

The Priest and Narcissus: Sterility and Self-love in Zola's *Paradou*

Aude Campmas

According to Zola, the depiction of the Paradou is a rewriting of Chapters II and III of Genesis. The novelist specifies in an early sketch:¹

Then they are left in the park. Eve and Adam awaking in the spring, in the earthly Paradise [...] with Nature playing the role of Satan in the Bible: tempting Serge and Blanche and laying them down beneath the tree of evil on a splendid morning. So, I have the whole of nature, vegetation, trees, grass, flowers etc., birds, insects, water, sky etc. I superpose the drama of the Bible, and at the end I'll in all probability show Brother Archangias appearing as God does in the Bible, evicting the two lovers from this Paradise. Book II of the novel thus relates the fall of Serge, who becomes a man in the arms of Albine, before leaving the Paradou.²

Book II of the *La Faute de l'abbé Mouret (Abbé Mouret's Transgression)*³ thus tells the story of the fall of Serge who 'becomes a man' in Albine's arms before abandoning her.⁴ This article seeks to demonstrate that the transgression does not happen in the garden but before. The transgression is Serge's self-love which from Zola's perspective, is condemnable because it is sterile. Serge, first by becoming a priest, and later by abandoning Albine, refuses to have a family. In the first part of this article, the narcissistic self-love, expressed through Serge's devotion to the Virgin, will be studied and the second part will focus on its re-enactment through Serge's love for Albine. Serge's religious ecstasy, which allows his self-love to bloom, will be replaced by a secular dream-like state. In this perspective, the episode in the garden, in book II, will appear as a slightly distorted reflection of book I. Finally, the uncultivated Paradou will appear as a metaphor of Serge's abandonment of Albine. Serge refuses to grow a family, to take care of a pregnant Albine just as he refuses to cultivate the garden.

Before we can understand why the love story in the garden is another version of Serge's self-love, it is necessary to examine his narcissistic relation to the Virgin. Numerous clues indicate that we are in the realm of a narcissistic love. The image Serge Mouret venerates is indeed a projection of himself. In the first book, the Virgin mirrors Serge; she grows up with him, he imagines her as scarcely older than he is, and, above all, they share the same gentle character and the same delicate physique. She is a reassuring projection. Furthermore, Serge collects images of the Virgin, they are the object of his devotion. These images are only so many mirrors: the virgin is described as a blank screen, a basis for contemplative (self)-reflection:

No more did he dream of childish games within the garden of heaven, but of continual contemplation before that white figure, whose perfect purity he feared to sully with his breath. (MT, 71)⁵

The untouched surface at the end of the celestial garden evokes the Ovidian myth of Narcissus. 'Picture a clear, unmuddied pool of silvery, shimmering water. The shepherds have not been near it; the mountain-goats and cattle have not come down

to drink there; its surface has never been ruffled by bird or beast or branch from a rotting cypress.’⁶ The idea of unsoiled surfaces is fundamental in the myth. Narcissus and the space around him are ‘virgin’. Narcissus refuses any companion and, ultimately, when Narcissus dies and Echo turns to stone, the myth tells us about the curse of sterility.⁷ The mineral world (and water is a mineral echo of stone) is, in opposition to the vegetal and animal worlds, free from procreation. As a narcissistic mirror but also as an unsoiled body, the Virgin represents Serge’s disgust for reproduction. This is why he likes her less when she is represented as Jesus’ mother. The comparison between Mary and the fountain, between Serge and Narcissus is reinforced all the way through the text: consider also chapter XIV (book I):

Again she was a *fountain* sealed by the Holy Ghost, a shrine and dwelling-place of the Holy Trinity, the Throne of God, the City of God, the Altar of God, the Temple of God, and the World of God. And he walked in that garden, in its shade, its sunlight, beneath its enchanting greenery; *he sighed after the water of that Fountain*; he dwelt within Mary’s beauteous precincts—resting, hiding, heedlessly straying there, *drinking* in the milk of infinite love that fell drop by drop from her virginal bosom. (MT, 73)⁸

A second description during one of Serge’s ecstasies, evokes the final moment of the myth, the metamorphosis into a flower.

And as his heart drew him higher up the ladder of light, a strange voice from within his veins spoke within him, bursting into *dazzling flowers* of speech. He yearned *to melt away in fragrance*, to be spread around in light, to expire in a sigh of music. As he named her ‘Mirror of Justice’, ‘Seat of Wisdom’, and ‘Source of Joy’, *he could behold himself pale with ecstasy in that mirror*, kneeling on the warmth of the divine seat, quaffing intoxication in mighty draughts from the holy Source. Again he would transform her, throwing off all restraint in his frantic love, so as to attain to a yet closer union with her. (MT, 77) (my emphasis)⁹

The comparison with Narcissus allows Zola to emphasize Serge’s inability to escape from self-contemplation, and his inability to truly love someone else. Serge’s desire is based on reflection (fountain, mirror) and has an inner origin (from within his veins) transforming Serge into a narcissistic flower (the “dazzling flowers”).

