient, leurs crochets sur les épaules. Deux ouvriers, allongeant le pas, faisaient côté à côte de grandes enjambées, en parlant très fort, avec des gestes, sans se regarder ; d'autres, seuls, en paletot et en casquette, marchaient au bord du trottoir, le nez baissé ; d'autres venaient par cinq ou six, se suivant et n'échangeant pas une parole, les mains dans les poches, les yeux pâles. Quelques-uns gardaient leurs pipes éteintes entre les dents. Des maçons, dans un sapin, qu'ils avaient frété à quatre et sur lequel dansaient leurs auges, passaient en montrant leurs faces blanches aux portières. Des peintres balançaient leurs pots à couleur ; un zingueur rapportait unelongue échelle, dont il manquait d'éborgner le monde ; tandis qu'un fontainier, attardé, avec sa boîte sur le dos, jouait l'air du bon roi Dagobert dans sa petite trompette, un air de tristesse au fond du crépuscule navré. Ah! la triste musique, qui semblait accompagner le piétinement du troupeau, les bêtes de somme se traînant, éreintées!\(^1\)

Words, Rhythm, and Textual Meter

On the basis of Antonin Artaud's comments in *Le Théâtre et son double*, Royce distinguishes between linear and non-linear forms of art.\(^1\) Dance falls between the two - it takes place in space as well as in time, and even dance viewed in the mind of the reader adds a spatial element to a text.\(^2\) But the theater's language is "half-way between gesture and thought,"\(^3\) between two other genres. This is essentially a description of the language of *l'Assommoir*; it is not written for the stage, but as if it were actually on the stage. It is full of movement and contains practically no "thought passages" in the sense of segments of interior monologue. The characters act or react rather than think and all forms of activity, even mental, are expressed as movement. The novel is a series of descriptions of the physical so vivid that the visual sensations are communicated to the reader. We may even surmise that Zola's attempts to adapt his material for the stage were motivated by the desire to communicate more physically, spatially, and thus directly with his public.

\(^1\) Royce, *Anthropology*, pp. 202-203.

\(^2\) Frye, in *Anatomy of Criticism*, pp. treats the subject of mental vision on pp. 243-337 ("Theory of Genres"). "Lexis" may be translated as imagery when it refers to the forming of a "simultaneous pattern of meaning apprehended in an act of mental vision."

The importance of rhythm and movement in this context gives significance to Gervaise's fascination with rhythm and to her own halting gait. We see her fascinated at the window of the watch-shop, the microcosm where the precise rhythmic marking of time is seen - all the clocks ticking with their individual sounds, hundreds of little pulses moving at once. Hampered by a limp herself, she loves to observe "la gaieté des petits coucous dont les balanciers se dépêchaient, battant l'heure à contre-temps, tous à la fois." For rhythm is almost sacred to Gervaise - and at the very least, hypnotic. She is mesmerized by her mantle clock and hides her savings-book under its globe, in this manner uniting her financial future - on which depends her achievement of her life's goals - with the clock as microcosmic symbol of the rhythmic universe. She "essuyait les colonnes avec religion, comme si le marbre de sa commode s'était transformé en chapelle."¹

The sensuous Nana responds to another type of rhythm - the one which pulsates through the pavement of Paris: "Elle s'arrêtait toute pâle de désir, elle sentait monter du pavé de Paris une chaleur le long de ses cuisses, un appétit féroce de morder aux jouissances dont elle était bousculée, dans la grande cohue des trottoirs."² The pavèment of Paris

¹Zola, l'Assommoir, pp. 525, 476, and 726.

²Ibid., p. 726.
is the earth itself, source of the "sève" linked to sexuality and life-giving rhythms and forces.

These episodes where rhythm is emphasized are not found at random in the text. The movements that are described and the nearly physical communication between author and public are organized thematically and structurally to form an artistic whole.

The fact that the component parts of the novel are tightly and skillfully integrated has not gone unnoticed, but the observation is usually made in terms of music. However it seems that the term "orchestration" applied to l'Assommoir could more appropriately be replaced by "choreography," since there is far more emphasis on rhythmic movement than on any aural or melodic element in the unified arrangement of interrelated themes that make up l'Assommoir. The music of the novel is in the background.

Max is not in error in his observations on the text, but in the names he gives to what he observes. While he is

1Stéfan Max, Les Métamorphoses de la grande ville dans les Rougon-Macquart (Paris: Nizet, 1966) pp. 39-40. He says, "Il fallait l'art de la composition orchestrale de Zola pour marier l'univers concret et le monde des idées; pour confondre les aventures d'une famille et d'une époque avec le bruissement d'une ville. Et de cette composition orchestrale résulte le fait que Son Excellence Eugène Rougon est autre chose qu'une étude d'un milieu politique, l'Assommoir autre chose qu'un traité contre l'alcoolisme, Une Page d'amour autre chose qu'une page d'amour." His comments reveal the very simple statement that Zola makes in his titles for works that deal with very complex problems. It is very much like the ironically simple choice of Madame Bovary as a title for Flaubert's study of a complex woman.
speaking of "orchestration" he cites a passage in which movement is the unifying idea - not melody.¹

There is every indication that Zola felt that not only man and other living creatures, but everything that is to be found on the earth is linked by rhythmic movement. At times it is simply repetitive, pulse-like movement that, with the power of centrifugal momentum, holds the earth on its course and men in their daily routine; at other times it is a life-producing, sexual force; at still other times it is a particular person's movements expressing his individuality. In the end, all these patterns combine to make up the panorama of life that dominates the text. Zola translates "... en une succession d'impressions désordonnées le movement incessant des êtres et des choses ...."² This movement is cyclic, a pattern of birth, death, and renewal. In the following passage Zola speaks of the oneness of man with the other elements of the world together in a cycle of generation and death:

"-Ah! bonne terre, prends-moi, toi, qui es la mère commune, l'unique source de la vie! toi l'éternelle,

¹Cf. Max, Métamorphoses, pp. 39-40: "La présence obsédante de Paris dans certain romans de Zola, fait de cette ville une fée des métamorphoses qui agit à la manière d'un centre de rayonnement. Elle entraîne dans son sillage tout un monde que sans elle on discernait mal; son sol semble parfois vaciller, ses quartiers se transformer en boîtes à surprises, ses jardins et son fleuve prendre part aux événements de l'époque pour leur donner un sens précis."

²Quoted ibid., p. 92.
l'immortelle, où circule l'âme du monde, cette sève épandue jusque dans les pierres, et qui fait des arbres nos grands frères immobiles! . . . . . . .

Within the earth, which is mother of all, is the soul reified in a fluid that comes from the earth and flows into all forms of matter, therefore uniting them with one another. This moving soul coming from below moves cyclically, from the earth, into the creatures who inhabit the earth, and back to the earth again.

Versification is the set of patterns and poetical devices of a given language, but textual meter is created by the rhythm of elements repeated in a text to evoke intellectual and physical responses in the reader.

The term "rhythmic literature" is generally applied to writing done in a formal metric pattern and containing poetical devices, and is most often used in reference to the ancient epics. However, the definition of rhythmic literature also covers a text characterized by meter, in either formal or informal patterns; and writing in which there exists textual rhythm.

Texts containing informal rhythmic patterns may be said to have rhythm in the same sense as blank verse may be called poetry. And if ancient epic is rhythmic literature of the type written in formal poetic meter, modern epic is

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characterized by textual meter. Because epic covers such an immense number of events, people, and places, repetition and rhythm are necessary to structure and relate these component parts.

There are, of course, many books on the use of metrics in the ancient epic. But it is not specifically our purpose here to discuss metrics or ancient epic per se, and we intend to deal with these subjects only to the extent that they are related to the work of Zola. Alfred Proulx's *Aspects épiques des Rougon-Macquart* addresses itself to just this issue and has been particularly useful to our study.¹

It is possible for a text to be so constructed as to emphasize by its own rhythm the relationship between motifs. In *l'Assommoir* we are repeatedly made aware of the rhythm that exists in all human activity - the rhythm of the earth which binds together the human, the animal, and the mineral.²

The rhythm is a presence, referred to in the text; it is de-


² "Par eux les figures du premier plan se trouvent mêlées à une large portion d'humanité et, comme cette humanité, ainsi qu'on a vu, est mêlée elle-même à la vie des choses, il se dégage de ces vastes ensembles une impression de vie presque uniquement bestiale et matérielle, mais grouillante, profonde, vaste, illimitée. (Ibid., p. 23.) Cf. also the very first pages of Zola's text, where he speaks of the "flot ininterrompu d'hommes, de bêtes, de charrettes, qui descendait des hauteurs de Montmartre et de la Chapelle." This wave of humanity, animals, and tools will be a recurrent image throughout the text. (Zola, *l'Assommoir*, p. 377.)
scribed; and it is created by the sounds of words. The patterns in which these various techniques are deployed then create the rhythmic texture of the work, a texture to which the reader becomes sensitive and responsive. When theme and symbol are added to this pattern, then we have the complete feel and meaning of the text.

In Greco-Roman mythology, which figures so heavily in Homeric epic, life is conceived of as a tapestry woven by the Fates: the life-threads are spun and then go in and out, carrying various colors through the warp; they are cut off at different points, and at last create the vast fresco of human activity by the intertwining. Zola’s rhythmic patterns work in much the same way as these threads do - each element of the text has a rhythm of its own, which is subject in the end to the rhythm of the earth, which can interfere with and affect any individual movement. The result is a complex interlocking of steps creating a vast, ballet-like vision of life.

We cannot discuss rhythm without at the same time talking about repetition, for there is no rhythm without repetition. No matter how intricate the patterns, the patterns must be reproduced in some way to constitute rhythm. And the repetitions in a text are in most cases anything but random; they function as a structuring element and they work together to create psychological effects. Calvin Brown notes that "... Zola can use repetition both as one of
the primary structural devices in the working out of his novels and as a means of creating memorably effective individual scenes.¹ This repetition may be simply what Brown calls "tags" (epithetical or formulae) or one of several other categories such as the "frame," whose "purpose is to set off an episode . . . by framing it between a statement of some sort and a repetition of that statement"; the key passage, which is a relatively long repetition embodying, in a striking and memorable forms, one of the fundamental ideas of a book . . . "; the hammer," "a short phrase, usually itself repetitions, which is used intensively throughout a relatively short scene in order to emphasize an action or situation, drawing it home by repeated blows"; the quotation (a character quoting himself or another character, or Zola quoting his own characters; metaphor and symbol; parallels; slogans; cumulative repetition, "a fomrula by which a new element is added to the end of a repeated passage at each reiteration, and thereafter constitutes a regular part of it"; and finally the "focus," "the gathering together into a fairly small space of a number of passages originally much more widely distributed" whose purpose is to serve as summary."² He demonstrates how one of Zola's most moving pas-

²Ibid., pp. 5-85.
sages (the death of Gervaise and Bazouge's arrival) achieves its literary power from the skilled use of repetition. In fact, repetition is the technique responsible for achieving many different effects in *l'Assommoir* - among them, irony pathos, emphasis on key ideas, character development, and personification.\(^1\) The result of these techniques is the "poetic animation of the inanimate," a three-stage process of establishing a metaphor, repeating and extending it so that the object of the metaphor becomes a presence in the text, and then using this presence in such a context that it becomes a symbol.\(^2\) However *l'Assommoir* is not composed of symbols achieved by poetic technique only - even if they are animated symbols; it is full of the activity of all of life. Even in its urban environment there are forces of nature at work through the functioning of machinery.

Speaking for the naturalists, Zola said, "La création entière nous appartient, nous la faisons entrer dans nos œuvres, nous rêvons l'arche immense."\(^3\) Not only did he want to portray life, he wanted to do so with feeling. It is undeniable that he succeeded at his task of "transplanting" life into his texts, in creating the sensation of movement in the most literal sense of the word. J. K. Huysmans found

\(^{1}\text{Cf. Max, } \text{Métamorphoses, pp. 92-93.}\)
\(^{2}\text{Ibid., p. 92.}\)
\(^{3}\text{Zola quoted by Brown, } \text{Repetition, p. 112.}\)
that "... certaines scènes parisiennes - le départ des ouvriers pour l'atelier, le pullulement de la maison où logent les Coupeau, la rentrée du peuple sur la chaussée de Clignancourt 'sont ... les premières pages où la vie fourmille et grouille avec une pareille intensité.'"¹

But the task is so great that it cannot be done without guidelines. To make "la création entière" fit between the covers of a book is difficult - even more so if there are artistic considerations to be taken into account. Repetition was Zola's solution to the problem of how to write artistically and "naturalistically" at the same time.²

It is not necessary to know whether the repetition was originally intentional or not. It is certain that Zola became aware of its existence and went on to use it deliberately and considered it to be an element of composition with the same function as repetition in a musical work.³ And so we have here not only the fact of Zola's conscious use of repetition but, what is more important for our purposes, the knowledge that he viewed literary and musical composition as based on the same principles.

Not all texts - even poetic ones - can be said to be characterized by movement. Some texts are very nearly

¹Huysmans's remark quoted in the "Notice" of l'Assommoir, p. 1557.


³Ibid., p. 118.
static: they capture a moment in time and in themselves have no linguistic rhythmic momentum. Some texts even describe a physical act while remaining non-rhythmic. They contain story-telling movement by which the plot advances, but it is neither patterned, symmetrical, or rhythmic. It has none of the qualities associated with dance: it is not a spontaneous expression of personal rhythms, but rather is narrative movement. It gives the reader information, but is not sensual in itself; it may be picturesque and mental, but not physical. But *l'Assommoir* advances by movement and it is through movement that we perceive psychological changes in the characters.

If we are to discuss dance, which is dependent on rhythm and organization of movement, in *l'Assommoir* we must be able to see how words create rhythm and how movement may be choreographed to produce the desired psychological, artistic, emotional, or other effect.
The Choreography of a Novel

Here we begin to deal with what is essentially a matter of "transposition d'art" - the techniques of one art form used for another. The Parnassians used in poetry the techniques of the plastic arts, creating the static poetry we mentioned above. The term "static" is not used here in any pejorative sense, since the static quality, the freezing of a particular moment in time was much sought after by the poets of this school. But while these writers were delving into the past for golden moments to be reworked by them into graceful, symmetrical fragments of poetry (cf. de Lisle's Poèmes antiques), another group of writers saw a social mission in their craft and were looking to science and industry for new sources of poetry. Of course Zola's politics and philosophy tied him to the latter group ideologically, and rather than sculpting a memorial to past glory in stone, he reflected the rhythm of contemporary life by coming into contact as intimately as possible with all aspects of Parisian life under the Second Empire and created a world full of people rather than a gallery of statues. In his own words, "Mais maintenant que tout est par terre, les capes et les épées sont inutiles, il est temps de faire des œuvres de vérité . . . . il n'y a que la vie, un champ immense où chacun peut étudier et créer à sa guise."¹

¹Charpentier, Théâtre, pp. 7-8.
If transposition d'art is operative in Zola's work—and let us refer specifically here to l'Assommoir, why should dance not be the logical (if not conscious) choice? For the reasons outlined in earlier chapters, we see that dance, the art of movement, is the medium which communicates most directly with the physical and sensual nature of man, with the part of him that makes him a brother to other forms of life. It is far more capable of this than traditional painting, for instance. In fact, if Zola was drawn to Impressionism it was largely because this school found all manner of life a worthy subject for the artist.

In a letter to Jules Lemaître, March 14, 1885, Zola said "L'âme que vous enfermez dans un être, je la sens éparquée partout, dans l'être et hors de l'être, dans l'animal dont il est le frère, dans la plante, dans le caillou."\(^1\) Similarly and consequently, he attacked traditional painting for its cleaned-up and adorned view of reality, preferring Pissarro, Jongkind, Monet, and others whose work was alive, taken from life, and depicted with the love they felt for these modern subjects.\(^2\) The last phrase —


\(^2\)"Zola, de son côté, attaque la peinture traditionnelle, 'les petits tableaux propres', les 'toiles pomponnées', en faveur de Courbet, Manet, Pissarro, Jongkind, Monet: 'Leurs œuvres sont vivantes, parce qu'ils les ont prises dans la vie et qu'ils les ont peintes avec tout l'amour qu'ils éprouvent pour les sujets modernes." Max, Métamorphoses, p. 91.
love that they feel for modern subjects" - has particular importance. Zola, far ahead of his time in this respect, was able to be moved by the joys and sorrows of his contemporaries and by the plight of the common man as a whole. He did not have to wait for a civilization to be "once removed" before its particular features, both good and bad, were discernible to him. In Zola we see the forerunners of the anti-hero and indeed the whole trend of twentieth-century literature.

In the daily movements of the common man there is a distinct beauty of style. There is poetry of sensation in an activity not because it has specific artistic purpose, or historical significance, but because it reveals a part of life's patterns and symbols. In portraying these patterns, Zola created a ballet of the people.

What then is an example of dance in *l'Assommoir*? What do we mean by textual movement that is choreographed? What is needed to create a passage - in fact, an entire novel - that moves with art, rhythm, and life?

Un moment, elles restèrent là, agenouillées, à se menacer. Les cheveux dans la face, la poitrine soufflante, boueuses, tuméfiées, elles se guettaient, attendant, reprenant haleine. Gervaise porta le premier coup; son battoir glissa sur l'épaule de Virginie. Et elle se jeta de côté pour éviter le battoir de celle-ci, qui l'effleura à la hanche. Alors, mises en train, elles se tapèrent comme les laveuses tapent leur linge, rudement, en cadence. Quand elles se touchaient, le coup s'amortissait, on aurait dit une claquette dans un baquet d'eau.\(^1\)

\(^1\)Zola, *l'Assommoir*, pp. 399-400.
Les hommes, au moins, sortaient dans la rue; Lorilleux et Poisson, l'estomac dérangé, avaient filé raide jusqu'à la boutique du charcutier. Quand on a été bien élevé, ça se voit toujours. Ainsi, ces dames, madame Putois, madame Lerat et Virginie, incommodées par la chaleur, étaient simplement allées dans la pièce du fond ôter leur corset; même Virginie avait voulu s'étendre sur le lit, l'affaire d'un instant, pour empêcher les mauvaises suites. Puis, la société semblait avoir fondu, les uns s'effaçant derrière les autres, tous s'accompagnant, se noyant au fond du quartier noir, dans un dernier vacarme, une dispute enragée des Lorilleux, un 'trou la la, trou la la,' entêté et lugubre du père Bru. Gervaise croyait bien que Goujet s'était mis à sanguoter en partant; Coupeau chantait toujours; quant à Lantier, il avait dû rester jusqu'à la fin, elle sentait même encore un souffle dans ses cheveux, à un moment, mais elle ne pouvait pas dire si ce souffle venait de Lantier ou de la nuit chaude.

Cependant, comme madame Lerat refusait de retourner aux Batignolles à cette heure, on enleva du lit un matelas qu'on étendit pour elle dans un coin de la boutique, après avoir poussé la table. Elle dormit là, au milieu des miettes du dîner. Et, toute la nuit, dans le sommeil écrasé des Coupeau, cuvant la fête, le chat d'une voisine qui avait profité d'une fenêtre ouverte, croque les os de l'oie, acheva d'enterrer la bête, avec le petit bruit de ses dents fines.¹

Not all movement in Zola is handled in just this way, of course. Some passages contain movement which is plot-related and not designed to convey basic societal or personal rhythmic impulses. However, we may say that movement of some type is always present in l'Assommoir and is in fact a unifying principle of its composition.

In l'Assommoir, movement involves three categories of verbs: verbs of unfolding and display; verbs of penetration; and verbs of ambulation, "seen in terms of human limbs."²

¹Ibid., p. 595.

In the glossary of the dance given in Appendix II, we see that these movements are also the foundation of dance movement. This may at first glance seem obvious, but the striking fact is that movement in *L'Assommoir* is limited rather strictly to these three categories – no charging steeds, no petals blowing in the wind, no gentle flicker of eyelids. The movement of the text is the movement of the dance. None of the basic movements of dance are omitted, and almost no movement outside these categories is seen.

The passage below shows what Frey refers to as a sentence of "detail accumulation and movement":

> Quand elle allongeait la tête, en camisole blanche, les bras nus, ses cheveux blonds envolés dans le feu du travail, elle jetait un regard à gauche, un regard à droite, aux deux bouts, pour prendre d'un trait les passants, les maisons, le pavé et le ciel . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .

Even mental activity is translated into movement – a "lexical synesthesia in which various types of movement, physical or of the mind, blend."

*L'Assommoir* owes much of its success as a sociological document specifically to the fact that it was written not as a social treatise but as a novel. An unrelenting sociological approach would have been too didactic for anything but a

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1 "*L'Assommoir* provides many examples of Zola's sentences of detail accumulation and movement, showing how early he had mastered this technique . . . . " (*Ibid.*, p. 189.)

2 "These are not the mental procedures of a thinker, but those of the intuitive artist-writer synthesizing his perceptions of the exterior world." (*Ibid.*, p. 152.)
pamphlet on social reform; if it is only sociological data we want, a pamphlet would be more effective than a novel in giving the facts and figures. However the pamphlet-reading public is rather limited in size and in scope, since only individuals who are already interested in social questions deliberately choose to read this sort of document. To reach a wider public, the artistic approach is more successful.

In a parallel manner, l'Assommoir owes much of its literary success to its theatrical presentation, since the melodramatic plight of its protagonist is actually too one-sidedly tragic to seem "natural" or even believable at times. The harsh focusing on the problems of Gervaise and other victims of fate (such as little Lalie) benefits from the air of theater in the text, since what is normal in the theater is too "dramatic" for a novel.
CHAPTER ONE

MACROCOSMIC MANIFESTATION: SOCIETY
The Ballet of L'Assommoir

Background: Precedents and Prototypes

By the early nineteenth century, ballet had evolved from court entertainment into a theatrical art form. The setting was no longer a palace, but a theater and the dancers were not just titled amateurs, but performers chosen for their innate ability: the ballet had become, in a sense, democratized.

As it evolved from courtly game into theater, ballet also became more sophisticated thematically. But even at this time dance was predominantly a social phenomenon representing in an artistic setting the patterns of society, as well as interpersonal relationships of various types.¹

By the end of the eighteenth century the ballet à entrée, which is episodic in nature, had given way to the ballet d'action, a narrative-type ballet with the stress on the importance of dramatic unity. Jean Georges Noverre was master of the genre. However, the ballet has always been marked by both of these emphases - one on movement, the other on plot.²

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¹"In its formality, ballet must have seemed the apotheosis of the social structure, the triumph or order." It reflected the hierarchy of Versailles. "... French court life had become excessively refined and stratified, and every social encounter had become as intricate as choreography." (Rust, Dance in Society, pp. 20-21).

²Royce discusses this issue in more detail. (Royce, Anthropology, pp. 183-184.)
In the late eighteenth century Salvatore Vigano began to combine mime and dance — instead of simply alternating them as other choreographers did — in continually-unfolding dramatic movement. Stendhal was one of Vigano's many enthusiastic admirers, referring to him as the "Shakespeare of the dance." Charles Didelot, another choreographer of this period, resembled Vigano in his desire for dramatic clarity, and often used paintings or sculpture as the models for his group scenes. There may have been some cross-pollination between painting and ballet here, since Watteau, for example, ardently admired the theater and was taught by Gillot that the stage was as good a source of material for art as was the "real" world. In fact, the remote backgrounds and artfully poses, fantastically-garbed figures of the Fêtes galantes suggest an atmosphere of theater.

The mid-nineteenth century Romantic era of ballet retained the idea of drama, though taste changed from drama on a heroic scale, with its preference for classical themes, to drama that utilized folk themes and emotional expression. Three of the ballets from this period are still mainstays of many repertoires — La Sylphide, Giselle, and Coppélia.¹

¹ Among other things Noverre felt that "ballets should be unified works of art in which every element contributes to the development of the main theme, that technical exhibitions for their own sake should be discouraged, and that such impediments to movement and expression as heeled shoes and cumbersome skirts should be abolished." (Anderson, Dance, p. 85).
La Esmeralda (1844), based on Victor Hugo's Notre Dame de Paris, had brought realism to the ballet stage, but a realism set in the gypsy world, with its aura of superstition, curses, colorful feasts, and earthy, passionate emotion—scarcely "reality" according to the ballet-going public's definition. However, the hordes of Paris were shown on stage, and even as late as 1902, following an entirely restaged Moscow performance, La Esmeralda was attacked as "emulating dangerous realism, particularly in the mob."  

The handling of these crowd scenes was exceptional in that they were done not for show but to further narration. "Individual vignettes framed linking incident."  

As in l'Assommoir, these scenes have a role other than that of backdrop. This attitude toward the crowd had its origin in choreodrama.

Choreodrama was created in the nineteenth century—largely through the efforts of Vigano. As usual for ballet, it was in Italy that the concept originated, later to be brought to France by the Italian choreographer. Vigano was famous for these choreodrammi, which were his development of the ballet d'action. He was brilliant in handling and characterizing the masses to achieve a demechanization of the corps de ballet. Before his time it had served only as an

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2 Ibid.
untextured, symmetrical background, performing only when the principals needed a rest. Vigano gave flexibility of movement to the corps as a whole, and distinguishing marks to individuals.\(^1\) Zola's crowd scenes are composed and used in essentially the same way. The pattern is for the scene to begin with Gervaise stepping out of the limelight for a period of time during which a decision is made or a change takes place. (We only guess at the amount of time that elapses by looking at the crowd's activities.) The crowd then comes center stage, first moving in unison and then breaking into groups of three or four. For a time our attention is directed successively from one person to another. Then the crowd moves back together into a body and leaves the stage. Gervaise returns center stage ready for a change of scene.

Vigano further enhanced the narrative aspect of ballet by welding movement into "fluid sequential action . . . .\(^2\)" with the result being that ballet was better able to handle more sophisticated, literary plots. In the coherence of his fluid technique, Vigano became a stage "novelist."

Like Zola's, Vigano's work was characterized by spectacular scale; the ability to present characters as persons, not types; and a concern for historical accuracy. (The

\(^1\)Cf. Ibid., p. 134.
\(^2\)Ibid.
crowd scene and faithfulness to historical accuracy seem to be related phenomena. Perhaps it is because it is easier to reveal the particular flavor of an era on a large scale than in a single personality. Taken individua-ly, and studied in depth, people usually prove to be much the same from age to age, causing the element of time and epoch to disappear. Thus the writer's desire to recreate an age can be satisfied better in large-scale description and superficial observation than in character study.)

Vigano's identifying marks as a choreographer soon became the characteristics of French ballet in general. When at last Eugène Scribe started to write for the ballet (in 1827, with La Somnambule), the dramatic aspect of dance was further reinforced. Ballet's prestige had plummeted in the serious theater and Scribe accepted the undertaking as a joke. However when he read his libretto to some members of the Institut de France, the press claimed that collaboration in the "twin skills of literature and dance might yield excellent results."

Scribe may not have been a first-class writer, but he gave the balletic pretext more substance that it had had in the past, when it seems as if choreographers merely took a key word - Pelleas, Rome, whatever - and concocted a dance around it. While avoiding a pedantic approach to the thea-

\[^1\]Ibid., p. 139.
tricalization of history or myth, Scribe still succeeded in providing solid background material for the stage - principally for the choreographer Jean Aumer (1776-1833). Aumer had become known through his work at one of the most important boulevard theaters, where the ordinary public saw performances that were far more innovative than those to which the staid Opéra was treating its patrons.

Perrot, the choreographer of La Esmeralda, went even further than Vigano in the treatment of character. He communicated complex psychological intention through dancing alone by his use of characteristic body movement. Characterization was achieved through a mosaic of gesture. The result was intense realism, resembling in tone Eugène Delacroix's historical paintings.\(^1\) Zola used this same process of furthering plot and delineating character with gesture thirty-odd years later in l'Assommoir, where the choppy, puppet-like movements of Gervaise, the ticks and tremors of Coupeau, the swirling, falling movements of Lalie, the sensuous swaying walk of Nana illustrate the progression of disease, herald the appearance of sexual motifs, show deterioration of personality and will, and so on. For example, we observe changes in Gervaise as her gestures go from those of helplessness at the beginning ("les mains abandonnées"), when she is awaiting Lantier's return, to "les mains

\(^1\)Ibid., p. 155.
jointes" observed in the conflicts of the middle section, to lifeless puppet gestures in the guignol imagery at the end of the book. This sophisticated use of gesture results in a complex psychological picture of Gervaise the individual, but at the same time achieves universality for her because her gestures are mirrored in the movements of all the passive, worn-out women of the slums.

With the development of Romantic ballet, the prima ballerina began to dominate the stage; concomitantly, individual poses were thought to be more interesting than the floor patterns of earlier dance. Weightlessness suggesting the ethereal was a greatly sought-after effect. However the concept of ballet that most resembles the one seen in l'Assommoir is that of the late-nineteenth-century master Marius Petipa. Petipa ballets contained mime; dramatic, lyric, classical, and character dance; and divertissements which formed a panoramic, unified whole while still brilliantly displaying each of the component parts. Unlike the fragile, soft Romantic ballet, Petipa's ballet was glittering and striking. He matched dancing styles with character types and this gave rise to the danseur noble and the caractère. He also created "divertissement" scenes to be the setting for spectacular show dances; in addition, he included in his three-act ballets, episodes of standardized

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1Cf. Kirstein, Movement, p. 146.
mime and the *pas de deux*, which never broke the pattern of adagio, followed by male variation, female variation, coda.¹

With Petipa we are already in sight of the three themes which preoccupied early twentieth-century dance historians: the distinction between folk and theater dance (a question that interested primarily anthropologists and dance scholars); the origin of the dance, (likewise the concern of anthropologists); and the psychological functions of dance — especially primitive dance. Historians of the dance were studying its ability to initiate cathartic experiences which freed the individual of the restraints of civilization in order for him to deal with his own true nature.² Royce maintains that all three of these themes had parallel emphases in society as a whole, as for example in the work of Freud and Jung, and that the same phenomenon was apparent in the world of theater dance as well.³ We see in Zola an interest in these same themes, which were to be as important in twentieth-century literature as in twentieth-century dance. For in spite of *l'Assommoir* 's basically sociological premise and approach, many aspects of the novel can be dis-


³"Freud and Jung seem to have prompted movements aiming at psychological self-awareness and social consciousness. Adjectives such as 'introverted,' 'extroverted,' 'ecstatic,' 'cathartic,' 'convulsive,' and 'mystical' abound in the dance histories of the period." (Ibid., p. 91.)
cussed only in ahtoropological terms. As Max says of Gervaise's district of Paris, life goes back to its most primitive, most elementary forms.¹

The artistic, sociological, psychologica, and historical movements from approximately 1850 through the turn of the century moved in a parallel manner. Beginning with an interest in folk themes and away from the classical and heroic, with emphasis on psychological and emotional development of the individual within this context, all four of these intellectual movements were tending toward an interest in just the sort of individual that we see in Gervaise Macquart. Zola, always the man of his time, created the tragic heroine -victim of the people.

This concept of the heroine began with the fantasy creatures of the early nineteenth-century ballets. La Sylphide (1832), as its name indicates, features a fantasy creature, as does Giselle (1841), the "l'art pour l'art" of ballet. Transformed into a Wili, Giselle, like Thérèse in La Somnambule and the Sylph in La Sylphide, is a remote, chaste figure completely dependent on others. Under the influence of older witch-type figures, they are the essence of naivete. All of them are in some way victimized by men (although in all three cases the injury is atoned for to some degree in the end).

¹"La vie retourne à ses formes les plus primitives, les plus élémentaires." (Max, Métamorphoses, p. 114.)
Giselle most perfectly expressed the essence of the Romantic era of ballet. "Its atmosphere of sadness, neurasthenic, inevitable loss, and weltschmerz, punctuated by bursts of danced hysteria expressed in physical exuberance, ended in the dancer's collapse, symbolizing death. It was the metaphor for insanity, suicide, and the individual's feeling of hopeless despair before "indifferent Great Nature."\(^1\)

In *Coppélia* (1870) we see the apogee of the non-human ballerina - Coppelia is literally a doll. In 1890 *La Belle au Bois dormant* and *Le Lac des Cygnes* (1877-1895)\(^2\) show that the tradition of the fantasy female - a sylph, a doll, a transformed being - was still dominating the stage at the end of the century, a theater tradition of more than fifty years.

As to the question of why these somewhat non-human creatures were so interesting, part of the answer is that the automaton is a metaphor for the potential in raw material, human or other. Coppélius represents all ballet masters because he choreographs mannequins.\(^3\) These dolls bring out the Pygmalion in all of us. Further, they engender the same devouring curiosity as does, for example, the prosi-

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\(^2\) Tschaikovsky had been impressed by the texture of Deliber and Bizet's dance music for Paris (Ibid., p. 178.)

\(^3\) Ibid., p. 170.
tute, or anyone else who performs what is considered to be an emotional act without emotion.

Similarly, the poor of l'Assommoir are automata. They are very much like wind-up toys - people whose real vitality has never been released and whose humanity and individuality will never be discovered, and who only go through the motions of life. In a tragic inversion of the natural order of things, in l'Assommoir machines come to life, while human beings are deprived of life, as we see in the passage below:

... Elles restaient de longs moments immobiles, patients, raidies comme les petits platanes maigres; puis, lentement, elles se mouvaient, traînaient leurs savates sur le sol glacé, faisaient dix pas et s'arrêttaient de nouveau, collées à la terre. Il y en avait une, au tronc énorme, avec des jambes et des bras d'insecte, débordante et roulante, dans une guenille de soie noire, coiffée d'un foulard jaune; il y en avait une autre, grande, sèche, en cheveux, qui avait un tablier de bonne; et d'autres encore, des vieilles replâtrées, des jeunes très sales, si sales, si minables, qu'un chifonnier ne les aurait pas ramassées ... Longtemps, elle piétina, ignorante de l'heure et du chemin. Autour d'elle, les femmes muettes et noires, sous les arbres, voyageaient, enfermaient leur marche dans le va-et-vient régulier des bêtes en cage. Elles sortaient de l'ombre, avec une lenteur vague d'apparitions; elles passaient dans le coup de lumière d'un bec de gaz, où leur masque blafard nettement surgissait; et elles se noyaient de nouveau, reprises par l'ombre, balançant la raie blanche de leur jupon, retrouvant le charme frissonnant des ténèbres du trottoir ... Et Gervias, aussi loin qu'elle s'enfonçait, voyait s'espacer ces factions de femme dans la nuit, comme si, d'un bout à l'autre des boulevards extérieurs, des femmes fussent plantées .... 1

These women are at the final stage of the remoteness and dehumanization which so intrigued the ballet-going pub-

1 Zola, l'Assommoir, pp. 770-771.
lic from around 1830 to nearly 1900. All of them in some manner move from one sphere to another—mortals who become spirits, dolls who come to life, or princesses who are put under a spell. But the impulse is toward transcendence of one world into another through the process of transformation. This impulse toward transcendence (usually in the form of an impulse toward elevation) has always characterized ballet; it also exists, as we have seen, in the story of Gervaise; but in her case the effort fails.

When the Romantic repertory was at last stabilized and the heroine of the hour completely defined, the product was a naive and innocent victim, a folk heroine, and a fantasy creature all in one, a being on the border where two worlds meet, on the verge of transcending one sphere and entering another. She was also a woman of the people. When the Naturalists began to document the dramas of the lower classes, the stage had already developed the prototype—peasant girls like Giselle, who were victims of their class or of their sex. The ballet preceded the novel in placing the common woman in the leading role. (Pre-Revolutionary French ballet took its subject from Greco-Roman antiquity and the heroes of these ballets fitted the category of myth, as de-

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1 Years of effort were devoted to developing the "pointe" position, to contriving costumes that suggested weightlessness, and to perfecting leaps of ever greater length and breadth. The term "la danse haute" refers to this movement which aspires upward, whereas "la basse danse" refers to movement tied to the earth. (Kirstein, Movement, p. 146.)
fined by Northrop Frye. Romantic ballet fits Frye's definition of legend or folk tale by virtue of its dealing with magic, unnatural phenomena and beings, and supernatural powers. The hero or heroine is in this case superior in degree to other people and to his environment.)¹

Logically then, these ballets - like l'Assommoir - are filled with the celebrations of everyday people.² The festivals celebrated by a rustic peasantry that remained close to the earth and in many ways still tied to a pre-Christian holiday calendar, provided the main events that structured the plots - seasonal changes, weddings, births, deaths. And even when these people are transported to an urban environment, as they are in l'Assommoir, they remain basically pagan in religion. In Sleeping Beauty disaster falls at a baptism. And it would not be stretching a comparison to see in the scene where the baby Nana is being presented to the family a resemblance to the baptism of Aurora. The presence of the Lorilleux is as threatening as that of Caragosse. Not only do these events mark the passage of time in the life of the poor and the peasants, fates are determined at


²Giselle is a typical example. Its village fetes and music were Germanic. The atmosphere came from poetic sources in both France and Germany: one of Victor Hugo's Orientales, in which dancers were condemned to dance all night; H. Heine's De l'Allemagne for the Wilis who lured men to death by dancing (perhaps a vestige of medieval dance mania); and works by Theophile Gautier, who was an outstanding ballet critic as well. (Cf. Kirstein, Movement, pp. 150-151.)
these celebrations - as Gervaise's was at the birthday party where Lantier reappears.

The force motrice in most of the plots is jealousy or rivalry of a blatant and unsophisticated variety. In the nineteenth-century ballet these two themes were as necessary to the plot as a naive, innocent, other-worldly female character was to the leading role, and magic or pagan ritual to the ideological climate. Indeed only a naive type could be so easily victimized and emotionally manipulated.

Gertrude is jealous of the fragile Thérèse in La Somnambule; the sylph is jealous of James' fiancée in La Sylphide; the complex plot of La Esmeralda is so filled with jealousy and rivalry that it is nearly impossible to summarize the action. In Coppélia Swanilda is jealous of a doll that Coppélius created. In Sleeping Beauty Carabosse's offended pride and revenge are the motors of the plot.

These are essentially primitive tales based on simple social problems: an intruder who tries to separate a young couple; rivalry among village people; spite and revenge in answer to insults. Even the luminous veil of magic does not conceal the primitive nature of the stories being dramatized. In a curious way the Romantic ballets were psychologically realistic in that they portrayed the feelings by which the majority of people are motivated.

This is also true of l'Assommoir. We are not in the world of the heroes of myth, where the motives may be relatively refined - or at least camouflaged. The milieu of
is not a sophisticated one where people have time to meditate on the subtleties of their emotions. It is a very simple world in this respect.

The element of jealousy is often curiously omitted in criticism of *l'Assommoir* in favor of discussions of the role of social determinism in shaping plot. While certainly the latter is of very great importance, much of the acute personal misery in Gervaise's life is the result of jealousy and rivalry directed against her, mainly by the Lorilleux and Virginie.

The secondary figures of ballet seem to fall into roughly two categories: archetypal male figures - chiefly the suitor; and other-worldly figures such as spirits, fairies, magicians, and other magical beings. The male figures tend toward very human archetypes who provide a sharp contrast to the ethereal prima ballerina.

But although archetypes are the source of lead roles for male dancers in classical ballet (soldier, peasant, puppet, common man, and so on), women have always had just the identity of "ballerina." For different roles they adopted different traits perhaps, but their essential identity did not change in any fundamental way from production to production.¹

If we compare *l'Assommoir*, we see that Coupeau, Goujet, and Lantier are extremely different from each other in the

archetypes they represent, but this same sharp distinction between the female characters does not exist. In fact, they have many points in common. Virginie is well on her way to becoming a second Gervaise, ruined in her turn by Lantier. (The idea of victimization is demonstrated by the female characters; the men are always credited with more responsibility for their destiny.)

Even though the male characters represent archetypal figures (lantier, the seducer; Coupeau, the loutish yet pitiful peasant; Goujet, the knight), they are anything but one-dimensional, far less so, in fact, than their balletic counterparts.¹ This can be explained by the fact that the novel form allows for a richer and more subtle development of character than does ballet, enabling Zola's own skill in the creation of character to have full rein.

As for the second category, once again the characters of l'Assommoir evoke the type while remaining original creations. Pere Bazouge is a sort of spirit of death, but he is also intensely human, a man who is offended when he sees Gervaise recoil from him and, to cover his embarrassment, reminds her that one day she may welcome him.²

The Lorilleux, spinning their eternal gold-chains and prophesying evil are a terrifying presence in the novel.

²Zola, L'Assommoir, p. 463.
Without ever lifting a finger, they manage to do irreparable damage to Gervaise's state of mind. It is as if they cast a spell of evil upon a hated victim. They are like the evil spirits of folk tales, and the gold that surrounds them in their apartment is a master touch. It provides an aura of magic to complement the strangely magical force they contain. The fact that they live and work in the same place, giving the impression that they never are seen outside their gold-dusted coffer of an apartment, makes them seem even less like ordinary human beings and more like spirits that inhabit a particular evil setting.