The myth of Narcissus, as an image of sterility, is recurrent in Zola’s novels. In *La Faute de l’abbé Mouret*, Zola continues to develop a metaphor first employed in *La Curée*. The Narcissus myth is a key subtext for these two novels, both associated with sterile gardens: the Paradou is uncultivated and the green-house is full of sterile hybrids.¹⁰ The gardens, even if they are luxuriant, are sterile because they are the location where ‘unproductive’ sex takes place. The green-house clearly represents sterile flowers (like Renée and Maxime) growing excessively only for pleasure. The Paradou, however, is slightly different: the garden is potentially very fertile (like Albine) but Serge, by refusing to cultivate it (and to grow a family there with Albine), leads it to sterility. The abandoned garden mirrors the abandoned woman as a metaphor for a nation in which children are not a priority.

From 1865, successive governments were very concerned about the decreasing birth rate in France, as on it depended the development of the nation. These concerns were exacerbated by the debacle of 1871, the defeat being attributed partly to the lack of soldiers.¹¹ During the Third Republic, the public authorities intervened much more in the private domain, as testified by numerous legal texts, parliamentary reports and works on social welfare, directed towards increasing the number of births and also to improving children's survival and education.¹² Zola's work also expresses these concerns. Fecundity (Zola used this title for a novel published in 1899) and sterility are two faces of the same coin. Both concepts are linked in Zola's work to cultivation (in its agricultural sense) because procreation is not just about the sexual act, it is about the development of the family. Therefore, even if Albine and the garden are in fact fertile (that is, they have the potential to bear fruit), they are metaphorically sterile because they are uncultivated). The book describes a morbid waste of fertility, and examination of the vocabulary used by Zola shows that death is one of the dominant words.¹³ The luxuriance of the garden and Albine's vitality emphasize Serge's refusal of fecundity. If the Paradou is fertile 'en puissance' (potentiality), it is sterile 'en acte' (actuality).

La Curée allows us better to understand Zola's reflections on sterility and cultivation, and more importantly it highlights the relation between sterility and the myth of Narcissus (Narcissism being the reason why Serge does not cultivate the garden). *La Faute de l'abbé Mouret* seems like a less obvious exposition of these themes, than *La Curée*, as if the one is a more subtle echo of the other.

In *La Curée*, the 'tableaux vivants' (in chapter 6) are a representation of the corrupted family. Narcissus is incarnated in Maxime, and Echo is interpreted by Renée, his lover and mother-in-law. Renée, who in the first tableau symbolises nature,¹⁴ represents at the same time consciousness of the perversion of the maternal instinct,¹⁵ and the very image of sterility when she is transformed into a rock in the last 'tableau'. Maxime is a handsome young man but also a degenerate and androgynous 'abortion' (avorton), who remains childless. There are numerous similarities between Maxime and Renée on the one hand, and Serge and Albine on the other. The two childless women are described as sacrificial victims of society (the Second Empire for Renée, the Church for Albine). They are both described as flowers, later transformed into stone; both are associated with statues in white marble. This metamorphosis is placed centre stage in *La Curée*, while in *La Faute de l'abbé Mouret* the descriptions of the white marble statue of a tall lady in a grotto make double reference to Echo -- to the stone into which Echo is transformed in death, and the grotto that her posthumous voice inhabits -- and also announce the death of Albine, whose name resonates with *alba*, white and alabaster, a white marble ('albâtre' in French).¹⁶ 'Finally, these women's voices, like that of Echo, are not truly heard. At the end of book II, Albine repeats five times 'Do you love me?' (MT, 193-194) without receiving any answer. Maxime and Serge are for their part estranged from nature by their respective social groupings, the Parisian *haute bourgeoisie* on the one hand, and the seminary on the other. Both have girlish airs, and their physical impotence mirrors a moral impotence: they refuse the virility demanded by familial responsibility. Both, as Narcissi of the Second Empire, betray women, and in so doing, betray the Zolian conception of the family.

However, if in *La Curée* the green-house was too corrupted for any hope of redemption, the Paradou could have been the opportunity for Serge not only to recover from his illness but also to become a man. Unfortunately, even if he does procreate, his love for Albine echoes his love for the Virgin, thus leading to Albine's abandonment. In the garden, Serge becomes once again a narcissistic figure. The passage from one mirror figure (Mary as screen) to another one, Albine, is facilitated by a shared metaphor. Both Mary and Albine are associated with gardens. Traditionally, the virgin is described as the *Hortus conclusus* (enclosed garden). If the violet of humility, the lily of chastity, and the rose of love are the flowers most commonly associated with the Virgin, Rachel Fulton reminds us that:

Flowers belong to the Virgin Mary as to no other saint. When the bridegroom of the Song of Songs says, 'I am come into my garden' (Song 5:1), almost all of the flowers that he would find there would, by the later Middle Ages at least, have been identifiably hers.¹⁷

Zola takes up these floral metaphors, and Mary, in book I, is described as a garden: for instance, 'all the vivid imagery of her cult unrolled itself before him comparing her to an earthly paradise of virgin soil, with beds of flowering virtues, green meadows of hope, impregnable towers of strength, and smiling dwellings of confidence.' (MT, 73)¹⁸

The Paradou is the reverse image of the Virgin's garden, as Albine is a sexualised version of Mary. This type of construction is common in Zola's work. In *La Curée*, the vegetation of the green-house is described twice. First before, and again after, the sexual act of Renée and Maxime. The descriptions are slightly different. The monstrous aspect of the flowers is exaggerated in the second one, making the vegetal more erotic and menacing. In *La Faute de l'abbé Mouret*, the same technique is used. The untouched virgin garden becomes a sexualised one.