In looking at these characters from a naturalist writer's pen, one is struck by the fact that they are far more touched by fantasy than the characters in eighteenth-century utopian novels — the incredibly down-to-earth Julie of *La Nouvelle Héloïse*, for example. There is no element of fantasy in the lives of these characters, even though they are the figures of a Utopian dream. With Zola the situation is just the reverse; in portraying contemporary reality and the common man, he moves toward the fantastic — enchanted states, hallucination, distortion, and illusion seeming to affirm that truth is indeed stranger than fiction.¹ And paradoxically, the sordid and tragic world of *l'Assommoir* is thus

¹For an interesting parallel, compare Flaubert's *Un Coeur simple*; "realism" often calls upon the writer to deal with situations and states of mind totally detached from reality, and to enter the world of hallucination and delusion.
invested with a kind of theatrical glamour that is reminiscent of the charm of the honky-tonk or bordello.
The Plot Line: Its Evolution and Character

How can we sum up the "story" of *l'Assommoir*? The question of plot has always been a difficult one. In comparing a synopsis of the action in *l'Assommoir* to the synopses of several well-known ballets of the period, we see that the plot lines are similar – simple, touching stories of tragic women. But the plot of the novel alone has no more interest than the pretext of *Giselle* or *Swan Lake* considered separately from the rest of the work. It is in the demonstration of theme that the artistic value of these works lies.¹

*l'Assommoir* is essentially the story of just one person. Although there are other characters in the novel, it is mainly the life of Gervaise that constitutes the plot.² She exists in a limited sphere – one part of a district of Paris. At no time is she depicted against another background. Indeed, she herself does not think outside her ghetto. She wanders the streets of her neighborhood living out a three-act tragedy, for her life may be divided into roughly three periods:

¹"Guy Robert observes that Louis Desprez' objection to Zola's determinism would have been pertinent if ' . . . Zola romancier ne faisait souvent bon marché des principes hautement affirmés par Zola critique'. (7) The very early work of Sherard (8) is stating the same thing in a primitive manner when he speaks of the absence of thesis and the difficulties Zola had in finding a plot line for *l'Assommoir* . . ."

²Zola actually thought of calling the novel *La Simple Vie de Gervaise* Macquart.
1. The struggle to succeed after abandonment by Lantier

2. The period of limited success, paralleled by the assembling of the forces that eventually bring about her downfall

3. The long downward path to her death and her abandonment once again

This is a very simple structure; the movement is slow ascent, brief leveling off, and slow descent - a trapezoidal figure, the base of which is formed by the crowds of Paris. It is the crowd that provides a background for Gervaise's story. But the crowd background, upon closer inspection, reveals itself to be made up of thousands of Gervaises, who live in economic repression, cultural nothingness, physical deprivation, and ever-worsening moral collapse.

Even though the actions of others have repercussions on Gervaise's life, no one act alone causes her ruin. Even Coupeau's fall - the most significant happening contributing toward Gervaise's fate - was not an insurmountable problem. On the surface at least, the implication is that had it not been for a complex set of deterministic sociological and hereditary factors, Gervaise could have avoided a steady decline. Her background and her class create an atmosphere of doom which pervades l'Assommoir, an atmosphere which is like that surrounding a tragic theatrical piece. From the moment the curtain rises, the audience can sense the outcome.
We do not have a great number of details about the events that make up the three major periods of Gervaise's life.\(^1\) Things just "happen," the result being that her existence gets completely out of her own control. Compare this sort of writing with, for example, a novel by Dickens. Events make up the plot - lost relatives, family secrets, specific occurrences come together to form the life and times of such people as Pip or David Copperfield. This is the kind of activity that we never find in \textit{l'Assommoir}. In almost imperceptible ways, Gervaise's passive and anxious-to-please nature was formed by heredity and environment. This "plot" of nature and man took place before the action, as such, of \textit{l'Assommoir} began.

This attitude toward plot is associated in our minds with Zola's commitment, both personally and as a literary theoretician, to certain sociological beliefs. These beliefs are translated into thematic elements of the plot rather than into specific events in Gervaise's life. For example, Zola's belief in the importance of heredity is illustrated by the prevalence of alcoholism throughout the Macquart family. Likewise, his belief in the influence of environment is stated openly throughout the text.

\(^1\) Several years of what must have been significant changes in her life after her marriage to Coupeau are quick-passed over. The birth of Nana is the only event of this period which is described in any detail at all. Even so, the pregnancy itself is mentioned only briefly, as are the days immediately following the birth.
However these convictions and their thematic illustrations in the text do not constitute plot as such. The three-part story outline suggested above is really all the "plot" there is. Here again we see that the framework of this novel, which is dependent neither on an interest in psychological relationships (such as in Benjamin Constant's *Adolphe*, for example) nor on an adventure, nor on the study of types, is far more akin to the skeletal story outlines taken from mythology, distant (and often distorted) history, or folk tales used as the pretexts for ballets, than on any typical conception of the novelistic form. No outside events of earth-shaking importance occur in *l'Assommoir*. In fact, it is difficult for the modern reader to associate Gervaise with an historical period, since her life is not depicted against the background of any major historical event. Artistic development of theme is the framework of the text, and Gervaise is the figure through which these themes are illustrated. This is not to say that her character is not fully developed in the course of the book; on the contrary, as we follow her progress through life we have a most complete portrayal of the woman. But plot itself is not the interest here. It is actually subordinated to Gervaise as a character and serves to illustrate thematic points in the superstructure of the work.

The great structural simplicity of the novel is a point of similarity with tragic theater or ballet. However, in theater it is the words of the characters which create the
story and a great deal of stage activity is usually frowned upon as being either a substitute for dialogue or antics to please the crowd. It is clearly not dialogue or revelation of the characters' thoughts that is the essence of _l'Assommoir_; it is their actions that we follow. What Gervaise does and what happens to her is far more significant than what is said.

The novel's thirteen chapters may be divided into two sections, with the pivotal Chapter VII standing separately. Chapters I—VI and VIII—XVIII are actually a set of "mirror chapters"—that is, what happens in Chapter I is reflected in Chapter XIII; Chapter II is mirrored in Chapter XII, and so on. Chapter VII contains the event (the return of Lantier) that changes the tone of the novel from one characterized by some degree of hope to one of utter hopelessness. The events of the last half of the book are under a shadow of fear and doom. Below is a brief synopsis of the thirteen chapters.

Chapter I — Gervaise, poised at her window, is waiting for Lantier as the laborers march to work for the day. She then goes to the laundry house, where the fight with Virginie takes place. Lantier leaves.

Chapter II — Courtship. Coupeau proposes marriage to Gervaise at the establishment called "L'Assommoir."

Chapter III — The wedding of Gervaise and Coupeau takes place and the wedding party makes an excursion through Paris and into the Louvre. Bazouge appears that evening.
Chapter IV - Domestic tableau. Life is tranquil. Nana is born. Coupeau has his tragic fall from the roof of a building where he is working.

Chapter V - Gervaise rents the boutique. The Goujets lend money to Gervaise. Gervaise begins to drink. Maman Coupeau moves in.

Chapter VI - Interlude in which Goujet figures prominently. He and Bec-Salé engage in a technical performance at the forge, the purpose of which is to impress Gervaise.

Chapter VII - Gervaise's birthday party, in which the whole neighborhood participates. The tone is bacchanalian. Lantier reappears lurking in a doorway in the background, and is invited in by Coupeau, heralding the disintegration of the already unstable Coupeau-Macquart union.

Chapter VIII - Lantier, at Coupeau's urging, becomes a member of the Coupeau household. Gervaise and Lantier become lovers again and Coupeau's drinking becomes repellent.

Chapter IX - Maman Coupeau betrays Gervaise. Maman Coupeau dies. In a scene of foreboding Bazouge stares at Gervaise. Virginie now has the boutique that once was the laundry of Gervaise.

Chapter X - Life becomes harder. Gervaise calls for Bazouge. She gets drunk at l'Assommoir for the first time. Nana makes her first communion.

Chapter XI - Nana runs away and is later spotted by her parents dancing in Grand Salon de la Folie. Coupeau invites
Gervaise to make money any she can, thus ending in spirit their marriage, already ended in fact.

Chapter XII - Gervaise waits for Coupeau out on the street, hungry. The workers once again parade by as we saw them do at the beginning. Old Mr. Bru, a beggar, approaches Gervaise, who is at the very same moment approaching him on the street. She sees Goujet for the last time and once again calls for Bazouge.¹

Chapter XIII - Coupeau dies at the hospital. Gervaise dies. Bazouge comes for the body of Gervaise and talks to her lifeless form in a gentle, tender way.

The book opens with Gervaise's abandonment by Lantier and closes when another man, Bazouge, comes for her. Both the first chapter and the next-to-last contain descriptions of the march of the workers through the streets of the faubourg. These scenes of vivid description and detail, depicting the essential tragedy of the downtrodden who will never know more than painful labor and misery at home, are key supports of the novel. They illustrate one of the basic themes - the dehumanization of the poor.

Chapters II and XII are the chapters of Coupeau and of Goujet, respectively. It is in the second chapter that we have the most complete picture of Gervaise and Coupeau's re-

¹A significant because rare event takes place in this chapter: Our attention is drawn to a train which is leaving Paris. This train and Etienne (who moves back to Plassans) are the only figures who leave the setting of the faubourg.
lationship — the essential innocence of the courtship; the hints that Coupeau is a very common sort of man with decent intentions, but no singular qualities; the indications of the sort of treatment Gervaise can expect as a member of the family. Their courtship is simple and pleasant in itself, but good omens are conspicuously lacking. The disquieting theme of the mysterious colored stream which must be avoided adds a puzzling and disturbing concluding note.

Chapter XII contains one of the few beautiful moments in Gervaise's life, even though it is a moment of tragedy and renunciation. For just as Gervaise and Coupeau's relationship was common in the extreme, between Gervaise and Goujet there passes a scene of exquisite love and self-knowledge. After a heart-rending attempt at prostitution, Gervaise comes upon Goujet in the street. He takes her to his apartment and gives her food — which she is almost too ill to eat. And even though she is no longer lovely, young, or even clean and well, he tells her of his love for her. They briefly remember together what they had felt in the past and in the end, reject consummation of this love. With the sense of time and place usually accorded only to classical heroes, Gervaise and Goujet realize that the time for them to love each other physically is over and this would now only choke them with an emotion joyless in its intensity and despair. One chapter after the beginning features the Gervaise-Coupeau couple; one chapter before the last we
are shown the very different relationship between Gervaise and Goujet.

Continuing to move toward the center, we look at chapters III and XI, which are also chapters of parallel and contrast. Chapter III is Gervaise's wedding to Coupeau. In Chapter XI Coupeau suggests that Gervaise could prostitute herself with no objection from him. The link that existed between them, fragile as it was, is worn through two chapters before the end.

Chapters IV and X describe the daily life of the Coupeau family; in Chapter IV all is well, the household is stable, and Nana is born. By Chapter X white has turned to black. Life is unbearably hard, and Gervaise has actually at one point of desperation distractedly called for Bazouge, this haunting call that grows in intensity throughout the last part of the novel. In Chapter X she drinks as Coupeau drinks for the first time and frightens little Lalie when returning home drunk.

Chapter V is on the whole a study of life in Gervaise's neighborhood - relationships between neighbors, lives of the shop-owners, and Coupeau family affairs. At the end of the chapter Gervaise takes in Maman Coupeau, who seems to be the least of anyone else's concern. In the mirror-chapter IX, Maman Coupeau dies, having betrayed Gervaise.

The last set of mirror chapters is composed of VI and VIII. Here we see the respective roles of Goujet (VI) and
Lantier (VIII) in Gervaise's life. Goujet the spiritual lover, Lantier the seducer, stand in the two divisions of the book which are joined in Chapter VII. As Gervaise moves away from Goujet and toward Lantier—eventhough unwillingly in both cases—her life takes its fatal downward turn.

The structure of *l'Assommoir* is, then, very symmetrical. It neatly follows Gervaise's life—ascend, shaky maintenance of the status quo, descent. The stage is empty except for Gervaise at the very beginning and then is suddenly filled with the "chorus" for a hearty opening chapter. A much sadder portrayal of the crowd occurs just before the end, and then the stage empties for the final scene, which is a pas de deux with Gervaise and Bazouge. The third crowd scene is placed in the middle, but is arranged so that Lantier can make a dramatic appearance.

This central Chapter VII, with its emphasis on food, a rowdy crowd of guests, and the reappearance of Lantier, the figure who will put the finishing touch to Gervaise's downfall and give it a moral and personal tone that overshadows the sociological, is almost bacchanalian in tone. The flawless structural balance of the novel hinges on this chapter. The splendid celebration, which is really Gervaise's only time of glory, lasts a short time, and then the menacing presence of Lantier is felt.

The last description of the troupe of workers signals the end of the section of *l'Assommoir* dedicated to the nov-
el's explicit premise (the study of the problem of alcoholism and the plight of the common man as a whole) and sets Chapter XIII apart in a special category. Just as the sixth chapter, the dream-like interlude centered on Goujet, differs in tone from the rest of the text, so does the portrayal of the final months of Gervaise's life. The emphasis is taken away from sociology, now that she has descended to the bottom level of all societal functions. Instead she moves into a symbolic realm, and the vestiges both of what she once was and what she could have been have more substance than she herself does. Lost in a world of obsession and reverie, it seems as if the Gervaise of this last chapter is a ghost already, and that she must have died the night of her last meeting with Goujet.

At times the symmetry of l'Assommoir is almost too complete; it verges on the contrived if the text is considered to be non-dramatic literature. Generally speaking, a too-symmetrical presentation and too much coincidence destroy verisimilitude in a novel; it is only the theatrical illusion that makes them acceptable in l'Assommoir. The reappearance of Lantier, coming as it does at mid-point in the novel and at Gervaise's birthday party, is melodramatic. Melodramatic also is the comparison established between him and the cat who sneaks in to take advantage of the sleeping Coupeau family. (We might add also the likening of Gervaise to the goose in this same metaphorical scene.) But this is
good theater, where appearances must be dramatic and obvious. With movement, appearance, and disappearance the only means of narrative, the dance depends upon the impact of striking effects. And here we are back once again to the concept of textual meter.

Both oral and dramatic literature, in which linguistic patterns, are uniform, must depend on repetition and symmetry to create special effects and to set off certain passages. They create textures in the textual rhythm which serve as points de repère for the audience.¹

Further, any lack of "realism" due to a too-symmetrical presentation is offset by the novel's extremely realistic descriptions of daily life, which also attenuate the effect of what might otherwise be too "stagey" a use of dramatic techniques and too much coincidence. Thus the use of dramatic stage effects and credible, brutally realistic descriptions are balanced delicately and give impact to the novel's sociological message while at the same time presenting this message in an artistically and aesthetically satisfying manner.

¹Zola's work has been compared to ancient oral literature for a number of reasons; repetition stands out as one of the more striking resemblances between his work and the Homeric epic. Once again, Proulx's Aspects épiques des Rougon-Macquart de Zola is in our opinion the most complete source of information on this topic. He even devotes one chapter to novels that he considers to be "more epic" in nature than others, and in this category he includes l'Assommoir, "l'épopée des faubourgs." (Proulx, p. 165.)
Themes and Symbolic Figures

It is only in looking at a complex set of factors that the background, extent, and implications of the parallelism between the ballet of mid-nineteenth century France and the novel _l'Assommoir_ can be fully understood. (See chart on following page.) Dance and literature can be compared on several bases, all of which call on different sets of symbols and result in varying levels of interpretation.

The point of departure for this study was _kinesis_ - movement itself. From this starting point we branched out to movement as performance, as a form of communication open to various levels of interpretation. The next step is to look for pattern and theme in the work, for with their presence the work becomes a work of art. The final step is then to examine these patterns and themes to discover the symbols which give the work coherence, impact, and aesthetic value.

To be aesthetically and not just psychologically satisfying a dance must related to more than anthropological or social instincts in the spectator; the movement must be brought to the level of art for the observation of movement to be an artistic experience. Thus the thematic link between _l'Assommoir_ and the dance is the most interesting one from an aesthetic standpoint, since the use of theme relates to the artistry of the performance rather than to the responses the dance evokes in man as a social creature.

Of course all levels of response to and interpretation of a text have significance - and are interrelated, for that
COMPARISON OF
KINETIC AND LINGUISTIC PHENOMENA

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(We have already discussed the relationship between the dance and literary art forms on anthropological and sociological levels, as well as the basic structure of the novel and its resemblance to classical theatrical dance presentations. On the textual level, we have mentioned patterns of language and the ways in which they create movement and rhythm to result in a written text which is also a physical text, possessing the characteristics of the physical, rhythmic art form that dance is.)
matter - but only the artistic evaluation of dance is concerned with the poetic symbol, rather than the event or the idea.¹ This poetic symbol is our final concern here, because all the assorted fragments from other disciplines, all the various levels of reading, all questions of subject matter and form, are fused together in it. Used in a valid manner in a coherent work of art, the poetic symbol serves as the key to interpretation. The symbol of Gervaise's limp serves that function in l'Assommoir. In a novel in which movement is expressed as choreographic display, a heroine who cannot dance is an element that cannot be ignored in any interpretation of the text. She is "out of step" in the metaphorical, as well as the literal, sense.

The expression of the poetic symbol may be illustrated by more than one theme in the text. However the themes must be integrated into the overall structure of the work and not simply reoccur as spasmodic intervals if they are to serve this purpose.

The basic organization of l'Assommoir is like that of classical ballet in that there are distinct divisions of the book corresponding to acts; the minor characters and crowds form a background of movement against which the key figure (like the prima ballerina, who was at her apogee in

¹For this presentation of the division of the human faculties within the framework of poetics, we are indebted to Northrop Frye, Anatomy, pp. 243 ff.
nineteenth-century French ballet) dances both with partners and alone. The vocabulary is composed of words which are evocative of dancing either directly or indirectly, and the syntax supports the vocabulary by its flowing and musical rhythm. The thematic structure is based on five principal motifs:

1. Animation of the inanimate
2. Flight
3. Dance to destruction (including the "moth to the flame" motif)
4. Transformation
5. Trance (including fascination with an object to the point of hypnosis)

These themes narrate the story, suggest patterns of movement, and serve in character development. Obviously there are not all literary themes in the strictest sense of the word. They are states of mind that are also "states of body." For this reason they are also typical dance motifs. In fact, these themes have for so long been associated with the dance that their mere presence suffices to evoke an atmosphere of theater.

All of these motifs lend themselves to dramatization because they are based on patterns of movement — stillness to life in animation of the inanimate; hurried steps and anxious turnings in the stylized portrayal of flight; frantic gesturing and acceleration in dance mania; alteration of
gesture to show transformation; and the passage from motion to stillness in trance, completing the cycle.

The plot composed of these themes, reduced to its simplest form, is the story of a woman's futile attempts to move upward and away from poverty, the manner in which these efforts are thwarted, the various forms of escape she resorts to, and the changes she undergoes in the process. This thematic structure of movement is flexible enough to connect all the characters and all their activities. Further, it constitutes a life cycle, and although the frustrations and escape mechanisms differ to some extent depending on social class, the cycle is essentially the same for all human beings who are involved in a losing battle - and in this respect *l'Assommoir* has tragic universality.

The first clue that we are to see a "performance" - a clue that would have been more obvious to the Parisian reader of the late nineteenth century - is the very title of the work. "L'Assommoir" was the name for a certain kind of cabaret at the time.¹ Thus we have a setting that suggests a stage-audience arrangement. The cabaret setting is used several times for important scenes, thus constituting a sort

¹"L'Assommoir" was the "name of a cabaret in Belleville which became the name for all low-class cabarets where the common people drink specially-concocted drinks that kill them." In choosing this name as the title of the novel, and as the name of the cabaret where part of the action takes place, Zola reinforced its symbolic value. (See Max, *Méta morphoses*, p. 89. The definition is from Delvau, "Notice" of *l'Assommoir*, p. 1576.)
of textual *mise en abîme*. The "theatricality" of the themes of the text, and the techniques used to demonstrate them (the portrayal of the protagonist's actions against a backdrop of a group of individuals in motion; the theme of flight; the animation of the inanimate, and so on) result in a feeling of spectacle and drama created on at least three levels: structural, thematic, and stylistic.

Animation of the inanimate is a feature of the text that has often been noted by critics and casual readers alike. There are countless examples throughout the text of objects that have a life of their own — the house where the sister of Coupeau lives, the *alambic*, Goujet's hammer Fifine, and a glass of liquor, to name just a few. Two examples follow:

> La maison paraissait d'autant plus colossale qu'elle s'élevait entre deux petites constructions basses, chétives, collées contre elle; et carrée, pareille à un bloc de mortier gâché grossièrement, se pourrissant et s'émittant sous la pluie, elle profilait sur le ciel clair, au-dessus des toits voisins, son énorme cube brut, ses flancs non crépis, couleur de boue, d'une nudité interminable de murs de prison, où des rangées de pierres d'attente semblaient des mâchoires caduques, bâillant dans le vide.

> Et Gervaise lentement promenait son regard, l'abaissait du sixième étage au pavé, remontait, surprise de cette

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1 Coupeau's proposal to Gervaise and Nana's confrontation with her parents after running away, for example.

2 These are expressed choice of words, the rhythm of the line, and the use of techniques associated with the stage.

énormité, se sentant au milieu d'un organe vivant, au cœur même d'une ville, intéressée par la maison, comme si elle avait eu devant elle une personne géante. . . .

On stage, this technique of making an inanimate object come to life generates a reaction of amazement or surprise in the spectators. Since in l'Assommoir this animation is a prevalent, sustained poetic technique used throughout the text, it does not carry with it the element of surprise. What it does do (as it also does on stage) is to create an atmosphere of the fantastic. The inanimate objects which come to life in l'Assommoir are structures and machines—the hallmarks of the urban environment.²

In l'Assommoir we see the generation of a new version of the folk tale in the attempts of the ordinary men and women of Gervaise's neighborhood to give the rigors of oppressive labor and a bleak daily life a touch of magic, and to make identification with and acceptance of their environment easier. Bec-Salé and Goujet do not simply work at the forge—they dance with Dédèle and Fifine. (The name Dédèle is, perhaps not coincidently, very close to that of the master Greek craftsman, Daedalus.) Imagining that the hammers have human traits adds an element of humor and grace to the daily routine of the smiths, as we see below:

Et Dédèle valsait, il fallait voir! Elle exécutait le grand entrechat, les petons en lair, comme une bala-

¹Ibid., p. 415.

deuse de l'Elysée-Montmartre, qui montre son linge; car il s'agissait de ne pas flâner, le fer est si canaille, qu'il se refroidit tout de suite, à la seule fin de se ficher du marteau . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .

For people with no hope of physical escape from the life they live, the only release is through infusing into routine places and everyday objects a fantastic animation. A corollary of this animation theme is the dancer's wish to participate in the life of the object. (Compare the Nutcracker ballet, in which the little girl wants the toy to come to life, for example.)

The second theme is that of flight. The dance born of fear may take more than one form; the dancer may flee a frightening figure, or simply run aimlessly to express fear or confusion, as Gervaise does just before she dies. The atmosphere of fear of and flight from an identified threat permeates the text. Gervaise is afraid in the general sense in response to her environment, with the hospital on one side and the slaughter-house on the other; and with regard to specific threats. The Lorilleux frighten her, and so do Virginie (who she fears may seek revenge), and Lantier. When she begins to hear about Lantier again through her friendship with Virginie, she becomes nervous and afraid,

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1 Zola, l'Assommoir, p. 532.

2 An inanimate object which has a life of its own, or one which comes to life is a common theme of myth and folk literature. (Cf. Bruno Bettelheim, The Uses of Enchantment (New York: Random House, 1977), pp. 45-47.)
suspecting his possible reappearance. She is portrayed like a tracked animal throughout the middle section of the text; in the end we see that she was right in her, for Lantier is indeed watching and waiting for her the night of the birthday party: 
"... quant à Lantier, il avait dû rester jusqu'à la fin, elle sentait même encore un souffle dans ses cheveux, à un moment, mais elle ne pouvait pas dire si ce souffle venait de Lantier ou de la nuit chaude."\(^1\)

There are two other menaces which are clearly identified - the *alambic* and Bazouge. Gervaise is both repelled by and drawn to both the object and the person which symbolize death to her. She approaches the *alambic* only to retreat, just as she calls Bazouge, afraid that he will really come. In the end we can almost see through a transparent *alambic* the waiting figure of Bazouge.

The fears of the first half of the text (Chapters I-VII) are linked to the past and have to do with moral ruin; they are symbolized by the figure of Lantier, who appears at the end of the section to make these fears into a reality. The old Bazouge represents the fears of the second half of the text - the fear of exclusion from society and death. So Gervaise is at first afraid for the quality of her life, and later fears for her identity and her existence itself.

In the dance of destruction, the dancer is either compelled to dance until he is spent or dead, or is drawn

\(^1\)Zola, *l'Assommoir*, p. 595.
irresistibly toward what will destroy him. This motif is central to the plot in Gervaise's flirtation with the alambic, which here again is a key symbol. It first appears when Gervaise is being courted by Coupeau, and from that point on is figuratively center stage as the source of destructive power.

The destruction motif was an almost tangible presence on the Romantic ballet stage. But it did not always refer to an outside threat - in fact, it was clearly more an impulse from within, a moral or mental collapse, a drive toward self-destruction than a physical threat from without that was depicted in the majority of cases.¹

Self-destruction is really the key theme of the group of five. Like the others, it centers on Gervaise, as a ballet theme centers on the prima ballerina. All the dramatic elements and all the characters are tied to her, a fact which the seventh chapter dramatizes. The only theme that does not actually originate with Gervaise is that of drunkenness, but this is consistent with the procedure throughout the novel of having Gervaise's flaws prefigured in the male characters. The most obvious example of this is the fact

¹This was doubtless an outgrowth of early nineteenth-century literature's Romantic male despair adapted to fit the female leads of Romantic mid-century dance productions. ("Romantic" as a term applied to the ballet means something slightly different from "Romantic" as a term applied to literature. It does not refer to a new school or an extension of the idiom. In essence it refers to ballerinas and their roles between 1830 and 1870). (Kirstein, Movement, p. 146.)
that Coupeau's drinking precedes Gervaise's drinking; his moral decline even sets the pattern for hers.¹

Each of these themes relates to an emotion: Animation of the inanimate is linked with hope and the possibility of renewal; flight is related to fear and agitation; transformation is associated with disappointment and even revulsion; trance is tied to confusion and despair. However, destruction generates absolute horror. It is responsible for the death of Lalie. It is also the cause of the alienation of Coupeau and the degradation of Gervaise. But Gervaise's death is the more painful because it is self-destruction, a poison which becomes part of the subject to the point where she cannot any longer define the enemy or fight it. Lalie at least dies with the serenity of a martyr; Coupeau never knew his own degradation. But Gervaise did realize the waste of her life in the end, in the self-knowledge that came through her relationship with Goujet.

The fourth theme, that of transformation, is most dramatically illustrated by Gervaise also; in fact it is really only Gervaise for whom the transformation theme is fully developed. For this motif to be handled successfully it must concern only one person (or object). Otherwise the viewer or reader's attention is spread over too large a field to appreciate the finesse of the metamorphosis, and

¹Cf. Dubois, L'Assommoir de Zola, p. 17.
the technique thereby loses much of its effectiveness. Gervaise changes from a lovely young woman in the first chapter to a grotesque puppet at the end of the book, appalled by her own shadow defined in the light from a gas lamp. The change in Gervaise is certainly not the only example of transformation in *l'Assommoir*, but it is certainly the most striking and heartbreaking one.

Transformation is never positive in *l'Assommoir* - it is as if possible butterflies returned to their cocoons; beauty is changed to grotesqueness, energy is channeled into self-destruction, the will turns to mere stubbornness, and competition degenerates into hatred and vengeance.

While Zola's use of sustained metaphorical transformation is highly dramatic and overtly stressed throughout the text, it never comes to the point of destroying the realism of the novel; it only adds another dimension to the text, one which increases the appeal to the imagination, and the work's final impact. In the last few chapters, the atmosphere of horror and hallucination predominates, but only serves to illustrate the text's final statement - that under certain conditions these altered states are the product of "reality."

An example of how the progression from concrete reality to nightmare is handled is given by Jacques Dubois. It begins with the choice of the novel's title, for *l'Assommoir* cabaret is the source of polyvalent, seminal evil, spawning
other "assommoirs." Eventually, through a metonymic process, the term comes to refer to the sign on the bistrot; the bistrot; any bistrot; alcohol; alcohol as poison; drunkenness; the evil of alcoholism; evil; any evil, any wicked determinism; the evil milieu; "bad" society; evil as Gervaise perceives and assumes it, anything which causes her fear, her monsters and her nightmares.¹

Transformation is a very difficult, if not impossible, effect to achieve in the plastic arts because it depends on movement - whether textual or physical. Although the related phenomenon of optical illusion in painting can surprise the viewer, its artistic merit is extremely limited, if not questionable. There are far greater artistic possibilities in transformation as it is operated on stage or in the unfolding of certain passages in literature. In a text the transformation may take place over an extended period of time or even span the entire work, but the technique of change is basically the same as that used on stage: Gestures are modified, costuming changes, the steps are different, and the result is that a new figure emerges.

The category of trance includes enchanted states, semi-conscious states, and hypnosis - especially that deriving from fascination with an object. Once again, Gervaise is the axis on which these themes turn. From the fight in the laun-

¹Dubois, l'Assommoir de Zola, p. 57.
dry at the very beginning, to her nearly comatose state at
the end, Gervaise is frequently in a state of altered con-
sciousness. These states are the forms that her passiveness
takes in response to various traumatic situations. Enchant-
ed states are usually imposed by outside evil forces; semi-
conscious ones are the reaction to trauma. Hypnosis, howev-
er, is sometimes positive in tone. The influence or charm of
an object can be either beneficial or harmful, depending on
the symbolism attached to that object. Clocks are very im-
portant to Gervaise; first it is the mantle-clock, the sym-
bol of hope in her early years; later it is the clocks she
sees in the shop window. She is attracted, almost mesmerized,
by the regular rhythms which contrast with her own halting
gait. Below we see an example of one of Gervaise's altered
states, this one occurring after the fight with Virginie:

Mais la jeune femme voulait s'en aller. Elle ne ré-
pondait pas aux apitoiements, à l'ovation bavarde des
laveuses qui l'entouraient, droites dans leurs tabliers.
Quand elle fut chargée, elle gagna la porte, où ses en-
fants l'attendaient.
- C'est deux heures, ça fait deux sous, lui dit en
l'arrêtant la maîtresse du lavoir, déjà réinstallée dans
son cabinet vitré.
Pourquoi deux sous? Elle ne comprenait plus qu'on
lui demandait le prix de sa place . . .
Quand Gervaise mit le pied dans l'allée de l'hôtel
Boncoeur, les larmes la reprimèrent. C'était une allée
noire, étroite, avec un ruisseau longeant le mur, pour
les eaux sales; et cette puanteur qu'elle retrouvait lui
faisait songer aux quinze jours passés là avec Lantier,
quinze jours de misère et de querelles, dont le souvenir,
à cette heure, était un regret cuisant. Il lui sembla
entrer dans son abandon . . .
Elle pendit son linge au dossier d'une chaise, elle
demeura debout, tournant, examinant les meubles, frappée
d'une telle stupeur, que ses larmes ne coulaient plus . .
. . et elle enfila d'un regard les boulevards extérieurs,
à droite, à gauche, s'arrêtant aux deux bouts, prise d'une épouvante sourde, comme si sa vie, désormais, allait tenir là, entre un abattoir et un hôpital. . . .

She receives a great deal of vicarious pleasure from observing regular, graceful movement in general, and it actually seems to function as a sort of inspiration or challenge to her. It was at the time when she was realizing some degree of commercial/financial success that she particularly delighted in looking at the watchmaker's display window. Later as she sinks into a more and more passive pattern of behavior, there is no further mention of her fascination with these clocks. Like a broken mechanical piece herself, she no longer has the right rhythm. She is losing her life-beat.

All of these themes and their variations make up the symbolic structure of l'Assommoir and constitute what may be referred to as "Gervaise's story." They form a symbolism of failed transcendence - a transcendence which is never achieved in the form in which it is sought. Gervaise is directly and consciously seeking improvement of a material nature, social betterment. However she is unsuccessful and her drive upward is dissipated in other channels - mainly, altered psychological states and escapism.

Even the animation of the inanimate, which strictly speaking would be classed as fantasy, is an attempt to move

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1Zola, l'Assommoir, pp. 401-403.
upward, away from the "real" (and sordid, in this case) world, and toward the spiritual.

If we superimpose the outline of the most significant events of the novel onto the symbolic framework of the text, we see that the forms and the trajectory are identical for both structures. If the poetic symbol is added to this graph, we see that it follows the same path as well.¹

The explicit premise of l'Assommoir - the examination of the poverty cycle - is approached through the problem of alcoholism. We are shown why social advancement is arrested and why the poor are trapped in a way of life that can only be described as bestial. While progress, or the betterment of life through material gain, freeing man to accede to spirituality, is the subject of the novel as a sociological work, the thwarting of this upward movement and the characters' increasing preoccupation with temporary forms of escape (alcohol, for instance), and the abandonment of their dreams provide the action.² Complete resignation precluding any social progress, detachment from reality, a sense of futility, and the almost medieval welcoming of death are the consequences of this sociological defeat. This defeat then provides the impetus into what we shall term the "post-

¹See chart on page .

²It seems that the materialistic definition of progress prevalent in the latter half of the nineteenth century is being reevaluated; the industrialization that had been meant to serve man was dehumanizing him instead.
social success
commercial success

PROGRESS
Arranges to buy boutique

SOCIAL
Marriage, relative financial ease

RUIN
financial, medical problems
Coupeau's alcoholism begins

Gervaise's alcoholism begins

Gervaise passive, obedient to Lantier

Banquet - singing, dancing
Gervaise as center of attention
Lantier's appearance

Major activity (procreative)

Minor activity, (domestic)

stillness, Gervaise poised at window

Escapism

Moral degeneration, household destroyed, loss of possessions

stillness in death

Limps only slightly

Limp disappears

POETIC SYMBOL

limps badly

limps grotesquely
textuality" of the work, the reader's action or attitudes resulting from his reading of the text, and the figure of Gervaise outside the context of l'Assommoir.

All of the characters in l'Assommoir are involved in this symbolic structure of failed transcendence as expressed by patterns of movement. They are all in some manner seeking a better life through material progress, and at some point believe in man's ability to conquer the obstacles his society places before him. This desire for improvement and a promise of potential are even implied for Lantier; at the beginning he is trying desperately, although dishonorably, to change his life. And as Gervaise says, "Il n'a pas mauvais coeur, quand il a de l'argent." ¹

However, balanced against this faith in progress and efforts to rise, at least materially, is another alternative — that of escapism and the consequent self-destruction. This too is a break from the status quo, but in a downward direction. However this alternative is always available when the goal of progress fails to be attained. Since in l'Assommoir the individual's attempts to use his talents or his will to break out of his environment are always defeated, everyone turns to some form of escapism. Even Goujet regresses to an adolescent state and lives in perpetual unfulfillment. This escapism is the path to destruction.

¹Zola, l'Assommoir, p. 389.
As we have said, destruction does not necessarily mean death; it can be anything that annihilates the individual, such as total erosion of the moral fiber (Lantier), alcohol (Coupeau), or complete passivity (Gervaise). If we envision a linear representation of the socio-thematic aspect of l'Assommoir we would see the break from poverty as an upward movement (material progress) or a downward movement (self-destruction). For a time escapism would be on a parallel course with poverty, but over an extended period of time the two together would take a downward course, the subject's declining energy failing to counterbalance the momentum of the other force, as shown below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Material Progress</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(subject) poverty---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(activity) escapism---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Destruction</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

On the "downward path" are dissociation from reality and alienation, resulting in annihilation of self. Even a poor reality, handled with proper adaptive mechanisms, would be better than no reality at all.

The despair born of this kind of frustration, the absence of progress, time standing still in generation-to-generation squalor is the drama depicted in the explicit thematic cycle of the novel as a whole, whose pattern is
stillness to movement, and back to final stillness again. When naturalism had served its didactic purpose in portraying this cycle, when it had put art to the service of social causes, the way was paved for the cultural climate of the late nineteenth century, a time of upheaval that opened the doors to total abstractionism.
The Tools and Techniques of Textual Choreography

Vocabulary

Vocabulary is the single most important tool in the creation of the world of movement of *l'Assommoir*. It is through the repeated use of words such as "valser," "défilé," and "cadencé," that dance is first suggested and by which the theme is developed into an artistic, structured presentation of the rhythmic, interrelated movements that make up human society.

In examining the vocabulary used in *l'Assommoir* we find two main categories of words describing human movement: those that refer to rhythmic movements of the body and those that refer to the patterns of this movement. The frequency with which words belonging to these categories are used is astonishing - the average is five times per page, with pages containing as many as ten not exceptional.

The passage below serves to illustrate the point:

Le long des batteries, aux deux côtés de l'allée centrale, il y avait des files de femmes, les bras nus jusqu'aux épaules, le cou nu, les jupes raccourcies montrant des bas de couleur et de gros souliers lâchés. Elles tapaient furieusement, riaient, se renversaient pour crier un mot dans le vacarme, se penchaient au fond de leurs baquets, ordurières, brutales, dégingandées, trempées comme par une averse, les chairs rougies et fumantes. Autour d'elles, sous elles, coulait un grand ruisseaulement, les seaux d'eau chaude promenés et vidés d'un trait, les robinets d'eau froide ouverts, pissant de haut, les éclaboussements des battoirs, les égouttures des linges rincés les mares où elles pataugeaient s'en allant par petits ruisseaux sur les dalles en pente. Et, au milieu des cris, des coups cadencés, du bruit murmuran de pluie, de cette clameur d'orage s'étouffant sous le plafond mouillé, la machine à vapeur, à droite, toute blanche d'une rosée fine, haletait et ronflait
sans relâche, avec la trépidation dansante de son volant qui semblait régler l'énormité du tapage. Cependant, Gervaise, à petits pas, suivait l'allée, en jetant des regards à droite et à gauche. Elle portait son paquet de linge passé au bras, la hanche haute, boitant plus fort, dans le va-et-vient des laveuses qui la bousculaient . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .

However "danser" itself is by far the most frequently used of the words in these two categories. Everything dances in l'Assommoir. The sunlight is "ce coup de soleil, cette nappe de poussière d'or dansante" (402). In the forge where Goujet works "tout dansait" (535) and the smiths regulate "la danse haletante des volants" (536). When Gervaise and Goujet meet for the last time, he recalls the times when she came to the forge to see him and "restait dans la danse de son marteau" (776).

The effects of alcohol are repeatedly described with forms of the word "danser." Coupeau in his last days contemplates "ses mains qui dansaient" (745) and "les maisons dansaient" before his eyes (695). The glass which he tries to hold firmly "malgré son effort, dansait le chahut, sautait à droite, sautait à gauche, avec un petit tremblement pressé et régulier" (695). Even hunger is expressed by a dance metaphor: " . . . elle grossissait toujours, malgré ses danses devant le buffet vide . . . " (729).

At the wash-house, the steam heater is described as if it were a dance teacher regulating the activity under her roof:

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1Ibid., pp. 386-387. In the paragraphs below, page references to l'Assommoir will be given in parentheses.
Et, au milieu des cris, des coups cadencés, du bruit murmurant de pluie, de cette clameur d'orage s'étouffant sous le plafond mouillé, la machine à vapeur, à droite, toute blanche d'une rosée fine, haletait et ronflait sans relâche, avec la trépidation dansante de son volant qui semblait régler l'énormité du tapage... (386-387)

Shadows, glasses, hammers, engines—everything dances.

Even Madame Lerait "tressautait d'une joie dansante de commère" when listening to gossip.

The verb "danser" and the nous "la danse" reach to every corner of the text—and if these words themselves are not used, we find related words and expressions such as "marcher," "ralentir le pas," "coup de pied," "tourner," "boiter," and so on, creating a complete verbal field of movement. Zola's approach is often one of bombardment, piling the movement words one on top of another until the page is alive with gesture and rhythm, as in the laundry scene.

At other times he describes the execution of a particular pattern in great detail, such as in this scene at the forge:

Goujet, debout, surveillant une barre de fer qui chauffait, attendait, les pinces à la main. La grande clarté l'éclairait violemment, sans une ombre. Sa chemise roulée aux manches, ouverte au col, découvrait ses bras nus, sa poitrine nue, une peau rose de fille où frisaient des poils blonds; et, la tête un peu basse entre ses grosses épaules bossuées de muscles, la face attentive, avec ses yeux pâles fixés sur la flamme, sans un clignement, il semblait un colosse au repos, tranquille dans sa force. Quand la barre fut blanche, il la saisit avec les pinces et la coupa au marteau sur une enclume, par bouts réguliers, comme s'il avait abattu des bouts de verre, à légers coups. Puis, il remit les morceaux au feu, où il les reprit un à un, pour les façonner. Il forgeait des rivets à six pans. Il posait les bouts dans une clouière, écrasait le fer qui formait la tête, aplatisait les six pans, jetait les rivets
terminés, rouges encore, dont la tache vive s'éteignait sur le sol noir; et cela d'un martèlement continu, balançant dans sa main droite un marteau de cinq livres, achevant un détail à chaque coup, tournant et travaillant son fer avec une telle adresse, qu'il pouvait causer et regarder le monde. L'enclume avait une sonnerie argentine. Lui, sans une goutte de sueur, très à l'aise, tapait d'un air bonhomme, sans paraître faire plus d'effort que les soirs où il découpaît des images, chez lui . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . (529)

Thus we actually have the vocabulary of movement, the description of movement, and the context which supports these elements of dance in the text, making l'Assommoir a "moving" text in more than one sense and in more than one dimension. By extension, everything that is tied to dance movement, its patterns, and the tools of body parts used to execute it are also part of this vocabulary and carry out the motif - feet, to heal is to "remettre quelqu'un sur ses pattes" (781); shoes ("Ses savates écoulées crachaient comme des pompes, de véritables souliers à musique, qui jouaient un air en laissant sur le trottoir les empreintes mouillées de leurs large semelles" (736), and so on.