We can draw parallels between the representations of self-love in books I and II, but they are not totally similar. The differences emphasize the inevitability of Serge's fall, after a period of hope. In book I, self-love is associated with ecstasy, a state that allows Serge to forget the external world and concentrate on himself. In book II, amnesia and a dream-like state of mind play the same role. Opening and closing physical and psychological spaces are central to the plot. The episode in the Paradou (book II) is clearly separated from the first and third books, as much by temporal ellipses as by white pages and textual separations, a typographical metaphor for the enclosure of this space. The enclosed space mirrors Serge's self-centred state of mind. Even if the garden is huge, enclosure defines the space. 'This is the Paradou,' replied the doctor, pointing to the wall.' (MT, 32)¹⁹ The wall is described several times and it is also what makes the Paradou visible from far away. It is also through this wall that Serge will leave the Paradou.

If Serge here is 'reliving' his self-love under a different guise in the Paradou, we have to emphasise the correspondence between dream and religious ecstasy as, for instance, suggested by Alfred Maury in *Sleep and Dream (Le Sommeil et les rêves)*. During the Second Empire, Maury's theories were extremely well known. Michelet quotes him three times in *La Sorcière*, Flaubert also mentions the book, and according to Nancy Lockes, Maury is certainly well-known to Zola and Manet.²⁰ In his

essay, Maury explains: 'The dreamer and the ecstatic are in the same state in so far as whatever they believe they are seeing, hearing, or feeling, is supplied by their own ideas or their own memories'.²¹ He later elaborates:

We have seen above that when we have been acutely struck by a spectacle or an event, it may happen that we later dream about it, that we are present in a vision which reproduces the main phases of the spectacle or event, even though other ideas or images, whose spontaneous recollection may be owed to internal or external sensations, may be intertwined with them. Now this equally happens in the case of the ecstatic. The sight of sacred ceremonies, paintings depicting holiness, the reading of mystical works, the long meditation of God, has filled his spirit with religious thoughts, images of Heaven, of Paradise, of Hell, of angels, and demons; and these supernatural or pious scenes instantly come into the imagination of the ecstatic, when he delivers himself up to meditation and abstracts himself from everything that surrounds him. He dreams in reality of what he has read and seen, said and heard, and the morbid disposition of his nervous system that permits his senses to withdraw more easily from outside impressions also makes him victim to his own visions.²²

The similarity between dream and ecstasy connects books I and II and allows Serge to withdraw from outside impressions ('se fermer aux impressions du dehors'). To emphasise the transition between one state and another, the passage from ecstasy, one enclosed mental space, to dream, another mental space, is undertaken via an underground tunnel: 'The whole time I had a nightmare, in which I seemed to be crawling along an endless underground passage.'²³ The passage suggests a kind of continuity between the two states/spaces. The underground structure, made nearly inaccessible, due to numerous piles of fallen rock, reminds us that both dream and ecstasy are worlds enclosed, and foreclosed, from outside, but also, as Maury underlines, porous to outside influence. In the novel, the underground structure of the beginning corresponds to the breach, or gap, of the ending of the Paradou episode:

A great breach gaped in it, like a huge window of light opening on to the neighbouring valley. It must have been the very hole that Albine had one day spoken of, which she said she had blocked up with brambles and stones. But the brambles now lay scattered around like severed bits of rope, the stones had been thrown some distance away, and the breach itself seemed to have been enlarged by some furious hand. (MT, 190)²⁴

Like the underground passage, this hole is partly closed, being blocked by stones. The passage through the underground structure marks the entry into dream, the passage through the hole the return to ecstasy. In Albine's bedchamber Serge explains: 'I have been dreaming, I am always dreaming.' (MT, 101)²⁵ Serge describes the nature of the park as a dream 'the disturbing thoughts (rêve [dream] in French) of this forest' (MT, 103)²⁶ 'behind that softened phantasm of the mighty life without.' (MT, 106)²⁷

Then he would relapse into his favourite dream of all the greenery which he could feel only a step away. For several days he lived on that dream alone. (MT, 109)²⁸

As for Albine, flower of all flowers, he adds, when he sees her as a woman for the first time: 'I was dreaming of you' (MT, 122)²⁹ At the moment when he sees the gap in the wall of the Paradou, Serge comes out of his dream:

But he put her from him gently. Then, while she fell down and clung to his legs, he passed his hands across his face, as though he were wiping from his brow and eyes some last lingering traces of sleep. (MT, 190)³⁰

Just before leaving the garden, he wonders: 'From what dream was he awakening, that he felt such keen anguish swelling up in his breast till it almost choked him?' (MT, 190)³¹

At the moment of this symbolic awakening, he hears once more the bells of Les Artaud which he has not heard since his arrival. The bell symbolises religion every bit as much as the notion of time that has been suspended during the dream-like state:

She wept, while Serge stood rooted by the breach, straining his ears to catch the slightest sound that might be wafted from the village, waiting, as it were, for some voice that might fully awaken him. The bell in the church-tower had begun to sway, and slowly through the quiet evening air the three chimes of the Angelus floated up to the Paradou. It was a soft and silvery summons. The bell now seemed to be alive. (MT, 192)³²

But whilst mystical ecstasy is morbid and leads to Serge's illness —'And then Abbé Mouret, felled by fever, his teeth chattering, swooned away on the floor.' (MT, 98)³³ — dream, which is the secular version of such visions, lets Serge, at first, recover his health. Dream allows the possibility of a world uncorrupted by religion: if ecstasy is morbid, then dream leads to the fecundation of Albine. However, like ecstasy, dream is an illusion and more importantly, it is a projection. Dream opens an inner-space in which Serge's self-love can blossom again. The re-enactment is positioned in a tragic, pessimistic movement which gives Serge no possibility of escaping his true nature. As he takes his first steps in the garden, Serge cannot see Albine: 'Still he stood there and made no answer. His eyes were far away; he never even saw that child at his feet.' (MT, 118)³⁴

And later, Albine remains nothing but a projection: 'you are no one but myself!' (MT, 122)³⁵ The dream-like state becomes as morbid as the previous ecstasy and leads to Albine's death.

Finally, we would argue that the Paradou, as an uncultivated, chaotic garden, participates in Zola's reflection on sterility because to Albine's abandonment corresponds the uncultivated garden that Serge also leaves behind.

The word 'garden', like paradise, means an enclosed world.³⁶ In *La Faute de l'abbé Mouret*, the name Paradou, thanks to the Provençal desinence 'ou', seems to evoke Paradise, just as in *Genesis*, as a place of delights and gentleness. However, the Paradou has no gardener: neither Albine nor Serge take it upon themselves to cultivate it.

Its vegetation was mighty, magnificent, luxuriantly untended, full of erratic growths decked with monstrous blossoming, unknown to the spade and watering-pot of gardeners. (MT, 128)³⁷

Is the unkempt garden still a garden? No, a garden requires a gardener as, more importantly, does Paradise. Without care, any garden degenerates and leads to chaos, symbol of evil. This is why order is the fundamental characteristic of Paradise, and by extension, of the garden. The description of the Paradou below is the opposite of the Biblical canon:

Amidst that tremendous luxuriance of vegetation even lengthy scrutiny could barely make out the bygone plan of the Paradou. In the foreground, in a sort of immense amphitheatre, must have lain the flower garden, whose fountains were now sunken and dry, its stone balustrades shattered, its flight of steps all warped, and its statues overthrown, patches of their whiteness gleaming amidst the dusky stretches of turf. Farther back, behind the blue line of a sheet of water, stretched a maze of fruit-trees; farther still rose towering woodland, its dusky, violet depths streaked with bands of light. It was a forest which had regained virginity, an endless stretch of tree-tops rising one above the other, tinged with yellowish green and pale green and vivid green, according to the variety of the species. (MT, 111)³⁸

The unnamed plants look undifferentiated in a mass of colours. According to the Old Testament, Adam had been given the mission of keeping and cultivating the Garden of Eden.³⁹ His name derives from Hebrew *ādām* – earth, and functions as a play on words with *ādāmā* (cultivated land).⁴⁰ He also received from God the power of naming the vegetables and animals. The image of Adam, arms stretched out, with his index finger pointing out living creatures, figures not only on manuscript illustrations and bestiaries but also on numerous dictionaries of natural history. Adam is often considered the first of the natural scientists.⁴¹ The denomination of plants participates in the order of science.

In a recent article, Sophie Guermès demonstrates how Zola destroys the real in his descriptions of the Paradou. One conclusion she draws from this is that unsettling the habits of the reader brings him or her closer to the reality of writing itself.⁴² Such systematic destructions of the referent can also be read as participating in the taxonomic imprecision that denies the order established by Adam and science. Serge's amnesia, which makes him incapable of naming a single living creature, reinforces the idea of chaos. Order and knowledge being destroyed, the Paradou is more than the opposite of Paradise, it is a garden of after the fall. As a Provençal proverb has it: 'The Paradou, the devil possesses it completely'.⁴³ After the fall from Eden came the Great Flood, initiating decay throughout the entire surface of the once perfect earth. In the flood, the 'Earth was broken and swallowed up' and 'Nature seem'd to be in a second Chaos'.⁴⁴

Since they are in this already corrupted garden, is there any hope for Serge and Albine? Carolyn Merchant comments that if the 17th- century theologian Thomas Burnet represents a very negative vision of the history of earth, the same period also sees more positive accounts. Francis Bacon, for example, is the spearhead of a 'Recovery Narrative', according to which, thanks to science and technology, man who had lost his "dominion over creation" could reconquer paradise.⁴⁵

Since the fall, nature has become chaotic and plants and animals wild and uncontrollable. But scientists could restore order to the garden by inventing docile, domesticated plants and animals, such as those in the original Garden of Eden.⁴⁶

The Paradou could have been inscribed within such a 'recovery narrative'. The voice of science and technology, Doctor Pascal, who sends Serge there, expects him to recover his senses and his health. But this recovery narrative, based on science and culture (in both senses), is very quickly brought into conflict with the re-enactment of Serge's sterile self-love. Serge should have started, with Albine's help, to name the plants, and cultivate the garden. But, in order to be able to do it, he would have had to refuse to stay in the dream-like state which allows him to focus on himself. The garden remains a blank screen, on which he projects his dark desires. In the Paradou, Mouret, (which means 'black' or 'dark brown' in Provençal) destroys Albine 'the white'. What is the meaning of Albine's death? As a death, it represents Serge's final renouncement of fecundity. Lying amongst flowers at the bottom of a hole, Albine is metamorphosed into the lady in marble. First compared with a flower, full of the promise of fecundity, she becomes a mineral, an image of sterility. She is the sacrificed victim of the priestly renouncement of paternity. It could seem ironical that Albine is killed by flowers, but these cut flowers are in the end a metaphor for Narcissus and self-love, a metaphor for Serge.

Focusing on the comparison between Narcissus and the garden, Zola continues in *La Faute de l'abbé Mouret* a reflection started in *La Curée* on non-fecundity, which is seen as one of the causes of the 'débâcle' of 1871. Zola's gardens, as an extension of women's bodies, and spaces of sacrificed fecundity, are a pretext for affirming the vulnerability of a nation that neglects the family. Like a country, a garden should not be left uncultivated and unprotected, because that will lead to its degeneration. The Paradou represents this abandonment. Albine's death was inevitable. Albine's Voltairian uncle, Jeanbernat, warns the reader of the danger of the uncultivated garden. This is why he tries to grow lettuces at his doorstep in the Paradou. He is the disabused Candide giving a new meaning to 'we must cultivate our garden'.⁴⁷

¹ I would like to thank William McKenzie for his translation of my article originally written in French.

² Translation by William McKenzie. 'Puis ils sont lâchés dans le parc. Eve et Adam s'éveillant au printemps dans le Paradis terrestre. [...] C'est la nature qui joue le rôle de Satan de la Bible, c'est elle qui tente Serge et Blanche et qui les couche sous l'arbre du mal par une matinée splendide. Or, j'ai toute la nature, les végétaux, arbres, herbes, fleurs, etc., les oiseaux, les insectes, l'eau, le ciel, etc. Je calque le drame de la Bible, et à la fin je montre sans doute Frère Archangias apparaissant comme le dieu de la Bible et chassant du paradis les deux amoureux. Le livre II du roman raconte ainsi la chute de Serge qui devient homme dans les bras d'Albine avant de quitter le Paradou'. Émile Zola, *Œuvres. Manuscrits et dossiers préparatoires. Les Rougon-Macquart. La Faute de l'abbé Mouret*, Dossier préparatoire, NAF 10294, folio 3 (ébauche). Available on Gallica. <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b53009327d/f17.image.r=zola%20dossiers%20la%20faute.langFR> [last visited 18 August 2015].

³ All the quotations from the text in English are from Émile Zola, *Abbé Mouret's Transgression*, edited with an introduction by Ernest Alfred Vizetelly, New York: The Marion Company, 1915. Further references to this book will be given in parenthesis in text, using the abbreviation MT and page number.

⁴ Émile Zola, *Œuvres. Manuscrits et dossiers préparatoires. Les Rougon-Macquart. La Faute de l'abbé Mouret*, Dossier préparatoire, NAF 10294, folio 2.

⁵ 'Il ne rêvait plus des jeux enfantins, au fond du jardin céleste, mais une contemplation continue, en face de cette figure blanche, si pure, à laquelle il n'aurait pas voulu toucher de son souffle.' Émile Zola, *La Faute de l'abbé Mouret*. Paris: Gallimard, Folio classique, 2000, p. 119. Further references to this book will be given as: (FM, page number).

⁶ Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, translated by David Reaburn, London: Penguin Books, 2004, 3, 406-410, p. 112.

⁷ According to Marie Delcourt, the worst curse in Greek Antiquity was that of sterility. Marie Delcourt, *Stérilités mystérieuses et naissances maléfiques dans l'antiquité classique*. Paris: Librairie E. Droz, 1938, p.18-19.

⁸ 'Elle était encore une *fontaine* que le Saint-Esprit avait scellée, un sanctuaire où la très sainte Trinité se reposait, le trône de Dieu, la cité de Dieu, l'autel de Dieu, le temple de Dieu, le monde de Dieu. Et lui, se promenait dans ce jardin, à l'ombre, au soleil, sous l'enchantement des verdure ; lui, *soupirait après l'eau de cette fontaine* ; lui, habitait le bel intérieur de Marie, s'y appuyant, s'y cachant, s'y perdant sans réserve, *buva* le lait d'amour infini qui tombait goutte à goutte de ce sein virginal.' (FM, 121) (Emphasis added)

⁹ 'À mesure que son cœur l'emportait plus haut, sur les degrés de lumière, une voix étrange, venue de ses veines, parlait en lui, s'épanouissant en *fleurs éclatantes*. Il aurait voulu se *fondre en parfum*, s'épandre en clarté, expirer en un soupir musical. Tandis qu'il la nommait *Miroir de justice*, Temple de la sagesse, *Source de sa joie*, *il se voyait pâle d'extase dans ce miroir*, il s'agenouillait sur les dalles tièdes de ce temple, il *buva* à longs traits l'ivresse de cette source.' (FM, 127). (Emphasis added)

¹⁰ Most horticultural hybrids are sterile or would degenerate quickly without human care.