The dance vocabulary is used for both the animate and inanimate alike. Once again Zola reinforces the idea of a world in which the animal, the vegetable, and the mineral are mysteriously bound together in rhythmic harmony. Human relations are expressed in terms of this rhythm:

. . . et il semblait que quelque chose avait cassé, le grand ressort de la famille, la mécanique, qui, chez les gens heureux, fait battre les coeurs ensemble . . . . Eh bien! des hommes si peu utiles, on les jetait le plus vite possible dans le trou, on dansait sur eux la polka de la délivrance. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . (685)
But there is one category of the dance vocabulary that has special symbolism - the category of hampered movement, which is Gervaise's. The overwhelming majority of the movements described in the text are normal, ("cadencé" is very commonly used) and almost monotonously regular; however Gervaise limps, and so for her we have the term "boiter" and other related words which describe awkward, halting movements.

The principal dance movements of circle and ellipse (forms); forward and backward (movement - directional); hopping, rhythmic stamping and whirling (movement - quality); ornamentation (movement - decorative) are expressed in the text by dozens of terms such as "se tourner," "avancer," "se réculer," "sauter," "taper," and others.¹ These words occur with nearly the same frequency as "danser." In addition there are words to indicate poses and body positions and terms that indicate dance events ("bal" is often employed).

The symbolic structure of the novel is supported by the repeated use of key "movement" words. In the passage below two symbolic fields are combined: Gervaise's foot traces out her humiliation before the Lorilleux; the symbolic presence of gold foretells her eventual financial ruin:

Vous n'avez pas l'air fort, avec ça ... N'est-ce pas, Lorilleux, madame n'a pas l'air fort?
- Non, non, elle n'est pas forte.

¹Cf. Rust, Dance in Society, p. 10 for analysis of the movements of dance.
Ils ne parlèrent pas de sa jambe. Mais Gervaise comprenait, à leurs regards obliques et au pincement de leurs lèvres, qu'ils y faisaient allusion. Elle restait devant eux, serrée dans son mince châle à palmes jaunes, répondant par des monosyllabes, comme devant des juges. Coupeau, la voyant souffrir, finit par crier:

- Ce n'est pas tout ça... Ce que vous dites et rien, c'est la même chose. La noce aura lieu le samedi 29 juillet. J'ai calculé sur l'almanach. Est-ce convenu? ça vous va-t-il?

- Oh! ça nous va toujours, dit sa soeur. Tu n'avais pas besoin de nous consulter... Je n'empêcherai pas Lorilleux d'être témoin. Je veux avoir la paix.

Gervaise, la tête basse, ne sachant plus à quoi s'occuper, avait fourré le bout de son pied dans un losange de la claire de bois, dont le carreau de l'atelier était couvert; puis, de peur d'avoir dérangé quelque chose en le retirant, elle s'était baissée, tâtant avec la main. Lorilleux, vivement, approcha la lampe. Et il lui examinait les doigts avec méfiance.

- Il faut prendre garde, dit-il, les petits morceaux d'or, ça se colle sous les souliers, et ça s'emporte, sans qu'on le sache.

Ce fut toute une affaire. Les patrons n'accordaient pas un milligramme de déchet. Il et montra la patte de lièvre, avec laquelle il brossait les parcelles d'or restées sur la cheville, et la peau étaillée sur ses genoux, mise là pour les recevoir. Deux fois par semaine, on balayait soigneusement l'atelier; on gardait les ordures, on les brulait, on passait les cendres, dans lesquelles on trouvait par mois jusqu'à vingt-cinq et trente francs d'or.

Madame Lorilleux ne quittait pas du regard les souliers de Gervaise.

- Mais il n'y a pas à se fâcher, murmura-t-elle, avec un sourire aimable. Madame peut regarder ses semelles.

Et Gervaise, très rouge, se rassit, leva les pieds, fit voir qu'il n'y avait rien...

We should also note here the reference to the "patte de lièvre" which further dramatizes the plight of Gervaise, crouching in a corner like a frightened rabbit herself. This type of metaphor is used for Lantier in the seventh

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1Ibid., pp. 429-430.
chapter, where is he compared to a cat scavenging after the feast and Gervaise resembles the victimized goose.

Dance vocabulary is used to describe both physical and mental, individual and collective movements. It is this blending of energy which unifies the world portrayed in l'Assommoir and gives a feeling of epic sweep and scope to the text. The characters do not move against a static background, but instead participate with their environment in the rhythm of the creation/destruction cycle.

Words of destruction and defeat are present in significant number. However, in l'Assommoir the individual collapse is expressed in terms of uncontrolled movements, as in the case of Coupeau, who dies unable to govern his body, subject to delirium tremens. Likewise Gervaise in her final stage of collapse has difficulty getting food into her mouth for shaking so violently, and can barely manage to lumber down the street.

This uncontrolled or involuntary movement (usually expressed by "trembler," "frisson," or "grelotter") is the result of either an attack or invasion of the individual, or the ravages of self-destruction.

Conversely, controlled movement reveals intentions and conscious desires. However, both kinds of movement are phrased in dance terminology, and are fully integrated into

\[1\] Frey, Aesthetics, pp. 151-152.
the creation/destruction cycle, which is a segment of an overall life rhythm. And, because all movement is part of this cosmic rhythm cycle, no individual pattern of movement can be good or bad in itself.

The dances themselves are described by the use of three categories of words: those pertaining to dance steps (taper, ponctuer à coup, ralentir le pas), quality of movement (piétinement, défilé), or patterns of movement and location (va-et-vient, suivre la rue, tourner sur soi-même, interroger le trottoir). In addition are those words which sustain the theater or dance metaphor, although not actually describing the act of dancing.

Like a dance pupil whose attention is being directed to the position of his feet and arms, and who is being shown how to respond physically to the sensation of movement and to free himself to its sensuous appeal, the reader's vision is constantly being directed toward the human body in motion.

In this last category are Zola's three most commonly used metaphorical/metonymical words - le pavé, les pieds, and les pas, which represent the earth, human beings, and human activity, respectively. "Pavé" is the richest in symbolism of the three. It serves the same function as "la terre" does in other Zola texts for two reasons - l'Assommoir is an urban novel and "pavé" is in an urban context what "la terre" is in a rural one. In contrast, "rue" is a directional term, sociological in its metaphorical implications. It
is a geographical word as well, artificial in the sense that a street has a name, a beginning and an end, numbered houses. However "le pavé" (matter) is a very physical, even sensuous, term. The feel of stones beneath the feet, the physical process of walking are reminders of the earth lying beneath. As the equivalent of "earth," "pavé" has life and rhythm perceptible to human beings, as in the passage below, where Nana feels the rhythm emanating from the pavement of Paris under her feet: "Elle s'arrêtait toute pâle de désir, elle sentait monter du pavé de Paris une chaleur le long de ses cuisses, un appétit féroce de mordre aux jouissances dont elle était bousculée, dans la grande cohue des trottoirs."\(^1\)

Another example, this one from Chapter I, follows:

Puis, entendant rire à la fenêtre Etienne et Claude, déjà consolés, elle s'approche, prit leurs têtes sous ses bras, s'oublia un instant devant cette chaussée grise, où elle avait vu, le matin, s'éveiller le peuple ouvrier, le travail géant de Paris. À cette heure, le pavé échauffé par les besognes du jour allumait une réverbération ardente au-dessus de la ville, derrière le mur de l'octroi. C'était sur ce pavé, dans cet air de fournaise, qu'on la jetait toute seule avec les petits; et elle enfile d'un regard les boulevards extérieurs, à droite, à gauche, s'arrêtant aux deux bouts, prise d'une épouvante sourde, comme si sa vie, désormais, allait tenir là, entre un abattoir et un hôpital. . . . . . . 2

The only case in which a street's directon has significance in l'Assommoir is when it leads into the world outside Gervaise's quartier - a stratosphere which the poor never

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\(^1\) Zola, *L'Assommoir*, p. 726.

\(^2\) Ibid., p. 403.
see, and imagine only with difficulty. At no time does Gervaise seem to know of the existence of the other Paris. For her the Champs-Élysées would be literally the Elysian Fields - a blissful place of rest reached by very few, and only in death.

Insisting still on the metaphoric field of dance, the words "être" or even "personne" to mean "human being" are often replaced by "pied." The foot is the point of contact with the earth ("pavé"), a symbol of sexuality, and a performing instrument.

"Pas" indicates human activities. The routine activities are expressed in dances whose patterns are repetitive, traditional, and well known, such as the laborers' march to and from work. The other kind of dances are those of self-expression, following no particular prescribed pattern. They are the dancer's pure creation to express his individuality.

The vocabulary of dance, foot, pavement, and gesture draws attention to the physical and away from the field of intellectual observation expressed in the fact and the eyes. Even the act of seeing is made over into whole-body movement and verbs such as "regarder" are frequently replaced by other, more active phrases such as "... de ses yeux ... elle faisait le tour de la misérable chambre garnie ... ; ... le regard noyé de leur mère s'arrêta sur eux ... ; elle allait, les regards perdus, des vieux abattoirs noirs ...
. . . à l'hôpital neuf . . . . " Even purely mental activity is expressed in physical terms. Emotional states are indicated not by what the characters say, but by their involuntary movements or immobilization: Powerful feelings throw Gervaise into a state of trance or confusion. Zola combines interior and exterior activity by using abstract nouns with strong active verbs, usually resulting in the "exterior" taking over the dominant role, as in lines such as, "La bonne manièrê du patron rétablit la gaieté . . . " or " . . . cette vue-là portait un rude coup au sentiment . . . . " 1 John Lapp refers to this as "concréisation de l'abstrait." 2

The movement of Zolaà's prose line is strong; its force and rhythm do not allow pause for reflection, but carry the reader from one phrase into the next until the pattern of movement is felt. Actions are not intellectualized or rationalized, but transmitted directly to the reader by recreation of the sensation of movement. The preponderance of rhythm and motion words, which increase in number as dramatic tension builds, reveals the extent of Zolaà's physicality of description.

To illustrate the frequency of use and variety of terms describing body movement, we give below a list of words from

1Ibid., pp. 375, 376, 380, 573, 631.
the first chapter of l'Assommoir. These words and phrases, in combination with terms indicating musical accompaniment, constitute the "dance vocabulary" of the text.

**Term**

bal, marcher

piétinement, défilé

piétinement, marcher, ralentir le pas, trottoir, pas

enjambée, trottant, pieds, marche, se promener

musique

boiter, jambe, traîner sa jambe

pied, suivre la rue, pavé

allée, filer, s'en aller, cadencé, dansant, tapage, pas, suivre l'allée, boiter, va-et-vient, bousculer

taper, ponctuer à coups, cadencé

coups de pied

pieds

taper sur les dalles

pas

tourner sur soi-même, marcher, pas, avancer, dégaine

coups de battoir, tremblement, pieds, courir

jambe, souliers, pieds, grélotter, réculer, par terre, patauger, cheville, pied, jambe, tomber, patte

par terre, accourir, réculer, retourner, se réfugier, sauter, secousse, se dégager, se prendre à, se prendre corps à corps, se rapprocher, tremblant

par terre, se redresser, agenouillée, se taper, taper, en cadence
But the fluidity of Zola's line, as unbroken as the movement of dance, requires the interrelationship of all movement and gesture. And because the descriptive line is not broken by changes from mental to physical activity, the two being often expressed together, passages and key words that are to be emphasized must be carefully prepared. There must be signs that an important event is about to occur, a dramatic presentation of the event itself, transformation of the event into symbol, and incorporation of the symbol into the overall symbolic structure of the novel.¹ Zola's own words seem to describe this process: J'ai l'hypertrophie du détail vrai, le saut dans les étoiles sur le tramplin de l'observation exacte. La vérité monte d'un coup d'aile jusqu'au symbole.²

Zola's word choice and structure are perfectly chosen to render his perception of the world of l'Assommoir, whose content and style are one. To paraphrase Richard Grant, the technique supposes the metaphysics.³

¹Ibid., p. 31.
²Ibid., p. 32.
"Steps"

The steps ("pas") of l'Assommoir are so numerous and so varied in style, length, and implication that it is impossible to deal with them as a group. The dance of Goujet at his anvil is explicitly an expression of sexual desire. The wedding of Gervaise and Coupeau constitutes a small ballet of its own within the framework of the balletic novel. The birth of Nana is expressed as a series of painful steps back and forth in the Coupeau apartment. The ambling gait of the drunkards is also a dance step linking the explicit theme of alcohol and the structural dance motif.

Types of dances or steps may be distinguished from each other according to a number of criteria. They may be conscious or unconscious performances, patterned, stylized movement, or improvisational; haute danse (aspiring upward) or danse basse (rooted in the earth). Some are given names in the text - "waltz" or "polka"; other dances are pantomimes, and these often feature dancers who are called "marionnettes," as we see below:

Derrière elle, le lavoir reprenait son bruit énorme d'écluse. Les laveuses avaient mangé leur pain, bu leur vin, et elles tapaient plus dur, les faces allumées, égayées par le coup de torchon de Gervaise et de Virginie. Le long des baquets, de nouveau, s'agitaient une fureur de bras, des profils anguleux de marionnettes aux reins cassés, aux épaules déjetées, se pliant violemment comme sur des charnières . . . . . . . . .

The laundresses move in tandem, mechanically.

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1Zola, l'Assommoir, p. 401.
Dances may also be categorized by the emotions they portray, by their symbolic value, or by the numbers of performers involved. The dance metaphor is so broad that it easily covers all of these categories and is used to illustrate all facets of the novel. For this reason it is best to look at the overall use of dance steps by character (or performer).

Gervaise, the lead performer, does several pas de deux as well as numerous solos; she never participates in the corps de ballet itself. Her greatest solo scenes are in Chapter I (the battle with Virginie at the wash-house) and in Chapter XII, as she walks the streets. Her pas de deux involve the three men Coupeau, Goujet, and Lantier; and in typical ballet style, the female dancer predominates. For Gervaise more than for any other character in the novel, dance phrases are used to describe movement and establish symbols. Some of her scenes verge on mime, in the broadness of gesture involved. (See, for instance, the scene where she is starving and decides to borrow money from the Lorilleux). Others are almost purely symbolic, as when she wanders dazed and starving through the streets trying to escape her destiny. Her unconscious, futile gestures are a refusal of reality.

Gervaise's dances are often performed in a state of disorientation that reveals her sociological alienation. Deprived of the traditional, patterned movements of those
who are at ease in their surroundings, deprived of even the peasant traditions which could have assured her a "fit" in society in the country, her movements are never those of the groups in which she finds herself in Paris. The old rhythms of Plassans serve her only once, and that is soon after she arrives in Paris in the climax of the fight with Virginie.

Puis, le battoir levé, elle se mit à battre, comme elle battait autrefois à Plassans, au bord de la Vienne, quand sa patronne lavait le linge de la garnison. Le bois mollissait dans les chairs avec un bruit mouillé. A chaque tape, une bande rouge marbrait la peau blanche. Oh! oh! murmurait le garçon Charles, émerveillé, les yeux agrandis.

Des rires, de nouveau, avaient couru. Mais bientôt le cri: Assez! assez, recommença. Gervaise n'entendait pas, ne se lassait pas. Elle regardait sa besogne, penchée, préoccupée de ne pas laisser une place sèche. Elle voulait toute cette peau battue, couverte de confusion. Et elle causait, prise d'une gaieté féroce, se rappelant une chanson de lavandière:

- Pan! pan! Margot au lavoir ... Pan! pan! à coups de battoir ... Pan! pan! va laver son coeur ... Pan! pan! tout noir de douleur ... 

Et elle reprenait:

- Ça c'est pour toi, ça c'est pour ta soeur, ça c'est pour Lantier ... Quand tu les verras, tu leur donneras ça ... Attention! je recommence. Ça c'est pour Lantier, ça c'est pour ta soeur, ça c'est pour toi ... Pan! pan! Margot au lavoir ... Pan! pan! à coups de battoir ... ...

The theme of sexuality, introduced by the allusion to the laundry of the garrison and culminating in her message to Virginie, the sister, and Lantier, is subtly woven into the life story of Gervaise, which is both described by references to Plassans and evoked by the laundresses' song; all of this awakens in her an old appropriate rhythm and refrain.

\[1\]Ibid., pp. 400-401.
Goujet's principal dance is performed at the forge and is part of his courting of Gervaise, a fact she recognizes although he apparently does not consciously understand the full implication of his performance. The terms of the dance are established in the first two sentences: "C'était le tour de la Gueule-d'Or. Avant de commencer, il jeta à la blanchisseuse un regard plein d'une tendresse confiante."\(^1\) Goujet addresses Gervaise with this gesture, making her both audience and partner, for although he dances in competition with Bec-Salé, his true partner is the laundress. Fifine is only a surrogate, representing the role Goujet is asking Gervaise to accept in this dance of courtship.

In the next two sentences, the style, rhythm, and quality of the performance are described: "Puis, il n'e pressa pas, il prit sa distance, lança le marteau de haut, à grandes volées régulières. Il avait le jeu classique, correct, balancé et souple."\(^1\)

The description of the (surrogate) partner follows:

Fifine, dans ses deux mains, ne dansait pas un chahut de bastinage, les guibolles emportées par dessus les jupes; elle s'enlevait, retombait en cadence, comme une dame noble, l'air sérieux, conduisant quelque menuet ancien. Les talons de Fifine tapaient la mesure, grave- ment; et ils d'enfonçaient dans le fer rouge, sur la tête du boulon, avec une science réfléchie, d'abord écrasant le métal au milieu, puis le modelant par une série de coups d'une précision rythmée. . . . . . . . . . . . . \(^2\)

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\(^1\)Ibid., p. 533.

\(^2\)Ibid.
It is clear that Fifine's performance is dependent upon the lead she is given by Goujet ("... dans ses mains, ne dansait pas un chahut de bastringue . . . .").

The next section of the dance establishes its source - the pulsation of the healthy blood of la Gueule d'Or, a nineteenth-century Vulcan. If there had been any doubt up to this point, there is no longer any reason to classify this performance as anything but a development of the anthropological overtones and theme of l'Assommoir. This dance reinforces Goujet's role as the representative of the health, natural instincts of man, and his role as the spiritual husband of Gervaise: "Bien sûr, ce n'était pas de leau-de-vie que la Gueule-d'Or avait dans les veines, c'était du sang pur, qui battait puissamment jusque dans son marteau, et qui réglait la besogne . . . ."¹ This remark further develops the contrast established between Goujet and Coupeau, whose blood is eventually "replaced" by alcohol, the poisonous "anti-sang."

The following segment of the dance is a detailed description of the physical beauty of Goujet in performance.

Un homme magnifique au travial, ce gaillard-laà Il recevait en plein la grande flamme de la forge. Ses cheveux courts, frisant sur son front bas, sa belle barbe jaune, aux anneaux tombants, s'allumaient, lui éclairaient toute la figure de leurs fils d'or, une vraie figure d'or, sans mentir. Avec ça, un cou pareil à une colonne, blanc comme un cou d'enfant; une poitrine vase, large à y coucher une femme en travers; des

¹Ibid.
épaules et des bras sculptés qui paraissaient copiés sur deux d'un géant, dans un musée. Quand il prenait son élan, on voyait ses muscles se gonfler, des montagnes de chair roulant et durcissant sous la peau; ses épaules, sa poitrine, son cou enflaient, il faisait de la clarté autour de lui, il devenait beau, tout-puissant, comme un bon Dieu.

With the phrase "une poitrine vaste, large à y coucher une femme" the purpose of the dance becomes explicit; it is not merely an offer to be Gervaise's sexual mate, but also proof that he is capable of filling this role.

Fifine's response to this powerful performance follows, and is a sign of Gervaise's final answer in its reserved dignity:

Vingt fois déjà, il avait abattu Fifine, les yeux sur le fer, respirant à chaque coup, ayant seulement à ses tempes deux grosses gouttes de sueur qui coulaient. Il comptait: vingt-et-un, vingt-deux, vingt-trois. Fifine continuait tranquillement ses révérences de grande dame.

The remark made by Bec-Salé ("Quel poseur! murmura en ricanant Bec-Salé, dit Boit-sans-Soif") is the only break in this long dance of about eighty lines of text; it serves as a sort of audience participation or interference, much like a spontaneous outbreak of applause in the midst of a technical tour-de-force.

The next paragraph focuses on Gervaise's response: first, her further recognition of the motives and meaning of the dance; and second, her actual physical response.

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1Ibid.
2Ibid.
Et Gervaise, en face de la Gueule-d'Or, regardant avec un sourire attendri. Mon Dieu! que les hommes étaient donc bêtes! Est-ce que ces deux-là ne tapaient pas sur leurs boulons pour lui faire la cour! Oh! elle comprenait bien, ils se la disputaient à coups de marteau, ils étaient comme deux grands cogs rouges qui font les gaillards devant une petite poule blanche. Faut-il avoir des inventions, n'est-ce pas? Le coeur a tout de même, parfois, des façons drôles de se déclarer. Oui, c'était pour elle, ce tonnerre de Dédèle et de Fifine sur l'enclume; c'était pour elle, tout ce fer écrasé; c'était pour elle, cette forge en branle, flamante d'un incendie, emplie d'un pétilllement d'étincelles vives. Ils lui forgeaient là un amour, ils se la disputaient, à qui forgerait le mieux. Et, vrai, cela lui faisait plaisir au fond; car enfin les femmes aiment les compliments. Les coups de marteau de la Gueule-d'Or surtout lui répondaient dans le coeur; ils y sonnaient, comme sur l'enclume, une musique claire, qui accompagnait les gros battements de son sang. Ça semble une bêtise, mais elle sentait que ça lui enfonçait quelque chose là, quelque chose de solide, un peu du fer du boulon. Au crépuscule, avant d'entrer, elle avait eu, le long des trottoirs humides, un désir vague, un besoin de manger un bon morceau; maintenant, elle se trouvait satisfaite, comme si les coups de marteau de la Gueule-d'Or l'avaient nourrie. Oh! elle ne doutait pas de sa victoire. C'était à lui qu'elle appartiendrait. Bec-Salé, dit Boit-sans-Soif, était trop laid, dans sa cotte et son bourgeron sales, sautant d'un air de singe échappé. Et elle attendait, très rouge, heureuse de la grosse chaleur pourtant, prenant une jouissance à être secouée, des pieds à la tête par les dernières volées de Fifine.1

Nana's dances are highly individualistic, spontaneous shows - a very good indication of what is to come in the novel written about her in 1880. In her first dance she is just a child, but has already established herself as the star of the performance.

Des rires d'enfants montaient dans la cour, une ronde de gamines tournait, au pâle soleil d'hiver. Tout à coup, on entendit Nana, qui s'était échappée de chez

1Ibid., pp. 533-534.
les Boche, où on l'avait envoyée. Elle commandait de sa voix aigüe, et les talons battaient les pavés, tandis que ces paroles chantées d'envolaient avec un tapage d'oiseaux brailards:

Notre âne, notre âne,
Il a mal à la patte.
Madame lui a fait faire
Un joli patatoire,
Et des souliers lilas, la la!
Et des souliers lilas! . . . . . . . . . . . .

This simple song is probably of traditional, provincial origin. Nana is not in charge of the performance because of her skill, but because she sings so loudly that she is heard above the other children - a rather innocent and natural way of taking the lead. However, a few years later, with the neighborhood girls, there is no question of her being innocent in any way and she is in charge precisely because of her worldliness. Once again, the stage is bathed in a pale, eerie light, and (as will also be the case in her dance at the Grand Salon de la Folie) she has escaped from some sort of confinement or restriction to dance. An element of the forbidden is thus inherent in each of these performances.

The patterns of movement are less structured and restrictive here than in the little round dance, as we see in the opening of the passage.

Elles venaient de se glisser dans la rue et de gagner les boulevards extérieurs. Alors, toutes les six, se tenant par les bras, occupant la largeur des chaussées, s'en allaient, vêtues de clair, avec leurs rubans noués autour de leurs cheveux nus. Les yeux vifs, coulant de minces regards par le coin pincé des paupières, elles voyaient tout, elles renversaient le cou pour rire, en

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1Ibid., p. 657.
montrant le gras du menton. Dans les gros éclats de gaieté, lorsqu'un bossu passait ou qu'une vieille femme attendait son chien au coin des bornes, leur ligne se brisait, les unes restaient en arrière, tandis que les autres les tiraient violemment; et elles balançaient les hanches, se pelotonnaient, se dégingandaient, histoire d'attrouper le monde et de faire craquer leur corsage sous leurs formes naissantes. La rue était à elles; ........................................

With terms such as "glisser," "gagner," "se tenir par les bras," "renverser le cou," "montrer le gras du menton," "briser la ligne," "rester en arrière," "tirer violemment," "balancer les hanches," (which evokes the image of the laundress, described similarly) "se pelotonner," "se dégingandaient," "faire craquer le corsage," the movements of the whole body are expressed. Patterns and structures are broken and realigned; the movement takes any form necessary to continue, circumnavigating all obstacles.

Whereas the childhood dance was done on a very small scale, this spectacular group performance appropriates for itself the entire quartier. By comparison, the crowd is colorless and still.

Au milieu de la foule lente et blême, entre les arbres grêles des boulevards, leur débandade courait ainsi, de la barrière Rochechouart à la barrière Saint-Denis, bousculant les gens, coupant les groupes en zigzag, se retournant et lâchant des mots dans les fusées de leurs rires. Et leurs robes envelopées laissaient, derrière elles, l'insolence de leur jeunesse; elles s'étalaient en plein air, sous la lumière crue, d'une grossièreté ordurière de voyous, désirables et tendres comme des vierges qui reviennent du bain, la nuque trempée . . .

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1Ibid., p. 711.
2Ibid., pp. 711-712.
The restless activity of the preceding section goes from smooth and surging gestures (expressed with verbs such as "glisser" and "gagner") to frantic movement ("bousculer" and "couper") as the girls rebound against the limitations of the neighborhood, which exerts a strangely restrictive influence on them. They only frontiers they recognize are the barrière Rochchouart and the barrière Saint-Denis. The passage concludes with a reference to nudity and the water imagery associated with female sexuality throughout the text.

Nana has by now mastered all the tricks of self-display and in spite of her clothes, it is the flesh of Nana that predominates in this scene. Of course she appears to be unconscious of the effect she creates and also pretends to be unaware of her audience (which was actually the case in the round she danced as a child); however, in every case she has singled out a man who is to be both spectator and victim of her charms.

Both Nana and Pauline appear to be illuminated by a spotlight, as was Goujet in the dance at the forge. ("Nana prenait le milieu, avec sa robe rose, qui s'allumait dans le soleil. Elle donnait le bras à Pauline, dont la robe, des fleurs jaunes sur un fond blanc, flambait aussi, piquée de petites flammes.")¹ The girls are depicted as lit with pink

¹Ibid., p. 712.
and yellow, whereas Goujet was "tinted" deeper gold. However the innate purity of Goujet's dance is strikingly different from the deliberate lasciviousness of Nana's, juxtaposing the two sides of sexuality in the text - the sexual urge of primitive man and the corruption of desire and its exploitation in the urban environment.

Even Goujet's respiration, regular and deep, is a contrast to the feigned gasps of Nana and Pauline. He may have a chest broad enough for a woman to lie across it, but he also has a neck "white, like a child's," again returning to the theme of his innocence and naturalness. Goujet's body is described vividly, but in terms of strength and movement rather than its ornamentation or nudity. In fact, Goujet's clothing is of no importance, whereas the girls utilize what may be termed a "decadent toilette" in the moral system of the text. Furthermore, Goujet's performance has the dignity of silence, whereas the girls affect small seductive whispers.

Nana prenait le milieu, avec sa robe rose, qui s'allu- mait dans le soleil. Elle donnait le bras à Pauline, dont la robe, des fleurs jaunes sur un fond blanc, flambait aussi, piquée de petites flammes. Et comme elles étaient les plus grosses toutes les deux, les plus femmes et les plus effrontées, elles menaient la bande, elles se rengorgeaient sous les regards et les compliments. Les autres, les gamines, faisaient des queues à droite et à gauche, en tâchant de s'enfler pour être prises au sérieux. Nana et Pauline avaient dans le fond, des plans très compliqués de ruses coquettes. Si elles couraient à perdre haleine, c'était histoire de montrer leurs bas blancs et de faire flotter les rubans de leurs chignons. Puis, quand elles s'arrêttaient, en affectant de suffoquer, la gorge renversée et palpitante, on pouvait chercher, il y avait bien sûr par là une de
leurs connaissances, quelque garçon du quartier; et elles marchaient languissamment alors, chuchotant et riant entre elles, guettant, les yeux en dessous. Elles se cavalaient surtout pour ces rendez-vous du hasard, au milieu des bousculades de la chaussée . . .

The endings of the two dances are also at opposite poles. The classic, regular, and powerful performance of Goujet ends with Gervaise's answering smile of tenderness at his having "forged love" for her, the tokwn of which is the little boulon. Compare the conclusion of Nana's run through the streets in the dying light of day, the fatigue of the crowd, the thick air that makes the low sky look pale, and the clammy quiet of the slum:

Le jour baissait, elles faisaient un dernier tour de balade, elles rentraient dans le crépuscule blafard, au milieu de la foule éreintée. La poussière de l'air s'était épaissie, et pâlissait le ciel lourd. Rue de la Goutte-d'Or, on aurait dit un coin de province, avec les commères sur les portes, des éclats de voix coupant le silence tiède du quartier vide de voitures. Elles s'arrêttaient un instant dans la cour, reprenaient les raquettes, tâchaient de faire croire qu'elles n'avaient pas bougé de là . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .

The final sentence provides an additional point of comparison between the dance of Goujet and that of Nana and Pauline. In the first case the performance is open and unashamed; there is a feeling of peace and resolution at the end. In the second case, however, there is a rather ineffective effort on the part of the girls to cover their traces and an uneasy aura of barely disguised immorality.

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1 Ibid.

2 Ibid., pp. 713-714.
The difference between these two dances is the difference between courtship and seduction.

The love of spectacle and performance traced out in the young Nana, the nascent lewdness and provocativeness of the developmental years have attained full development in Nana's performance at the Grand Salon de la Folie. There is no doubt in Gervaise's mind that this is her daughter:

... C'était, à gauche, un vieux chapeau de velours noir, avec deux plumes déguenillées qui se balançaient; un vrai plume de corbillard. Mais ils n'apercevaient toujours que ce chapeau, dansant un chahut de tous les diables, cabriolant, tourbillonnant, plongeant et jaillissant. Ils le perdaient parmi la débandade enragée des têtes, et ils le retrouvaient, se balançant au-dessus des autres, d'une effronterie si drôle, que les gens, autour d'eux, rigolaient, rien qu'à regarder ce chapeau danser, sans savoir ce qu'il y avait dessous.
- Eh bien? demanda Coupeau.
- Tu ne reconnais pas de chignon-là? murmura Gervaise, étranglée. Ma tête à couper que c'est elle! ... ...

Nana is executing an exuberant dance of total freedom and joy in public display; her behavior is far more amoral than immoral in her sensuous abandon and love of the starring role. In addition, it is a totally logical development of her upbringing. The self-righteous reaction of her parents comes as far more of a shock, and indeed appears far more unjustified, than Nana's behavior. Her childlike amazement at their reprimand is a poignant contrast to the sophistication of her dance. As in the street dance with the other girls, Nana here again uses clothes to suggest nu-

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1 Ibid., pp. 739-740.
dity. After a lengthy description of her costume, her spirited performance is described. However, the overtones are sinister and suggest physical abuse rather than performance in the use of terms such as "se tortiller," "coup," "casser en deux," "battements de pieds jetés dans la figure," "se fendre," "secouer," "fouetté," "tourner pareil à une toupie," "s'abattre sur le plancher," and "aplâtir." They are terms we will see again in the description of the beating of Lalie.

Just as Nana is finishing her dance in a very subtle and seductive manner, her father breaks through the crowd and all three members of the family leave the cabaret in disgrace.¹ This last dance of the "Grand Salon" segment completes the group of Nana's dances, which although they occurred over a long period of time in her life are given in close succession in the text, showing her growth and development through her performance.

What is surely one of the most hideous episodes in all of literature - the beating of Lalie by her father, is also described as a dance:

- Dis donc, le petit veau, regarde ça; c'est un cadeau pour toi. Oui, c'est encore cinquante sous que tu me coûtes. . . Avec ce joujou-là, je ne serai plus obligé de courir, et tu auras beau te fourrer dans les coins. Veux-tu essayer? . . . Ah! tu casses les tasses! . . . Allons, houp! danse donc, fais donc des révérences à monsieur Hardi!
  Il ne se souleva seulement pas, vautré sur le dos, tête enfoncée dans l'oreiller, faisant claquer le grand

¹Ibid., p. 741.
fouet par la chambre, avec un vacarme de postillon qui lance ses chevaux. Puis, abattant le bras, il cingla Lalie au milieu du corps, l'enroula, la déroula comme une toupe. Elle tomba, voulut se sauver à quatre pattes; mais il la cingla de nouveau et la remit debout.

- Hop! hop! gueulait-il, c'est la course des bourriques! .. . Hein? très chouette, le matin, en hiver; je fais dodo, je ne m'enrhume pas, j'attrape les veaux de loin, sans écorcher mes engelures . . . Dans ce coin-là, touchée, margot! Et dans cet autre coin, touchée aussi! Et dans cet autre, touchée encore! Ah! si tu te fourres sous le lit, je cogne avec le manche . . . Hop! hop! à dada! à dada!

Une légère écume lui venait aux lèvres, ses yeux jaunes sortaient de leurs trous noirs. Lalie, affolée, hurlante, sautait aux quatre angles de la pièce, se pelotonnait par terre, se collait contre les murs; mais la mèche mince du grand fouet l'atteignait partout, claquant à ses oreilles avec des bruits de pétard, lui pinçant la chair de longues brûlures. Une vraie danse de bête à qui on apprend des tours. Ce pauvre petit chat valsaît, fallait voir! les talons en l'air comme les gamines qui jouent à la corde et qui crient: Vinaigre! Elle ne pouvait plus souffler, rebondissant d'elle-même ainsi qu'une balle élastique, se laissant taper, aveuglée, lasse d'avoir cherché un trou . . .

The word "dance" is used to describe beatings throughout the text. (Cf. Chapter XI in reference to beatings inflicted on Nana, and Chapter X, Lalie.)

The meaning of the word dance, as we see from the passage above, depends entirely on context. Our immediate association of the term with recreation and the accompanying positive aspects of the dance is dispelled by the use of the word in scenes such as this one, or in the final "dance" of Coupeau at the hospital. Dance is the equivalent of a pattern of movement, and like the word "movement" or "rhythm"

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1Ibid., pp. 692-693.
is a non-emotional term. In the context of l'Assommoir it is an error to associate dance with any one particular state of mind. For all of its exhilaration, Nana's dance with the girls in the streets of Paris could hardly be called joyous.

Some of the most striking crowd scenes ever written are the group dances of l'Assommoir. In the following passage is an example of Zola's use of dance to express a panorama of human activity.

Deux ouvriers, allongeant le pas, faisaient côté à côté de grandes enjambées, en parlant très fort, avec des gestes, sans se regarder; d'autres, seuls, en paletot et en casquette, marchaient au bord du trottoir, le nez baissé; d'autres venaient par cinq ou six, se suivant et n'échangeant pas une parole, les mains dans les poches, les yeux pâles. Quelques-uns gardaient leurs pipes éteintes entre les dents. Des maçons, dans un sapin, qu'ils avaient frété à quatre et sur lequel dansaient leurs auges, passaient en montrant leurs faces blanches, aux portières. Des peintres balançaient leurs pots à couleur; un zingueur rapportait une longue échelle, dont il manquait d'éborgner le monde; tandis qu'un fontainier, attardé, avec sa boîte sur le dos, jouait l'air du bon roi Dagobert dans sa petite trompette, un air de triste-tesse au fond du crépuscule navré. Ah! la triste musique, qui semblait accompagner le piétinement du troupeau, les bêtes de somme se traînant, éreintées!  

The passage begins with a pair of workers described in a sentence made up of short phrases in units of three and four syllables that evoke a purposeful but unhurried pace; the workers move together physically, but remain in a certain psychological isolation. There is no information about their appearance. The purpose of the two figures is solely to start the walking rhythm of the crowd.

\[1\]Ibid., p. 765.
The group then grows with the addition of "others" who are also, paradoxically, "alone" but moving in the same posture ("le nez baissé"). However they are described in somewhat more detail. Then still "others" are added to the scene in fives and sixes, maintaining the same silence and the same isolation with regard to one another. But their personal description and their activities are more fully explained.

In the last half of the passage, individual members of the crowd are singled out by occupation; most of them are construction workers of some type. The crowd grows and diversifies simultaneously. The music added at the end of the description then binds the individuals together in chorus-like undifferentiated movement.

This kind of treatment of the crowd prefigures cinematic techniques that were to come early in the next century after the publication of l'Assommoir and which had not even been conceived of in the primitive attempts being made in photography at the time the novel was written. The switch of focus from small units to larger ones, the pulling back to provide panoramic crowd views, and even the use of background music together constitute a model for portrayals of the crowd as handled by movie directors for several decades to follow. Coincidentally, black and white are the only two colors usually mentioned in these descriptions, once again causing us to think of the early twentieth-century cinema.
In the following passage we have an example of another type of crowd scene - one in which an individual is outlined against the masses. The procedure for describing the crowd is essentially the same, with a background of impersonal movement working its way into the description of the gestures of individual workers. The descriptions become more detailed as the passage progresses. Then at the end the crowd becomes anonymous once again:

Gervaise, tout en répondant avec complaisance, regardait par les vitres, entre les bocaux de fruits à l'eau-de-vie, le mouvement de la rue, où l'heure du déjeuner mettait un écrasement de foule extraordinaire. Sur les deux trottoirs, dans l'étranglement étroit des maisons, c'était une hâte de pas, des bras ballants, un coudoilement sans fin. Les retardataires, des ouvriers retenus au travail, la mine maussade de faim, coupaient la chaussée à grandes enjambées, entraient en face chez un boulanger; et, lorsqu'ils reparaissaient, une livre de pain sous le bras, ils allaient trois portes plus haut, au Veau à deux têtes, manger un ordinaire de six sous. Il y avait aussi, à côté du boulanger, une fruitière qui vendait des pommes de terre frites et des moules au persil; un défilé continu d'ouvrières, en longs tabliers, emportaient des cornets de pommes de terre et des moules dans des tasses; d'autres, de jolies filles en cheveux, l'air délicat, achetaient des bottes de radis. Quand Gervaise se penchait, elle apercevait encore une boutique de charcutier, pleine de monde, d'où sortaient des enfants, tenant sur leur main, enveloppés d'un papier gras, une côtelette panée, une saucisse ou un bout de boudin tout chaud. Cependant, le long de la chaussée poissée d'une boue noire, même par les beaux temps, dans le piétinement de la foule en marche, quelques ouvriers quittaient déjà les gargotes, descendaient en bandes flânant, les mains ouvertes battant les cuisses, lourds de nourriture, 1 tranquilles et lents au milieu des bousculades de la cohue.

The text contains numerous descriptions of small-group performances as well - merchants, drinkers, florists, prosti-

1Ibid., p. 406.
tutes, and so on. In some cases each member of the group has a particular step to execute which interlocks with those of the others of the group. However these dances are never as long or as complicated as the great solo performances.

As in the large crowd scenes, the background movement is slow, flowing broad with the use of terms such as "envahissement," "couler," "traîner," etc. However there is one basic difference between the treatment of small groups and large groups: in the small groups the physical description of the workers is more detailed. The workers resemble each other, but together they look different from other groups.

De tous les gargots, des bandes d'ouvriers sortaient; des gaillards barbus se poussaient d'une claque, jouaient comme des gamins, avec le tapage de leurs gros souliers ferrés, écorchant le pavé dans une glissade; d'autres, les deux mains au fond de leurs poches, faisaient d'un air réfléchi, les yeux au soleil, les paupières clignotantes. C'était un envahissement du trottoir, de la chaussée, des ruisseaux, un flot paresseux coulant des portes ouvertes, s'arrêtant au milieu des voitures, faisant une traînée de blouses, de bourgeois et de vieux paletots, toute pâle et déteinte sous la nappe de lumière blonde qui enfilaient la rue. Au loin, des cloches d'usine sonnaient; et les ouvriers ne se pressaient pas, rallumaient des pipes; puis, le dos arrondi, après s'être appelés d'un marchand de vin à l'autre, ils se décidèrent à reprendre le chemin de l'atelier, en traînant les pieds. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .

(Various forms of the word "traîner" recur quite frequently in these scenes; it is the workers' emotional metronome.)

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1Ibid., p. 409.
A striking feature of the groups of women workers is their tendency to move in chorus to a much greater extent than the male workers do, as in the passage below:

La matinée fut d'une chaleur étouffante. Les ouvrières avaient baissé les jalousies, entre lesquelles elles mouchardaient le mouvement de la rue; et elles s'étaient enfin mises au travail, rangées des deux côtés de la table, dont madame Lerat occupait seule le haut bout. Elles étaient huit, ayant chacune devant soi son pot à colle, sa pince, ses outils et sa pelote à gaufrer . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .

Even though their occupations are as varied as those of the men, they are represented as acting in chorus or in performing repetitive action, as seen in the excerpt below:

Alors Augustine, sa voisine de gauche, la supplia de lui dire tout bas. Et Léonie, enfin, voulut bien lui dire, les lèvres contre l'oreille. Augustine se renversa, se tordit à son tour. Puis, elle-même répêta la phrase, qui courut ainsi d'oreille à oreille, au milieu des exclamations et des rires étouffés. Lorsque toutes connurent la saleté de Sophie, elles se regardèrent, elles éclatèrent ensemble un peu rouges et confuses pourtant. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .

There are innumerable small passages of dance throughout the text used to define character and to incorporate the rhythm of each individual into the whole performance; in the passage below one more marionnette is added to the group:

Madame Putois, une femme de quarante-cinq ans, maigre, petite, repassait sans une goutte de sueur, boutonnée dans un vieux caraco marron. Elle n'avait pas même retiré son bonnet, un bonnet noir garni de rubans verts tournés au jaune. Et elle restait raide devant l'étalib, trop haut pour elle, les coudes en l'air, poussant son fer avec des gestes cassés de marionnette.

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1Ibid., p. 716.  
2Ibid., p. 719.  
3Ibid., p. 504.
This is truly a puppet's performance - jerky, graceless, meaningless; the movement does not come from within. The marionnette, a toy agitated by someone else's hands, provides an excellent metaphor for the broken women typified by Madame Putois.

The only characters who do not take part in the dancing are August Lantier and the Lorilleux. Like the Lorilleux, Lantier is more a presence in the text, a symbol of disaster than a participant. He stands at the side, ominously waiting for another opportunity to do harm and another mother-mistress. He is described as a verbal, politicized person, and while obviously he is not a great thinker, he is in a different category from the others, who at no time show any interest in events outside the quartier.

Even inanimate objects dance, for in l'Assommoir personification in virtually every case refers to this special version of animation in which all things make patterned movements in space in accord with some mysterious rhythm of their own. The "dancing" objects of key importance are the alambic, the steam engine, and the glass of alcohol. Below are examples of the technique used.

L'alambic, avec ses récipients de forme étrange, ses enroulements sans fin de tuyaux, gardait une mine sombre; pas une fumée ne s'échappait, à peine entendait-on un souffle intérieur, un ronfllement souterrain; c'était comme une besogne de nuit faite en plein jour, par un travailleur morne, puissant et muet.1

1Ibid., p. 411.
As time passes, we learn that beneath the brooding worker's exterior there is a truly evil personality:

Cette sacrée marmite, ronde comme un ventre de chaudronnière grasse, avec son nez qui s'allongeait et se tortillait, lui soufflait un frisson dans les épaules, une peur mêlée d'un désir. Oui, on aurait dit la fressure de métal d'une grande gueuse, de quelque sorcière qui lâchait goutte à goutte le feu de ses entrailles . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .

This description of the steam engine at the laundry-house is not unlike the early description of the still; the machines seem to be workers like any others in the poor section of Paris. The only difference is the suggestion of great power lurking below the surface, as in the description below:

Quelques coups de bâtoir partaient encore, espacés, au milieu des rires adoucis, des conversations qui s'empêtaient dans un bruit glouton de mâchoires; tandis que la machine à vapeur, allant son train, sans repos ni trêve, semblait hausser la voix, vibrante, ronflante, emplissant l'immense salle. Mais pas une des femmes ne l'entendait, c'était comme la respiration même du lavoir, une haleine ardente amassant sous les poutres du plafond l'éternelle buée qui flottait . . . . . . .

The little dancing glass of alcohol that Coupeau tries desperately to control seems less the latent monster and more the evil spirit of folk tale. It is the still which generates the evil and hence is the more frightening figure, as we see in the description of the glass below with the preceding passages:

Il tendait furieusement ses muscles, il empoignait son verre, pariait de le tenir immobile, comme au bout

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1Ibid., p. 706. 2Ibid., pp. 390-391.
d'une main de marbre, mais, le verre, malgré son effort, dansait le chahut, sautaît à droite, sautaît à gauche, avec un petit tremblement pressé et régulier.

The ballet started with the awakening, in the allegorical sense, of Gervaise and the setting in motion of the crowds; the middle segment is composed of very active performances - leaps of joy and plunges of despair - along with the highly individualized dances of Nana and others. However the dances of the very end of the novel are slow, powerful, majestic in tone. The grand "scène de guignol" of Gervaise deserves special attention.

The first half of this last act is divided into three major scenes, punctuated with the elliptical refrain, "Monsieur, écoutez donc . . . . " Gervaise is "planted in front of the Assommoir" and the passage has an ironically humorous tone at the start:

C'était l'instant d'avoir du coeur et de se montrer gentille, si elle ne voulait pas crever au milieu de l'allégresse générale. D'autant plus que de voir les autres bâfrer ne lui remplissait pas précisément le ventre . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .

However, her almost defiant, comic stance changes upon seeing the other women like herself. Here is the opening of the dance of the prostitutes, staged like a ballroom scene:

Elles restaient de longs moments immobiles, patientes, raidies comme les petits platanes maigres; puis, lentement, elles se mouvaient, traînaient leurs savates sur le sol glacé, faisaient dix pas et s'arrêtaient de nouveau, collées à la terre.

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1Ibid., p. 695.  2Ibid., p. 770.  3Ibid.
The **corps de ballet** recedes into the background as Gervaise begins haltingly to mimic their steps. They then join her to complete the scene.

Longtemps, elle piétina, ignorante de l'heure et du chemin. Autour d'elle, les femmes muettes et noires, sous les arbres, voyageaient, enfermaient leur marche dans le va-et-vient régulier des bêtes en cage. Elles sortaient de l'ombre, avec une lenteur vague d'apparitions; elles passaient dans le coup de lumière d'un bec de gaz, où leur masque blafard nettement surgissait; et elles se noyaient de nouveau, reprisées par l'ombre, balançant la raie blanche de leur jupon, retrouvant le charme frissonnant des ténèbres du trottoir. Des hommes se laissaient arrêter, causaient pour la blague, repartaient en rigolant. D'autres, discrets, effacés, s'éloignaient, à dix pas derrière une femme. Il y avait de grosmurmures, des querelles à voix étouffées, des marchandages furieux, qui tombaient tout d'un coup à de grands silences. Et Gervaise, aussi loin qu'elle s'enfonçait, voyait s'espacer ces factions de femme dans la nuit, comme si, d'un bout à l'autre des boulevards extérieurs, des femmes fussent plantées. Toujours, à vingt pas d'une autre, elle en apercevait une autre. La file se perdait, Paris entier était gardé. Elle, dédaignée, s'enrageait, changeait de place, allait maintenant de la chaussée de Clignancourt à la grande rue de la Chapelle.

- Monsieur, écoutez donc...

She becomes more agitated now in this last walk.

C'était sa promenade dernière, des cours sanglantes où l'on assommaît, aux salles blafardes où la mort rai¬
dissait les gens dans les draps de tout le monde. Sa vie avait tenu là.

- Monsieur, écoutez donc...

Then Gervaise suddenly sees her own changed body - "un vrai guignol." She has taken on the form in which she dances the first **pas de deux**, with père Bru.

Et, brusquement, elle apercut son ombre par terre. Quand elle approchait d'un bec de gaz, l'ombre vague se

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1Ibid., pp. 770-771.  2Ibid., p. 771.
ramassait et se précisait, une ombre énorme, trapue, grotesque tant elle était ronde. Cela s'étalait, le ventre, la forge, les hanches, coulant et flottant ensemble. Elle louchait si fort de la jambe, que, sur le sol, l'ombre faisait la culbute à chaque pas; un vrai guignol! Puis, lorsqu'elle s'éloignait, le guignol grandissait, devenait géant, emplissait le boulevard, avec des réverences qui lui cassaient le nez contre les arbres et contre les maisons. Mon Dieu! qu'elle était drôle et effrayante! Jamais elle n'avait si bien compris son avancement. Alors, elle ne put s'empêcher de regarder ça, attendant les becs de gaz, suivant des yeux le chahut de son ombre. Ah! elle avait là une belle gaupe qui marchait à côté d'elle! Quelle touche! Ça devait attirer les hommes tout de suite. Et elle baissait la voix, elle n'osait plus que bégayer dans le dos des passants.
- Monsieur, écoutez donc . . . .

The crowd once more marches across the stage. Then Gervaise begins slowly to move again. Her partner appears for a perfectly symmetrical brief pas:

L'homme s'était arrêté. Mais il n'avait pas semblé entendre. Il tendait la main . . . . Tous deux se regardèrent . . . . Ils demeuraient béants en face l'un de l'autre. À cette heure, ils pouvaient se donner la main . . . . Ils se regardaient toujours. Puis, sans rien se dire, ils s'en allèrent chacun de son côté, sous la neige qui les fouettait.

Then the second partner appears. Gervaise sees "a man's broad shoulders, a dancing patch of darkness, penetrating deeper into the mist." Perhaps in subconscious awareness of his identity, she begins to run after him; it is Goujet, whom she no doubt knew by his broad shoulders. With him she does

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1Ibid., pp. 771-772. 2Ibid., pp. 773-774.

3"Enfin elle aperçut les larges épaules d'un homme, une tache sombre et dansante, s'enfonçant dans un brouillard. "Oh! celui-là, elle le voulait, elle ne le lâcherait pas! Et elle courut plus fort, elle l'atteignit, le prit par la blouse. - Monsieur, monsieur, écoutez donc . . . . " Ibid., p.774.
a second, long pas de deux, with the setting changed from
the street to Goujet's apartment:

Venez, dit-il. Et il marcha le premier. Elle le
suivit. Tous deux traversèrent le quartier muet, filant
sans bruit le long des murs . . . . Quand il eut ouvert
la porte et allumé une lampe, il se tourna vers
Gervaise, restée humblement sur le palier . . . . Entrez
. . . . Entrez . . . elle entra, peureuse, de l'air
d'une fille qui se coule dans un endroit respectable.
Ils traversèrent la pièce à pas étouffés . . . . Puis,
quand il eut poussé Gervaise dans sa chambre, il ferma
laporte . . . . Gervaise, . . . n'osait avancer, se re-
tirait . . . . il voulut la saisir et l'écraser entre
ses bras. Mais elle défaillit . . . . elle se baissa,
avec un soupir.¹

In a suspended moment, Goujet recalls the dance of an
earlier day, the memory of which replaces a sexual encounter
between them. This dance at the forge was the closest he
and Gervaise ever came to physical love-making - the dance,
the rhythm, the *jouissance." The dream-like quality that
this remembered dance has for them is emphasized by the
introduction to the next part of the scene: "Quand elle
revint à elle, elle avait sonné rue de la Goutte-d'Or . . . .²
The tempo is very slow throughout, and there are even long
rest periods.

Chapter XIII is the second scene of the last act of the
ballet. It includes the long dance of the dying Coupeau.
This dance is one of the most grotesque episodes in a novel
full of the grotesque. The scene begins as Gervaise is
mounting the staircase at the hospital. Already she can

¹Ibid., pp. 774-776. ²Ibid., p. 778.
hear frightening noises, and the guard notices that she is disturbed:

- Hein? il en fait, une musique! dit le gardien.
- Qui donc? demanda-t-elle.
- Mais votre homme! Il gueule comme ça depuis avant-hier. Et il danse, vous allez voir.
  Ah! mon Dieu! quelle vue! Elle resta saisie. La cellule était matelassée du haut en bas, par terre, il y avait deux paillassons, l'un sur l'autre; et, dans un coin, s'allongeaient un matelas et un traversin, pas davantage. Là-dedans, Coupeau dansait et gueulait. Un vrai chienlit de la Courtille, avec sa blouse en lambeaux et ses membres qui battaient l'air; mais un chienlit pas drôle, oh! non, un chienlit dont le chahut effrayant vous faisait dresser tout le poil du corps. Il était déguisé en un-qui-va-mourir. Cré nom! quel cavalier seul! Il butant contre la fenêtre, s'en retournait à reculons, les bras marquant la mesure, secouant les mains, comme s'il avait voulu se les casser et les envoyer à la figure du monde. On rencontre des farceurs dans les bastringues, qui imitent ça, seulement, ils l'imitent mal, il faut voir sauter ce rigodon des soûlards, si l'on veut juger quel chic ça prend, quand c'est exécuté pour de bon. La chanson a son cachet aussi, une engueulade continue de carnaval, une bouche grande ouverte lâchant pendant des heures les mêmes notes de trombone enroulé. Coupeau, lui, avait le cri d'une bête dont on a écrasé la patte. Et, en avant l'orchestre, balancez vos dames!  

While Coupeau dances on alone, Gervaise returns home, unable to see more. But at the Boche apartment she hears the story of another dance like Coupeau's:

Boche avait connu un menuisier qui s'était mis tout nu dans la rue Saint-Martin, et qui était mort en dansant la polka, celui-là buvait de l'absinthe . . . . Puis comme on ne comprenait pas bien, Gervaise repoussa le monde, cria pour avoir de la place; et, au milieu de la loge, tandis que les autres regardaient, elle fit Coupeau, braillant, sautant, se démanchant avec des grimaces abominables.  

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1 Ibid., p. 782.
2 Ibid., p. 784.
From this point on, this danse macabre invades the narration; Gervaise can see nothing else.\textsuperscript{1}

At the hospital Coueapu continues to dance, and in the accompanying delirium animals enter the scene; they too dance. Once again, after seeing him Gervaise leaves, "ayant assez d'une représentation."\textsuperscript{2} Again she goes to the Boche apartment, where she imitates the dance of Coueapu. The scene then switches back to Coupeau once more. He is hallucinating, and sees a bizarre sort of parade:

\begin{quote}
- Tien! cria-t-il, c'est la bande de la chaussée Clignancourt, déguisée en ours, avec des flafla . . . Il restait accroupi devant la fenêtre, comme s'il avait suivi un cortège dans une rue, du haut d'une toiture.
- V'là la cavalcade, des lions et des panthères qui font des grimaces . . . Il y a des mèmes habillés en chiens et en chats . . . Il y a la grande Clémence, avec sa tignasse pleine de plumes. Ah! sacré di! elle fait la culbute, elle montre tout ce qu'elle a! . . . Dis donc, ma biche, faut nous carapatter . . . Eh! bougres de roussins, voulez-vous bien ne pas la prendre! . . . Ne tirez pas, tonnerre! ne tirez pas . . .
\end{quote}

In the last segment of his dance, Coupeau sees Lantier and Gervaise in a hallucination. This produces a final delirious rage, after which Coupeau falls into a sleep. In this segment, the narrative, the symbolic, and the structural elements of the latter half of the book are welded together. The dance motifs show the ravages of alcoholism and the disintegration of the Coupeau family. The dance ends thus:

\begin{quote}
\textsuperscript{1}Ibid., p. 785. \textsuperscript{2}Ibid., p. 789. \textsuperscript{3}Ibid., p. 791.
\end{quote}
Et il fit remarquer la figure de l'homme aux deux autres. Coupeau, les paupières closes, avait de petites secousses nerveuses qui lui tiraient toute la face. Il était plus affreux encore, ainsi écrasé, la mâchoire saillante, avec le masque déformé d'un mort qui aurait eu des cauchemars. Mais les médecins, ayant aperçu les pieds, vinrent mettre leurs nez dessus d'un air de profond intérêt. Les pieds dansaient toujours. Coupeau avait beau dormir, les pieds dansaient. Oh! leur patron pouvait ronfler, ça ne les regardait pas, ils continuaient leur train-train, sans se presser ni se ralentir. De vrais pieds mécaniques, des pieds qui prenaient leur plaisir où ils le trouvaient.

Pourtant, Gervaise, ayant vu les médecins poser leurs mains sur le torse de son homme, voulut le tâter elle aussi. Elle s'approcha doucement, lui appliqua sa main sur une épaule. Et elle la laissa une minute. Mon Dieu! qu'est-ce qui se passait donc là-dedans? Ça dansait jusqu'au fond de la viande; les os eux-mêmes devaient sauter. Des frémissements, des ondulations arrivaient de loin, coulaient pareils à une rivière, sous la peau. Quand elle appuyait un peu, elle sentait les cris de souffrance de la moelle. À l'œil nu, on voyait seulement les petites ondes creusant des fossettes, comme à la surface d'un tourbillon; mais, dans l'intérieur, il devait y avoir un joli ravage. Quel sacré travail! un travail de taupe! C'était le vitriol de l'Assommoir qui donnait là-bas des coups de pioche. Le corps entier en était saucé, et dame! il fallait que ce travail s'achevât, émiettant, emportant Coupeau, dans le tremblement général et continu de toute la carcasse.

Les médecins s'en étaient allés. Aubout d'une heure, Gervaise, restée avec l'intérim, répéta à voix basse:

- Monsieur, monsieur, il est mort . . .

Mais l'intérim, qui regardait les pieds, dit non de la tête. Les pieds nus, hors du lit, dansaient toujours. Ils n'étaient guère propres, et ils avaient les ongles longs. Des heures encore passèrent. Tout d'un coup, ils se raidirent, immobiles. Alors, l'intérim se tourna vers Gervaise, en disant:

- Ça y est.

La mort seule avait arrêté les pieds. 1

Before her death, Gervaise often performs Coupeau's dance for the entertainment of the neighbors. This dance

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1Ibid., pp. 793-794.
incorporates all the others in its symbolism. At the beginning of the novel each group has its own particular steps, as do various individuals, and even some inanimate objects. However as time passes the number of steps decreases and those which illustrate the dehumanization of the poor and the plight of Gervaise are emphasized and repeated. Similarly, at the beginning there was a dance or a dance metaphor for every type of performer and activity. By the end all the concepts that were represented by separate dances are channeled into the portrayal of two emotional states - trance and delirium. In the final pages Gervaise unites these two states in her person. By the end of chapter eleven, most of the dances have been consolidated into one of two categories - trance-like numbers (such as the dance of the prostitutes), or grotesque fits (Coupeau's dance).

Gervaise's final pas de deux, with Bazouge, which she both desired and feared throughout the tale, embodies the ambiguity of her nature. This ambiguity is illustrated by the three categories or pairs of contrasting types of dance found in the text: conscious versus unconscious performances, patterned, stylized movement versus improvisation; danse basse versus haute danse. It is in the dichotomy of each category that we see the two sides of Gervaise's nature. Was Gervaise ever conscious of the meaning of her actions? Were heredity and society responsible for her fate, or was it in her power to control? How was she able to be both a
noble heroine and a weak-willed drunkard? These questions are expressed in the contrast between types of movement. The patterned, stylized, conscious, danse basse gestures which represent the forces of social determinism and heredity which influence individual behavior are contrasted with the unconscious, spontaneous, haute danse movements which express the pulsations of the individual soul as it exists in its uniqueness and freedom.
Staging, Costumes, and Accompaniment

The staging of l'Assommoir, like the plot organization and chapter division, is highly symmetrical in design. Once again the "realism" of the novel is nearly jeopardized by the extreme parallelism of presentation. However this symmetry serves the symbolic and social structures admirably.¹ On the right of the stage, if we envision the setting of the novel, are the old "abattoirs"; on the left is Lariboisière hospital, a new "abattoir". In the background is the faubourg where the masses live, waiting to be used as fodder by an industrialized Paris, to which they are attached by the Faubourg-Poissonnière. In the foreground, unseen, is the mur d'octroi, the magic world beyond the faubourg.² In the distance is the country, invisible and lost forever to those who have come to Paris as Gervaise has done. Paris is a rich milieu, but Zola chooses from the vast field of symbols that it offers only the façade of non-descript buildings and the architectural outlines of the streets. It is only in the first scene, at the Hôtel Boncoeur, that the interior of a building holds importance. Here it is not so much the room itself as its destitution that is important. The decor is being systematically pillaged of every item that can be

¹Cf. Max, Métamorphoses, pp. 95-96.

²Max also notes that in spite of the accuracy of the description of Gervaise's quartier, it is presented as too symmetrical and ordered for the places described not to have symbolic value. (Ibid.)
pawned or sold - a process that will be repeated more slowly and irreversibly in the final chapters of the book.

The quartier is neatly cordoned off so that the restriction of lieu is reinforced: Gervaise is confined within an area marked off by the rue Polonceau, the rue des Poissonniers, the boulevard de la Chappelle, and the rue de la Charbonnière. Rue de la Goutte d'Or bisects the stage like an artery. The names of places and streets mark out a sort of carte du tendre of the characters. The rue Poissonniers evokes the two sisters Adèle and Virginie and, homonymically, Chappelle hints at the chapelier, Lantier. The name Hôtel Boncoeur is both ironic (applied to Lantier, who "doesn't have a bad heart when he has money") and sincere (applied to Gervaise).

There are two other important aspects of the staging of l'Assommoir: the position of l'Assommoir itself, with its alambic, like a temple with its altar (Cf. p. 418); and the use of symbolic fluid streams. The center-stage location of the still emphasizes its key symbolic value in the neighborhood. The symbol itself is reified as alcohol - thus bringing in the whole range of fluid imagery and symbolism - and sacralized by its position at the central point of the central place. This fluid (the stream of alcohol produced by the still) is in turn linked with the fluids from the two other symbolic places - the "ruisseau" from the Coupeau building, and the stream from Gervaise's laundry. All of
these places hold great importance in Gervaise's life in Paris, as well as recalling the streams of Plassans where she began to work as a laundress.

In considering the staging of the piece, it is important to consider not only the tangible elements of set, but the atmosphere and context of Paris, which is an almost tangible presence in itself. The city's influence on the lives of the characters is highly significant; many of them, like Gervaise, are victimized by the urban environment. They dream of returning to the country with money earned in the city, but the social evils of life in Paris not only prohibit the realization of the dream, but corrupt the immigrants as well. The dirt, the cramped quarters, the subjugation to the rule of machines are sources of moral degeneration. In the passage given below, we see how atmosphere becomes force, invading the spirit like a poisonous gas, to destroy the will:

Elle continua à compter tout haut. Elle n'avait aucun dégoût, habituée à l'ordure; elle enfonçait ses bras nus et roses au milieu des chemises jaunes de crasse, des torchons raidis par la graisse des eaux de vaisselle, des chaussettes mangées et pourries de sueur. Pourtant, dans l'odeur forte qui battait son visage penché au-dessus des tas, une nonchalance la prenait. Elle s'était assise au bord d'un tabouret, se courbant en deux, allongeant les mains à droite, à gauche, avec des gestes ralentis, comme si elle se grisaît de cette panteur humaine, vaguement souriante, les yeux noyés. Et il semblait que ses premières paresse vissent de là, de l'asphyxie des vieux linges empoisonnant l'air autour d'elle.¹

¹ Zola, l'Assommoir, p. 506.
Throughout most of the text, costuming is used mainly in descriptions of the masses, to show their uniformity, and as a form of professional identity in small groups; this thus gives to costuming a generally sociological orientation. The descriptions are rather general, as in the passage describing the workers going to their jobs. ("On reconnaisait les serruriers à leurs bourgerons bleus, les maçons à leurs cottes blanches, les peintres à leurs pantalles, sous lequels de longues blouses passaient.)¹

In most other situations, attire is described in a rather vague manner. People are simply referred to as "bien mis"; article of clothing is only a "jupe" or "blouse." For this reason, when costuming is described in detail it is striking in the text. At the beginning, for example, significant attention is paid to Virginie's outfit in the lavoir scene. Her apparently careful and decorative toilette contrasts sharply with Gervaise's ragged clothing. This extends the significance of Lantier's having pawned out most of Gervaise's possessions.² It is also the first example of the use of clothing as a sort of moral judgment - a technique often used in the text. "Fine" clothing is the equivalent of the black hat in western movies; it is equated

¹Ibid, p. 378.
²The description of this costume also serves a structural purpose, since Gervaise dismantles Virginie's ensemble piece by piece in the course of their battle.
with faulty character. Tattered and/or simple clothing, on
the other hand, denote respectability and honesty. Nana's
outfits are described in detail throughout the text and in
the scene where her parents find her at the Grand Salon de
la Folie, they recognize her at the same time as their
daughter and as a "bad" woman by her clothing. Her love of
fancy apparel is mentioned throughout the text, and it blos-
soms at the same time her womanly figure does.¹

The very limited use of detailed costume descriptions
and the simplicity of the costumes of the crowd allow atten-
tion to go to the movements and gestures of the body itself,
and in fact highlight them. This accords with the prejudice
in favor of the body itself expressed in the text. Nudity
is, indirectly, associated with purity, for where Goujet and
Gervaise, the two most innocent creatures in the text are
concerned, it is their bodies and not their attire to which
our attention is drawn.

This very spare use of costuming detail serves another
function as well - it makes the detailed descriptions that
much more noticeable in the few cases where they exist. The
segment of the wedding party profits from this interplay of
detailed and simple description. In the "noce" episode,
dress is very important, not only for the crowd as a whole,
but for the individual members of the group. However this

¹Although his clothing as such as not mentioned, we are
told that Lantier, a basically unsavory man, is dandified.
entire scene forms a distinctly separate section of the text in several respects.

Sometimes a particular feature of attire is given attention, such as the decorations of the doctors who come to view Coupeau at the hospital. Their mention is ironical in tone, for these honors bestowed on them by a bourgeois society serve to widen the gap between them and the poor whose diseases they care about only from the medical standpoint.

Coupeau was, however, proud of his own costume and its social significance. In fact, it is he who openly speaks of worker identity and clothing, thus explicitly establishing costume as a sociological element of the text. In the passage below he gives belligerent voice to his pride as a common man:

Coupeau se dandinait sur ses pieds, en blouse sale, en vieille casquette de drap sans visière, aplatie au sommet du crâne. Et, comme il barrait le passage, il vit un petit jeune homme maigre qui essuyait la manche de son paletot, après lui avoir donné un coup de coude.

- Dites donc! cria-t-il, furieux, en retirant son brûle-gueule de sa bouche noire, vous ne pourriez pas demander excuse? . . . Et ça fait le dégoûté encore, parce qu'on porte une blouse!

Le jeune homme s'était retourné, toisant le zingueur, qui continuait:

- Apprends un peu, bougre de greluchon, que la blouse est le plus beau vêtement, oui! le vêtement du travail! . . . Je vas t'essuyer, moi, si tu veux, avec une paire de claques . . . A-t-on jamais vu de tantes pareilles qui insultent l'ouvrier!

Gervaise tâchait vainement de le calmer. Il s'était-lait dans ses guenilles, il tapait sur sa blouse, en gueulant:

- Là-dedans! il y a la poitrine d'un homme!

Alors, le jeune homme se perdit au milieu de la foule, en murmurant:

- En voilà un sale voyou!
Coupeau voulut le rattraper. Plus souvent qu'il se laissait mécaniser par un paletot! Il n'était seulement pas payé, celui-là! Quelque pelure d'occasion pour lever une femme sans lâcher un centime. S'il le retrouvait, il le collait à genoux et lui faisait saluer la blouse . . . .

The explicit treatment of clothing as costume enhances the theatricality of presentation of _l'Assommoir_. Similarly, the very restrictive use of _lieu_ and the symbolic value of places, evocative of an expressionist stage-set, contribute to the dramatic tension of the text. But the third element of the _mise en scène_ of _l'Assommoir_, music, is probably the most significant in sustaining the dance motif of the text.

Some type of music accompanies nearly all of the dances in _l'Assommoir_, serving to underscore the patterns and types of movement used and thus lending impact to the performance and reinforcement to the atmosphere of the scene created by the gestures. "Musique" is used to indicate sound in the same way that "dance" is used for "movement," as we see in the passage below, taken from the first chapter.

La jeune femme se remit à sangloter. Les éclats de voix, les mouvements brusques de Lantier, qui culbutait les chaises, venaient de réveiller les enfants. Ils se dressèrent sur leur séant, demi-nus, débrouillant leurs cheveux de leurs petites mains; et, entendant pleurer leur mère, ils poussèrent des cris terribles, pleurant eux aussi de leurs yeux à peine ouverts.
- Ah! voilà la musique! s'écria Lantier furieux.

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1 Ibid., pp. 738-739.
2 Ibid., p. 381.
In contrast to the example above, other sounds give the impression of being music without being called such in the text, just as some movement constitutes dance without bearing the name.

Much of the music in *l'Assommoir* is vocal, such as the song Gervaise sings as she beats Virginie in the *lavoir*. ("Pan! Pan!") etc. or earlier, "Et chaque déluge était accompagné d'un éclat de voix.")\(^1\) The sounds Coupeau makes as he dances in delirium are also referred to as music.

Although sound generally accompanies movement, it is not the sound of the movement itself which constitutes the music; the sound comes from another source, outside the performer. In Chapter VII the conclusion of the birthday party is accompanied by the cat's crunching on the bones of the goose that was eaten for dinner. "Le petit bruit de ses dents fines" wafting in the night air is the haunting refrain that ends the chapter.\(^2\)

When the musical background is arrested, it is an indication of intense concentration and emotion, such as in the laundry scene:

La bataille recommença, muette, sans un cri, sans une injure. Elles ne se prenaient pas corps à corps, s'attaquèrent à la figure, les mains ouvertes et crochues, pinçant, griffant ce qu'elles empoignaient.\(^3\)

The very interruption of sound intensifies our concentration on bodily movement.

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\(^1\) Ibid., pp. 397-401.  \(^2\) Ibid., p. 595.  \(^3\) Ibid., p. 398.
The most symbolic use of accompaniment is in passages where the music seems to generate spontaneously in response to a certain kind of dance. Such a phenomenon occurs toward the end of the book in one of the great crowd descriptions. The music is simply "in the air": "Ah! la triste musique, qui semblait accompagner le piétinement du troupeau, les bêtes de somme se traînant, éreintées!"\(^1\)

\(^1\)Ibid., p. 765.
Performance and Interpretation

There are three categories of dance in *l'Assommoir* - those which are anthropological in origin, those which illustrate sociological patterns; and those which serve an aesthetic, artistic purpose. These categories roughly correspond to folk, popular, and theatrical dance, respectively.

As an anthropological phenomenon, dance functions in puberty-initiation rites; courtship, friendship, weddings, occupation, vegetation, astronomy, hunting, animal mime,¹ battle, healing, and death. Ecstatic dance and clown dances are also part of this anthropological role of Dance. Rites of passage (birth, coming of age, marriage, death, and religious ritual as ritual expression, both secular and religious) are also expressed by dance. Religious events may be related to ecstatic or trance dances, masked dances, and processionals.²

Broadly speaking, this is the category of dance done to fill a basic individual human need. Mime is also grouped with anthropological dances, and some of Gervaise's dances are clearly in this latter category - particularly the scene culminating in her going to beg money from the Lorilleux:

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²This listing is from Gertrude Kurth, "Dance: Folk and Primitive," *Dictionary of Folklore, Mythology, and Legend*, vol. 1, Maria Leach and J. Fried, eds. (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1949), pp. 271-297, quoted in Royce, *Anthropology*, p. 79. See also Royce, p. 80, based on Shay.
None of the explanatory phrases given by Zola are needed in visualizing this scene. She goes from a trance-like state into sleep, awakens suddenly, then collapses again on her chair like a marionette whose strings have been suddenly released. When the clock chimes three, she becomes child-like, crying helplessly, rocking herself, trying to quiet the pain, until another thought transfixes her. As soon as she has made her decision, she goes out into the stairwell.

Goujet's dances lend themselves most readily to an anthropological reading. His greatest performance, the dance at the forge, is the best example of this "anthropological dance." It follows the pattern of the primitive mating ritual dance.

The theme of sexuality is given its best expression in the figure of Goujet. For most of the couples in the book (Gervaise and Coupeau in particular) sexuality as such is the least significant aspect of the relationship. (Although

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1 Zola, L'Assommoir, p. 753.
the book was attacked on moral grounds, l'Assommoir remains a particularly chaste work in this respect, as Zola himself said.) Lantier seems to have joined forces with Adele more to escape responsibility and boredom than for passion. And although he (Lantier) represents to Gervaise the introduction to sexuality and youthful romance, this phase of her life precedes l'Assommoir. What is demonstrated by the Lantier-Gervaise couple is moral erosion, not sexuality or eroticism. She only resumed her relationship with him because of the disintegration of her marriage, typified by her being unable to sleep in her own bedroom because of Coupeau's loutish behavior.

Goujet represents sexuality in its natural and more wholesome context, as a force uniting man and woman and as the origin of the family unit. His link with Gervaise's son further emphasizes his role as husband and father in a spiritual family he forms with Gervaise. He represents a return to the primitive and "pure" version of man in a manner that is reminiscent of Rousseau. All of Goujet's performances are in the societal rather than the magico-religious sphere of anthropological dance. If we consider the division of these functions given below, we see his importance in three of these five categories.

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1"Et Etienne était ainsi devenu un lien de plus entre la blanchisseuse et le forgeron." (Ibid., p. 518.)

2Rust, Dance in Society, p. 12.
Dancing

Social
- Birth
  - Initiation of boys and girls into tribal life
- Marriage
- War
  - Secret society
    - Initiation, periodical ceremonies

Magico-Religious
- Worship
  - Deity
  - Sun
  - Moon
  - Fire
  - Snake
- Food
  - Agriculture
  - Rain
- Sickness
  - Hunting
  - Fishing
  - Exorcism
  - of demons
- Death
  - Funerary dance to lay the ghost
He oversees the initiation of Gervaise's child Etienne into "tribal" life. Etienne becomes his apprentice at the forge, having left home because Coupeau treated him badly. This further illustrates the failure of Coupeau in the male role, while it emphasizes the symbolic marriage of Goujet and Gervaise. This symbolic union transcends the society in which the two find themselves. When Goujet asks Gervaise to go away with him he is unconcerned about any constraints imposed by the law because of her previous marriage, because he functions in a completely different sphere.

In his membership in the society of the smiths and his performance, with them, of special skills that the ordinary man is incapable of, he forms part of a secret society. It also shows his full integration into his peer group as well. Coupeau on the other hand has difficulty maintaining relationships of any kind; the only friendly overture he makes is to Lantier, an entirely misguided gesture, the reason for which is highly suspect. He seems more interested in testing Gervaise than in having a friend.

Birth and war are the only aspects of the societal function of dance which Goujet is excluded from, for although Goujet is presented as the ideal male, he is still at an adolescent stage of development - that is, he has the potential of being the ideal. This is confirmed in the last chapter of the text when we are shown Goujet's room, essentially the home of a schoolboy.
Anthropological dances are by no means limited to Goujet. A disquieting aspect of the primitive dance is seen in the Bijard family. The beatings Bijard inflicts on his daughter reflect the primary anthropological role confusion and its vaguely incestuous overtones in this family where the daughter has assumed the maternal role.

Several of Gervaise's dances also fall within this category: the birth of Nana, the trance dances, the first part of her prostitution scene, her supervision of Maman Coupeau's burial, and her own death scene.

From the standpoint of interpretation and symbolism, the most interesting aspect of these anthropological dances is their use in linking the ideal (as represented by Goujet) to man in his primitive functions. The conclusion that forces itself upon the reader is that only in this naïve and simple role does the human being fulfill himself according to nature's plan. If he fails to do this, he can only hope to descend to the next highest order of things, contemporary society, and try to make the best of it. By far the greatest number of figures in the text are doing this - from the crowds in the streets, to the groups of workers, to nearly everyone except Goujet, who cannot compromise.

When society changes from "primitive" to a more evolved state, the dances change. Their anthropological functions have to be relabelled to fit the activities of contemporary man that have replaced the prototype. The categories of
dance given above (page 152) are thus adapted to the following functions:

1. dance as a reflection and validation of social organization

2. dance as a vehicle of secular and religious ritual expression

3. dance as a social diversion or recreational activity

4. dance as a psychological outlet and release

5. dance as a reflection of aesthetic values or as an aesthetic activity in itself

6. dance as a reflection of economic subsistence patterns, or an economic activity in itself.¹

The sociological dances are usually associated with group performance - the march of the workers or the smaller units such as the laundresses or the Coupeau wedding party. The dancers belong to the same class and, in the smaller groups, have the same occupation. It is in fact their occupation by which they have group identity, being not yet sufficiently politicized (in many cases they have only recently arrived from the country) to view themselves in terms of class or ideology. The laundresses, the prostitutes, the

blacksmiths, the flower-shop girls all have their scène de ballet. Some of the dances have as their purpose reinforcement of group solidarity. (Cf. the blackssmiths, Chapter VI.)

Group dance in l'Assommoir is the equivalent of what is sometimes referred to as formal dance by dance scholars. The group dance requires more skill than the informal dance, and emphasizes the group's particular distinctive traits or talents. Because it is a symbol of group identity and/or a means of creating group solidarity, dance tends to emphasize the traits that distinguish one group from another and de-emphasize common, universal human traits. Thus a nearly medieval identification with profession is seen in l'Assommoir's small group dances, and the beginnings of urban class identity are seen in the large group dances, such as the common people going to work at the beginning of the day and returning home in the evening).

Gesture is a particularly potent sociological datum, for it is much easier to switch language than to switch gesture. The language of the boyd, which is so difficult to unlearn, binds a person to his origins,¹ and emphasizes in still another way the importance of social determinism and heredity, in accord with the "philosophy" of the text. The crowd's gestures are stylized, characteristic of a certain milieu, to which they are forever bound in hundreds of ways.

¹Royce, Anthropology, p. 162.
Coupeau's dances reveal him to function mainly in the sociological reading of the text, and his difficulties in a social context are many, as we have already pointed out. Because his alcoholic dances are pathogenic in nature, they isolate him from his surroundings, his peers, and his family. They are at the heart of the disintegration of the Coupeau family, expressed in passages such as the one below:

A quoi servait-il, ce soûlard? à la faire pleurer, à lui manger tout, à la pousser au mal. Eh bien! des hommes si peu utiles, on les jetait le plus vite possible dans le trou, on dansait sur eux la polka de la délivrance. Et lorsque la mère disait: Tue! la fille répondait: Assomme! Nana lisait les accidents, dans le journal, avec des réflexions de fille dénaturée.¹

Such passages even create a distance between Coupeau and the reader, who psychologically recoils from the pages describing his death. It is difficult to empathize with Coupeau because his dance is an interior one, the product of his delirium, causing him to see a world that the reader does not perceive. He is literally alienated by his illness and in the end seems less than human. By contrast, we see Gervaise's world through her eyes and are tied to her viewpoint in this way. Her death scene brings her closer to the reader, if anything.

Nana's dances are open to two readings, lending themselves to sociological interpretation and at the same time being highly expressive of individual creativity. Indeed,

¹Zola, l'Assommoir, p. 685.
the two issues are related, because at the basis of the process of the socialization of a human being is the establishment of identity in relationship to the peer group. We have decided to treat Nana's dances under the category of solo performances whose orientation is aesthetic/artistic, but this decision is purely arbitrary.

The third category - dance as an aesthetic activity and as a form of artistic creation - allows for far greater individuality than the first two. Whereas in the first category the dancers reveal the nature of the human being as *homo sapiens*, and in the second man's social interaction is expressed, in this third category dance is used to portray character on an individual basis. There are six sets of criteria used for cataloguing these dances that are particularly meaningful when dance is being used as a method of character delineation. It can be classed as human or non-human;\(^1\) conscious or unconscious; formal or informal; group or individual function; expression of feeling or method of working off energy; secular or ritual. A further consideration is whether the dance is called a dance because of its content (movement and gesture) or its context (dance event).

\(^1\)In *l'Assommoir* there is a merging of the human, the vegetable, and the mineral which makes the divisions between these categories very hazy. Thus there is no need to distinguish between human and non-human where the quality, attributes of dance are concerned here. Cf. "... elle revenait, le cou tendu, s'étourdissant à voir couler, entre les pavillons trarus de l'octroi, le flot interrompu d'hommes, de bêtes, de charrettes." (*Ibid.*, p. 377.)
From a structural standpoint, these artistic dances vary the line of movement of the text by giving texture to the narrative line. In this sense they are "ornamental"; they are not, however, expendable. They are "art for art's own sake" in the text - movement for the beauty of movement, to be appreciated by the senses and the imagination. They are the creation of Zola the instinctive, sensuous writer.