¹¹ See Jean-Claude Gégot, *La population française aux XIXe et XXe siècles*, Paris: Ophrys, 1989, p. 112.

¹² For a study into the birth rate in France during this period, see Catherine Rollet-Echalier, *La Politique à l'égard de la petite enfance sous la IIIe République*, Institut National d' Études Démographiques, Travaux et documents, 127. Paris: PUF, 1990, pp. 27-67.

¹³ There are 117 occurrences of the adjective/noun 'mort' in the novel, and 20 of 'mourir' in the infinitive.

¹⁴ 'Echo's costume was an allegory in itself: it suggested tall trees and lofty mountains, the resounding spots where the voices of the Earth and the Air reply to each other; it was rock in the white satin of the skirt, thicket in the leaves of the girdle, clear sky in the cloud of blue gauze of the bodice'. Émile Zola, *The Kill*, translated and edited by Brian Nelson. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004, p. 213. [La robe de la nymphe écho était, à elle seule, toute une allégorie ; elle tenait des grands arbres et des grands monts, des lieux retentissants où les voix de la terre et de l'air se répondent ; elle était rocher par le satin blanc de la jupe, taillis par les feuillages de la ceinture, ciel pur par la nuée de gaze bleue du corsage]. Émile Zola, *La Curée*. Paris: Gallimard, Folio classique, 1996, p. 260

¹⁵ A few paces away Echo was dying of frustrated desire; she found herself caught little by little in the hard ground, she felt her burning limbs freezing and stiffening, She was no vulgar moss-stained rock, but one of white marble, by her arms and shoulders, by her long snow-white robe, from which the girdle of leaves and the blue drapery had slipped down. Sinking into the satin of her skirt, which was creased in large folds, like a block of Parian marble, she threw herself back, retaining nothing of life in her cold sculptured body except her gleaming eyes, fixed on the water-lily reclining languidly above the mirror of the spring. [A quelques pas, la nymphe Écho se mourait aussi, se mourait de désirs inassouvis; elle se trouvait peu à peu prise dans la raideur du sol, elle sentait ses membres brûlants se glacer et se durcir. Elle n'était pas rocher vulgaire, sali de mousse, mais marbre blanc, par ses épaules et ses

bras, par sa grande robe de neige, dont la ceinture de feuillage et l'écharpe bleue avaient glissé. Affaissée au milieu du satin de sa jupe, qui se cassait à larges plis, pareil à un bloc de Paros, elle se renversait, n'ayant plus de vivant, dans son corps figé de statue, que ses yeux de femme, des yeux qui luisaient, fixés sur la fleur des eaux, penchée languissamment sur le miroir de la source. Et il semblait déjà que tous les bruits d'amour de la forêt, les voix prolongées des taillis, les frissons mystérieux des feuilles, les soupirs profonds des grands chênes, venaient battre sur la chair de marbre de la nymphe Écho, dont le cœur, saignant toujours dans le bloc, résonnait longuement, répétait au loin les moindres plaintes de la Terre et de l'Air.] Émile Zola, *La Curée*. Paris: Gallimard, 1996, p. 260. Her desire is of course her desire for Maxime but it can also be interpreted as a desire for a child. Émile Zola, *The Kill*, *op.cit.*, p. 221.

¹⁶ Looking at the statue, Albine gives a shiver. It is a premonition, for she will end up as a statue lying in a hole.

¹⁷ Rachel Fulton, 'The Virgin in the Garden, or Why Flowers Make Better Prayers', *Spiritus: A Journal of Christian Spirituality*, Volume 4, Number 1, Spring 2004, p.1.

¹⁸ 'Les images vives s'épalaient, la comparaient à un paradis terrestre, fait d'une terre vierge, avec des parterres de fleurs vertueuses, des prairies vertes d'espérance, des tours imprenables de force, des maisons charmantes de confiance.' (FM, 121)

¹⁹ 'Voici le Paradou, répondit le docteur, en montrant la muraille'. (FM, 70).

²⁰ Nancy Lockes, *Manet and the Family Romance*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001, p. 23.

²¹ 'Il croit voir, il croit entendre, il croit sentir ce que lui fournissent ses propres souvenirs ou ses propres idées. Et en cela l'extatique est dans le même état que le rêveur.' L.-F. Alfred Maury, *Le sommeil et les rêves, études psychologiques sur ces phénomènes et les divers états qui s'y rattachent ; suivies des Recherches sur le développement de l'instinct et de l'intelligence dans leurs rapports avec le phénomène du sommeil (3e édition revue et considérablement augmentée)*. Paris: Didier, 1865, p. 236. Translation by William McKenzie.