In this category, the dances are quite often solos, purely individualistic performances in which a character asserts his individuality, expressing himself in movements that reflect his feelings, and distinguish him from the "troupeau"/troupe. In these dances all that is basic to a given personality, all the psychological, historical, and hereditary data are pulled together to present the complete picture of Gervaise or Nana, or another. In addition, these scenes are great releases in the text, which is often heavy with the stultifying routine and stifling atmosphere of the poor quarters of Paris. They are hopeful interludes also, in the sense that they show the existence of individuality (or its emergence) in an atmosphere which almost inevitably blankets everyone under the sameness and the depressive hopelessness of great poverty. Sparks of life exist in dances such as the one Nana performs in the cabaret.

Solo performance emphasizes individuality because it allows for spontaneity and improvisation. We have only to contrast this kind of dance with the workers' march, the
direction and pace of which are predetermined. The value of dance for the individual (particularly the precocious child) is at least threefold: It channels off some of his discontent; it keeps him from becoming too bored; and it allows him an orgy of "aggressive individualistic exhibitionism and thus compensates for the repression of personality in other spheres of life."¹ Nana's repeated dance episodes are expressions of just these adaptative issues. They are indications of an almost alarming precociousness and an individuality which could explode if not handled correctly.

Individuality is almost expressed in dance by emphasis on a physical defect or handicap.² In some societies the latter are capitalized because the dance functions as the exploitation (in the positive sense) of the personality. In a society where there is room for individuality, defect would then become a mark of distinction and uniqueness, with no stigma attached to it. Conversely in the world of l'Assommoir it is a source of insults and shame, as we see with Gervaise. Many of Gervaise's dances are "ruined" by her limp. Madame Lorilleux exploits this defect with special

¹ Cf. Rust, Dance in Society, p. 17. These remarks are based on Margaret Mead's observations in From the South Seas (New York: Morrow & Co., 1939), pp. 223-224.

² "Particularly interesting in Mead's account is the fact that every physical defect or handicap was capitalized to the full in this universal exploitation of individual personality. A hunchbacked boy had worked out a most ingenious imitation of a turtue: ..." (Ibid., p. 17.)
malice. She uses it to embarrass Gervaise when she first meets her. It even causes a strange resentment which reflects Madame Lorilleux's own situation ("Mais qu'a-t-elle donc sur elle, cette infirme, pour se faire aimer! Est-ce qu'on m'aime moi!"\(^1\) She may even have the horrible suspicion that her sister is right and that men like Gervaise's limp, meaning that La Banban is actually profiting from her deformity instead of suffering because of it.

However for Gervaise the metaphor is obvious - her deformity is her downfall in the repressive \textit{milieu} in which she lives. In fact, her identity is reduced to her deformity. (Cf. the nickname "La Banban.") Anyone who is set apart from the crowd becomes the target of suspicion. The handicapped arouse primeval fears and distrust, as if the defect were a contagious disease or the sign of the ill-will of the gods.

In looking at these dances of individual movement and their symbolism we see that an aspect of society is being condemned. Attempts at self-realization in the \textit{milieu} of \textit{l'Assommoir} are thwarted either out of jealousy or fear. The lame are not allowed to dance, if we express the idea in the metaphor of the text. In Gervaise's last dance, she is both performer and spectator. Her final humiliation is the sight of her own ungainly movements silhouetted in the light

\(^{1}\text{Ibid., p. 498.}\)
from the street lamp. The shadow of the limp expresses the curse that has been with her since even before her birth.

There is also a positive aspect to the interpretation of Gervaise's solo dances, and that is the manner in which they set her apart spiritually from her milieu. Socially she may be an outcast, but personally she is able to form ties on a higher level. Her introspective self is expressed in dances of wandering which show her solitude and her confusion. She is as uncertain of her identity and her destiny as Goujet is certain of his. She is divided among three men; he has only one woman. But this motif of interrogation and searching gives added depth to her portrayal.

The relationships she forms and the love she inspires are expressed in pas de deux. In some cases the two partners dance together with interlocking movements; in others they alternately perform for each other. In traditional ballet, the pas de deux is a romantic dance in which the lead couple's relationship is given its most complete expression. In l'Assommoir, however, couples (both pairs of lovers and married couples) are highly unstable. The couple unit does not reflect real psychological or emotional bonds. So Gervaise's pas de deux are not performed with

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1 The book opens with Gervaise in a faltering relationship with Lantier, who moves on to Adele, back to Gervaise, then to Virginie, and eventually to an unknown tripière. Gervaise marries Coupeau, forms a romantic but non-sexual relationship with Goujet; under pressure, she resumes her relationship with Lantier.
Coupau or Lantier; they are with Goujet (spiritual husband and romantic ideal); le pere Bru (with whom the theme of Gervaise's compassion is illustrated); and Bazouge (the symbol of death and also, in a strange sense, the lover, considering the final scene of the novel).

The performing units of l'Assommoir are large groups (usually divided by sex);¹ small groups (four to twelve participants) of people of the same profession (laundresses, shopkeepers, florists), the same personality (marionnettes, guignol figures, dolls), or the same interests (Nana and her friends); and individuals.

The division of crowd scenes into male groups and female groups is probably more a depiction of reality than a sexist view of the contemporary scene. The outstanding features of these performers is their individual ornamentation of mass activity: all the workers are moving in the same direction, with the same purpose, but each dancer is given a particular distinguishing action or feature to indicate his individuality and to show symbolically that the hordes of Paris are made up of unique human beings.

The performers in the smaller groups do not have any more individuality than the members of the large groups; however the activities that they perform as a group are more varied. The term "marionnettes" is used to reinforce the

quality of lifelessness and/or resignation of the majority of the women, with Madame Putois being just one example.¹ The four figures for whom performance is most effectively used as a method of characterization are Nana, Coupeau, Gervaise, and Goujet. Nana's performances are not just structured as dance or referred to metaphorically in those terms; they are conscious performances. Nana is the only intentional dancer in the text and she performs in recklessly individualistic abandon. Her self-awareness contrasts sharply with Gervaise's lack of it.

For classically pure performance there is Goujet. He performs steps that reflect his faithful, honest, pure nature. But both on a symbolic and a material level Goujet operates in a world of his own.² His dances set him apart from the overall symbolic structure and narrative in which the other key figures participate. For example, as we said, his principal dance is the mating dance at the forge, but the mating theme as such is not a dominant one in l'Assommoir. The dissolution of couples, not their formation, is the interest of the narrative, forming part of a symbolic field of destruction.

The performers of l'Assommoir tend to be described in terms of roles rather than characters, a fact that has not

¹Zola, l'Assommoir, p. 504.
²Cf. the chart showing societal and magico-religious functions of dance, p. .
gone unnoticed before. They are portrayed as filling a role society has set for them, and they are often identified by their trades or professions. This archetypal aspect of characterization is reinforced by the evocative use of names. Madame Lerat, Madame Putois, the Lorilleux, pere Colombe, whose establishment is described in Christian religious terms, are names that call forth an image, or an archetype. These symbolic associations both deprive the character of some of his individuality and invest him with the added force of symbol.

The play between the three levels of performance, executed by various units of performance, and various types of performers, produces a text that is a labyrinth of symbols and interpretations. A reading of the text involves moving from one level of meaning to another, as well as following the complex interplay of theme and character which forms the structural design of the piece. While Goujet is usually the vehicle for the anthropological reading, Coupeau for the sociological, and Gervaise for the symbolic/artistic, all of the performers move back and forth from one field to another to interlock the various aspects of the text and to duplicate the interweaving of various aspects of human behavior to be found in reality. The unifying principle of the pre-

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1Cf. Dubois, l'Assommoir de Zola, for one.

2Note the use of archetypes, particularly in roles for male dancers, p.

sentation is rhythm, for in l'Assommoir life is a series of rhythmic relationships.
CHAPTER TWO

MICRO COSMIC REPRESENTATION: ART
Antecedents: Homer, Moliere, Diderot

In re-integrating l'Assommoir into its literary context, the question that immediately comes to mind is whether the dance motif that dominates the text had a precedent in earlier literature. If so, how did dance enter the literary tradition?

Any answer to this question must of course recognize that both dance and literature are part of a single artistic tradition and that it is impossible to define genres equivocally, so that there is no area in which they overlap. But in considering the dance as defined in our study, it is clear that its techniques are carried into verbal modes of expression. This occurs in at least four ways. The first is the incorporation into a written literary tradition of material that originated in the oral tradition. This material was originally meant to be performed and was therefore keyed to gesture and other physical aspects of presentation. This includes the early epics, mucky early lyric poetry, certain types of drama in which improvisation is an important part of the performance, and early rhetorical forms.

Drama, in fact, stands alone as a category because even in the modern age, when plays are performed from scripts, the stage still belongs to two genres: literature and dance. The stage will always be a place when blending of gesture and text occurs. There has never been a time when the theater was not a vehicle for bringing elements of the
dance into the literary tradition. The theater never remains perfectly balanced between its two influences. Periodically the balance shifts toward the verbal or toward the physical. In the latter case, it is the dance which contributes to the realignment of the genre. Even when a theatrical performance does not contain dance as such, dramatic literature keeps alive the emphasis on gesture, movement, physical presentation, and physical communication which are evocative of pure dance.

The third way in which dance finds its way into writing is in efforts to make verbal communication more direct and physical. This type of effort may be connected with a literary movement, or it may be merely an individual writer's conception of the possibilities and goals of verbal communication. It can also be the result of the writer's need to convey his feelings to the reader and to convince him that the text is based on verifiable facts - that it is a "true story."

Finally, in some cases it is the artistic context and cultural climate into which the work is born (perhaps in combination with one or more of the other three factors) which is the reason for the appearance of a textual dance motif. In late nineteenth-century France the dance was an artistic preoccupation in several genres, and thus the dancer suggested itself as a figure well suited to be the subject of a work in literature, the plastic arts, or the per-
forming arts. The dancer was in effect the figure of woman as viewed by the arts in the latter half of the century.\textsuperscript{1}

There is still, however, no precedent for the use of a dance motif in a text as is seen in \textit{l'Assommoir} - either in scope or in artistry. This kind of textual dance motif has therefore at least not been the focus of study until this time, although the use of gestural language, symmetrical syntax, and theatrical techniques in literature have been. These types of structural study have been made of some of the earliest literature in the Western tradition, such as the \textit{Idylls} of Theocritus\textsuperscript{2} and the Homeric epic. Since Zola has so often been linked with the epic tradition, this genre is a good starting point for discussing textual dance motifs.\textsuperscript{3}

Structurally, the Homeric epics consist of a number of scenes linked by narrative passages, and recited in such a way as to recreate as vividly as possible the dramatic ac-

\textsuperscript{1}See pp. 197-220.

\textsuperscript{2}In his chapter "Figures and Tropes" Thomas Rosenmeyer does an excellent job of discussing the dual functioning of rhythm and syntax in poetry. Its principles are flexible enough to be applied to any number of texts. (Thomas Rosenmeyer, \textit{The Green Cabinet: Theocritus and the European Pastoral Lyric} (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), pp. 247-284.

\textsuperscript{3}Again, Proulx's discussion of the epic tradition and Zola's relationship to this genre (in \textit{Aspects épiques des Rougon-Macquart de Zola} is by far the most interesting we have found up to this point, since he approaches the subject from a number of different perspectives.
tivity of these scenes. Therefore movement is an important element in the text and the original presentation of the material was necessarily dramatic. A similar type of composition was used in subsequent works in this genre because it had become a traditional pattern. (In addition, imitation of the ancients was the method by which would-be authors began, and sometimes ended, their careers.

Although many types of symmetry in Homeric epic have been classes as mnemonic devices, they are recognized as stemming from artistic motives as well. The great scenes of epic are treated as performances: a setting is established, a particular audience for the event is indicated, and attention is then focused on the physical activities of the character(s). This kind of staging is typical or works which are essentially series of scenes.

Gestural language, and modification of syntactical patterns, are methods used to provide texture and variation in a text which is composed in a consistent, unified language such as Homeric diction - or Zola's own style indirect

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1. The Homeric poems were composed orally; they consist of thought units of a certain meter referred to as "formulae," which are bound together with narrative material following a general thematic pattern. The poems differed slightly at each performance because they were unwritten. Milman Parry was the first to determine the oral, extemporaneous nature of Homeric composition. His work is published in The Making of Homeric Verse, A. M. Parry, ed., (Oxford, 1971). (See also Charles Segal, The Theme of the Mutilation of the Corpse in the Iliad (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1971).
libre. In these texts there is no switching of viewpoint, only juxtaposition of scenes to show contrasting ideas. Neither is there any adaptation of the overall language of the text, but only of the rhythm and patterns within it. In the Homeric epic, both the poet and his characters speak the same language, follow basically the same code of behavior, and have the same cosmic viewpoint. Except for small details, they are culturally alike. This is not to say that all the characters are the same in this type of text; they may be very different from one another in personality, opinions, actions, and psychology. For instance, Agamemnon and Achilles have contrary ideas on what should be done with Briseis, but they operate within the same philosophical universe and see their heroic roles in essentially the same way, for epic implies both a comprehensive approach to subject and a comprehensive system of values. It is the product of an attitude, and nothing extraneous to its system may

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1 Classicist William Beare discusses and compares the rhythmic and syllabic qualities of French and Latin verse. There are some striking similarities between them that do not exist between Latin and other Romance languages, particularly because of the importance of syllabic value in establishing the rhythmic pattern in French and Latin poetry and prose. Beare also discusses the occurrence of body movement and tonic accent in French accompanying the recitation of certain types of literature. His discoveries and conclusions provide rich material for the study of how movement, gesture, and rhythm are handled in French prose, since it makes available to the student of French many of the tools already developed for the use of classicists, but thought useless in studying modern languages. (William Beare, Latin Verse and European Song: A Study in Accent and Rhythm (London: Methuen and Co., Ltd., 1957), pp. 99-102.
be included in the text. Indeed the principal source of unity for the Homeric epic is in this presentation of a single system of values, mirrored in the homogeneousness of the language and the choice of metaphors. Similarly, Zola allows his characters to speak, but their speeches are integrated into the authorial discourse - even the so-called "direct quotations."

Limited by the use of formulas, Homer had to create individual and characteristic speech to match the identity of each character by varying the combination of formulaic elements. Zola faces basically the same problem in that he must also differentiate between characters without betraying his unified linguistic approach (the style indirect libre) and without adding material from outside his poetic universe. Of course he is not limited by the requirements of formulaic diction, but he has a limitation that Homer did not, since all of l'Assommoir's characters are from the same level of society. There are no kings, chief warriors, or slaves present to express contrasting points of view. Therefore Zola also juxtaposes scenes and uses "catch phrases" ("joli _____ de blonde," for example, to describe various physical attributes of Gervaise) which are very much like formulae) to set off one viewpoint against another.

Both in Homer and in Zola another method used to highlight a particular attitude, to favor one character to the disadvantage of another, or to give an event special empha-
sis is to place side by side a scene showing the private
life of a character and another focusins on the masses.
This switching from personal to impersonal, individual to
group, gives a poignant touch to the portrayal of solitary
figures. It outlines one person against the background of
humanity. Emphasis and valorization are thus achieved by
structural means. 1

With only the presentation of the scenes as a structur-
ing tool with which to convey a literary cosmos, these
scenes must be as vivid as possible. The author's need for
very direct communication leads him to vigorous use of
rhythm and gesture in his text. This in turn involves the
use of techniques evoking the physical or actually creating
it verbally. Rhythm, anaphora, aposiopesis, metaphor, ono-
matopoeia, the repeated use of words indicating gesture, are
all techniques employed to bring the text to a point of
evoking sensation in the reader. An emotional reaction does
not suffice alone, because the emotional response takes
place on an evaluative and, to some extent, intellectual
level, and this is one step removed from the more direct,
sensual, physical response level. Emotional response is
also more individualistic and less predictable than is phys-
ical: the poet cannot hope for an emotional scene to reach

1 For an illustration of this kind of writing in Homer,
see E. T. Owen, "The Farewell of Hector and Andromache,"
Essays on the Iliad, pp. 93-104.
as many of the audience, and in the same way, as the physical does, since the latter is the common human denominator. The emotional level is in addition more nuanced, and thus includes more variety of reaction.\footnote{For more on this subject, see Herbert Josephs, \textit{Diderot's Dialogue of Language and Gesture: Le Neveu de Rameau} (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1969).}

The desire to create a very immediate communication with the reader is typical of the writer of literature based on a conviction or a positive ideal, and epic is such a "positive" genre.\footnote{Cf. Frye, \textit{Anatomy}, pp. 54-55.} The poet wholeheartedly participates in the system he portrays, rather than questioning it. The speculation of the essayist or the self-centered \textit{fougue} of the lyrical poet are not marked by this same desire to prove and convince. The epic author may not resort to authorial intervention in a direct manner, but it he is not didactic, he at least reinforces the values of his system, and this fact implies a certain element of persuasion. He believes in the culture for which he writes. He does not try to convince ideologically, but assumes the same ideology for the characters, the audience, and himself. He does not argue, but seeks to inspire by recreating the heroic reality on which the epic is based.

An example of the kind of writing at the opposite pole from this is André Gide's \textit{Les Faux-Monnayeurs}, with its to-
tal subjectivity, its movement in and out of the novelistic universe, its switching of viewpoints and realities, the intellectual rather than emotional or physical appearl of the words themselves. However, epic takesitself and its audience very seriously. This is one of the reasons that the tone of the work must not vary, for if the reader leaves the epic universe even for a moment, then he views it as separate from himself, as an artificial creation and not "reality."

The sincerity of the epic author is most often expressed in the use of what he considers to be realism. Extensive cataloguing in the text — lists of names, places, events, and objects — are used to prove that the text is based on fact. His enthusiasm sometimes results in texts abounding with detail and "scientific" proofs which could scarcely withstand the test of laboratory verification. In his desire to convince the audience of the truth of the tale he often turns to assertions at the frontier of believability, as in *le Docteur Pascal*, where Zola has old Macquart die of spontaneous combustion due to alcoholism. (This idea did have some support at the time. But often the defense of principles or ideals supposedly formulated on the basis of fact or actual social reality may be grounded in the gross-est exaggeration and even untruth.)

But in spite of what seem like elements of fantasy, the epic views itself as real. In the epic mode, reality is the
essential quality of the work, whose purpose is to inculcate and confirm societal values.

Thus in the epic we have three of the circumstances which lead to the use of textual movement: dramatic presentation; a structure in which patterns may vary, but not the form of the work itself (formalistic structure); a desire for very immediate communication from author to public as a principle of composition. It is not within the scope of this study to deal with the works of any other writer than Zola except insofar as they contribute to an understanding of our thesis. Therefore we will not give in the body of this text any illustration from the works of Homer. The principles of syntax, the patterns, the concepts we have cited in reference to his work cannot, in any case, be described in a few pages here, and have already been enunciated clearly elsewhere.\(^1\) What we can say is that the linguistic restraints of epic composition at the time of Homer, and the oral presentation of texts, led to the use of techniques and concepts of composition that are the ancestors of Zola's dance motif in l'Assommoir. Not enough is known about the actual composition of the **Iliad** and the **Odyssey** (nor, probably, will there ever be) to say whether Homer chose to write in this particular style or whether it was a

literary tradition wholly imposed on him. We do know that Zola wrote in an age when the author had fewer formalistic literary restraints, and that if his text revolves around a dance motif, it must be a reflection of his worldview and not an effort to follow any sort of rules for writers.

As we said above, writers of epic manifest a strong need to feel the response of the audience and to communicate in a very direct manner with their listeners. The sensuousness of presentation, the enjoyment of words for their own sake, the physical involvement of the epic poet in his recitation are necessities of the genre. A cynical and negative writer does not compose in this way. Epic composition demands commitment, and not aesthetic distance.¹ Zola's identification with the epic mode and his chosen role of socially-committed writer led him to this same physical, sensuous presentation of text - one which seems quite natural to his artistic temperament as well.

Although the vestiges of the Greco-Roman epic tradition may be found all along the way from ancient Greece to

¹The Greek epic is not a homogeneous body of works, of course. There are even vast differences between the Iliad and the Odyssey in many respects, in spite of the fact that they are often considered to be the work of the same author. Steward discusses the different ways in which identity is established in the two works. He also deals with the differences in societal codes. In addition, his discussion of the handling of characterization and personal identity reveals some interesting similarities between the Odyssey and l'Assommoir. (Douglas J. Stewart, The Disguised Guest (London: Associated University Presses, 1976).
nineteenth-century Paris over the span of centuries, it is not practical to try here to trace the evolution of the epic genre, nor is it our purpose. As a writer in the Western European tradition, Zola could not have failed to be influenced by the ancient classics, and because of his own personality he was well suited to the epic genre. However he was also oriented toward drama, dance, and other types of stage performance as they had developed in the French literary tradition. From this background of French theater, the work of Molière provides an excellent example of the artful integration of elements of physical performance into a verbal text.

The dance came to influence the theater of late seventeenth-century France through a rather complicated set of circumstances which began to develop in the previous century. At that time a significant amount of material for the French comic theater ("comic" in the sense of non-tragic and non-liturgical) was being imported from Italy, largely through the work of an Italian immigrant (re)named Pierre de Larivey. He wrote "French" plays which were largely adapted translations of Italian works derived from Latin originals. Along with these comedies, the stage featured nearly direct adaptations of the same Latin originals, and the old French traditional farce. As yet there was no romantic comedy, with its traditional plot, happy ending, poetic tone, and lack of cynicism. (The origin of romantic comedy was to
some extent a development of what are termed "chaste love intrigues" which developed mainly from the Italian commedia erudita, but are more likely to be found in the pastoral, a separate genre and the opposite of farce.)¹

While all of these types existed at the same time, they also represented various stages in the evolution of comic theater, the Latin comedies having given rise to the commedia erudita, and the commedia erudita to the commedia dell'arte. The influence of commedia dell'arte was very great for later theater. It has a physical presence not found in other models. Commedia dell'arte began in the mid-sixteenth century and was a combination of comedy and farce. Lively physically, it employed stock figures, acrobatics, and mime. The dialogue was improvised and the performances were unscripted until around 1675. The players wore masks or make-up to create types which are still well known: the miles gloriosus; Arlecchino; Pantalone; Brighella; the Doctor; Pulcinella, and others. Young characters such as Colombine were less stereotyped and more human, and attractively presented. They did not even wear masks, nor did their servants. The "types" concept was the aspect of these comedies which had the greatest effect on French comedy.²


²Ibid., pp. 6-7.
Farce as a type of theater existed parallel to all three of these other forms, but also was an element used by them to varying extents at different times; it continued to survive as a comedic genre in its own right in the seventeenth century. The only native comedy the Parisians as a whole received with enthusiasm was farce. (In the provinces the farce was French in origin, not the Italian farce popular in the city.) All four types of comedy - Latin, commedia erudita, commedia dell'arte, and farce (plus Larivey's special work) were fairly undeveloped. In addition, there were no really good theaters; there was not a particularly astute public; and there was no outstandingly good writer.

All of these types of comedy can be distinguished from tragic theater by the fact that they depended to a rather great extent on the physical aspect of the presentation - the Latin comedies to a somewhat lesser degree. Tragedy, on the other hand, depended on the verbal aspect of the drama. According to Racine, there was no place even for music in a tragic production. Thus the stage was polarized between the physical and the verbal.

The art of ballet was developing at the same time as these other theatrical forms and along the same lines as that of the comic stage. Beginning with acrobatics and floor patterns, they were both moving toward more unified themes, more sophisticated plots, and more subtle and sym-
bolic use of gesture. By the early seventeenth century the ballet held an extremely powerful position in France: It was associated with royal power and the person of the king. In fact, it was in a ballet scenario that young Louis XIII revealed his plans to assert his royal authority. ¹ This was the first of a group of politically significant ballets. Whereas now the ballet is often seen as remote from current affairs, in the seventeenth century it was a fairly reliable indicator of the direction the monarchy was going to take.

From the early 1600s on, ballet was far more popular than any one of the varieties of comic theater. It was developing more sophisticated elements of physical presentation, while comedy plays continued to depend on cliché plots, farce, coarse jokes, and mime. In fact, a comic play lacking elements of what today we would call crude farce was unacceptable as a form of entertainment in the seventeenth century. Thus the stage had farce on one side, tragedy on the other, and ballet occupying the large central area in both subject and presentation. Thus when Molière began to attempts to write true comedy, he did so under very diffi-

¹King Louis XIII selected the plot and danced the lead in La Délivrance de Renaud, which premiered in the Grande Salle of the Louvre. It shows him ready to take over as monarch, which he did with a vengeance four months later (April 26, 1617), having his mother's favorite assassinated and exiling Queen Marie de Médicis to Blois. The Queen had asserted her own power only two years earlier in 1615 in Le Ballet de Madame, as reported by Lincoln Kirstein, Movement, pp. 62-63.
cult circumstances. The public and the king wanted ballet. In addition, his own attempts in other genres had met with failure. But even though he was on uncertain ground, Molière was still not afraid of a new venture. He began to integrate dance and comic theater, a compromise that satisfied public and royal taste, but which removed the grosser elements of farce and acrobatics from the stage. This he did in his comédies-ballets, combinations of dance interludes and comedy in a single production. (A similar concession to kingly taste resulted in the insertion of dance interludes into operatic productions.)

In the Prologue to *l'Amour médecin*, Comedy invites Music and Ballet to end their rivalry and unite "pour donner du plaisir au plus grand roi du monde." The comédie-ballet was not a new concept; Aristophanes wrote in this genre in ancient Greece, and so Molière could at least cite literary precedent for his undertaking. While on the surface comédie-ballet appears to be a simple juxtaposition of two forms of entertainment, this was not the actual case. In fact, *le Grand divertissement royal*, which is the framework for *George Dandin*, is so intertwined with the latter that it contains its dénouement. In his comédies-ballets Molière actually achieved a transformation of comic theater. He

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2Ibid., p. 66.
used the elements of physical presentation for which the public was showing a preference, but at the same time he eliminated crudeness and acrobatics from the production. In using ballet elements to take the place of the rougher aspects of farce, he redefined comedy painlessly; the public felt in no way deprived of the physical activity which they had come to expect on the stage.

Pantomime was one aspect of dance that was not used in the comédie-ballet. Had it been included, the result might have been a more harmonious blend of the silent and verbal sides of theater.\(^1\) However Molière could not be faulted for this. Like Zola, he was a man of letters at heart, and even though he may have had talent, expertise, and interest in other areas, his objective was the composition of comedy plays. The other elements of these productions existed to give depth to the drama, to make it richer, more meaningful, and more like life.

In making changes in the contemporary theater, the king's taste was a more immediate problem for Molière than even the public preference - even though he had high regard for this - because he wanted the comedy to dominate the other aspects of the production. In fact, in the original edi-

\(^1\)"S'il eût pu remettre en faveur la pantomime ... son effort pour accorder la poésie, la musique et la danse lui eût été facilité en bien des cas; cette 'comédie muette' eût secondé la comédie parlée et eût ménagé une fusion plus aisée entre les éléments divers des trois arts. (Ibid., p. 71.)
tions, the *comédies-ballets* are referred to as simply *comédies* (with the exception of *le Bourgeois gentilhomme*). Molière felt that in the Greek prototypes of *comédie-ballet* dance and music were subordinate to the comedy. In the Prologue of *l'Amour médecin* it is clearly *la Comédie* that does the talking and is in charge of the production.\(^1\)

In order to win the affection of Louis XIV for the comedy segment so that it could continue to be a part of palace productions, the playwright made the comedies complement the ballets they were to be performed with. He also was willing to use characters and situations taken from the ballet in his plays. For example, it is unlikely that he would have spontaneously elected to use shepherds and shepherdesses in his comedies if they had not been stock figures in ballet.\(^2\) Molière did not appear to object too strongly to this concession, since he felt that such conventions were appropriate in musical pieces anyway; and of course if compromise enabled him to please public and royal taste and perhaps eventually broaden it as well, it was an even more acceptable tactic.\(^3\)

This long-range goal called for a specific, conscious use of dance in drama that had an effect on theatrical pre-

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\(^1\)Ibid., pp. 62-63.

\(^2\)Ibid., pp. 5-7.

\(^3\)Apparently standards of taste were in need of some improvement. Cf. ibid., pp. 68-69.
sentations from that time forward. However another consequence of this action, resulting in further integration of dance motifs into drama, is due to the reciprocal influence of themes and subjects of the two genres. Certain topics could not be handled side by side. Thus, simply because the two segments of the production were dovetailed, the interplay of motifs had to be successful and the performance of both productions complementary - but not identical. Out of concern for the overall evening's entertainment the genres began to influence each other. Furthermore, Molière's own art seems to have benefited from having to deal with two genres. Pellisson separates Molière into halves: Molière the observer, moralist, philosopher, dramatist; and Molière the poet and artist, a side that is shown better in comédie-ballet.¹

The dances of the comédies-ballets were choreographed using classic steps; sarabandes, courants, chacones and other dances were also included. But the dancer himself in these pieces was usually representing an action - that is, integrating dance into the comedy itself.² The result of

¹Ibid., p. ix.

²Ibid., pp. 69-70. Cf. also, "'Champagne, valet de Sganarelle, frappe en dansant, aux portes de quatre médecins, -- Les quatre médecins dansent, et entrent avec cérémonie chez Sganarelle.' Dans Monsieur de Pourceaugnac, 'quatre curieux de spectacles (sic), qui ont pris querelle . . . dansent en se battant, l'épée à la main . -- Deux Suisses séparent les quatre combattants et, après les avoir mis d'accord, dansent avec eux.'" (Ibid., p.70.)
this gradual working of dance into the action of the play is a figure such as Scapin, in which dance is part of his very nature and not just an activity he performs on certain occasions.

Scapin is farce transcended, and commedia dell'arte perfected; . . . here he (Molière) met his double and witness in the company of the great puppets of the burlesque escapades . . . . (he is) the nimble dancer who is put into action at the least chance for mischief . . . . It is he . . . who relegates all the others to the rank of silhouettes and marionettes, while he himself accedes to the dignity of the great leading role . . . . Scapin alone . . . offers this ecstatic image of bodily acting driven to its limits . . . . He surpasses gesture through dance . . . . While he exalts himself in dancing . . . . he arrives at a truly Dionysian intoxication.  

Ballet was showing the effect of this dual-natured presentation in its ever more sophisticated plots and concomitant de-emphasis on acrobatics done for their own sake. We will not attempt to examine all the possible repercussions of this influence on later comedy, but it can be noted that the use of partners or counterparts became prevalent in the late seventeenth-century theater and into the early eighteenth century as well, reflecting the partnering of the dance segments of the comédie-ballet productions. Similarly, characters began to indulge less in self-analysis, and in fact most often expressed themselves in scenes with partners in word-for-word resone. These plays were dependent

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on physical movement and settings, and contained music, dancing, numerous elements of visual comedy (farce), and dramatic stage effects.

It was fortunate for drama as a whole that Molière was willing and able to compromise and attempt this reworking of comedy. Otherwise the comic genre would probably not have advanced further than slapstick, and the remaining elements of comic theater would have been converted to melodrama. Combined performances of dance and drama may have originated for the pleasure of the ballet-loving Louis XIV or to provide more variety in palace entertainment, but the resultant twinning of dance and drama enriched the possibilities of both art forms to their mutual benefit.

Eventually these plays written to be performed with song and dance became part of the body of dramatic literature as a whole. The music and dance segments are now largely ignored, and the plays performed alone. In some cases they become purely textual pieces, which are only read. But when this literature which was written to be acted, sung, and danced is incorporated into the written tradition, it brings with it the elements of ballet that it had needed for its original stage performance. There are places in the texts of what were originally comédies-ballets which seem to call for the reader to imagine the physical activity taking place and to respond to the rhythm of the scene. For just
as dance has always been marked by a conflict between emphasis on plot and emphasis on movement, so comic theater has also shown signs of the struggle between the verbal and the physical. The general public tends to like material with gestural orientation. It also likes to view rather than to read. But in evaluating these works scholars tend to concentrate on the text itself and to respond to the intellectual qualities of the piece rather than its physical ones.\footnote{Pellisson tells an anecdote about Theophile Gautier, in which the latter complains about the "mitilation" of Molière's comédies-ballets, referring to the excision of all but the text of the play.}

Although dance's main influence on literature is seen in terms of this relationship between the gestural-physical and verbal aspects of the text, Molière's \textit{comédie-ballet} and the dance per se share other features as well - especially the use of the mask and the object. Even when Molière does not actually use a mask, he approximates its effect through other devices. The basic forces of theatrical performance are gesture, word, mask, and object. In farce, noise, movement, mask, and object are used to animate the play and to concretize the abstract, including the concept of destiny or fate.\footnote{Simon, \textit{Critical Essays}, p. 38. Cf. also, "Elementary and ritual, farce infuses its poetic dynamism into all the road by which Molière approaches his profound truth. The studied presence of noise, movement, mask, and object haunts those of his comedies that seem the most realistic and literary. These elements mark the intervention of the comic fatum, of theatrical destiny in its most opportune or gratuitous, most expected or surprising, form ... The theater's primary forces are gesture, word, mask, and object." (pp. 29-38).}
One of the consequences of the use of masks is that the actor's body takes on additional importance. The result is what is referred to by one critic as the "dancing mechanism of masks." Another result is the creation of stereotyped characters, because the details of facial expression and the individuality it lends to a performance are lost. We have only to compare the use made of masks in commedia dell'arte to see how this is true. Sympathetic characters are allowed to show their faces, whereas the more ludicrous types have their faces concealed. Further, bodies seen from a distance are striking in their similarity, not in their variety; thus we can imagine that the fanfaron or the dottore on the stage are the people we know who resemble them in real life.

In their use of objects, Molière and Zola are remarkably alike; both of them use objects as a dancer does, as fixed props which serve as pivot points. The object stands between the setting and the character, an enviably ambiguous position, artistically speaking, for thus it can ally itself with either of the two. Coincidentally, of the categories of objects used most often by Molière, three of the five—

1"Like gesture and elementary language, the mask tends to impose a stereotyped image of man . . . . It conceals the actor, but reveals the character. And most of all, it trusts in the actor's body, for hereafter it is in the way he holds his head, moves his hands, muscles, and legs that the actor can hope to animate a character who can no longer count on the detailed expressiveness of his face. But the most striking characteristic of the mask is its inhumanity." (Ibid., pp. 34-35.)
those that stand for possession (the chest, the purse, the key ring); for enjoyment (the snuff-box, the bottle, the dish of food); and for frivolity (mirrors, ribbons, jewels) - make up the symbolic framework of *l'Assommoir*. Those representing denunciation (letters or portraits), and repression (stick or sword) do not appear. The only ones not used are those which would be out of place in a story of poor people.¹

The emphasis in Chapter I on the *dépouillement* of Gervaise's apartment is heightened by the use of the trunk and the chest of drawers. The parallel emphasis in this chapter on the toilette of Virginie (for she and her sister are the beneficiaries of Lantier's generosity) points to the fact that Gervaise is being dispossessed to the advantage of the frivolous, loose-living Poisson sisters. Food, and later alcohol, are the symbols of the enjoyment associated with Gervaise. Of course the powerful symbolism of the bottom as driving force of the story cannot be overlooked.

But even when the objects are not the same ones selected by Molière (the mantle clock, the cuckoo, and the still), they are used in the same way - to embody a quality that is fundamental to a given character. Zola handles props the

¹"The role of the object begins with farce; we are familiar with the use clowns make of it, and its ambiguities . . . . The prop moves between the setting and the character, sometimes becoming part of the former as furniture or curio, sometimes becoming part of the costume as trinket or tool." (Ibid., p. 36.)
way a director does, to concretize an emotion or show fixation - to focus our attention on the crucial point of a scene. He does not describe objects from love of detail for its own sake, nor does he describe articles which have any inherent interest. The object, as in Molière, is the lens between the reader's eye and the mind of the character - it makes the vague and invisible, visible and clear.¹ Because things are not described out of love of words but to fix the movement of the text, they take on a symbolic value with both writers. Activity takes place in relationship to fixed points on the scene, as it does in dance. Further, objects retain their physicality in Zola and in Molière; although the still has a presence that pervades the text, it remains a concrete item to be seen, heard, used. This is clearly different from very verbal texts in which the sun, for example, has great symbolic value, as it does in Phèdre (Racine's version).

In both Molière and Zola, the body, the setting, and the props give direction to the physicality of the text. This is what creates the artistry of the play or novel. Animation alone cannot sustain a theme or provide a structure for a work of any substantial length. The emphasis on

¹Numerous critics have studied the dramatic use of objects in the Rougon-Macquart novels. Lewis Kamm, Stéfan Max, and Jacques Allard, among others, all make interesting observations on the subject.
gesture that Molière wrote into his plays and which Zola created in his prose is supported by the use of tangible accessories. These props, including those that are part of the costume, not only control movement, but provide a network of symbols in a field of gesture, sound, and visual spectacle.

The precedent-setting work of Homer and that of Molière were steps in the formation and concept of gestural language and performance of berval material, but these were not specifically the goals of either man. In Homer the ties between literature and dance are the result of practical considerations, a result of the mode of presentation of the original oral epic legend. In the case of the seventeenth-century French comic theater, they are the result of the realignment of artistic forms and genres in a time of transition, undertaken for very practical purposes in a gesture of compromise, and the result of certain circumstances of performance whose impact could not have been foretold. In both cases, artists were responding to literary practices of the time, both using the existing literary code and being subject to it at the same time, combining individual genius and rules of composition to create a personal style. In both cases - and in many others as well - the possibilities of expression in language were expanded as the result of their work.

One of the most significant conscious efforts to change the use of language and to create gestural language in a ver-
bal mode of communication is seen in the work of Denis Diderot. He was the first to achieve the gestural language that later found fuller emotional expression in Zola. Diderot's desire to create movement in the dramatic line was based on an aesthetic that was much the same as Zola's more than one hundred years later - he was seeking to give more immediacy to the word as a form of communication. In Diderot we see a conscious and quasi-scientific effort to discover how gesture is used in language and to employ it in the expression of ideas. The difference between Diderot and Zola here is that the latter uses gesture and movement to express sensation based on cosmic principle, rather than to express an intellectual idea. However in the case of both Diderot and Zola, the physical possibilities inherent in a language and in a text are explored with a view to their value as artistic principles, and with specific goals in mind. It is only the definition of the goals that is different, Diderot operating as a critic and a philosopher investigating principles of composition, Zola working more as an artist within his own metaphysical system.

Interested in all aspects of the artistic movements of his age, as well as the intellectual ones, Diderot pleaded for a return to naturalness of gesture on the stage, and

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1We refer in particular to Le Neveu de Rameau, and the study by Herbert Josephs cited above (Diderot's Dialogue of Language and Gesture).
suggested that actors could achieve more natural demeanor and delivery for the interpretation of the text by abandoning the stage conventions of the time and learning from the dance. Many of the most distinguished critics of the time agreed with Diderot and the ballet genius Noverre that the dance could break down the artificiality of the eighteenth-century stage, but most of them foresaw applying their newly-evolved precepts only in drama.

There were many attempts by critics to compare different art forms, such as dance and drama. However most of these attempts were actually comparisons of various (and not parallel) aspects of these different genres, or comparisons of an art form with a performance skill. Falconet made this mistake when he compared a painter's achievement, which involves both conceptualization and execution, with that of the dancer, whose job is usually just performance and some interpretation. The sculptor decided, predictably, on the basis of this unequal comparison, that painting is a superior art. Within his judgment is the barely concealed implication that the transient nature of the performing arts makes them inferior to the plastic arts. Falconet thought, in fact, that Plutarch was in error to think that poetry is more closely related to the dance than it is to painting.¹

Diderot wanted to unleash some of nature's creative power, and to do this he had to find a more direct mode of communication than existed in the language of his time. Like Zola, he viewed the world as a field of dynamic forces and believed in the inseparability of mind and body. For Diderot, everything was in motion. All forms of life were constantly evolving from one state to the next. The movements of the mind were mirrored in the movements of the body, and gesture was the form given to the principle of life itself, an idea almost identical to Zola's.

In these beliefs Diderot was typical of his era. Even human feeling was conceived of as a movement in the soul. The expression "les mouvements de l'âme" is found frequently in literature of the eighteenth century, reflecting the belief that there is a physical cause for everything which occurs.¹

This idea did not, of course, die out when the eighteenth century ended. In defending himself against the accusation that his novels were coarse and vulgar, Zola said, in a letter to Jules Lemaître:

J'accepte très volontiers votre définition: 'Une épopée pessimiste de l'animalité humaine,' à la condition pourtant de m'expliquer sur ce mot 'animalité.' Vous mettez l'homme dans le cerveau, je le mets dans tous ses organes. Vous isolez l'homme de la nature, je ne le vois

¹"Physical mobility was a mirror of mental mobility; gesture was the human form of the fundamental principle of life," (Josephs, Diderot's Dialogue, p. 50). On his resemblance to Zola, see Brady, L'Oeuvre, pp. 330-334.
pas sans la terre, d'où il sort et où il rentre ... .
Et j'ajoute que je crois fermement avoir fait la part de
tous les organes, du cerveau comme des autres ... .
Moi, je soutiens que j'ai ma psychologie, celle que j'ai
voulu avoir, celle de l'âme rendue à son rôle dans le
vaste monde, redevenue la vie, se manifestant par tous
les actes de la matière ... . Les raisons qui font
pour vous que je ne suis pas un psychologue font évi-
demment que je suis un écrivain grossier.1

Diderot too filled his work with the physical. His
fiction has been aptly described as "haunted by the power of
physical presences, a poetry of bodies in movement."2 He
was determined to read this body language - and to read
underneath false gesture.3 He did not limit himself to the
stage, where it is fairly easy to use gestural language; in
"Lettre sur les sourds et muets" he proposed the application
of some of his ideas in the area of poetry, reflecting a
very complete understanding of the power of words to embody
an idea and to express all types of bodily activity - mental
or physical.

Diderot's linguistic image of performance was achieved
in language that produces a physical effect on the reader;
however, this effect does not depend solely on the meaning
of the words as concepts. The sound of the word communi-
cates an idea, just as a gesture in space concretizes a

1Letter of March 14, 1885, cited by Lewis Kamm, The
Object in Zola's Rougon-Macquart (Madrid: Turanzas, 1978),
pp. 126-127.

2Josephy, Diderot's Dialogue, p. 49.

3Ibid., p. 50.
thought.\textsuperscript{1} This conception takes language back to its very origin as the direct physical expression of feelings and responses, which must have been accompanied by some sort of charade. This physical aspect of verbal communication, combined with the idea represented by the words, constitutes a language of dramatization.

Diderot was the most eloquent theoretician of the concept of gestural language. However, in Zola gestural language is employed perhaps more artistically through his use of thematic and symbolic structure, as well as linguistic power. Gestural language alone cannot make a novel.

\textsuperscript{1}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 79.
Dance Motifs in the Plastic Arts

The figure of the dancer burst upon the French artistic scene in the last third of the nineteenth century. Although Degas may be the first name that comes to mind in connection with the dance motif, he was not the only artist of his time to be captivated by the dancer as subject. However Degas's sculpture and painting on the dance are so well known that they overshadow what was actually a trend of the era.

Dancing figures have been represented in art from the earliest times, but not before Watteau had a painter taken dance as a thematic organizational principal; the lovely costumes, the fantasy landscapes against which the figures are shown, the ever-changing patterns of interlocking movements delicately executed were poignant metaphors for the fleeting beauty of certain moments in human life. Watteau's dancers are courtly figures, both male and female.

The work of Watteau in the eighteenth century coincided with the first great era of French ballet. The atmosphere of his paintings tended toward that of theater (as did those of Claude Gillot, his master), but a theater of song and dance with a marked Italian influence. From his second master, Claude Audran III, Watteau learned of decorative painting with its use of arabesques and exotic costumes.\(^1\) "In turning to the theater for material," says Edward Lucie-

\(^1\)Edward Lucie-Smith, *A Concise History of French Painting* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 120.
Smith, "he began a tradition in French painting which lasted until the time of Toulouse-Lautrec."¹

Watteau had many followers in the first half of the eighteenth century. Once the figure of the dancer was established as a valid subject, other artists produced their own interpretations of it. But a vigorous theatrical influence in painting did not appear until the early nineteenth century, gathering strength until its crescendo in 1875. Artists such as Corot, Moreau, Manet, Forain, Daumier, Renoir, and of course Degas filled their canvasses with dancers. They painted all kinds of performers and all aspects of the theater, from Manet's Le Polichinelle (1874) to Toulouse-Lautrec's portraits of cabaret dancers who could be Nana Coupeau, Daumier's engraving Paillasse, and Forain's Dans les coulisses. The dance had become an almost obsessive subject in France by the 1870's. From the festivals of the provinces to the stages of Paris, every detail of the theater was shown. By the middle of the 1800's the male dancer was represented infrequently and generally by clown-type figures or cabaret performers. It was the female dancer who was preferred. She was painted at her toilette, exercising — was depicted, in fact, in every conceivable pose of her theatrical and personal life.

In 1871 a surge of French nationalism brought to the

¹Idid., p. 122.
fore a taste for the theater and the ballet, the latter being considered a particularly French art form.\textsuperscript{1} The theatrical dancer became for the artists of the time the incarnation of Fatal Woman;\textsuperscript{2} she was typified by the figure of Salome. Moreau treated the subject in painting (Salomé dansant, 1976), Wilde in literature, Strauss in music.

Other "less Parisian" artists were painting folk events and rustic dances, an echo of the village \textit{fêtes} of the Dutch school or the marvelous landscaped dances of Watteau's \textit{Fêtes galantes}, completing the depiction of the phenomenon of dance in nineteenth-century French art. But this rural aspect was by far the less interesting of the two.

The essentially urban character of a large segment of late \textit{fin de siècle} art signaled the beginning of social change and a further defeat for anyone still clinging to the Ancien Regime in any way, or identifying with the aristocracy, whose roots were still to some extent in the provinces. The new urban subjects marked the art of a new order, art which was not the exclusive property of the rich but which in subject and even in accessibility was of the middle and even lower classes. Watteau's \textit{Fêtes galantes} had not been completely fantastic; scenes of organized, structured activ-

\textsuperscript{1}Madeleine Vincent, \textit{La Danse dans la peinture française contemporaine (de Degas à Matisse)} (Lyon: 1944), pl. 84.

ities being carried out by elaborately costumed, sophisticated people in a rustic setting were not unknown in that age. The dream-like quality of the works does not imply an entirely imaginary world. But that world no longer existed in 1870. Between Watteau's era and that of Toulouse-Lautrec dance had lost its quality of amateur divertissement and become an art form executed by skilled professionals. Paintings of dancers naturally reflected this change. Further, like the entertainment stars of any era, these people were fascinating to the public and to observers of the contemporary scene. Their lives and their souls were explored.

With the passage of time the representation of the dancer became more stylized, and moral overtones of decadence began to affect her image. In a passage that evokes the dance of the prostitutes of l'Assommoir ¹ Jean Lorrain described the dancers of his era:

Les lugubres marionnettes de l'Elysée remises ou brisées, avec quelle joie nous reversons tous, grisiés de lumière et de boulevardisme, vers les étincelantes pupazzi de la mode et de l'art. Or séductrice et délirante entre tous ces fantouches, la poupée souveraine et absurdement femme, la goule irritante, délicate et fuyante entre toutes avec sa tête de Sidonie perverse, le ballonnement fou de ses jupes, sa taille invraisemblable et guêpée, et mystère inquiétant dans cette face poudrée, la fleur de sang frais des lèvres grasses de fard, c'est la Danseuse, la Danseuse moderne et même un peu macabre de pâleur exsangue et de maigreur, la Danseuse chère à Degaz (sic) . . . . ²

¹Zola, l'Assommoir, pp. 768-773.
As the above passage shows in its use of terms such as "mystère inquiétant," "fleur de sang," and "macabre de pâleur exsangue," the dancer is seen neither as a skilled performer nor even as an artistic figure; rather, her image has been assimilated to that of the demimonde whore of Baudelaire—a mysterious woman of the night, a haunting, other-wordly creature. Even Degas, whose portrayal of the ballerina was not unflattering, when asked to illustrate Maupassant's La Maison Tellier, began a drawing of a ballet dancer (a work which was never completed), in spite of the fact that he had already done a series of monotypes on the brothel. (The Baigneuses by Gervex and the Danseuses by Falguière are the models for the works of art in Maupassant's novels).  

1 Rubin points out that Degas sees in the dancer the "ugly 'future prostitute'" and for him the nude was not an example of nature in her glory but rather just an "undressed woman." Even the pose of his bather Degas likens to that of a cat licking herself.

This view of the dancer seems to be more the result of the artist's fantasy than of actual observation. The aura of the fantastic with which these figures are presented

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probably evolved from the darker side of the Romantic imagination, for it should not be overlooked that Degas and his contemporaries were products of that era. The most chilling and decadent examples of this aspect of Romanticism were found in the roman charogne; any acquaintance with this genre makes one wonder how Zola could ever have been accused of exhibiting bad taste in either his choice of subject of its presentation. The novels and stories that came from this dark movement show a fascination with decay, death, and perversion for their own sakes that is unparalleled elsewhere in literature.¹

The less decadent and more bohemian imagination had another outlet – the exaggerations and eerie darkness of shadow theater, and the contortions and illusion of pantomime. Both types of theater were extremely popular. Even American tourists in the late 1800’s were urged to visit a show at Paris’s Chat Noir cabaret while abroad. Degas lived across the street from this club, founded by Rudolph Salis in 1881. In its back room (referred to as the "Institut ") the likes of Anatole France, Catulle Mendès, Paul Bourget, Paul Verlaine, Guy de Maupassant, Steinlen, Forain, Cheret, Gill, Raffaelli, Rivière, and Toulouse-Lautrec, as well as

¹For a thorough discussion of the black side of the Romantic movement, see Mario Praz, The Romantic Agony (London: Oxford University Press, 1933). Cf. in particular the figure of Fatal Woman as embodied by Salome in his chapter IV.
figures from other artistic circles, met to discuss literature, read poetry, hear concerts, and see shadow shows.

Unlike the staid, formal theatrical performances of the classical or bourgeois theater, shadow theater and pantomime were at home in a club or cabaret environment, and thrived on dark, intimate settings in bohemian neighborhoods. Artistically speaking, they were both avant-garde and demimondain productions, clearly removed from the classical tradition both by design and by their very nature. In addition, they did not come to France through conventional literary channels.

Gerard de Nerval had seen shadow theater in Turkey and been impressed by it — specifically by its use of distortion and "dream colors."\(^1\) Karagueuz was the hero of these productions and he must have been a gifted acrobat. Pierre Loti (who participated in shadow theater in Paris) spoke with awe of Karagueuz's incredible contortions.\(^2\) These contortions, actually the distortion of the body, opened up a new field of exploration — "the possibilities of metamorphosis in silhouette,"\(^3\) which was a vital aspect in art for the last two decades of the nineteenth century.

\(^1\)Rubin, "Shadows," p. 115.


\(^3\)Ibid., p. 116.
Artists such as Debureau, who played in the gentle, delicate, lyrical style of Italian pantomime, were replaced by English-style Pierrots, who worked with the techniques of distortion and aggression. (Debureau was the figure immortalized in the Carne film *Les Enfants du paradis*.)

In *pantomime anglaise* the deformation of the body was magnified in the projection of the shadows. In addition, the pantomimists themselves were distorted by their costumes; these costumes included artificial heads, huge shoes, bizarre wigs, and shapeless clothing, the latter a legacy from the *commedia dell'arte's* Pierrot. (They also evoke the portrait of Gervaise at the end of *l'Assommoir*.) The fame of pantomime (non-verbal) artists such as Valentin\(^1\) shows to what extent they dominated the artistic scene - even internationally in some cases. Their performances, which centered on the possibilities of the macabre in human movement and in dance, were the link between two social classes - the rich and the poor - and two artistic worlds - painting (and sculpture) and literature.

The art of Degas, himself of good family but acquainted with the demimonde as well, was influenced by pantomime. It is in his work that some of the links between the world of cabaret show and dance were combined to create a new image

\(^1\)Valentin appears in the famous "La Goulue" poster by Toulouse-Lautrec.

of the dancer in art.¹

The supremacy of the dance in the latter part of the century was reflected in this rising importance of pantomime. Just as the ombre chinoise had done a century earlier, pantomime and shadow theaters expressed the essence of the age. In fact, the interest in pantomime corresponded to the popularity of prints and the use of black and white rather than color in the graphic arts.

The style of Henri Rivièrè, a man of many artistic and intellectual gifts, was the most popular of the "chatnoiriste" approaches. From the descriptions of the shows he invented, we can only regret that at the time there existed no method of preserving them for the future. We have only a few stills, which of course do not do justice to this medium born of movement. Rivièrè's theater was most often in black and white tones, but he also worked with different shades of a single color. This fascination with the nuances to be achieved in a monochromatic tableau falls clearly within the Symbolist approach as handled by Redon or Maurice Denis. Rubin terms Rivièrè's choices of subjects as "verlainesque," but in his approach to subject he showed a degree of inventiveness that surpasses Verlaine; Jules Lemaître said that "the Théâtre du Chat Noir...is an attic window on the supernatural world." Louis Morin's style represents the

other main approach in shadow theater: stark black-and-white contrasts and a new deformed image of the body. The human body had been viewed in the same way from the beginning of the Renaissance to about 1870; the natural postures of normal human beings were considered esthetically pleasing. But from 1870 on, distortion, metamorphosis, and silhouette were considered far more intriguing than the ordinary forms of nature. The fascination with metamorphosis led to the body's being at times represented in distortion suggesting animal form.¹ The preoccupation with the cat in late nineteenth-century art (and with other animals to perhaps a lesser extent) was not so much an interest in animals per se as it was an expression of fascination with deformation and metamorphosis.²

The popularity of shadow theater was thus linked to an interest in silent theater, where movement predominates rather than words. The original pantomime and shadow shows were rather straightforward, playing upon the novelty of movement and projection of movement. But in the search for increasingly innovative theater, the emphasis was more and more placed on the unreal and the fantastic. The absence of color

¹Ibid., p. 117-119. He notes, "Legs, arms and even heads were cut off by framing devices, while bodies were twisted into unnatural positions, creating silhouettes that were hardly recognizable as human and which often suggested animal forms.

²Ibid., p. 120.
is a striking feature. The modern assumption that early motion pictures would have been "talkies" in color had technology made it possible at the time, may be a false one. Everything in the theater of the fin de siècle heralds the arrival of motion pictures. The most advanced artists of the age seemed to be aware that a barrier was about to be lifted. They were feeling their way forward into the next age - the age of motion. Even poetry reflects this desire for a more total expression of man's experience, as can be seen in Mallarmé's desire to create verse than surpassed mere verbal communication.

It is easy to see how the dancer's importance as an artistic figure fits into this evolution in art. The increased emphasis on a theater of movement, and the stress placed on physical skill, among other factors, increased interest in the dance and the dancer. Unfortunately, other associations tended to tarnish her image. The term "theater" was being used in reference to establishments of doubtful reputation, however valid they may have been from an intellectual or artistic standpoint; and the stars of these shows were often characters of dubious association.

Degas's work reflects all of this. He too was verging on cinema in his desire to move rather than fix a subject. Together with other artists in the intellectual mainstream, he was becoming ever more preoccupied with the rendering of motion. He even experimented with moving projections of his
sculpture on screens.\textsuperscript{1} But as he was striving to recreate her gestural perfection in his sculpture and painting, the image of his subject was plummeting at the hands of other artists.

The portrait of the dancer was more and more often that of a young woman who had glamour by virtue of her profession but who was also hardened by the latter. The gentle world of Watteau, with its blend of fantasy and reality, finally was replaced by that of Lautrec, where the psychological portrait of the dancer was the focal point of the work, and the dancers selected were cabaret sensations.

Excitement and eroticism pervade Degas's work, for he deals with the essence of movement. However he not only portrayed the technical aspect of performance and performer, he captured the audience and the theater itself—in short, the world of dance as spectacle. As we said above, this was an urban art. Just as the peasant dances and festivals maintained the traditions of the land and evoked the past, theatrical dance was a vanguard movement. This portrayal of the dance was followed by that of Toulouse-Lautrec, where the soul of the performer is the central feature.\textsuperscript{2} For Degas dance was work, even though it was work performed in an elegant milieu. Toulouse-Lautrec found his models in cabaret

\textsuperscript{1} Millard, \textit{Sculpture}, pp. 105-106.
\textsuperscript{2} Cf. Lucie-Smith, op. cit., p. 234.
bars and showed them work-work rather than working.

Degas was troubled, as so many artists and theoreticians have been, by the relationships between the various art forms. Even earlier than 1800, the modern tendency to question and remove barriers, a tendency that has become a working assumption in the twentieth century, had taken hold. It was only natural that painters, sculptors, writers, and dancers began to explore where the boundaries between the arts, are, if indeed boundaries exist at all. Often this curiosity is reflected (as it was in Degas's case) by negative remarks about the interference of literature in painting or generally unflattering comments about other genres; what lay behind these remarks was almost certainly a desire to explore the limitations of various means of expression and the similarities between them.

Degas did do some writing and even drew the admiration of such a demanding critic as Paul Valéry for his sonnets. Of course his artistic viewpoint was always that of a painter/sculptor, but his intellectual spirit, his extensive background in letters, his friends, and his occasional work as an illustrator obviously generated a controversy in his own mind about the relationship between the visual arts and literature.

The 1870's in France saw an amazing degree of communication and genuine friendship between novelists, poets, painters, philosophers, sculptors, playwrights, and performers.
One example of the kind of artistic round-robin which resulted from these relationships involves the famous Miss La La by Degas. A circus performance provided the direct inspiration for this painting, a novel, a review of the novel—all among friends. The exchange of ideas centering on this topic crystallized Degas's own ideas about his art compared with that of the Impressionist landscape painters. In a conversation at the Cirque Fernando he remarked to one of these painters "A vous il faut la vie naturelle, à moi la vie factice."¹ When a few months later Edmond de Goncourt published Les Frères Zemganno, an enthusiastic Degas said, "Il passa sur tout ce qu'avait d'artificiel le soi-disant realism du roman."² In this review of the book, Barbey d'Aurévilly seemed to grasp the kind of almost physical communication passing from one genre to another:

Je suis convaincu que, pour qui a le sentiment des analogies et la puissance des mysterieuses assimilations, les regarder, c'est apprendre à ecrire.³

This remark about the relationship between the physical and the verbal, because its point of reference was Les Frères Zemganno, is also a comment on the relationship between per-

¹Reff, op. cit., p. 586.
²George Moore: Impressions and Opinions, p. 308, quoted Ibid.
formance (entertainment) and real life, and a call for definition of le factice and le naturel. The relationship between the portrayal of life and life itself was indeed being redefined.

Les Frères Zemganno was just one of several points of contact between Degas and the oncourt brothers. Their relationship seems to have been marked by genuine friendship and mutual professional respect. Moreover there seems to be artistic similarities between the writers and the painter on a technical level and not just a philosophical one.

Reff says, perhaps correctly, that the "resemblances between Degas's image and the Goncourt's are not... signs of a mysterious affinity, but rather the result of their mutual reliance on the conventional method of representing space by means of three contrasting planes...." However he does conclude that in so doing they "were able to modify the conventional method in order to express the greater subjectivity of modern experience." ¹

¹Cf. "'Nous sommes à l'Opéra, dans la loge du directeur, sur le théâtre. A côté de nous, Peyrat et Mlle Peyrat, une jeune fille...' In both, he looks past the young woman to observe the glittering star on stage: 'Et tout en causant, j'ai les yeux sur une coulisse qui me fait face...la Mercier, toute blonde, chargée de fanfreluches dorées,...se modèle en lumière, absolement comme la petite fille au poulet de la Ronde de Rembrandt...' And in both, he glimpses behind the star the vague shapes of other performers in the distance: 'Puis derrière la figure lumineuse de la danseuse ...un fond merveilleux de ténèbres et de lueurs, de nuit et de rêveveillons. Des formes qui se perdent...' quoted Ibid., p. 589, from Goncourt: Journal, V, pp. 72-73, dated 12th March 1862.
With Edmond de Goncourt and Degas the techniques of the writer and those of the painter begin to resemble each other from the standpoint of perspective. It is not merely an issue of one inspiring the other. However there certainly were issues of originality of subject being raised. Goncourt claimed to have inspired Degas in Manette Salomon; however Manette does not mention dancers and has only one reference to laundresses (a line containing the phrase "hanchement d' une blanchisseuse"). This comment itself arose from earlier depictions of this subject in the work of Favatte and Daumier. Goncourt would have made a better point by using his journal entries on subjects taken from the theater and ballet.1

Zola as well makes a contribution toward expanding the artistic vision; but he not only reveals the spectacle - he creates it as well. He is not so much an observer as a participant in his literary universe.

Degas, although a product of Romanticism, clearly allied himself with the "modern" writers of his time, as

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1Reff, op. cit., p. 589. "With an artist's eye for the novel effects of light and illumination characteristic of the stage, with repeated references to similar effects in Rembrandt and Goya, the Goncourts had created in their own vivid pictures of dancers rehearsing with the ballet behind the scenes, or mounting the spiral staircase in the practice room, or moving as luminous shapes against the sombre stage sets, very much as in Degas's later canvases and pastels. In one such passage, written in 1862, the very structure of the vision seems to anticipate that of a work like Le Ballet (L. 476; Fig. 12) of some eighteen years later. In both cases, the artist views the stage from a loge, seated beside a young woman...."
Theodore Reff noted.\textsuperscript{1} He moved away from the historical subjects of Romantic art, just as the Naturalists avoided the pictorial element in Romantic literature. Degas selected contemporary urban subjects. Curiously, we have no evidence of Degas's having an interest in Daudet or Maupassant; however this may be simply lack of evidence and not lack of interest.

The matter of "setting" is crucial in understanding the difference between the way Degas and Goncourt conceived their work and the view presented by Zola. In the first place, Degas/Goncourt view the setting as a separate entity from the subject.\textsuperscript{2} The setting provides clues to the identity or the personality of the subject but it is not seen as the womb from which his personality is born. Instead, it is something he creates for himself, carefully selecting the objects which are to surround him as an interior decorator would in pleasing the taste of his cultivated upper-class clients. In both cases the relationship between setting and character is close, but for Zola the setting is conceived as something both more primitive and more vital, the combination of hereditary and social factors which make up an individual's environment and mental climate. Degas' settings retain the quality of backdrop, and here again we see that he

\textsuperscript{1}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 575.

functions as a spectator - although a discerning, intelligent one. With Zola there is always an element of authorial participation. He does not merely observe - he directs. But he does acknowledge the problems of his approach.\textsuperscript{1} And so because he is really after this vitality and movement, he foregoes the rigorous inventorying of the setting, compensating for the lack of pictorial image by the vitality of his style.

This glance that Goncourt cast on laundresses and dancers was that of an observer at a spectacle. For both of these men of delicate, bourgeois sensibility the distancing of theater was an indispensable element in the observation of life. The "factice" and the spectacular in the portrayal of the dancer in particular - for she far surpassed the laundress in the frequency of her appearance in the literature and painting of the time - elevated her to the position of an artistic archetype, and the theater to a metaphor for life. However, in Goncourt's work and in Degas's, the dancer appears as a dancer, a performer; and although they could see the theater as a microcosmic representation of

\textsuperscript{1}"L'indication nette et précise des milieux et l'étude de leur influence sur les personnages (sont) des nécessités scientifiques du roman contemporain... 'il peut y avoir abus, dans la description surtout... 'On lutte avec les peintres, pour montrer la souplesse et l'éclat de sa phrase." Émile Zola, Oeuvres Complètes, ed. H. Mitterand, (Paris (1977-8), XI, pp. 74- from Les Romanciers Naturalistes (1881) quoted in Reff, "Degas and the Literature," p. 584.
life, they did not see the theatrical element in real life. They separated "le factice" from "le naturel," where later Zola showed that indeed the world is a stage. In doing so he welded together the two images that Goncourt and Degas had selected to represent womankind - the laundress is a dancer.

Perhaps this explains why Zola elected to portray the laundress and not the dance, and why Degas painted the dancer washing and not the laundress dancing. Degas always opted for the "factice"; the magic surrounding the performer because of her profession made her every movement more interesting than those of an ordinary woman. We can see in Degas's own comments about life and art that like so many of his class, he needed the element of artificiality and carefully-staged elegance to enhance life and, indeed to make it bearable, at times. With his very different social orientation, Zola sought the potential for elegance and grace in the mundane.

In speaking of his friend's artistic career, Edmond de Goucourt commented "il s'est énamouré du moderne, et dans le moderne il a jeté son dévolu sur les blanchisseuses et les danseuses," adding "Je ne puis trouver son choix mauvais, moi qui dans Manette Salomon, ai chanté ces deux professions, comme fournissant les plus picturaux modèles de femmes de ce temps, pour un artiste moderne."¹ If Degas' choice of sub-

¹Ibid., p. 589.
ject was influenced by personal and social considerations deeply rooted in his character, his interest in movement seems just as profoundly attached to psychological factors. It has been pointed out more than once that the movement of horses and dancers is essentially the same and that "Race horses are in the animal world what the danseuses are in the human, begin trained for a special purpose, and full of movement and graceful energy." For Degas in his sculpture "there is really no difference between the horses and the women. Just as this nude ballerina stretches out her leg, forward, backward, strong and sturdy, and as that other does so with her arms, so also can the legs, hindlegs and forelegs, of a horse be stretched. The tension is the same. Both are models of animal training." This interest in ritualized and highly sensual animal movement has clear erotic overtones which Degas himself obliquely recognized in the sonnet in which he spoke of a horse, "tout nerveusement nu dans sa robe de soie."

Once again we arrive at the concept of movement, and not merely by coincidence. It has been noted that Degas' horses and dancers, even though not presented as overt erotic symbols, were subjects that attracted him on a very primitive level, appealing to him in a profoundly sensual way through their movements. Movement was as obsessive a subject to Degas (and openly so) on a psychological level as it was with Zola as an artistic and theoretical principle.
For while Zola speaks of the teeming movement of life, its rhythm of creation and death, the quivering aliveness of even plants and rocks, for Degas movement was a personal solace for pain. He wrote (in a letter to Henri Rouart) "It's the movement of things and people that distracts and even consoles if one can be consoled when one is so unhappy. If the leaves of the trees didn't tremble, how unhappy the trees would be and we also."¹

In the last five years before his death, Degas wandered alone through Paris "obsessed by the idea that one does not die while walking."² Millard comments that "... movement, the visible sign of life, became the antidote even for death and would, so long as it were maintained, keep one from dying. There is clearly here an emotional association of movement with fear - fear of death - and the double association of movement with fear and with desire suggests the underlying ambiguity that played such an important role in Degas' life and art - an ambiguity that almost certainly resulted from unresolved emotional conflicts involving his attitude toward women."³

Degas' preoccupation with movement must have led him

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²Zillhardt, "Monsieur Degas" (B. 113) 16 September 1949 p. 5., quoted in Millard, Sculpture, p. 86.

³Ibid., pp. 86-87.
toward the subject of the dancer, since in this figure are embodied both the theatrical, artistic side of life — le factice which was so dear to him and to the Goncourts — and the symbol of movement. Zola, likewise preoccupied with movement, but for perhaps different reasons, chose the other face of the Janus-headed woman of the 1970's — the laundress, and made her a dancer in a story written like a ballet, whose lines of prose contain the "souplesse" and "éclat" of artistic motion.
The Paintings in the Louvre in l'Assommoir

The text's artistic preoccupation with the dancer as subject is seen in the visit of the wedding party to the Louvre in Chapter III. This combined cultural-excursion-and-honeymoon is the real event of the day; the most notable fact about the ceremony itself was the manner in which it was discounted by both the state (at the mairie) and organizes religion.

The Louvre episode actually encompasses more than just the tour of the museum itself. It has five parts: a primary preparation period, in which the members of the wedding party decide how to spend the remainder of the day; the walk through Paris to the museum; the tour of the galleries; the rest under the Pont-Royal; and the return trip to the old neighborhood.

Whereas in the rest of the text, groups move in circles or clusters and individuals perform special numbers, in the wedding episode the entire group bands together in a chain-like structure to trace out an intricate, meandering pattern on its parade through Paris that is reminiscent of the elaborate peasant dances of the older provincial tradition. And indeed this wedding-day celebration is a fête champêtre. The presence of Madame Gaudron, conspicuously pregnant, and the jokes made about her condition which she laughingly accepts, add an earthy touch to the proceedings. However the qualities which had not seemed out of place in
the Rue de la Goutte d'Or make its inhabitants appear comi-
cal in a more sophisticated milieu. It is not surprising
that this group of recent immigrants to the city will even-
tually find its way to a place in Paris that is reminiscient
of the country they have left - the patch of land available
along the Seine, under the Pont-Royal. Removed from their
customary surroundings to the alien atmosphere of the city,
they revert to basic instincts and the comfort of the fami-
liar.

The Louvre episode stands apart from the rest of the
text in many ways - in its emphasis on costuming, in a
change in the linguistic pattern of the rest of the novel,
in its setting, among others. However, its most outstanding
feature is its use of art as a commentary on life, simulta-
neous with the use of life (the characters) to comment on
art - all of this encompassed within the framework of anoth-
er artistic creation (the novel). The results of this are
added depth of characterization, a questioning of the nature
of the subject in formal art forms, and another dimension to
the next.

This segment of l'Assommoir serves other purposes as
well. It distinguishes between personalities who have until
now been on more or less the same level of importance in the
text. It separates the stock types from the distinctive
characters. Even the art-on-life/lifeeldon-art commentaries
serve the purpose of characterization.
The overall structure of the work easily accommodates this episode, for although it may stand apart in some ways from the rest of the text, it too is part of *l'Assommoir*'s presentation of life as a dance performance: the dancers here are *commedia dell'arte* players. The strict parallels between the stock types of this Italian comedy and the sketches of characters already presented in *l'Assommoir* here become overt. The entire wedding chapter is colored by indirect but obvious use of types whose identity as performers of mime, comedy, dance, and acrobatics is well known. Not only at the Louvre, but throughout chapter three, the wedding group is presented as a spectacle for the enjoyment of the crowds.

Even the attention paid to costuming intensifies the theatricality of the episode. This is the only part of the text in which the characters are portrayed in such a stylized way - they are clearly identified with the world of theater art. Reinforcing this emphasis on the presentation of dance as theater, we have art in a gallery. Both theater and the plastic arts are shown as spectacle. Similarly the characters, like actors, are presented as both human and artificial when, in certain cases, the "real person" meets his artificial double in the paintings.

Because *commedia dell'arte* figures make great use of gesture and pantomime, and their performance is so like dance, they were ideal figures to use in this episode. A
simple dancer does not provide the rich imagery of the \textit{commedia} types. Thus, while not being strictly dancers, these figures are close enough to the image to remain within the ballet structure of the novel, while at the same time providing a wealth of material to use in characterization and an air of theatricality to match the festiveness of the occasion and to fit in with the chapter's focus on the relationship between art and life. And of course the tone of the \textit{commedia} is better suited to the Coupeau's friends than the classical ballet's aura would have been.

Until Chapter III, the dance motif was expressed in the structure of the novel, the use of rhythmic language, descriptions of patterned movement, and the vocabulary of dance. This textual dance is performed by the characters unawares; they are simply keeping time to the rhythms of life. However the Louvre episode puts these dancers on stage by associating them with known theatrical figures. This both broadens the definition of dance to include \textit{commedia dell'arte}, and focuses on dance as art form and spectacle. The Louvre setting and the presence of the masterpieces it contains intensify an awareness of the spectacle quality associated with formal art.

The first step in creating a feeling of theater is the creation of costumes for the principals. Madame Fauconnier is wearing an ecru dress with floral print, a pink nec-scarf, and a hat that is loaded with flowers. Mademoiselle
Remanjou is "toute fluette dans l'éternelle robe noire."

As for the Gaudron ménage, "le mari d'une lourdeur de brute, faisant craquer sa veste brune au moindre geste; la femme, énorme, étalant son ventre de femme enceinte, dont sa jupe d'un violet cru, élargissait encore la rondeur." Madame Lerat is "fagotée dans une robe puce trop large, dont les longs éffilés la faisaient ressembler à un caniche maigre sortant de l'eau." Madame Lorilleux was in "soie noire, dans laquelle elle étouffait; le corsage, trop étroit, tirait sur les boutonnières, la coupait aux épaules - et la jupe, taillée en fourreau, lui serrait si fort les cuisses, qu'elle devait marcher à tout petits pas." ¹ Elsewhere in the text, the attire of the characters is either given just summary description, or, in some cases, is used to show negative character traits. These costumes, however, provide bright spots of color as the wedding party moves out into the Rue Saint-Denis:

Au milieu du gribouillement de la foule, sur les fonds gris et mouillés du boulevard, les couples en procession mettaient des taches violentes, la robe gros bleu de Gervaise, la robe écru à fleurs imprimées de madame Fauconnier, le pantalon jaune canari de Boche; une rai- deur de gens endimanchés donnait des drôleries de carnaval à la redingote luisante de Coupeau et à l'habit carré de M. Madinier; tandis que la belle toilette de madame Lorilleux, les éffilés de madame Lerat, les jupes fripées de mademoiselle Remanjou, mêlaient les modes, traînaient à la file les décrochez-moi-ça du luxe des pauvres. Mais, c'étaient surtout les chapeaux des messieurs qui égayaien, de vieux chapeaux conservés, ternis par l'obscurité de l'armoire, avec des formes

¹Zola, l'Assommoir, pp. 437-443.
pleines de comique, hautes, évasées, en pointe, des ailes extraordinaires, retroussées, plates, trop large ou trop étroites. Et les sourires augmentaient encore, quand, tout au bout, pour clore le spectacle, madame Gaudron, la cardeuse, s'avançait dans sa robe d'un violet cru, avec son ventre de femme enceinte, qu'elle portait énorme, très en avant.¹

In this first segment, at the café, the characterizations are verging on being stylized. Secondary figures such as Mademoiselle Remanjou are described more fully than usual so that this previously non-descript woman is brought into sharp focus.

The commedia types, among which the zanni or servants were the most important, include about twelve key figures. One of the most famous of these is Arlecchino, the acrobat, the wit, somewhat childlike and most often in love; Coupeau takes this role. Brighella is more roguish and sophisticated, but also cowardly and a villain, a type who will do anything for money. This character (Lantier) has appeared earlier, but is missing from the actual festivities. However his presence is felt in a number of ways – in particular, by the presence of his children. Goujet fills the role of the martyr and dreamer Pedrolino (also Pierrot or Pagliacci). Pulcinella, who is characterized as dwarfish, cruel, and a humpback or deformed man, and a bachelor, is the prototype for Bazouge. Pantalone, originally the caricature of the Venetian merchant, who often had a young wife or adventurous

²Ibid., p. 443.
daughter, is the inspiration for Poisson. Madinier takes the role of the pompous, fraudulent Dottore, Pantalone's only friend, and a caricature of the scholar. The swaggering but cowardly Capitano produced l'Assommoir's Bec Salé. This character was finally replaced by the more agile Scaramuccia, the Robin Hood of commedia.

Obviously, no one plays the true Inamorato to Gervaise's Inamorata. In l'Assommoir's commedia scene she is loved by Harlequin instead, who is supposed to love Inamorata's servant Columbine. Thus the disparity between Gervaise and Coupeau is introduced for the first time. Finally, there is an old woman called La Ruffiano - Madame Lorilleux here - who is either the mother or the village gossip who thwarts the lovers.1 Inamorata, Inamorato, Columbine, and the other female figures did not wear masks in the Italian commedia, nor did the rest of the Cantarinas and Ballerinas, who provided the singing, dancing, and other accompaniment for the players.

There is a great building of tension before the Louvre episode - a long period of preparation precedes the departure and thus the reader is ready for an event of some importance. First the wedding party has to wait for Madame

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1La Ruffiano is very much like the subject of another portrait in the group by Titian which includes Young Woman Doing Her Hair. It is called La Vecchia, and represents a rather frightening-looking old woman who seems to be addressing the viewer with some unpleasant message. (See p. .)
Lorilleux, who is carefully preparing her toilette, and then just as she arrives a storm breaks, forcing the group to stay inside waiting for the rain to stop. Tempers have begun to flare. Madame Lorilleux flies into a rage because the group cannot make up its mind about the rest of the day's activities, and she threatens to leave. Her husband and Coupeau have to restrain her forcibly at the door. This unpleasant woman dominates the wedding party, an angry presence in black silk, whose hatred of Gervaise is expressed throughout the day, a prologue to the misery she will cause Gervaise all the rest of her life.

Monsieur Lorilleux finally suggests a trip to Père Lachaise, where the noce can view the tomb of Abélard and Héloïse, but this is rejected by the group. The decision not to make a pilgrimage to the tomb of two of the world's most famous lovers is an ominous symbol. Even though it was highly unlikely that the group would have been interested in the medieval figures, this rejection establishes a sharp contrast between the medieval lovers and Gervaise/Coupeau.

Then Madinier asks to head an expedition to the Louvre. As a sort of "proletarian gentilhomme" he asserts that he is familiar with the artistic world. (He knows a boy who decorates cardboard packing boxes for a company.) Madinier's pathetic efforts to show his knowledge of art impress the noce and, in a rare although oblique address to the reader, his ignorance in artistic matters is revealed. For although
throughout the rest of the text Zola unites reader, author, and characters in the style indirect libre (which is both linguistically and psychologically unified), in the Louvre segment he writes in a more conventional style.

Soon after the tour of the galleries begins we see that the real subjects are not to be found in the canvasses. The noce assumes the function of the paintings as spectacle both for the reader and for the other visitors to the Louvre as well. We are, for the only time in the novel, separated from the group - textually speaking. Throughout the gallery tour there is a back-and-forth movement between the paintings and the members of the wedding party - a curious process of telescoping and microscoping to establish comparisons between subjects, and contrasts as well. First the group as a whole is presented; then a painting with a group as subject is shown. Next an individual member of the noce is singled out, and then a painting featuring this subject is viewed, thereby contrasting the "real" models with their artistic counterparts.

The Louvre segment is a game with mirrors, a situation in which art is viewed by the noce and represented by them at the same time. The comparisons are subtle, but direct; the group as a whole responds to group paintings, and one-to-one comparisons are made between key figures and central figures in the masterpieces in the galleries. It is a mirror study in another sense too, for here we have a dramatic
example of the theme of self-observation crucial to the development of character in l'Assommoir, and which will be reprised so tragically in the last chapter. ¹ The paintings used to double individuals are the ones in which the subject seems to apostrophize the viewer, and in one case the painting almost certainly referred to actually contains a mirror (Young Woman Doing Her Hair).

This is an episode about art and human life as well. The characters are drawn to paintings in which they see themselves, whether the reader considers the resemblance to be real or imagined. The work is then evaluated by the "real" subject, and then the "real" subjects are evaluated in terms of the work they have selected, both by the reader and by the other visitors to the galleries. In the contrast between actual subject and members of the wedding party is the authorial comment.

This part of the text is aesthetically complex in that we have a multiplicity of subjects serving as reference points to and defining one another. However, structurally it is a simple presentation. Two group portraits - the Raft of the Medusa and the Kermesse mark the beginning and end of the interlude. The middle portion is a series of individual portraits. The entire trip to the museum is preceded

¹Cf. the scene in which the declining Gervaise sees herself in memory on the day she arrived to look at the building as a possible location for her new laundry business.
by a group tableau and ended by one (at the restaurant and under the Pont-Royal, respectively). The confusion and strife within the group is reprised by the Raft of the Medusa, and the final phase is a reconstruction of Rubens's Kermesse, in which something of the rustic peasant nature of these people is recaptured. Through art they have reestablished their actual identity, established years ago in the provinces.

Their first experience in the galleries is with Assyrian art, which they uniformly decide is ugly. Shocked and mute, they stand with their chins slightly lifted, blinking at these similarly mute and unmoving statues, unknowingly aping their poses. Madinier breaks the stalemate and calls them to follow him upstairs. Already chastened by the severe appearance of the staircase alone, they are further intimidated by the guard, who seems to be waiting for them, and in this mood they enter the French gallery. Here they are awed by the burst of sun-king gold that greets them. The gold of the picture frames and later the parquet floor, and the copyists doing imitations of masterworks are the three aspects of the trip that impress them the most. At the end of the gallery Madinier halts them before Géricault's Radeau de la Méduse (1819), a work based on a tragic and controversial event which had occurred some years earlier.¹

Due most likely to the incompetence of the captain, the *Méduse* had run aground, forcing passengers and crew to survive as best they could on bits of flotsam and on a poorly built raft which they had thrown together just before the ship sank. The horrible events which took place on the raft as the survivors waited to be rescued shocked the public when they were later revealed by one of the group. The stronger ones amputated limbs from those trying to cling to the make-shift raft in order to free themselves. This was only one of the ghastly stories of savagery that took place, showing human beings at their worst in a desperate struggle to survive. The painting is described briefly by Madinier:

Puis, au bout, M. Madinier les arrêta brusquement devant le Radeau de la Méduse; et il leur expliqua le sujet. Tous, saisis, immobiles, ne disaient rien. Quand on se remit à marcher, Boche résuma le sentiment général: c'était tapé.\(^1\)

Given Madinier's level of expertise, we cannot be sure that he knew exactly what the subject was. The *Méduse* segment appears to have closed with those few remarks until the next paragraph, where a subtle comparison is established between the desperate group on the raft and the inhabitants of the Rue de la Goutte d'Or struggling likewise to survive.

Dans la galerie d'Apollon, le parquet surtout émerveilla la société, un parquet luisant, clair comme un miroir, où les pieds des banquetttes se reflétaient. Mademoiselle Remanjou fermait les yeux, parce qu'elle croyait marcher sur de l'eau.\(^2\)

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\(^1\) Zola, *l'Assommoir*, p. 444f.  
\(^2\) Ibid.
However the comparison verges on parody, making the noce again appear comical. Once again they are more impressed by the museum itself, more awe-inspiring than Géricault's artistry. The floor is more exciting than the painting. They exaggerate the smoothness of the wood, acting as if they can barely keep their balance - behavior more characteristic of children, usually, than of adults. Unable to react fully to the paintings, they show an exaggerated reaction to their surroundings. They are already beginning to be aware of their ignorance, which is highlighted as they arrive before the next masterpiece, The Wedding at Cana, by Veronese.