²² 'On a vu plus haut que lorsque nous avons été vivement frappés d'un spectacle ou d'un événement, il nous arrive souvent d'en rêver, d'y assister dans un songe qui en reproduit les principales phases, bien qu'il s'y mêle d'autres idées, d'autres images dont le rappel spontané est dû à des sensations internes ou externes. Or cela se produit également chez l'extatique. La vue des cérémonies sacrées, de tableaux de sainteté, la lecture d'ouvrages mystiques, la longue méditation en Dieu ont rempli son esprit de pensées religieuses, d'images du ciel, du paradis, de l'enfer, des anges, des démons; et ces scènes surnaturelles ou pieuses se reproduisent tout à coup dans l'imagination de l'extatique, quand il se livre à la méditation et s'abstrait de tout ce qui l'entoure. Il rêve en réalité de ce qu'il a lu et vu, dit et entendu, et une disposition morbide du système nerveux permettant plus aisément à ses sens de se fermer aux impressions du dehors, il devient le jouet de ses propres visions.' Maury, *op.cit.*, p. 248-249

²³ 'Toujours le même cauchemar me faisait ramper, le long d'un souterrain interminable.' (FM, 158)

²⁴ 'Une brèche ouvrait sur la vallée voisine une fenêtre de lumière. Ce devait être le trou dont Albine avait parlé, un jour, ce trou qu'elle disait avoir bouché avec des ronces et des pierres ; les ronces traînaient par bouts épars comme des cordes coupées, les pierres étaient rejetées au loin, le trou semblait avoir été agrandi par quelque main furieuse.' (FM, 274)

²⁵ 'J'ai rêvé, je rêve toujours.' (FM, 156).

²⁶ 'le rêve inquiétant de cette forêt' (FM, 159).

²⁷ 'ce rêve attendri de la vie puissante du dehors. (FM, 163).

²⁸ 'Et il retombait dans le rêve caressé de ces verdure qu'il sentait près de lui, à deux pas. Pendant plusieurs jours, il ne vécut que de ce rêve.' (FM, 167).

²⁹ 'Je rêvais de toi.' (FM, 182).

³⁰ 'Il l'écartait lentement. Puis, pendant qu'elle lui embrassait les genoux, il se passa les mains sur la face, comme pour chasser de ses yeux et de son front un reste de sommeil.' (FM, 275).

³¹ 'De quel rêve s'éveillait-il, pour sentir monter de ses reins une angoisse si poignante, qui grossissait peu à peu dans sa poitrine, jusqu'à l'étouffer?' (FM, 275).

³² 'Lui, ardemment, écoutait, cherchant à saisir les moindres bruits lointains, attendant qu'une voix l'éveillât tout à fait. La cloche avait eu un léger saut. Et, lentement, dans l'air endormi du soir, les trois coups de l'Angelus arrivèrent jusqu'au Paradou.' (FM, 277).

³³ 'Et l'abbé Mouret, claquant des dents, terrassé par la fièvre, s'évanouit sur le carreau.' (FM, 153).

³⁴ 'Lui, sans répondre, demeurait debout. Il avait les yeux au loin, il ne voyait pas cette enfant à ses pieds'. (FM, 177).

³⁵ 'Et tu n'es autre que moi-même!' (FM, 183).

³⁶ According to Michel Baridon '*Paradise* comes from the Greek *paradeisos* borrowed from Persian *pardès* which signifies building, closure. "Garden" [*jardin*] derives from a Graeco-Roman root where we find Latin *hortus* and Frank *gart* which means "enclosure". Michel Baridon, *Les Jardins, Paysagistes – Jardiniers – Poètes*. Paris: Robert Laffont, coll. Bouquins, 1998, p. 19.

³⁷ 'La végétation y était énorme, superbe, puissamment inculte, pleine de hasards qui étalaient des floraisons monstrueuses, inconnues à la bêche et aux arrosoirs des jardiniers.' (FM, 191).

³⁸ 'À peine pouvait-on, à la longue, reconnaître sous cet envahissement formidable de la sève l'ancien dessin du Paradou. En face, dans une sorte de cirque immense, devait se trouver le parterre, avec ses bassins effondrés, ses rampes rompues, ses escaliers déjetés, ses statues renversées dont on apercevait les blancheurs au fond des gazons noirs. Plus loin, derrière la ligne bleue d'une nappe d'eau, s'étalait un fouillis d'arbres fruitiers ; plus loin encore, une haute futaie enfonçait ses dessous violâtres, rayés de lumière, une forêt redevenue vierge, dont les cimes se mamelonnaient sans fin, tachées du vert jaune, du vert pâle, du vert puissant de toutes les essences.' (FM, 169).

³⁹ *Genesis*, II, 15.

⁴⁰ See Monique Alexandre, *Le commencement du livre Genèse I-V: la version grecque de la Septante et sa réception*. Paris: Editions Beauchesne, 1988, p. 269.