Gervaise is apparently drawn to Veronese's work, but is not familiar with the Biblical story which is its subject (the first public miracle of Christ and, along with the Adoration of the Magi and the Baptism, one of the three festivals of Epiphany). She asks what the subject is, and the general opinion is that subjects should appear on the frames. The association of Gervaise and The Wedding at Cana invites a number of interesting reflections. Gervaise's confusion about the subject may be justifiable because although Christ, his head encircled by a halo, appears in the center of the canvas, a striking blond woman in the foreground, probably the bride, fixes the viewer with an enigmatic expression. Perhaps Gervaise senses that she is looking at another bride, Gervaise certainly does have something in
common with this other newly-married woman, for the latter seems as curiously detached from the festivities surrounding her marriage as Gervaise herself is. She seems unaware of the feast taking place in much the same way that Gervaise was at the restaurant, where she stayed in a corner talking with her new mother-in-law and Madame Fauconnier.

The city of Cana in the background is a powerful presence in the Veronese work, just as Paris is in Gervaise's wedding. And, ironically, drink is also a dominant presence in both wedding-day portraits. The subject of Wedding at Cana is the miracle in which Jesus changed water into wine, and the drinking motif is seen throughout the foreground field, reinforcing the theme of alcohol in the forefront of Gervaise's own life.

Then in rapid succession are presented da Vinci's la Joconde, an Antiope (and evidently some other female nudes), and Murillo's Virgin. Whereas the confrontations between the subjects in Géricault's Raft and the group, and between Gervaise and her double seem poignant, Coupeau's inadequacy before la Joconde and Boche and Bibi-la-Grillade's juvenile reaction to the nudes is at once depressing and comical. Their appraisals trivialize the subjects, although Coupeau's reaction is certainly not facetious. ("Coupeau s'arrêta devant la Joconde, à laquelle il trouva une ressemblance avec une de ses tantes.")\(^1\) The Mona Lisa is certainly no

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\(^1\)Ibid., p. 445.
enigma to Coupeau. However, the fact that he is drawn to her at all and comments on her identity suggests possibilities in Coupeau that will never be developed.

Although the group flies by the majority of the paintings in the first rooms, they do respond to certain subjects; in their confusion they seek the familiar in these exotic works. The nudity of thighs has actual shock value for Boche and Bibi. Unsophisticated and unaccustomed to the sight of a nude female body openly displayed, they react to this spectacle on an intensely personal level. Their laughter is a sign of real discomfort, for the paintings are real to them at this moment.

In each case, although art per se is an unknown to these people, they try to establish a personal communication with the paintings by looking for the familiar in them. Sometimes a bond forms spontaneously, as it does between Gervaise and the bride in The Wedding at Cana, or between Monsieur and Madame Gaudron and Murillo's Virgin. As Madame Gaudron, her hands on her stomach, stands before the mother of Jesus, the communication between painting and viewer is of the most intense variety. One can only guess at the sort of comparison establishing itself in the minds of the couple. But in their simplicity, emotion, and awe they are not unlike Joseph and Mary before the birth of Jesus, as we see below:

Et, tout au bout, le ménage Gaudron, l'homme la bouche ouverte, la femme les mains sur son ventre,
restaient béants, attendris et stupides, en face de la Vierge de Murillo.\textsuperscript{1}

This scene concludes their first tour of the salon. However at the suggestion of Madinier, they go through again.

Madinier is quite solicitous of the well dressed Madame Lorilleux, and when she thinks that the subject of a portrait by Titian has blond hair like her own, he is quick to tell her that this woman is \textit{la Belle Ferronnière} – an obvious attempt to flatter by referring to her occupation of goldsmith by referring to the ornament which does appear in the real \textit{Belle Ferronnière}.\textsuperscript{2}

\begin{quote}
Il s'occupait beaucoup de Madame Lorilleux, à cause de sa robe de soie; et chaque fois qu'elle l'interrogeait, il répondait gravement, avec un grand aplomb. Comme elle s'intéressait à la maîtresse du Titien, dont elle trouvait la chevelure jaune pareille à la sienne, il la lui donna pour la Belle Ferronnière, une maîtresse d'Henri IV, sur laquelle on avait joué un drama, à l'Ambigu.\textsuperscript{3}
\end{quote}

While one cannot fault his gallantry, Madinier's knowledge of art and history is clearly limited. \textit{La Belle Ferronnière} was the mistress of François I, not Henri IV; her portrait is attributed to Leonardo da Vinci, and not to Titian. The Titian they are viewing is probably \textit{Young Woman Doing Her Hair}, a portrait in which an unidentified man is

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{1}Ibid., p. 445.
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\textsuperscript{2}In the early nineteenth century "ferronnière" referred to an ornament worn on the forehead, a chainette or a bandeau decorated with a jewel in the middle.
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\textsuperscript{3}Zola, \textit{l'Assommoir}, p. 445.
\end{flushright}
holding a mirror for a pretty woman who seems to be addressing the viewer. It is a strange and rather disturbing painting, part of a series of similar works in which a subject invites comparison between the viewer and itself, the theme being the passage of time and the terrible changes wrought by it.\(^1\) This was a favorite subject of Titian, and also one which is fundamental to l'Assommoir as Gervaise changes to horribly over the years. The implication is that the laundress is the subject of this painting as well, and not Madame Lorilleux.

The ignorance and error which surround Madame Lorilleux's identification of herself with the Titian point to the fact that the comparison she makes is false. Further, her attempt to liken herself to the Titian subject crystallizes her characterization as a pathetic, pretentious woman with little on which to base pretentions. The incorrect statements made about the work by the equally pretentious but more likeable Madinier and Madame Lorilleux's request for flattery (which is, of course, the reason that she suggests the comparison) stand in sharp, comical contrast to the silent and dignified comparison between Gervaise and her prototype. The events of the wedding day validate Gervaise's recognition of herself in the bride of Cana; the reference to the work by Titian is an intimation of what will follow the wedding "festivi-

ties." Contrary to what Madinier says, there is no Belle Ferronnière in this pitiful group.¹

The last work viewed by the noce is the Kermesse, by Rubens. Whereas the other paintings are named one after another, there is a long pause between la Belle Ferronnière and the Kermesse. The Kermesse episode has three parts, the first of which is this pause where the noce is once again portrayed as a group of people totally out of their element and confused by the succession of colors and forms they are seeing. Further, they are now a public spectacle, laughed at by the museum guards as they plot through masterpieces. Thus in this interlude the identity of the group as subject and as spectacle is reiterated and emphasized for the coming comparison with another group of revelers (in the painting).

Madinier expects to make a sensation with the Rubens, and he presents it with great assurance:

M. Madinier se taisait pour ménager un effet. Il alla droit à la Kermesse de Rubens. Là, il ne dit toujours rien, il se contenta d'indiquer la toile, d'un coup d'œil égrillard.²

¹In one edition of Zola's complete works (Henri Mitterand, ed., Emile Zola: Oeuvres complètes, Cercle du livre précieux, vol. 3 (Paris: Fasquelle, 1967) the note (p. 950) is not correct. The painting is Titian's, not one by da Vinci.

²Zola, L'Assommoir, p. 446.
This viewing of the painting is the second part of the Kermesse episode.

The Kermesse is a tableau of drinking, feasting, debauchery, and peasant life. In its depiction of sheer energy it is the equal of Zola's prose.\footnote{In Rubens' painting, we feel almost as if the earth itself had come alive in all these rolling, swaying, turbulently active bodies. There is nothing here of the standardized choreography of a country square dance. We are closer to a tribal ritual or the orgiastic abandon of ancient bacchanal . . . . all these figures, from suckling infant to tippling gray-beard are bursting with energy and are propelled by an irresistible need to convert this energy into action. Like a wedge this drinking, arguing, fighting, dancing, and embracing body of humanity pushes out from the shaded tables of the country inn at the left toward the open fields at the right, where a few scrubby willows seem to bend under the impact of that onslaught.} Structurally it is a narration in form of the Louvre episode. The figures seem to move as a body, as does the wedding party, referred to in a collective subject, with singular verb. The figures appear to be leaving a country inn to the left and moving toward a stream in the lower right-hand corner, reprising the group's departure from the museum and the walk to the Seine.

Their physical types resemble Zola's characters, for although they are clearly peasants, they are idealized types. An element of coarseness exists, but it is less striking than this idealization. The setting of the work is pastoral, but nature does not predominate. After the noce has viewed the canvas, Madinier sweeps the group on with the skill and
timing of a master. ("Allons-nous-en, dit M. Madinier, ravi de son succès. Il n'y a plus rien à voir de ce côté.")\(^1\)

However, the reaction of the group is still taking place. The actual presentation of the painting is done quickly and its significance is only partly clear in this second segment of the episode. But at first it seems that the comparison is finished.

In a long passage which follows, Madinier becomes lost and leads his party astray. The disorientation and fatigue which they experience and their pitiful attempts to find their way out are metaphors for the entire Paris experience of the group. The other visitors to the museum look on in astonishment as the noce tries desperately to leave. (Throughout most of the Louvre segment the wedding party is treated collectively - using the singular "noce" or even "elle" - particularly at the very beginning and at the end, to intensify and consolidate the collective movement, making it seem like the movement of one lost individual and heightening the dramatic effect. The use of phrases such as "retourna sur ses pas," "frissonnait" and "respira" is more effective and believable in the singular, and "elle" is less vague and impersonal a subject than "ils" or "on," allowing a sweeping, forceful description of the group's movement than could have been achieved by enumerating what each indi-

\(^1\)Zola, l'\textit{Assommoir}, p. 446.
vidual or couple did as they made their way through the lab-
yrinthine corridors of the museum.

The final part of the Kermesse episode occurs after the
party has left the Louvre. It is four o'clock - too early
to go on to the restaurant for the wedding supper. Everyone
is too tired to continue walking, but since no one proposes
anything else, the group follows the quays along the Seine.
Suddenly a storm breaks and Madame Lorilleux, heartsick for
fear her dress will be ruined, suggests finding shelter un-
der the Pont-Royal. Here the group is swept into a restag-
ing of the painting.

In seeing them recreate the Kermesse we realize how
strong the identification of these people with the painting
has been and how complete. When they lookin in delight and
astonishment at the figures on canvas, it was not only be-
cause of the more scandalous activities depicted there; the
real surprise is due to the fact that they are seeing them-
selves. Having never imagined that people such as they
could be the subject of art at all, let alone art housed in
an illustrious museum, they are astounded. Furthermore,
they see their own favorite activities "condoned" by their
depiction in art.

On a narrative level, it is apparent that the sophisti-
cated activities of the early afternoon made them long for
the pursuits which they can truly appreciate and enjoy. The
entire Louvre episode (including the rest on the riverbank)
is clearly not a moment of abandon in which Zola could not resist showing his knowledge of art. It is instead part of the framework of the novel. It does, of course, reveal a certain level of expertise on the part of the author and assumes knowledge on the part of the reader for a complete understanding of the episode, but so does the use of a certain vocabulary, in reading any text.

The kermesse on the seine is a resolution of questions raised in the Louvre episode. It is the microcosmic representation in art of the aesthetic premise of the novel. The comic dancers who have paraded through the museum providing a spectacle for the audience of museum visitors are now at rest. In being compared to the subjects of paintings, the dancers have established their own artistic identity. The movements they carry out are not only the rhythms of life, but a form of art as well. Painting functions as the symbol of formal art and provides the background for the dance of life.
CHAPTER THREE

INDIVIDUAL COUNTER-MANIFESTATION: LE BOITEUX
Identity and Limping:

The Lame and the Vulnerable in Literature

The theme of lameness is intertwined with some of the greatest issues in literature. It is linked to family curse and discord, particularly that between parent and child. It is used extensively in sexual metaphors. And finally, the crippling of the body is a question involving personal identity. The lame person has been an archetype in literature since ancient times, when the story of Vulcan was first told.

The functioning of the feet and legs determines the way in which a human being moves, and manner of movement is one of the bases on which identity is established in society. This is particularly true in primitive cultures, where visible signs of status are very important. Furthermore, in societies where dexterity and grace are desirable attributes, the denial of them has devastating effects on the individual personality. A classic technique of clowning is the feigning of an awkward or silly walk, a type of humor understood by disciples of Bergson. So movement and gesture are significant in determining the image a person has in society.

Not every physical defect is presented so negatively. Whereas the lame are often made the object of scorn or ridicule, the portrayal of the blind man has been almost always favorable. He is often a prophet (ironically, a seer), like

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Teiresias. Oedipus's gaining of wisdom is accompanied by self-blinding. Homer himself is said to have been blind. This last item may be true, but it may also have been an explanation of his powerful literary vision, the kind of inner seeing attributed to the blind.

Unfortunately the cripple lacks this dignity. Not only in primitive societies but in so-called sophisticated ones as well, physical prowess and physical beauty remain important. In primitive milieux the lame man does not have the skill necessary to fight and work effectively. In a woman this defect may mar physical desirability, which is one of the key factors in determining her position in society. A parallel situation exists in modern cultures, where imperfection is punished in a less elementary but equally damaging fashion.

A wound to the foot or legs is a recurrent theme in Greek literature. Outside of the Iliad's helmet- and head-smashing, the most frequently damaged area of the body is the foot. If we take into account that the foot and its protective cover the shoe frequently appear as sexual symbols in myth, this adds another dimension to stories in which the foot, its vulnerability, its wounds, and its scars are significant factors.¹

Among the figures of classical literature who were vulnerable in the foot are Vulcan, Achilles, Philoctetes, Eurydice, and Oedipus. In addition, there is Hector and the final disgrace wrought upon him - to be dragged in the dust, his feet attached to Achilles's chariot.

Vulcan, the god of fire, the blacksmith, the educator, husband of Venus, is openly angry when he says that (his mother) "Juno is a bitch because she wanted to hide me and my lameness away." He speaks of himself and his lameness in the same breath, equating his identity with his flaw. The context of his comment is particularly ironic, because he is speaking to Thetis, who wants him to make armor for her son Achilles. In Vulcan's story we see a reference to the issue of parent responsibility which arises in several of these myths. Injury to the child either before or after birth carries the implication of parental failure to protect and nourish. Since in the child's eyes this is the primary function of parents, their failure in this respect is interpreted as rejection. It matters little to the child whether the parents were simply unable or really unwilling to fulfill their duty, the result is the same to him as he evaluates the situation.

1 Although no longer as widely known as the others, Philoctetes was the subject of plays by Aeschylus, Euripides, Sophocles (who wrote two), and the Roman Accius. André Gide and John Jay Chapman wrote about this figure more recently.

2 Iliad XVIII, 11. 396 ff.
There are two versions of the story of Vulcan's lameness: according to the first, he was thrown from Mount Olympus by one of his parents, and therefore Juno or Jupiter is to blame for the injury. In the other version Vulcan is rejected by his mother because he is lame already. In either case the parent is held to be at fault. We also see in this myth the association of lameness with being "cast down" in both the metaphorical and literal sense. The up-down imagery of falling - of, in fact, a primary fall which is reenacted forever in the stumbling of the lame - is inherent in the concept of lameness.

Blame is ascribed to Thetis (as it was to Juno), who did not adequately protect her son Achilles, forgetting to wet his heel when she immersed him in the waters of the Styx. The vulnerability of Achilles's heel has a touch of the ironic or even the ludicrous, evoking as it does his ruse to avoid fighting in the first place and his dependence on maternal intervention. It is also supremely tragic: a glorious career ends because of one small spot on the heel. Here we see the final vulnerability of all human bodies symbolized ironically and dramatically.

The cause of Eurydice's death and, therefore, of Orpheus's trip to Hades to retrieve her was a bite on her foot from a poisonous snake. The overtones of the story are unmistakable, both in situation and in symbolism. Eurydice, a young bride, is being pursued by a shepherd trying to make
amorous advances to her. As she runs away from him through the grass, a snake hidden there bites her. The lecherous shepherd (a stock figure in sexual encounters in pastoral poetry), the presence of the evil snake, and the symbol of the unprotected foot create a metaphor of sexual injury. However the blame affixes to Orpheus, who left his bride unprotected, more than to the shepherd who frightened her by his pursuit. It is no wonder that Orpheus meets his death at the hands of Bacchantes after he loses his wife a second time. The older women punish him for his thoughtlessness for his wife's safety, and his bride's consequent vulnerability. It is quite unacceptable that a young woman should be so neglected so early in her marriage.

Philoctetes was also bitten by a snake, on the foot. This happened as the Greeks were journeying to Trop. They had stopped at the island of Chryse to make a sacrifice and Philoctetes, the first to approach the shore, was bitten. The infection was terrible and the moans of the victim made it impossible for the Greeks to perform the ritual. Furthermore, the wound emitted such a horrible odor that his comrades moved him to Lemnos and left him there. Ten years later, the wound still had not healed and the Greeks still had not taken Troy. Finally it was learned that Troy could not be taken until Achilles's son Neoptolemus, in his father's armor, and Philoctetes and his bow were both present. This bow was given to him by Hercules, at the time
Philoctetes lit his funeral pyre. These conditions were met. Asclepius the physician's son healed Philoctetes's wound. Two themes of vulnerability and disability are present here: that of a gift accompanied by a disability, and physical injury as representative of psychological disorder.  

The foot wound appears in other not-so-famous examples as well. Theocritus's Idyll 4 is reminiscent of the Eurydice story. The situation is reversed though, and it is the male who is hurt while running after a heifer; the symbolism is, however identical.

The shoe is often used dramatically and overtly together with the foot in sexual metaphor; this symbolism is very well illustrated in the story of Cinderella. This heroine belongs with the other figures mentioned above, since her story too is one in which questions of rejection, identity, and sexual development are resolved, and in which the symbolism of the foot and the shoe are of primary importance.

The legend dates from prehistoric times; it has been found in places as far apart as Scotland (in the story of

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1This second theme is treated by Bettelheim, Enchantment, p. 70. See also Edmund Wilson, The Wound and the Bow (New York: Oxford University Press, 1947), pp. 287-290. He notes that the hero with a wound that cannot be cured was a stock figure of myth (p. 290).

2Rosenmeyer, Green Cabinet, p. 279.

3The emphasis on the foot probably means the story originated in the East, where small feet were considered a mark of virtue, distinction, and beauty. (Cf. the Chinese custom of foot-binding) (Bettelheim, Enchantment, p. 236.)
Rashin Coatie) and China. Cinderella is not the only myth in which the foot and the shoe together represent various aspects of sexuality, but it is the most complete picture of the use of these images. The two key items - a pretty, tiny foot and a beautiful and precious slipper - are the basis for a fairy tale all by themselves - a story reported by Strabo and which is a great deal older than even the Chinese version of Cinderella.¹

There are at least 345 versions of Cinderella, but in most of them the essential features are a heroine who at first was loved and esteemed, then fell to complete degradation, and finally returns to a higher position at the end; and a slipper and foot which are matched to identify Cinderella and to join her with her lover. The only really vital difference between any of the versions of this story is the cause of Cinderella's degradation.² In most versions the mother of Cinderella is dead, and the father does not protect his daughter, who dwells among the ashes.

From among the many symbols that appear in this tale, the central one is the slipper which fits Cinderella's foot. For more than two thousand years this has been a metaphor for betrothal, and one which appeals to both sexes for many different, complex reasons. Although the Brothers Grimm ex-

¹Ibid., p. 269.
²Ibid., p. 247.
cised the episode, in many versions of the story the mother of the stepsisters mutilates her daughters' feet (or has the girls themselves do so) to try to make them fit the slipper. Since the prince can recognize Cinderella only by her foot, they hope to make their feet like hers and fool him into marriage.

Even considering the mutilation segment, Cinderella is not a story of lameness; it is nevertheless a tale in which the foot is both the equivalent of identity and a sexual symbol; it might be said that the two factors are inseparable in any case. Thus, Cinderella's foot, like Gervaise's, is the source of her individuality and her identity. In both stories, the foot is associated with desirability of the female.

We should also note a variant of the theme in the story of Odysseus. He too was betrayed by his leg, but the result was a happy one. The identification of the scar on his thigh by the old nurse Euryclea was the starting point of his resumption of his old life after the Trojan War. As Euryclea washes the still-disguised Odysseus's feet, she sees the scar which reveals his true identity to her. In a long digression, the story of how he was badly hurt by a boar is told. The injury occurred when the young Odysseus was staying with his grandfather. Once again, the implication of inadequate familial protection colors the story. The recounting of Odysseus's injury is a story of his identity, for
the digression based on the discovery of the scar deals with
the naming of the hero and is more concerned with his ori-
gin and his self-identity than with his identity as per-
ceived by another.¹

Nowhere are the questions of identity, rejection from
the family, and male dictation more striking than in the story
of Oedipus. Because of the prophecy that he would one day
kill his father and marry his mother, his feet were pierced
and he was left to die soon after birth. (The custom of
abandoning children in this manner was not unheard of at the
time.) He was rescued from death, but not from fate, by a
shepherd and his swollen feet gave him his name. This dis-
figuring injury is both the sign of the curse on his life,
and of the refusal of the parents to accept and protect.

Studies of Oedipus generally do not give more than ca-
sual attention to the fact that this child was left to die
— however justifiably in his parents' opinion — and that it
is not his excellence that gave him his name but his damaged
feet. The near perfection of this young man's mind and body
is offset by a mark that should have made him question his
identity long before the mysterious events that began to
occur at Thebes.

¹Stewart, Disguised Guest, p. 115. This scene evokes
the ancient custom of foot-washing as a sign of acceptance
and love, in addition to its treatment of the subject of
identity. See also Auerbach's Mimesis and G. E. Dimock's
The Name of Odysseus for discussions of this episode.
The foot as vulnerable point of the body has a well established literary and mythological precedent. Many interpretations of this defect have been offered by the lame themselves, as well as by others; they show varying degrees of acceptance, from Vulcan's angry denunciation of Juno, to Oedipus's non-acknowledgement of a sure sign of what must have happened to him in the first few hours of life, to Gervaise's placid account of how her father's rough, drunken love-making caused her leg to "sprout late."

The symbol of the limp places Gervaise among the figures named above. Like them, her identity is linked to her flaw. But another fact about Gervaise which links her with the others is her physical perfection in other ways; although it is not greatly emphasized in the text we are told that she would have been among the most beautiful of women had it not been for her leg.¹ This phrase is striking to the contemporary reader, for so great an extent the twentieth-century concept of beauty has focussed on the face. However, in earlier times great emphasis was placed on the rest of the body and on the medical history of the family. Like the fine warrior Achilles, or the fine king Oedipus, Gervaise too is a "fine specimen" except for one flaw, which offsets this excellence. In all these stories

¹"Enfin, c'était une jolie blonde, et elle aurait pu se mettre parmi les plus belles, sans le malheur de sa jambe." (Zola, l'Assommoir, p. 501.)
of figures whose feet were in some way the vulnerable points of the body, the context renders the flaw even more significant. (Oedipus's scarred feet were the clues to his identity and his identity solved the riddle of the curse on Thebes.) In l'Assommoir's ballet, Gervaise's limp is a fatal flaw; no dancer can perform if she is crippled, graceless, unable to keep the beat.
The Symbolism of the Flaw

Sexual Allegory

Like dance itself, lameness as a symbolic flaw functions on three levels of meaning - anthropological, sociological, and personal. Understanding the symbolism of the limp in sexual or familial problems is a matter of anthropological interpretation.

Sexual symbolism can refer to physical desirability and to conception and birth. The limp is certainly a factor in Gervaise's attractiveness as a woman, just as it is in her coming into the world in the first place. Coupeau's two sisters, Madame Lerat and Madame Lorilleux, both sense the tie between Gervaise's lame foot and her feminine appeal, but respond to this in very different ways. Madame Lerat thinks men find the "quille d'amour" appealing, but cannot explain why; Madame Lorilleux suspects that the limp may be attractive and is infuriated, since as a defect it should be a detriment and not an asset to "la Banban." The answer is probably not only that the limp is per se fascinating, but that it calls attention to a part of the body which is a symbol of sexuality.

When Gervaise has lost her sexual appeal and cannot even sell herself, she is represented as wearing large, ugly shoes and walking in an extremely ungainly manner. Nana's flowering sexuality and Gervaise's loss of her own (Chapter XI) are expressed by references to the feet:
But as Nana is on her way to becoming the "Mouche d'or,"
Gervaise is scrubbing floors in the shop that once was hers.
As she leaves what has become Virginie's store, she asks
Lantier for news of Nana and is told that her daughter is
firmly established as a young woman of bad reputation.
Gervaise slogs off in her own scrubwoman's attire:

Et Gervaise s'en alla avec ses trente sous dans la
main. Ses savates écoulées crachaient comme des pompes,
de véritables souliers à musique, qui jouaient un air
en laissant sur le trottoir les empreintes mouillées
de leurs larges semelles.\(^1\)

Similarly, on her last walk, unable even to sell her charms,

Gervaise allait toujours, gambillant, remontant et
redescendant avec la seule pensée de marcher sans cesse.
Des somnolences la prenaient, elle s'endormait, bercée
par sa jambe; puis, elle regardait en sursaut autour
d'elle, et elle s'apercevait qu'elle avait fait cent pas
sans connaissance, comme morte. Ses pieds à dormir
debout s'élargissaient dans ses savates trouées. Elle
ne se sentait plus, tant elle était lasse et vide.\(^2\)

However while others may view the limp in its sexual
context, the lame person is far more likely to see it as a
familial or hereditary problem, or an omen of the ill will
of some universal force. These are feelings formed in the
earliest years, as the child seeks answers to why he or she
is different from others. Gervaise does not seem to harbor

\(^1\)Ibid., p. 709. \(^2\)Ibid., p. 736. \(^3\)Ibid., p. 773.
any feelings of ill will against her parents, but clearly places the responsibility for her limp on them. Her frank discussion of her own conception, as she understands from what she heard from her mother, reveals an openness concerning sexual matters that is characteristic of rural, lower-class life, and serves as a reminder of her origins. The story she recounts has the quality of myth or superstition, for in her primitive metaphysics nothing is unexplained.

Since it is the result of drink and a hereditary family flaw, the limp represents Gervaise's membership in the family. However heredity is a negative factor in the Macquart lineage and the limp is the visible sign that the hereditary defect is still alive. Another even more damaging consequence of interpreting the flaw as a hereditary defect is that the concept of curse then comes into play and the concomitant fear that this first punishment is only a beginning. Any misfortune can then be seen as part of the curse and a pessimistic, fatalistic mind-set develops. Thus the limp begins as a physical fact, takes on sociological implications, and then becomes a symbol.

In *l'Assommoir* sexual and familial themes are combined in the emphasis on Gervaise's limp because it is both supposedly the result of the manner in which she was conceived and a sign of the hereditary problem that besets the Macquart family. Thus the lame foot is linked to Gervaise's very existence and the images of rhythm and movement used
throughout the text sustain this theme of the inherited weakness.

Limping may be the result of a congenital problem or the consequence of injury - usually a fall. However the fall has to do with will, whereas a congenital defect is treated as a matter of fate. The lame person carries the mark of a problem which he cannot control. Falling implies blame to some extent and the person who falls usually feels in some way responsible for what happened, even if he did not (which is almost always the case) want to fall.

Both the feeling of guilt that comes with the fall and the implication of curse in the congenital limp are not without effect on the subject's attitude toward his fate. He may in either case see himself destined for a certain end over which he has no control except in the way he approaches the inevitable. However the lame person is likely to accept his flaw and assimilate it into his entire self-concept, whereas the injured man is more likely to curse fate.

Furthermore, congenital lameness is very different in its symbolism from lameness due to injury. The former is related to the process of conception and birth and is viewed as a direct manifestation of a hereditary problem. It is difficult to assign a hereditary first cause to injury, although it could, in a general sense, represent inherited "bad luck." Thus congenital defect and injury are problems dealt with in very different ways, psychologically speaking.
Gervaise looks to a mixture of primitive science and magic to explain her limp; but because it occurred in a time of pre-consciousness for her, it still remains something of a mystery. Coupeau's injury is, on the contrary, an event of his life experienced by him consciously, and, in spite of its dire consequences, nothing more. It does not become part of his self-concept. Of course his injury did not result in permanent physical disability, but that fact alone need not have kept it from becoming part of his identity. In some cases scars and woulds are sources of pride, even though they do not result in permanent injury; this is the "war wound" or "football injury" syndrome, where the event is integrated voluntarily into the personality.

In the context of the novel as a whole, Coupeau's fall has far more dramatic consequences than Gervaise's limp, socially speaking. It results in personal failure and the decline of a family. It is a powerful symbol as well - the one false step which ruins everything. But it does not figure in the anthropological interpretation of the text's symbolism.
Ostracism and Ill Fate

The sociological implications of lameness center mainly on the intensification of the struggle of daily living, and the double issue of the lame person's effort to integrate himself into society and society's attempts to ostracize him. Whether this occurs because of fear (thinking the flaw is contagious) or from a misguided attempt to protect the species, the "normal" members of society cordon off the "abnormal" to prevent reproduction of the flaw — deliberately or otherwise. Gervaise is not physically excluded from society because of her limp, but she is verbally set apart when referred to as "la Banban." The use of this nickname is subtle but pervasive in the text (as is the limp itself) in representing the lame person's non-acceptance by certain segments of society.

We cannot say that the limp is directly responsible for Gervaise's decline in life, but we know that it is not unrelated to her problems. It certainly has something to do with Madame Lorilleux's hostility toward her, which culminates in her refusal to help Gervaise even when the latter is dying of starvation.

Gervaise is only addressed as "la Banban" once in the text, but she knows about the references made to her and the way in which she is set apart (as in her introduction to the Lorilleux). This nickname, evoking her thudding movement in walking, is one of the few words in French in which the
tonic accent is used; it is very reminiscent of the chants of children which show rhythmic stress.¹ It is probably a name she has heard since her own childhood.

The limp is most surely responsible for her desire to be accepted and to please, and in this way it is to blame for her defeat in life and the defeat of her will. Her attempts to ingratiate herself to others to break down the barriers that separate her from society as a whole, and her acceptance of those less fortunate than herself makes her own suffering all the more heart rending. It is particularly painful for Gervaise to be ostracized because she is above all a social creature. Her most striking qualities - warmth, cheerfulness, the desire to please, a strong desire to attach herself to others (a trait she shared with her mother) - are social in nature.

Three characters in the novel typify three different attitudes of society toward Gervaise's physical flaw: Madame Lorilleux shows hostility and cruelty; Madame Lerat shows curiosity and interest;¹ Coupeau is only vaguely aware

¹Beare discusses the occurrence of tonic stress in certain rare instances in French verse and song. (Beare, Latin Verse, pp. 99-102. Cf. the disturbing situations in which these songs occur in the text (Zola, l'Assommoir): pp. 400-401, pp. 584-594, and p. 688.

²Coupeau's sisters are strangely asexual beings - one by circumstance and the other by nature, it seems. Madame Lerat is described as a big, masculine woman, whose sexual activity ended when her husband died. However she is fascinated by the subject of sex and full of risqué innuendoes in her speech.
that it exists at all. These three different attitudes are sharply outlined the day of the wedding by the three Coupeau siblings.

Madame Lorilleux is an extremely unpleasant person, but an interesting character. She epitomizes all that is negative in society's treatment of the lame. She is responsible for much of Gervaise's misery, but she does not really contribute to the laundress's fatal weaknesses. Ironically, she instead brings out the best in Gervaise. When she is miserly, Gervaise is generous. When she is hard and unforgiving, Gervaise tries to make peace. The barreness of Madame Lorilleux's life and her own unhappiness, dramatized in the scene where Gervaise is first introduced to her, are obvious. Although it often seems in l'Assommoir that the only cause of unhappiness is poverty, this is clearly not the case with Madame Lorilleux and her husband. The two of them can afford clothing, have decent food to eat, and maintain a more than acceptable standard of living for their neighborhood. However Madame Lorilleux is jealous of Gervaise, and that in an overt, morbid, hostile way. When Gervaise has rented the boutique and is beginning to thrive, Madame Lorilleux's jealousy takes on desperation:

Elle accusait très carrément Gervaise de coucher avec Goujet. Elle mentait, elle prétendait les avoir surpris un soir ensemble, sur un banc du boulevard extérieur. La pensée de cette liaison, des plaisirs que devait goûter sa belle-soeur, l'exaspérait davantage, dans son honnêteté de femme laide. Chaque jour, le cri de son coeur lui revenait aux lèvres:
- Mais qu'a-t-elle donc sur elle, cette infirme, pour se faire aimer! Est-ce qu'on m'aime, moi! ...

She constantly seeks to justify her feelings, and does not succeed. Obviously it is not just the loss of Coupeau's monetary contribution to the Lorilleux household that makes her resent his marriage. She is like an evil spirit the day of the wedding - anti-social, antagonistic, miserable in the face of what she suspects may be love. Indeed, at this point there is no solid reason for her to suspect that Coupeau and Gervaise are not in love and destined for happiness. She fairly calls for disaster when she arrives at the wine merchant's:

- A-t-on jamais vu! bégayait-elle. Ça m'a pris juste à la porte. J'avais envie de remonter et de me déshabiller. J'aurais rudement bien fait ... Ah! elle est jolie, la noce! Je le disais, je voulais tout renvoyer à samedi prochain. Et il pleut parce qu'on ne m'a pas écoutée! Tant mieux! tant mieux! que le ciel crève!

In her helpless rage, she tries to invest herself with supernatural powers, to no avail.

We know that she uses Gervaise's liaison and her two children as arguments against the union. But given the kind of moral behavior in her quartier this is a very pretentious stand. Gervaise is hard working, not promiscuous in spite of her relationship with Lantier, and she is sweet in nature. There is no reason for Madame Lorilleux to think that she will not become a suitable wife. It must be obvious that

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1 Zola, l'Assommoir, p. 498. Ibid., p. 439.
she and Coupeau have been courting in a very restrained manner. But Madame Lorilleux, whose marriage seems tolerable although lifeless, shows a primitive fear at having a defect incorporated into her family. She finds it unbearable that anyone could overlook Gervaise's limp, let alone love her in spite of it. Further, she seems to suspect that she may even be loved because of it.

Throughout the wedding chapter Madame Lorilleux's hatred grows until it explodes at the end. This section once again is a microcosmic representation of what occurs throughout *l'Assommoir*. It is a summary of the sociological implication of physical defect as represented by Gervaise's limp.

To begin the day, Madame Lerat and Madame Lorilleux have already had a fight, and Madame Lerat has left her at home; while she completes her toilette, the entire wedding party has to wait. Arriving at last, in a terrible mood, she refuses to acknowledge Gervaise, who is seated next to Maman Coupeau. Her temper shows throughout the scene in the café. Getting no response, she becomes more hostile than before. She interrupts a stream of unkind comments about the marriage, "pour montrer Gervaise, que la pente du trottoir faisait fortement boiter. -- Regardez-la! S'il est permis! . . . Oh! la banban!" If she had hoped for support

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1 For a moral portrait of the *faubourg*, see ibid., p. 637.
2 Ibid., p. 442.
here, she must have been disappointed. Although Lorilleux himself sneers and considers the name appropriate, Madame Fauconnier defends the laundress. ("On avait tort de se moquer d'elle, elle était propre comme un sou et abattait fièrement l'ouvrage, quand il le fallait.")\(^1\) Madame Lerat, "toujours pleine d'allusions polissonnes, appelait la jambe de la petite 'une quille d'amour', et elle ajoutait que beaucoup d'hommes aimaient ça, sans vouloir s'expliquer davantage."\(^2\) This last remark opens the way to reflections that have been just below the surface throughout the courtship of Coupeau and Gervaise. There is something alluring about her walk, something touching about the visible effort she has to make to go up the sidewalk and which makes Madame Lorilleux's remark so particularly acid and shocking.

Coupeau's sister again tries to provoke a response when Madinier suggests climbing the colonne Vendôme, this time making fun of Madame Lerat as well by incorporating her term "quille" into "Si vous croyez que la Banban va se risquer là-dedans, avec sa quille!"\(^3\) She is shocked and indignant when she catches a glimpse of Coupeau kissing his bride quickly on the neck, thinking they are unobserved, crying, "Eh bien! vous êtes propres, ne vous gênez pas tous les deux!"\(^4\) At this bibi-la-Grillade explodes. Her outburst made him lose count of the steps, however it is apparent at

\(^1\)Ibid. \(^2\)Ibid. \(^3\)Ibid., p. 448. \(^4\)Ibid., p. 449.
this point that both he and the rest of the group are losing patience with Madame Lorilleux. She makes no more open remarks until the very end of the day, when Coupeau timidly says that they will keep Gervaise's room for their own home: "Madame Lorilleux s'oublia, se tourna d'un mouvement brusque. -- Ça, c'est plus fort! cria-t-elle. Tu vas coucher dans la chambre à la banban!" The imagery of this last expression "la chambre à la banban!" leaves little to the imagination.

Gervaise devint toute pâle. Ce surnom, qu'elle recevait à la face pour la première fois, la frappait comme un soufflet. Puis, elle entendait bien l'exclamation de sa belle soeur: la chambre à la Banban, c'était la chambre où elle avait vécu un mois avec Lantier, où les loques de sa vie passée traînaient encore. Coupeau ne comprit, fut seulement blessé du surnom.¹

Coupeau attempts to establish peace, but with no success after this outburst.

At no other time in the story is the limp used so openly and so cruelly against Gervaise - even counting Virginie's public insults in the wash-house. However, although Madame Lorilleux typifies an attitude that exists in society, her hostility seems to be more a personal antipathy and a function of her own maladjustment. She does show the primitive fear and avoidance of "imperfect" individuals that has always existed in society, but it less Gervaise's flaw that she hates than the latter's perfection in other ways. Even

¹Ibid., p. 461.
the desire she and her husband have to elevate their social status would not explain the nature and depth of their cruelty toward Gervaise. These facts, taken in the context of the novel as a whole, seem to indicate that Gervaise is actually mistreated by only a small element of society.

The real tragedy of the limp is that it has prevented Gervaise from becoming all that she might have under other circumstances, and it has contributed toward her passiveness. The limp probably also explains other aspects of her personality that contribute to her developing a weak will, which she herself attributes to her mother.

Thus we are left with something of a dilemma: the thesis of l'Assommoir purports to be basically a sociological one. However this limp which is so crucial to the novel in other ways seems to play a relatively minor role in the sociological aspect of the text. The limp does not make Gervaise drink, nor does it keep her from being a queen in her own domain at the time in her life when she is prospering in her laundry business.¹ The limp does not do any one thing by itself other than reinforce Lantier's already-made decision to abandon Gervaise and the children. Madame Lerat's attitude toward Gervaise is actually more typical than the one expressed by Madame Lorilleux in the text as a

¹Cf. the comments of Jacques Dubois, l'Assommoir de Zola, p. 120. He discusses the abandonment of sociological themes in favor of emphasis on other motifs.
whole. She holds nothing against Gervaise because of her limp, and her suggestion that it may even be attractive to men rings true.

Coupeau's attitude is in some ways a harmful one, for by refusing even to acknowledge Gervaise's limp he also refuses to acknowledge the additional burden it adds to her life. While the handicapped do not need to be continually reminded of their disability, assistance is both needed and appreciated from time to time. The reader is often reminded of how hard daily tasks are for Gervaise because of her leg. This aspect of the characterization is especially well handled; if worked to excess it could have resulted in melodrama. As it is, the occasional discreet references to her difficulty in walking parallel the difficulties of her life and invest them with more profound meaning.

Only one event of great social importance is associated with physical disability, and that is Coupeau's fall, as we said above. Madame Lorilleux rejected Gervaise in an effort to protect her family from a physical defect, and failed. She must feel herself entirely vindicated when Coupeau's own foot betrays him and he falls from the roof. The defect has now become contagious, and her attempt to ostracize Gervaise is now justified in her eyes as a means of protecting society and the family.
Will versus Destiny

Anyone coping with a physical handicap must face his problems on the levels we have mentioned: as a physical problem to be understood, even corrected, and prevented from recurring if possible. It is secondly a social problem to be faced in daily life. How does it affect relationships with others? What barriers of mobility does it create? And finally, it must be faced on the personal level.

The meaning that physical defect has for an individual is dependent on two sets of factors: those which come from the outside (from society) and which determine how he is integrated with others; and those which come from within, which are his personal response to the physical and sociological facts of his life. The interpretation that he places on these factors will determine his self-concept. How does he view his handicap? Is the defect part of the person? What is its symbolic value? Can it be acknowledged openly or should it be ignored? It is in these issues and on this level that the individual human personality asserts itself.

As we said above, a basic problem in settling these questions lies in the difference between congenital defects and injuries; a further difference exists between injury to which blame is attached, and injury which is a source of pride. L'Assommoir does not portray a heroic society, and thus we see no cases of wounds which are sources of pride,
such as battle scars. In any case, heroic wounds rarely, if ever, appear on the foot, probably because of its size and position on the body.

The congenital defect is the one most fundamentally linked to self-identity. If it is considered to be the fault of someone else (the parent or an evil spirit is most often blamed) it can be externalized to some extent. But the flaw is impossible to separate from the individual personality as a whole. It is internalized, whereas injury is viewed as an outside force. Even if the injured person blames himself to some extent, the injury still is not part of his self-concept. There is a vast difference between Coupeau's convalescence, during which he could walk only with the help of canes (an occurrence), and Gervaise's lifelong limp (a state of being).

The nature of the disability and the response it receives from others situate the flaw in a particular context. The interpretation of this context is a matter of individual personality. The way one views life as a whole, the events of his own existence, and the actions taken in response to these perceptions show whether individual will or a sense of destiny dominates his self-concept. The interpretation of any event or symbol will be dependent upon the extent to which the individual considers that his life is controlled from without. The issue of control of one's own life is crucial in l'Assommoir.
The acceptance of congenital defect - although necessary - paves the way for passiveness. If this primary acceptance and acknowledgement of the rights of destiny is allowed to become too basic a part of the individual, the role of individual personality and will is diminished. The flaw, representing destiny, takes over, making it difficult to assert the personality. For instance, Gervaise is capable of making plans, carrying them out, expressing her opinion, and yet she still remains fundamentally passive.\footnote{Cf. her remark to Coupeau: "Elle se sentait prise d'une sueur devant l'avenir et se comparait à un sou lancé en l'air, retombant pile ou face, selon les hasards du pavé." (Zola, \textit{L'Assommoir}, p. 417.)} She eventually assimilates her environment as she accepted her limp, without any resistance. This kind of integration is anything but positive; instead it results in the inability to extricate oneself from bad circumstances, the cessation of activity, and atrophy of human will. The measure to which Gervaise accepts herself and her environment, and the greater the loss of her will, the more inclined she is to blame a vague destiny for her plight. The more she internalizes her affliction, the more she externalizes positive forces until finally there is no room in her for anything but the playing out of fate.
Gervaise

The Inherited Flaw

Gervaise's limp is a presence throughout the text. It figures in all the activities of her life, yet at times seems curiously separate from her, as if it were a character of its own in the story which capriciously comes and goes. Indeed at the end the limp takes on such an independent identity that Gervaise perceives it as another being.

The limp is a physical problem, worsening as time passes, but it is also the barometer of Gervaise's well-being throughout her life. Thus it serves as both a narrative and a thematic element of the text. It is the motor of what actual plot there is in l'Assommoir, since it is a determining factor in Gervaise's relationships with others and in her self-concept. However the most important function of the limp is to provide a metaphor in movement for the thematic construct of the novel, uniting the imagery of the text and its balletic structure. It is the nucleus of the symbolic field.

Gervaise's explanation of her limp is given in a speech to Coupeau in which she also provides an analysis of her character. Recounting the old days at Plassans, her life with Lantier, and what it means to have a household leads her to talk about her mother:

Elle d'ailleurs, ressemblait à sa mère, une grosse travailleuse, morte à la peine, qui avait servi de bête de somme au père Macquart pendant plus de vingt ans. Elle était encore toute mince, tandis que sa mère avait
des épaules à démolir les portes en passant; mais ça n'empêchait pas, elle lui ressemblait par sa rage de s'attacher aux gens. Même, si elle boitait un peu, elle tenais ça de la pauvre femme, que le père Macquart rouait de coups. Cent fois, celle-ci lui avait raconté les nuits où le père, rentrant soûl, se montrait d'une galanterie si brutale, qu'il lui cassait les membres; et sûrement elle avait poussé une de ces nuits-là, avec sa jambe en retard.¹

Gervaise shows considerable insight into her own nature here, for although a simple person, she is not lacking in intelligence or perceptiveness. With peasant naturalness she tells of her own conception, and easily imagines her parents in their conjugal roles. Even the pride she takes in her mother's strength and endurance is typical of a more primitive milieu. Her explanation of the limp contains no resentment and indicates her acceptance of the handicap as an inheritance from both parents. Even knowing that it will bend her double in her old age, she is not angry - merely resigned:

- Oh! ce n'est presque rien, ça ne se voit pas, dit Coupeau pour faire sa cour.
  Elle hocha le menton; elle savait bien que ça se voyait; à quarante ans, elle se casserait en deux.
  Puis, doucement, avec un léger rire:
  - Vous avez un drôle de goût d'aimer une boîteuse.²

This is the first occasion on which Gervaise speaks of the limp, but not its first appearance in the text. We first saw it through Lantier's eyes:

Puis, pendant qu'elle se lavait à grande eau, après avoir rattaché ses cheveux, devant le petit miroir rond, pendu à l'espagnolette, qui lui servait pour se raser.

¹Ibid., p. 408. ²Ibid.
il parut examiner ses bras nus, son cou nu, tout le nu qu'elle montrait, comme si des comparaisons s'établissaient dans son esprit. Et il eut une moue des lèvres. Gervaise boitait de la jambe droite, mais on ne s'en apercevait guère que les jours de fatigue, quand elle s'abandonnait, les hanches brisées. Ce matin-là rompu par sa nuit, elle traînait sa jambe, elle s'appuyait aux murs. 

Lantier the opportunist, evaluating his decision to leave Gervaise, gives an exact, detached appraisal of her defect. We learn as well that Gervaise lets herself go with the limp ("s'abandonne") under certain circumstances, and even at this early point in the narration it is suggested that the limp will be an indication of when her resistance is down, both physically and psychologically.

Soon after this, in the famous laundry-house battle, Virginie taunts Gervaise about her lameness:

...ça a laissé une jambe dans son pays... Elle est tombée de pourriture, sa jambe...
- Ne causez pas tant, bégaya Gervaise... On a vu mon mari, hier soir...
- Son mari! Ah! elle est bonne, celle-là! Le mari à madame! comme si on avait des maris avec cette dégaine!... 

After that day at the laundry, the limp is not mentioned until the discussion with Coupeau. When he brushes it off as nothing at all, it seems as if this flaw will, as we had hoped, be simply a small detail of her general description and nothing more. Coupeau's total acceptance of Gervaise makes her limp insignificant, a face reinforced by its not being mentioned again after that day until she meets

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1Ibid., p. 383.  
2Ibid., pp. 395-396.
the Lorilleux. (Similarly, the importance of the limp for Lantier was emphasized by repeated references to it in the pages immediately following Gervaise's argument with her lover.) As Coupeau and Gervaise leave l'Assommoir, both of them "traînant les pieds," it seems that the suitor has actually taken some of the limp from Gervaise into his own body. The psychological and mystical aspects of the limp are dramatized in Chapter IV, when Gervaise is renting the boutique, and success seems to be just around the corner:

Gervaise courut toute la journée, de la rue Neuve à la rue de la Goutte-d'Or. Dans le quartier, à la voir passer ainsi, légère, ravie au point de ne plus boiter, on racontait qu'elle avait dû se laisser faire une opération.\(^1\)

This is the first time that the psychological aspect of the limp is made explicit; in fact, it even seems that the limp is more mental than physical in nature if we judge by this passage.

There were earlier hints that the limp was tied to Gervaise's state of mind, such as when she limps strongly on the way to the wash-house after her argument with Lantier. But there is also a possible physical explanation for this, since she is carrying a package of laundry. Likewise, in the wedding party's promenade through Paris she limps very noticeably, but the sloping sidewalk is the excuse and not the feeling of depression that pervades the wedding day.

\(^1\)Ibid., p. 492.
However, the negative emotional context which dominates both these scenes seems to be a more valid explanation for the worsened limp than any physical reason. Similarly, as she begins to give in to gluttony and Coupeau to drink, her limp is aggravated: "Elle avait encore engraisé, elle boitait davantage, parce que sa jambe, qui s'enflait de graisse, semblait se raccourcir à mesure."\(^1\) The "semblait" implies that her eating is a form of degeneration manifested by the limp.

Eventually Gervaise's limp is expanded to include weakness of the foot as well. For example, when she sees Lantier again after her marriage to Coupeau, she nearly falls. She claims to have turned her ankle, but this is a strange explanation for the mishap. In fact, a near fall does not seem to be a particularly natural physical reaction to shock in any case. Gervaise is simply so used to having her foot indicate trouble and to its being the vulnerable point of her body that she automatically accuses it in this or any situation. The pattern is by now established that a strong limp indicates situations in which Gervaise is unhappy; weakness of the foot (or leg) or falling indicate crisis, and the complete disappearance of the limp marks joy and participation in life.\(^2\)

\(^{1}\)Ibid., p. 558.

\(^{2}\)Cf. "Elle avait le coeur tout gonflé . . . . elle sentait ses jambes qui se cassaient . . . ." (Ibid., p. 755.) when she goes to beg from the Lorilleux.
Two cases in which Gervaise's lameness figures most dramatically are her introduction to the Lorilleux and her final walk through Paris. With the Lorilleux it is not the motion of the limp which is dramatized, but the very fact of its existence as a congenital defect. Coupeau's sister and her husband strongly disapprove of the projected marriage, but cannot really justify their attitude. Other approaches having failed, they begin to attack Gervaise's health in general. After some preliminary remarks, they aim at their real target - the limp. Gervaise reacts as if she were guilty of a crime. She tries to bury her foot, but afraid of having disturbed something, uncovers it. The Lorilleux seize the opportunity to focus on her feet: "You are not very strong because of that, don't you think so, Lorilleux, she doesn't look strong." When Gervaise finally shows them her feet, supposedly to prove that she has not picked up any bits of gold on the soles of her shoes, she blushes, "raised her feet, showed them there wasn't anything amiss."\(^1\) The irony of this last line is dramatized in the gesture of Gervaise's actually displaying her feet.

It is in the final promenade that the limp takes on a separate identity, becoming a grotesque figure following Gervaise through the streets of Paris:

\[\text{Et, brusquement, elle aperçut son ombre par terre. Quand elle approchait d'un bec de gaz, l'ombre vague se}\]

\(^1\)See ibid., pp. 429-430.
The limp has reached its final stage of evolution at this point. Arising as it did from Gervaise's background, the limp both marks her as a Macquart and embroils her in the family mythology of alcohol; it is thus a source — however unfortunately so — of her identity. This sign (of family identity) in physical form then grows and gathers strength until it becomes a self-sustaining force which, spiritlike, frees itself from Gervaise's dying body. It is, in effect, at this point that she ceases to exist. The events after the final walk are hazy for her and for the reader, to whom items are reported objectively, as if there were no longer the laundress's eyes to see through.

Even though the limp is an astoundingly good and complete image for unifying various elements of the text, it is not without the support of other symbols — in particular the clock and the still. The symbolism of the clock, although not as pervasive as that of the limp, parallels it and

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1Ibid., pp. 771-772. See also our p. .
occupies a crucial place in the images of the text. But closely related and complementary as they are, these two symbols serve different purposes. The limp is a dramatization in gesture of Gervaise’s flaw and a sign of her state of being. It is a sustained metaphor throughout the text. The clock is also a dramatic symbol, but in a different manner; it is the center of three highly concentrated dramatic scenes. These interludes include commentaries on the events of the preceding pages by which her life is evaluated, and mark off stages of her existence. But more importantly they are points at which, confronted by the palpable embodiment of rhythm, the essence of life itself, she seems to inquire into her soul. In her changing response to this symbol we see the stages of her degeneration.

The number three is a significant element in the clock episodes. The symbolic value and the mystical, religious significance of this number since pre-Christian times are well known. Thus it fits in well with the aura of religion surrounding the clock in Gervaise’s eyes. But as we see most dramatically by its use in fairy tales and myth, the number three is also associated in the unconscious mind with sexuality and the psychoanalytic aspects of the mind—id, ego, and superego.\textsuperscript{1} An interpretation of \textit{l’Assommoir} from these standpoints would be another study in itself; it

\textsuperscript{1}Bettelheim, \textit{Enchantment}, pp. 219-220.
is sufficient to say that the elements of Gervaise's own internal conflict are represented separate from one another by Lantier (id), Coupeau (ego) and Goujet (superego). But she not only has three men, she has three children, and three desires in life. Time is even measured most often in units of three. These episodes, in which Gervaise looks into her own soul, are themselves three in number: one occurs just after she breaks with the last traces of her old life with Lantier; another is to be found at the point when she is becoming established as a businesswoman in the neighborhood; the last comes as her final deterioration begins. Each of the three clock episodes begins with the number three - "pendant trois années," "trois années se passèrent," "trois heures sonnèrent" - and are themselves divided into three segments. These introductory words, like the three raps at the start of a play, further enhance the feeling of theater that pervades the scenes.¹ The dominance of the figure three not only evokes the mystery that Gervaise senses in the presence of the clocks and their mystical power over her, but in addition, the symmetry of three-part presentation lends itself easily to dramatic effect and gives these passages much of their power.²

¹Cf. the use of myth and fairy tale in ballets of the nineteenth century.

stage this type of symbolic symmetry was concretized in rhythm and gesture.)

Much as is done in the Louvre episode (but on an intellectual, aesthetic level there), in these emotional segments there is telescoping and microscoping on the subject. The broad sweep of time of the prologue gives the feel of epic scale, momentarily removing the reader from the Rue de la Goutte d'Or. Then the enumeration of rather mundane activities which follows brings attention back to the quartier. Finally, the field of vision narrows to Gervaise herself at a particular point in her development—alone, very still, listening to the ticking of the clock as if it were the message of an oracle.

Both the limp and the clock are Gervaise's personal symbols. They are also both flexible: the limp varies with her state of mind and the nature of the clock's symbolic value is modified as Gervaise herself changes over the years to reflect these changes. Even the use of time is adapted to fit her changing perspective. For example the last clock segment begins with "trois heures" instead of "three years" as the two others did. A moment later we learn that time is passing very slowly for Gervaise now and that even a very short period seems like ages to her.

The first of these scenes occurs about a fourth of the way into the text, but preparation for the importance of the clock as symbol begins even earlier, when we learn that
one of Gervaise's dreams is to be able to buy a mantle-clock for her apartment:

Un rêve, dont elle n'osait parler, était d'avoir une pendule pour la mettre au beau milieu du marbre, où elle aurait produit un effet magnifique. Sans le bébé qui venait, elle se serait peut-être risquée à acheter sa pendule. Enfin, elle renvoyait ça à plus tard, avec un soupir.¹

This mantle-clock, which she does finally buy on installment payments, is her most treasured possession. Similarly, the neighbor she regards most highly is the clock maker across the street.

The heart of the passage below is of course the moment of suspension when she forgets herself in front of the instrument, and we see its importance for her as the symbol of the life force that exists in movement and the rhythm of this force. Even the term "pendule" is a reference to the rhythm rather than the passage of time, and at this point in Gervaise's life it is indeed the regular rhythm of clocks which attract her, and not their hands and faces. But we learn other pertinent facts here as well: Gervaise is putting her life in order and accomplishing certain goals. We also see the lack of unity in the Coupeau household. She does not share this precious object, where she keeps her bankbook and thus all her hopes for the future, with her husband. In spite of her passiveness in so many ways and her desire to please, Gervaise is an independent thinker,

¹Ibid., p. 465.
she makes plans, saves money, manages everything without benefit ofCoupeau's help.

Pendant trois années, la vie des deux familles coula . . . En trois années, elle avait contenté une seule de ses envies, elle s'était acheté une pendule; encore cette pendule, une pendule de palissandre, à colonnes torses, à balancier de cuivre doré, devait-elle être payée en un an, par acompte de vingt sous tous les lundis. Elle se fâchait, lorsque Coupeau parlait de la monter; elle seule enlevait le globe, essuyait les colonnes avec religion, comme si le marbre de sa commode s'était transformé en chapelle. Sous le globe, derrière la pendule, elle cachait le livret de la Caisse d'épargne. Et souvent, quand elle fût à sa boutique, elle s'oubliait là, devant le cadran, à regarder fixément tourner les aiguilles, ayant l'air d'attendre quelque minutes particulière et solennelle pour se décider.1

This ornate clock was the only one of Gervaise's desires ever realized. It is the heart of her home, both physically and spiritually. Uniting as it does her future and the magic of a hypnotically regular beat, it takes on religious significance for this woman whose own halting rhythm has played such a critical role in the establishing of her identity.

The second clock segment occurs at the end of Chapter V. Once again a three-year time unit introduces the episode. A short history of the previous years follows, and then we have a recounting of her neighborhood activities and acquaintances. But there is a new element also - the figure of the bird, traditional symbol of the human soul, is joined to that of the timepiece. The cuckoo dwelling inside its

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1Ibid., pp. 475-476.
clock-home humming with activity dramatizes the longing of
Gervaise's own soul to be in a similar setting:

Trois années se passèrent. On se fâcha et on se
raccommoda encore plusieurs fois. Gervaise se moquait
pas mal des Lorilleux, des Boche et de tous ceux qui ne
disaient point comme elle . . . . Dans le quartier, on
avait fini par avoir pour elle beaucoup de considération,
parce que, en somme, on ne trouvait pas des masses de
pratiques aussi bonnes, payant recta, pas chipoteuse, pas
raleuse . . . . Mais le voisin qu'elle respectait le plus
était encore, en face, l'horloger, le monsieur en redingote,
l'air propre, fouillant continuellement des montres
avec des outils mignons; et souvent elle traversait la
rue pour le saluer, riant d'aise à regarder, dans la
boutique étroite comme une armoire, la gaieté des petits
coucous dont les balanciers se dépêchaient battant
l'heure à contre-temps, tous à la fois.¹

The figure of the bird, first linked with the clock mo-
tif in the watch-maker's shop, reappears here. In fact, the
only information that we have about this clock is that it is
a cuckoo. There is no mention of pendulum, bobs, or rhythm
-only this symbol of the soul and the number three coming
from the invisible clock of the croque-mort.

Although Gervaise's reactions are by this time dulled
and slow, she responds as she had in the past:

Trois heures sonnèrent au coucou du père Bazouge. Il
n'était que trois heures. Alors, elle pleura. Jamais
elle n'aurait la force d'attendre sept heures. Elle
avait un balancement de tout son corps, le dandinement
d'une petite fille qui berce sa grosse douleur, pliée
en deux, s'écrasant l'estomac, pour ne plus le sentir.
Ah! il vaut mieux accoucher que d'avoir faim! Et, ne
se soulageant pas, prise d'une rage, elle se leva,
piétina, espérant rendormir sa faim comme un enfant qu'on
promène. Pendant une demi-heure, elle se cognait aux
quatre coins de la chambre vide. Puis, tout d'un coup,
ell'elle s'arrêta, les heux fixes. Tant pis! ils diraient ce
qu'ils diraient, elle leur lécherait les pieds s'il vou-
laient, mais elle allait emprunter dix sous aux Lorilleux.²

¹Ibid., p. 524-525. ²Ibid., p. 753.
Miraculously the clock once again awakens her sense of life, now nearly extinct. This brief renascence unfortunately does not save her. The Lorilleux refuse to help and she is no longer capable physically or mentally of saving herself without assistance.

Toward the end of her life Gervaise is aware of the passage of time but not of its beat; this is a complete reversal of the symbolism the clock once had for her. The term "cadran" replaces that of "pendule" as the equivalent of "clock," now just a printed dial without animation. A day becomes merely a stretch of time to be filled - "vingt-quatre heures, deux fois le tour du cadran!" instead of a series of activities as it once had been.¹ As Gervaise becomes increasingly removed from the active life, losing her possessions and her home, withdrawing ever further into herself - in short, as she detaches herself from the physical and moves into the mental sphere - the image of the clock evolves from the keeper of rhythm to the concept of time itself and the changes it works. The guideposts of rhythm, the tangible aspect, are gone. At the end of her life even her idea of the passage of time is hazy.²

¹Ibid., p. 767.

²"Ce devait être le samedi après le terme, quelque chose comme le 12 ou le 13 janvier, Gervaise ne savait plus au juste. Elle perdait la boule, parce qu'il y avait des siècles qu'elle ne s'était rien mis de chaud dans le ventre." (Ibid., p. 749.)
As the clock loses its meaning for Gervaise, the still's stature grows. It represents the power of alcohol to destroy physical reality and life itself. In the precarious universe of l'Assommoir there is no equal force to counter attack. Neither the clock, at best the embodiment of an ideal, nor the limp stands for a source of energy. There is only life itself to hold fast against destruction.

Bit by bit Gervaise gives to the alambic what she once gave to her pendule - her devotion, her money, her energy. As the transition takes place, even the religious terms once applied to the clock are given to the alambic and one of its victims:

On faisait queue devant l'Assommoir du père Colombe, allumé comme une cathédrale pour une grand'messe; et nom de Dieu! on aurait dit une vraie cérémonie, car les bons zigs chantaient là-dedans avec des mines de chantres au lutrin, les joues enflées, le bedon arrondi. On célebrait la sainte Touche, quoi! une sainte bien aimable, qui doit tenir la caisse au paradis.\(^1\)

Les joues creuses, les yeux dégoûtant, pleurant assez de cire pour fournir une cathédrale, il (Coupeau) ne gardait que sa truffe de fleurie, belle et rouge, ... \(^2\)

The field of destructive symbols headed by the still encompasses the secondary "flame motif" of alcohol - a flame which Gervaise rejected at first, and then later welcomed. After looking at the "drunk machine" intently for some time,

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\(^1\)Ibid., p. 769.

\(^2\)Ibid., p. 745. Cf. also (p. 622) "... le père Colombe, blême et tranquille dans son tricot bleu, ..." Placid, detached, and dressed in the colors associated with the Virgin, he presides over the machine.
with perhaps a premonition of what is to come, she pulls back in fear:

L'alambic, sourdement, ... laissait couler sa sueur d'alcool, pareil à une source lente et entêtée, qui à la longue devait envahir la salle, se répandre sur les boulevards extérieurs, inonder le trou immense de Paris. Alors, Gervaise, prise d'un frisson, récula, et elle tâchait de sourire, en murmurant:

- C'est bête, ça me fait froid, cette machine ... la boisson me fait froid ...  

Because it produces the fluid, the alambic - and not the bottle which merely contains the fluid - represents alcohol.

This seems to be a rather characteristic Zola choice. The less elemental bottle is instead the personal symbol of Coupeau, serving the same purpose for him as the clock does for his wife:

D'autres fois, on le voyait pendant des heures en contemplation devant ses mains qui dansaient, les regardant sauter comme des grenouilles, sans rien dire, ne se fâchant plus, ayant l'air de chercher quelle mécanique intérieure pouvait leur faire faire joujou de la sorte; et, un soir, Gervaise l'avait trouvé ainsi, avec deux grosses larmes qui coulaient sur ses joues cuites de pochard. 

Fire is not a completely negative image in l'Assommoir. Goujet, like a vestal before the fire of his forge, guards a beneficial fire which never dies. However, alcohol represents the negative side of fire imagery. Like alcohol, which produces temporary elation but is actually a depres-

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1 Ibid., pp. 411-412.

2 Ibid., p. 745. This scene evokes the ancient theme of the evil spirit locked up in a bottle. Cf. Bettelheim, Enchantment, p. 312.
sant, a flame gives the impression of life, warmth, and cheer, but these are temporary and thus deceptive impressions. The flame dies in the end, not only having consumed but having been consumed.²

Movement and Meaning

To simplify a complex set of events, essentially we can say that Gervaise limps because her father was a drunk. When through drink she falls to ruin morally, socially, and physically, her limp worsens to the point of bending her in two. The hereditary flaw has succeeded in manifesting itself and destroying her.

The limp, so like a drunken amble, is a particularly good symbol for alcoholism.\textsuperscript{1} The sustained stress on the direction and nature of Gervaise's movements reinforces the structure of the novel, based on terms of movement and verticality, as well. The emphasis in the text on falling, both overt and implied, is a structural doubling of the more elusive "limp" metaphor.

The image of the fall which hovers over the entire text is the logical completion of the lameness group of symbols. The use of the expression "une première chute" sets up the symbolism used to express the tragedy of Gervaise's life:

Il l'avait empêignée, il ne la lâchait pas. Elle s'abandonnait, étourdgie par le léger vertige qui lui venait du tas de linge, sans dégoût pour l'haleine vineuse de Coupeau. Et le gros baiser qu'ils échangèrent à plaine bouche, au milieu des saletés du métier, était comme une première chute, dans le lent avachiissement de leur vie.\textsuperscript{2}

\textsuperscript{1}Of course, the amble or stagger of the drunk is just the starting point; the final movements associated with drunkenness are those of delirium tremens. The dance metaphor is served by emphasis on the movements of alcoholism.

\textsuperscript{2}Zola, l'Assommoir, p. 509.
Literal and figurative falls are intertwined in the text, as are symbolic and actual gestures of falling and limping. Coupeau's slip of the foot when he falls from the roof where he is working is simply another version of Gervaise's limp. This fall is the cause of all subsequent family tragedies - or falls - at least on the surface. Coupeau's momentary disregard for the unwritten rules of his trade carries forward into his total abandonment of moral and social rules and responsibilities. The symbolism is orderly; Coupeau falls morally through his own fault, just as he fell physically through negligence.

The great fall of Gervaise's family which is the subject of the novel is a macrocosmic representation of the microcosmic limp. This personal gesture embodies and symbolizes all the sorrow of the Macquart line and all the lost opportunities of Gervaise and her husband. The choice of the limp shows the consummate artistry that characterizes the use of symbols in *l'Assommoir*. In one concept, illustrated by one movement, the narrative and symbolic lines come together. Further, the dramatic representation of the limp, as in the last walk, where it appears as a grotesque companion to Gervaise, gives it an animation that takes it from a purely verbal existence into a three-dimensional artistic realm. The fact of Gervaise's lameness if thus of vital importance as the image that holds the thematic structure together and units it to all the other aspects of the
text - narrative, dramatic, symbolic; and this unity is what gives *l'Assommoir* its three-dimensional feel. The limp is not a line running through the text; it is rather a gesture that reaches out in various directions. But it is the dance motif of the text which gives the limp the function of cardinal symbol.

Because of this dance motif, Gervaise the cripple is forced to assume the role of dancer as well. As we have seen, the dancer and the laundress were two female types that captured the artistic imagination of the late nineteenth century. They were captioned by Goncourt as the "most picturesque feminine types of the age for a contemporary artist," and the discovery of the superiority of these figures as subject he considered to have been fundamental to the formation of a new aesthetic.

While the cripple may at first consideration seem to be at best the distorted image of the dancer, at worst her total opposite, the resemblance between the dancer and the laundress is easier to establish. In fact, the dancer and the cripple are in a sense united in the figure of the laundress. The vocabulary used to describe Gervaise's lame walk - in particular the "hanches" brisées" is similar to that used to describe the movement of a laundress. This "hanchement" can describe Gervaise in both contexts. It is this

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1Reff, "Degas and the Literature," p. 589.
characteristic walk, the famous "hanchement d'une blanchisseuse," by which the laundress of that era was known. Her sway as she carried loads of clothes on her hips was closely associated with the maternal gesture of carrying a child balanced on one hip, an archetypically female movement. The swaying walk is also an overtly sexual movement. But just as her movements link the laundress with the halting movement of the cripple and with the classic feminine figure, her way of moving is the reason she is associated with the dancer as well.

In the late 1800's the life of the dancer was no more glamorous than that of the laundress on an everyday basis. Both did hard physical work, with long hours. Given the standards of cleanliness of the time, the laundress probably saw no more dirt than the ballerina did in her perspiration-soaked rehearsal costumes and layers of stage make-up. Sternly disciplined by the dance master, she was no more free than women such as Madame Putois, and perhaps no more skilled a worker. Even in performance, the laundress with her heavy folds of cloth and the dancer's swirling long skirts and sleeves were very much alike in gesture. Washing as it was done in the countryside, where the women stood in patterns, holding their sheets and making them billow in the air and then come to rest on the ground in a rush of air, bore a strong resemblance to the chorus dancing movements of the era. Both occupations are characterized by skilled
handling of objects and graceful movements of the body, as are so many of the tasks traditionally performed by women. The similarity between Gervaise's movements and "l'éternel féminin" is strengthened by the use of the term "bercer" to describe the limp. It becomes more and more a rocking movement, until at the end her rocking is reprised by Bazouge's in the pas de deux where he rocks her to her final sleep, telling her to "faire dodo."

It is the ending of l'Assommoir that makes it so particularly Gervaise's story - even more than it is a story of alcoholism, or of a particular period in the Second Empire. The last chapter is a "nouement" or interlocking of symbols and themes, all of which center on Gervaise and which find their completion in her death scene. This final scene is exceptional for a novel, but classic or even traditional in ballet. Scores of ballerinas have been laid to rest in the same manner was Gervaise was - gently rocked to a tender refrain. Literature abounds with tragic death, but none in which the grotesque and the mortal are transformed as they are in the final pages of l'Assommoir.

To understand Gervaise it is necessary to keep this final scene in mind as a reference point, because although it is distinct from the rest of the text in tone and emphasis, it is entirely a product of the preceding chapters, totally derived from the events that went before, and in no way ex machina. Here the overt theme of alcoholism and the
symbolic infra-structure give way to the pure artistry of Zola the choreographer as he orchestrates the rhythm and the design of his heroine's release from life.

There is no actual death scene for Gervaise. She simply disappears, removed from what has become a painful and hopeless existence to find in death the tenderness that her own gentleness should have brought her in life. Long before the final pages, Gervaise's removal to a higher order is being prepared. She lives on memories, some of which are unexpected revelations of moments of beauty she enjoyed in a happier time:

Et Gervaise, dans les crampes qui lui tordaient l'estomac, pensait malgré elle aux jours de fête, aux gueuletons et aux rigolades de sa vie. Une fois surtout, par un froid de chien, un jeudi de la mi-carême, elle avait joliment nocé. Elle était bien gentille, blonde et fraîche, en ce temps-là. Son lavoir, rue Neuve, l'avait nommée reine, malgré sa jambe. Alors, on s'était baladé sur les boulevards, dans des chars ornés de verdure, au milieu du beau monde qui la reluquait joliment. Des messieurs mettaient leurs lorgnons comme pour une vraie reine. Puis, le soir, on avait fichu un balthazar à tout casser, et jusqu'au jour on avait joué des guiboles. Reine, oui, reine! avec une couronne et une écharpe, pendant vingt-quatre heures, deux fois le tour du cadran! Et, alourdie, dans les tortures de sa fain, elle regardait par terre, comme si elle eût cherché le ruisseau où elle avait laissé choir sa majesté tombée.¹

This "majesté," even though it was fallen, refers to a side of Gervaise that was sensed but never openly stated before. Her kind nature, and other qualities, set her apart from the other petty, and even cruel, residents of the

¹Ibid., pp. 767-768.
neighborhood - the Boches, the Lorilleux, even Maman Coupeau, who turned against the only person who would take her in when she could no longer live alone. The knowledge that events of this magnitude were not described as they occurred in her life suggests Gervaise's contact with the world that Goujet imagined for her.

Her death really begins with the phrase "C'était sa promenade dernière,"\(^1\) this final act again being expressed in the dance metaphor of the text. No longer capable of "tapages," "danses," "bais," "tours," "pas," she staggers slowly through the only Paris she knows. Even though she must have, technically speaking, walked after this time, this is her last walk in the sense that it was her last conscious activity. Gervaise's nobility of character is enhanced by the fact that her very last gesture was her farewell to Goujet. This makes the tragic events of her remaining physical life, when she performs imitations of Coupeau's delirium tremens, seem not to be her actions at all, but those of a soulless marionnette.

The death of Coupeau was a coup de grâce for Gervaise. The shock of it seems to have precipitated the physical death of a Gervaise already mortally wounded psychologically by her farewell to Goujet.\(^2\) Like Coupeau, who performed his own dance of death, Gervaise too does a subtle danse macabre:

\(^1\)Ibid., p. 771. \(^2\)Cf. ibid.
"La mort devait la prendre petit à petit, morceau par morceau, en la traînant ainsi jusqu'au bout dans la sacrée existence qu'elle s'était faite."

If *l'Assommoir* were to end here, it would be not a ballet but *guignol*. It is in the very last paragraphs that Gervaise's role is completed and she is at last given a partner with whom she can move in perfect harmony, with no limp. This final partner neither abandons her, as did Lantier, nor is he awkward with her, as Coupeau was, nor did he soar too high and fast for her, as Goujet did. A sort of frog prince or nutcracker, Bazouge is ironically the only partner with whom Gervaise finds the harmony of movement she had pursued throughout her life.

The topic of Zola as a writer of epic has interested a number of critics who have studied the Rougon-Macquart novel series from many standpoints, among which are the role of destiny; the use of time, personification, and allegory; the characterization of the crowd; the presence of supernatural forces; and the establishing of an heroic model. In addition, the themes of epic vision, cyclic rhythm, and the use of repetition in the series have been examined. But there is another quality which links the Zola epic to its Greco-Roman prototypes which has not been discussed - the presence of ritual, ceremony, and performance - particularly the per-

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1Ibid., p. 796.
formance of sacred acts. What Dubois refers to as the "gestuel"\(^1\) of Zola's text is intrinsically bound up with the performance of rites, the repetition of ritual scenes, and remembrances of these occasions.

The care given to the laying-out of the dead in \textit{l'Assommoir} is an example of the ceremonial rites which fill the text. The bodies of Maman Coupeau, Lalie Bijard, and Gervaise herself occupy important places in the novel. There is an obvious parallel to this in Homeric epic, where the funeral and burial are events of the greatest significance. But ritual is a vital aspect of other scenes as well: the washing of clothes at the \textit{lavoir} is a rite, as is the birth of Nana, Goujet's work at the forge, the preparation of banquets, and even the drinking at \textit{l'Assommoir}, with père Colombe presiding. On a broader level, the continual self-sacrifice made by Gervaise is a prolonged rite of appeasement directed toward an unknown deity.\(^2\)

The performance of ritual is both a physical and a spiritual act. The emphasis on movement in \textit{l'Assommoir} makes the acting out of these ceremonies possible; all depends on the "gestuel" of the text, aided by the use of repetition of both

\(^1\)Dubois, \textit{l'Assommoir de Zola}, p. 87.

a formulaic and lyric nature.\textsuperscript{1} We have mentioned before the use of phrases such as "joli ___ de blond" to describe Gervaise. In addition to these formulaic phrases, there are longer descriptions of certain physical features which resemble the dis cursus of Homer; references to these descriptions are made later in the text, and these shorter references take on a formulaic quality. (Cf. the passages on Boche's mouth, the references to Goujet's blondness, the boniness of the Coupeau siblings, the dirtiness of the Gaudrons and simultaneously, their fecundity.) These descriptions are often composed of odd or striking combinations of words, or expressions that seem inappropriate for their context, such as the "bonheur raisonnable" of Gervaise on her wedding day.

The best example of lyric repetition is the refrain "Monsieur, écoutez donc" with which Gervaise interrupts her own final walk through Paris. It is reminiscent of the use of similar refrains in Homeric composition, such as the "did this ever happen" of the Iliad.\textsuperscript{2} Reminiscence of the reliving of significant moments is used to formalize and sanctify key events, such as the day Gervaise first came to look at the boutique, planning a successful future; or the twenty-four hours that she was queen of her neighborhood, or

\textsuperscript{1}For the use of the trait descriptif see John Lapp
Goujet's memories of the days when Gervaise came to see him at the forge.

The importance of place in l'Assommoir, of special spaces such as the boutique, père Bru's corner, Bazouge's room, the quartier itself, and even the city of Paris, is necessary to the feeling of ritual that pervades the text. Every event must occur in the appropriate setting, and this is true for even accidental occurrences or spontaneous acts.

Religion in l'Assommoir is largely a matter of superstition and ritual. Nana's communion, Gervaise's wedding, the burial of Maman Coupeau are not marked by any particular spiritual character, nor do they seem to belong to any one sect as religious acts. They are purely ritual acts performed without any clear reference to religious conviction. However they are sacred acts - if not spiritual moments - in that they represent a mysterious communion with some non-human force. The dance motif of the text would be incomplete without the presence of dance as sacred act or rite.

The ritualistic element of the text is expressed in its language. In addition to the downward "moral" movement of l'Assommoir and the anthropomorphism which is present throughout, there is an appropriate symmetry in Zola's prose as he describes ceremonial behavior which is evocative of religious ceremony. (Even social encounters are described in ritualistic terms, as we see in the encounter between
"Madame Coupeau et Madame Poisson."¹ This is less a scene of reconciliation than it is one of acknowledgment of newly-acquired social status and recognition. The similarities in their lives are illustrated by gesture.) The combining of thought and movement, the expression of relationship by acts here and throughout the text gives a unity to Zola's writing that is evocative of the Homeric style. The "gestuel" in l'Assommoir is the source of its linguistic, structural, and narrative cohesiveness; without it, the dance of l'Assommoir would not have been anything more than a random series of movements.

One other figure from classical mythology is important in the story of Gervaise - Dionysus, god of wine. Although there is an obvious link between the god of spirits and a novel about alcoholism, some other not-so-obvious relationships exist between this deity of earth and the heroine of l'Assommoir.

Like Gervaise's father, who died of spontaneous combustion, Semele the mother of Dionysus was consumed by flame. There is also a resemblance between the friendship between Vulcan the blacksmith god and Dionysus, and the closeness between Goujet and Gervaise, although the latter was a pla-

¹Zola, l'Assommoir, pp. 540-541.

²Cf. Stewart, Disguised Guest, with regard to the recognition of social status in the Homeric epic.
tonic relationship because of extenuating circumstances, whereas the former was simple camaraderie.

The issues that surround Dionysus in his dealings with mortals are the issues facing the characters of l'Assommoir. The revels led by the god teach "liberation from the sordid limits of mortality" and certainly in l'Assommoir Gervaise and the others are seeking an escape from a depressing, sordid daily life. But Dionysus is opposed by those who reject the disorders of the spirit and the madness that accompany drink - as we see in the famous story of Pentheus. Of course Gervaise does fall prey to the disorders and the madness, as had Coupeau, Bijard, and the rest.

There are other similarities between Dionysus and Gervaise. She could be called a victim of this deity, but the god himself was a victim, made a madman and a wanderer by Juno. Like Gervaise, he too was raised in the atmosphere of drink, by old Silenus, for even though Dionysus was the god of wine, he did not invent it. Both he and Gervaise are characterized by drowsiness and lethargy, and both of them are associated with revels - Dionysus with actual orgies, Gervaise with feasting.

Dionysus is called a promoter of civilization, a lawgiver, and a lover of peace. Gervaise is certainly all of these herself. She believes in order and peace, and does

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her best to achieve them in her early days. The god of wine is also a god of animal life, and vegetation, and these elements are lacking in Gervaise's environment. We sense that she misses these aspects of the life she knew in the country, and in fact it is the city atmosphere where people and pavement replace animals and trees, which contributes to her destruction.

The final link between Gervaise and Dionysus is the dance. Dionysus is the god of revelry and dance. Tigers, lynxes and panthers accompany him and curiously, the only live animal in Gervaise's world is the cat which creeps in at the end of her birthday bacchanal as a subtle reminder of the presence of the god.

The themes associated with Dionysus are the themes of _l'Assommoir_ and in particular, of Gervaise, for Dionysus is also the god of dance. The peaceful reveler, promoter of civilization but himself a victim of the mental disorder of drink, dancing his drunken jig, is the patron deity of Gervaise Macquart.
CONCLUSION:

THE THREADS OF EPIC AND EMILA ZOLA
Emile Zola's enthusiasm is often praised, but not often enough is his artistry as a writer mentioned. The time he spent pouring over dictionaries and reconnoitering the areas of Paris he was to use in the Rougon-Macquart are well known facts in literary history. But even his admirers speak more of his vigor, his emotion, and his dramatic gift than they do of his skill and even delicacy in writing. He is very much like the description of Goujet in his forge, hammering as if he were working on glass. The subtleties of Zola are easily overlooked, hidden by the spectacular. No one can forget the horror of Lalie's death. But the pathos of Goujet, sobbing as he leaves Gervaise's birthday party after the appearance of Lantier, or spending evenings cutting out pictures alone in his room, dreaming like a youth, is also touching.

In following a single thread throughout the text - the motif of the dance - the completeness of Zola's artistic vision becomes apparent. Adam Parry, in describing the composition of the Iliad, said, "To offer a succession of scenes so comprehensively evaluating the human situation, to present them in a dramatic trajectory . . . requires an artistic construct of the highest order."¹ This is true of l'Assommoir, as it is of the Iliad. While not overlooking the artistic possibilities of each scene and allotting each

¹Parry, Iliad, p. 11.
vignette its full development, Zola created a unified drama of life.

The limp is the heart of the dance motif of l'Assommoir. It unifies the symbols and structure of the text. Without this aesthetic unity, l'Assommoir would be not a tragic story, but a meaningless, anonymous, dated documentary - a powerful rumbling about the downfall of someone who, paradoxically, had never reached any heights. It is only the delicacy with which Gervaise's life is acted out which shows the fineness of her character, as well as that of Goujet, père Bru, Lalie, and others. The limp makes up aware of the burden of destiny Gervaise carries with her at all times. It is the background which is the display for the grace of her spirit.

L'Assommoir is a much more disciplined text - and not just by virtue of the scholarship that went into its composition - than is commonly allowed. Graham King said, "... through this great novel flows a magnificent passion, the quivering vibration of tremendous, purposeless energy, the shockwaves of the primal force by which man expresses his presence on earth."\(^1\) While it is true that this kind of energy makes itself felt in l'Assommoir, the text itself is not simply a field of unbridled, quivering forces. The movement is organized according to artistic principles: The movement is the vehicle of communication.

\(^1\) King, Garden, p. 124.