⁴¹ Valmont de Bomare's *Dictionnaire raisonné universel d'histoire naturelle* (Paris: Chez Lacombe, 1764–1768) is a good example of such representation. The inscription on its frontispiece reads: 'He brought them before Adam to see how he would name them'. The problematic of naming, of nomination, is at the centre of the frontispiece of that dictionary. Corresponding to Adam's movement, naming living creatures by pointing his finger, is the creative action of Yahweh, whose name is written in Hebraic lettering in the centre of the sun. This name, which shines out and dominates the scene, engenders cognition, knowledge, whilst Adam's gesture signals re-cognition. Jean-Marc Drouin offers the following pertinent analysis: Adam's denomination of the natural world, the first gesture of the first man, is primary in so far as it is 'the condition of all socialised knowledge of nature [...] it expresses also the conviction that the act of denomination is one of legitimacy because there exists something which (cor)responds to the name'. p. 18-19. See Jean-Marc Drouin, 'Linné et la dénomination des vivants: portrait du naturaliste en législateur', in *La Dénomination, Le Temps des savoirs, Revue interdisciplinaire*, numéro 1, Paris: Odile Jacob, 2000, p. 17-38.

⁴² Sophie Guermès, 'Détruire le réel: "l'outrance de sève" du Paradou (à propos de *La Faute de l'abbé Mouret*, d'Émile Zola)', *Wydział Filologiczny Uniwersytetu Gdańskiego, Cahiers ERTA* 3, 2013, p. 69-82.

⁴³ 'Lou Paradou, Lou diable l'a tout', proverb pertaining to the Paradou near Arles. Frédéric Mistral, *Lou Tresor dóu Felibrige*. Raphèle-lès-Arles: Culture provençale et méridionale, Tome 1, 1878, p. 477.

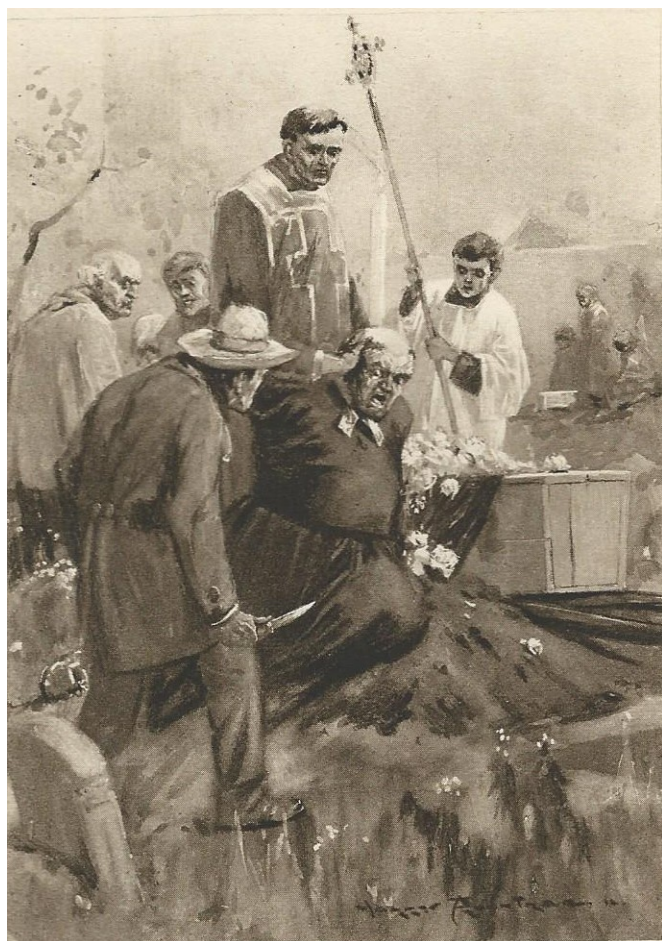
⁴⁴ Carolyn Merchant, *Reinventing Eden, The Fate of Nature in Western Culture*. New-York, London: Routledge, 2013, p. 62

⁴⁵ 'Man by the Fall, fell at the same time from his state of innocency and from his dominion over creation. Both of these losses can in this life be in some part repaired; the former by

religion and faith, the latter by arts and science." Humans, he asserted, could "recover that right over nature which belongs to it by divine bequest". Bacon's narrative plot was thus a reversal from decline to progress—from the tragedy of the Fall to the comedy of survival and recovery. See Carolyn Merchant, *op. cit.*, p. 65.

⁴⁶ Carolyn Merchant, *op. cit.*, p. 65.

⁴⁷ 'mais il faut cultiver notre jardin'. Voltaire, *Candide ou l'Optimisme*, Paris: Gallimard, Folio classique, 2007, p. 154



Frontispiece by H. Rountree from the Caxton edition of *Abbé Mouret's Transgression*, [c.1912]. The scene is the burial of Albine who died, suffocated by the overpowering perfume of the flowers that filled her bedroom. The service is being conducted by the Abbé Mouret, the young cleric who, oblivious of his priestly vows, fell in love with the girl as she nursed him back to health, but who can no longer return her love. He is assisted by a Christian Brother, Archangias, a coarse minded man of violent temper. Archangias has grossly insulted both Albine and the uncle with whom she lived, Jeanbernat, caretaker of the Paradou estate. Jeanbernat quietly enters the graveyard, goes behind Archangias, and as the service is coming to a close he takes a knife from his pocket and slices off the Brother's right ear with a single cut. He then leaves, saying the left ear will be for another occasion.

K.H.